

The background of the cover is a photograph of a landscape at sunset. In the foreground, several tall, green cholla cacti with sharp spines stand prominently. A dirt path winds through the cacti towards the middle ground. In the background, a valley with some buildings and a utility pole is visible, followed by a range of mountains under a bright orange and yellow sky with a low sun partially obscured by clouds.

*Alicante: Between Past,
Present and Future*

*A Family Journey Through Hope and New
Beginnings*

A Photographic Memoir by Michael Graham

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BEGINNING

Introduction

Some journeys begin with a destination in mind. Others begin with a need to pause. When we travelled to Alicante, we were looking for more than a family break in the Spanish sunshine. Beneath the excitement of the trip sat a mixture of emotions that many families will recognise: the need for rest, the weight of unanswered questions, the memories of loved ones no longer with us, and the hope that a new chapter might still lie ahead.

The months leading up to our journey had been filled with change. We found ourselves reflecting on the past while also trying to make important decisions about the future. Alicante offered something we desperately needed: time. Time to step away from daily routines. Time to be together as a family. Time to think, to talk, and to consider what might come next.

At the centre of that future was a deeply personal decision. Could our family grow again? One of the main reasons for our journey was to attend appointments connected to donor egg treatment, a path that brought both hope and uncertainty in equal measure. We travelled to Alicante not simply to seek answers, but to take the next step in that process. The trip represented more than a medical appointment. It represented the possibility of another chapter in our family's story.

Yet this book is not solely about fertility treatment. Nor is it simply a travel journal. It is a story about family, resilience, and the moments that shape us. It is about standing between past, present and future, carrying memories of those who helped us become who we are while looking ahead to who we may yet become.

The photographs and reflections that follow capture more than landscapes and city streets. They capture conversations, emotions, quiet moments of reflection, and the small experiences that often leave the deepest impressions. Together they tell the story of a journey that became far more significant than we could have imagined when we first boarded the plane.

Looking back, Alicante gave us something invaluable. Not all the answers we were searching for, but the confidence to move forward and embrace whatever came next. And sometimes, that is where every new beginning starts.

Michael Graham

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CHAPTER 1: THE CALL



What began as a possibility was suddenly becoming real.

THE CALL

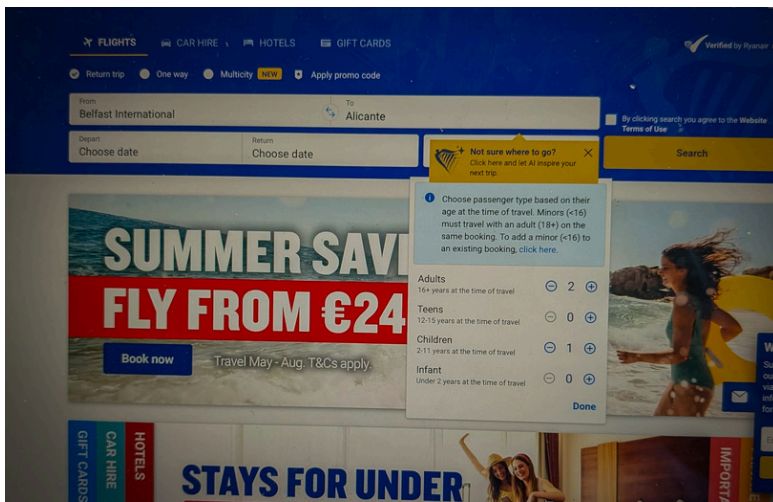
Booking First, Finding Answers Later

No matter how many flights you have done, travel still finds ways to throw something new at you. My daughter, at eight years old, is already somewhere around 75 flights deep. I have long since lost count after a few hundred myself. You would think by now we would have it mastered. In many ways we do. Over the years we have learned how to make family travel smoother, where to spend money and where not to, how to keep movement through airports, roads, queues and tiredness manageable. But sometimes trips arrive where control is only partial from the very beginning.

This Alicante trip was one of those.

Unlike the old May trips over to see my aunt and uncle in Torremendo, this one sat in a completely different emotional space from the start. My wife and I were travelling over for treatment at Instituto Bernabeu in Alicante as part of our donor egg journey, and with that came a strange balance between ordinary travel planning and something far bigger quietly sitting underneath it all. Potentially the chance to bring new life into the world. Exciting, hopeful, uncertain, expensive, practical, emotional — often all within the same hour.

From the outset we knew this would probably become a last-minute trip because so much of the timing depended on nature rather than us. Sure enough, on the Monday we were given a strong indication to prepare ourselves. At that point we took a gamble and booked the outbound



Ryanair flight for Thursday anyway because the fares on the surrounding days were already climbing into ridiculous territory. We still did not fully know if Friday would become the clinic day or not, but waiting much longer risked pricing ourselves out altogether.

Then Wednesday at 2pm the call came. We needed to be at the clinic Friday morning.

Suddenly the gamble on the outbound flight had paid off.

The problem now was that we had barely over a day, plus whatever sleep we could fit around it, to organise everything else. Return flights home, accommodation, transport, car hire, work logistics, packing,

“Then Wednesday at 2pm the call came. We needed to be at the clinic Friday morning.”

THE CALL

budgeting. The reality with trips like this is that nature controls the timetable, not you. The “best fare” is usually long gone before you even know you need it. You take what you can get, what you can afford, and then try to make it work practically afterwards.

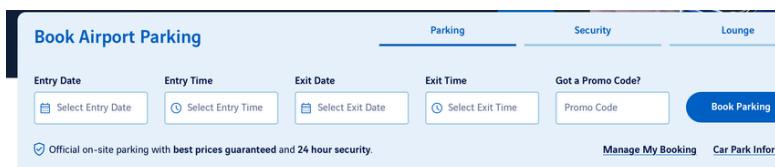
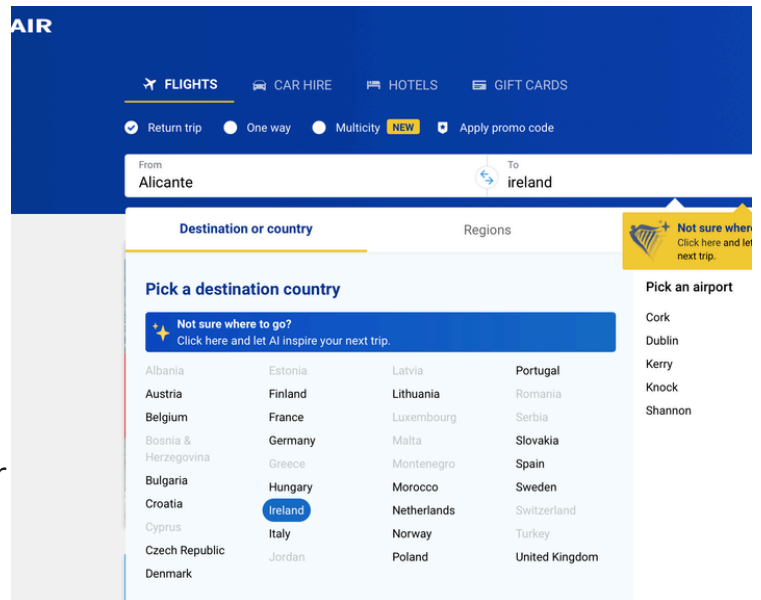
Solving the Pieces

People give Ryanair plenty of abuse, but in this situation they genuinely saved us. While other airlines were throwing out one-way fares close to a thousand euro for the three of us, Belfast still had something vaguely realistic available. Even with Belfast being over 150 miles away from us, it became the sensible option.

At that stage we could not even book a return because we still did not know our return date yet. We were gambling entirely on the outbound Thursday flight because every other day around it was hundreds more expensive.

Once we finally had a rough return plan, the options home were not exactly ideal either. Dublin was astronomical unless you wanted to spend a fortune. Cork had a 5:45am departure which is manageable leaving Ireland but grim coming home into it. Kerry briefly entered the conversation because the flight times were actually decent and part of me liked the adventure of it, but the reality of the long wait for a connecting flight onwards to Dublin quickly killed that idea.

Eventually we settled on the compromise option: fly back late into Belfast, land close to midnight, then pay extra for an airport hotel rather than attempt a three-hour drive home exhausted with a child in the car.



Our Car Parks

Official Airport Parking.



That really became the recurring balancing act of the whole trip before it had even properly started — affordability against practicality, and recognising when spending slightly more money now avoids creating bigger problems later.

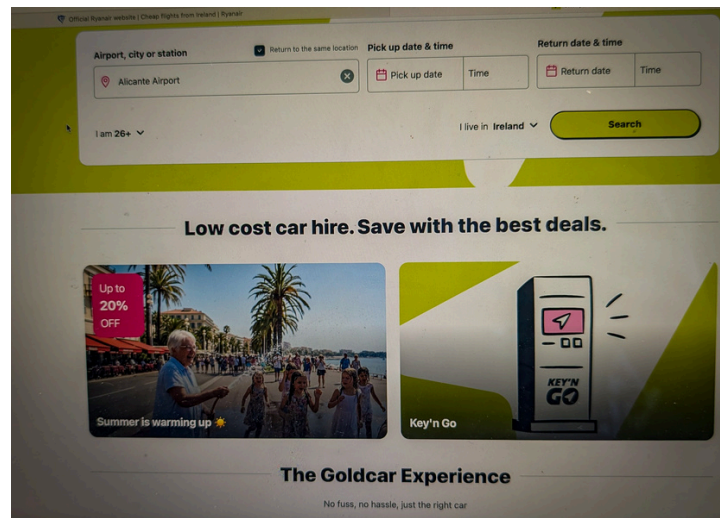
Decision made. Drive to Belfast. Park the car. A friend managed to get me a ten percent parking discount as well which I was very grateful for.

THE CALL

Accommodation became the next challenge. Last minute in Spain is not easy anymore, especially with the newer Airbnb regulations and restrictions around shorter stays. Normally we would have weeks to prepare, compare areas, work within a proper budget and slowly build a loose plan around the trip. This time there was none of that. We just needed something realistic rather than ideal.

Airbnb requests and rejections followed. Some places disappeared before we could even confirm. Others would not allow shorter stays. A few simply never replied. The pressure slowly built in the background while trying to sort everything else at the same time.

Alongside the accommodation I was trying to sort the car hire situation. Normally I shop around far more carefully, but time pressure changes how you make decisions. In the end we booked Goldcar mainly because of the Key and Go option. The thought of landing late and walking straight to a car without standing at another desk queue suddenly became worth paying for. Around €216 all in, no excess stress, no extra surprises. Public transport had crossed my mind, but realistically



with clinic visits and the way we travel when in Alicante, the flexibility of having the car simply made more sense.

Ironically AI actually saved me money here. One of those random searches threw up a discount code which knocked about twenty euro off the booking. Small wins matter on trips like this. Accommodation though still remained unanswered, so eventually there was nothing left to do except try get a bit of sleep.

By departure day I also had a routine blood test along with a blood pressure test. I should have been nowhere near one as I was wired to the moon on adrenaline. Unsurprisingly my blood pressure and heart rate came back slightly elevated. The second attempt after a brief bit of meditation came back

much better.

Then finally, while still searching and half running on fumes, a ground floor apartment in Gran Alacant suddenly popped up. Last minute, instant confirmation, even a small discount applied. The host confirmed almost immediately.

Relief.

