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'Our baby was born to a surrogate abroad but coronavirus means we're stranded and can't bring her home'

British couples are stuck in foreign countries, waiting for passports for their newborns - and flights back to the UK

By Lara Hill

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After having our new daughter Emily via a surrogate, we assumed we'd be able to bring her home without any problems. But she was born in January in Georgia, and now we find ourselves stranded out here, unable to obtain her a passport or fly her out of the country. Due to the [coronavirus pandemic](#), services have ground to a halt, and there are currently no flights to the UK from Tbilisi, the Georgian capital where we're currently holed up in an Airbnb flat.

I have a heart condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which cast doubt over whether I could safely carry a baby. That was why my husband Andrew and I opted for surrogacy, to enable us to have the family we'd always dreamed of.

But commercial surrogacy isn't currently permitted in the UK, so we found a surrogate for both of our children in Georgia, where such arrangements are allowed.

We had our son Marcus this way 21 months ago. Then, this year, we were thrilled to meet Emily, who I'm happy to say is doing well. We, on the other hand, are not. Trapped with our baby and toddler in temporary accommodation overseas, we are frightened and have no idea how to get home. Some 2,600 miles from our close family support network that helps us in Weybridge in Surrey, we're at a loss as to what we can do.

The first difficulty is that surrogate babies born abroad to British couples are not automatically British citizens. Parents need to obtain a passport for them first, which is far from straightforward right now.



Officials wearing protective gear stand near the tent at a checkpoint, set up to prevent the spread of coronavirus in Marneuli near Tbilisi, Georgia | CREDIT: IRAKLI GEDENIDZE/ REUTERS

As Andrew has joint British and Australian citizenship, we thought it would be quicker to obtain Emily an Australian passport and fly her back to Britain on that. But like Britain, Georgia is in a state of lockdown, and to complicate matters further the Australian embassy responsible for Georgia is actually in neighbouring [Turkey](#). So when the passport we've applied for arrives, it will be in Istanbul - more than a thousand miles away.

We hope to arrange a courier. But the possibility of that, like everything else, is in doubt. And even when we do obtain the passport, there remains the problem of flights.

We don't know how long this will last. No-one does. And we don't know where we will go once our accommodation rental period ends on April 22.

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Needless to say we were totally unprepared for this nightmare. We brought with us some baby clothes for 0-3 months but have nothing for when Emily outgrows them. We also have no outdoor space here, so for 24 hours a day, our toddler is cooped up indoors.

To make matters worse, Andrew’s contract as a software developer has been terminated since we arrived, as his firm has been hard hit by the virus and forced to make cuts. He can’t search for jobs while we’re out here, and I was already on a career break from my job as a tax adviser.

Quite frankly the situation is terrifying. These were supposed to be the happiest of times, and yet here we are, wracked with uncertainty about how we can possibly get home. And we have a newborn baby to care for.

At least the four of us are together. I just hope we can get out of here soon.

As told to Rosa Silverman

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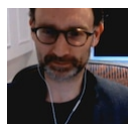
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