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Personal shopper Annalisa Barbieri



My eight-month-old baby is at a stage where she puts everything in her mouth (and I mean everything). After the recent toy recalls, I checked her toys. Though not recalled, most of them are made in China and almost all of the high-street brands are manufactured in China. I have been looking for toys made in the UK or Europe or fair-trade toys from around the world, but it is difficult to find them. Any suggestions? *Umit Isil Simsek, Guildford, Surrey*

There are a few issues here. Not all toys made in China, or the far east, are "bad", just as not everything that's produced in Europe will be "good", but if you're asking for toys that aren't mass-produced, and are morally produced, then, yes, they're not overly easy to find because there aren't loads of them and they also tend to be of the more educational variety. This is in part because the toy trade is a cut-throat business (don't be fooled by the cuddly toys!), consumers want things to cost as little as possible and also because there is no UK guarantee to look for on toys – the Fairtrade mark is the UK's only independent guarantee of fair trade, and it doesn't currently cover toys. So while a toy may be genuinely fairly traded, or be made from fairly traded materials, there's no actual guarantee you can look for, and be aware that the words "fair trade" are easily bandied about.

However, Barbara Crowther of the Fairtrade Foundation says that "there are many companies that have direct relationships with small-scale handcraft producers making fairly traded toys. Bishopston Trading, for example [www.bishopstontrading.co.uk] sells a range of toys and dolls clothes made with Fairtrade-certified cotton, and the British Association for Fair Trade Shops [www.bafts.org.uk] can provide details of local shops across the UK that stock other brands of fairly traded toys. Oxfam and Draftcraft also sell fairly traded toys." Bishopston Trading has some very



Crocheted doll £16.99



Handmade teddy £30



Toy lion £4.90



Vegetable rattles £16.99



Babycube £3.95



Coho Playbracelet £10



Rattle £4.95



Tingle-ling Tiger £3.99

cute soft toys for £4.90 and a baby-cube, which may be ideal for your daughter, for £3.95. The International Fair Trade Association's website is another good starting point (www.ifatf.org). It's a good sign if a supplier is a member of Ifatf (or Bafts) and you can search for various products, including toys, and also check to see if someone

who says they're a member, really is. Biome (www.biomelifestyle.co.uk, 020-7254 7613) is a lovely website with a wide range of products that are stylish but also environmentally friendly, organic, recycled or ethically sourced. Each product has a symbol that tells you if it's locally produced, so you can shop accordingly. There's a great solar-

powered toy helicopter (for when your child is older) for £17. But my favourite is the handmade teddy, £30, which is locally handmade from recycled fabrics. You can even send in fabric to have a teddy made for your child from a favourite dress or something, which I think is a lovely idea to make it really special and personal.

Urchin (www.urchin.co.uk, 0870 112 6006) has a few items that come from a small company in Bangladesh, which is a member of Ifatf and where workers are treated well and paid a fair wage, and no children are involved. A crocheted doll is £16.99 and the vegetable knitted rattle set is also £16.99. I think that your little girl would particularly like the latter.

The Coho Playbracelet, £10 (www.cohogear.co.uk, 020-8288 8948) is made in England by Mel Jukes. It's made from sustainably grown wood beads, non toxic-paints and finished with non toxic-varnish. Although I think that any parent who goes down the party-bag road is a fool, you may be interested to know that Turrets and Tiaras (www.turretsandtiaras.co.uk, 01484 665100) sells ethically produced party bags for £3.99 that contain a bar of Fairtrade Double chocolate and soft dolls made by Cause (www.cause.de) whose philosophy is "quality, safety, usefulness". Cause actively campaigns against child labour, and at least 50% of its profits go towards school projects in developing countries.

A few other websites for you to look at: Holz Toys (www.holz-toys.co.uk, 0845 130 8697) has some spectacularly beautiful toys with good credentials, but they're not cheap. All their suppliers are known ("We know everything about the provenance of our toys"), and have been personally visited by the man behind Holz. The toys are mostly made in Europe from sustainable sources and guaranteed not to have been made by child labour. The Dangle and Drape is to my mind the best baby gym you can get. And my daughter had a Holz pram chain, which was her number one favourite toy for ages. Little Green Earthlets (www.earthlets.co.uk, 0845 072 4462) has partnerships with small family-based enterprises in Sri Lanka. Look for its rattles from £4.95 or Tingle-ling Tiger, £3.99 (these will go on sale and on the website from October 22). A book you might find useful is *The Real Toy Story* by Eric Clark.

Shopping problems
Contact Personal Shopper, The Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER or email: annalisa.barbieri@mac.com