



Family Travel

Are we there yet? That familiar refrain is part of the cultural lexicon of the art and science of traveling with children. Being a good traveler is something best learned early in life, and parents can help ensure that children enjoy their family trips to the utmost with a little planning. Along the way, parents also make their own time spent in the airplane or in the car more enjoyable and less stressful. If you are traveling with young ones, here are a few tips that will make the experience less of a trial and more of a treat.

Choose appropriately. Ask your travel agent for travel plans that are highly recommended for children and families. Not all destinations and themes are age appropriate. But dude ranches, bird watching, hiking and almost any other activity can be enjoyed by children in measured doses and with adequate preparation. Many tour operators specialize in the family element and are better equipped to deal with the attention spans and skill levels of your children. But even family oriented tour operators have age limits, so make sure that your travel agent is informed on the age of your children early in the planning process. Likewise, family travel involves special budgetary considerations that your travel agent will be adept in handling for you. Many airlines and tour operators provide infant discounts that your agent can acquire for you.



Getting there is not really half the fun, particularly if the kids in tow are not happy. Plan ahead by structuring some activities during the travel time. Discuss your trip and planned activities with the kids to give them something to look forward to. Even a brief description of the landscape through which you will be driving or over which you will be flying will be enough to entice many children into making lists of sites, animals or other points of interest. Portable DVD players help the time pass, and packing a game bag in advance is always a good idea - include cards, game books, crayons and paper. Airline meals do not always stack up against the food children (or adults) would prefer to eat. Packing light, fun snacks and drinks is a good idea when flying or driving.



Stopping often during the course of the trip is not only a good idea, it is usually a necessity. All night and day marathon driving sessions are hard on small bodies, so breaks are an important health and stress consideration. Plan the drive to encounter interesting waypoints to keep kids attentive and to break up a tedious drive.

Many kids love to collect things, so give the children a special box or pouch to place found objects like shells, stones or feathers. Along with pictures, these keepsakes are great ways to remember the trip. Speaking of pictures, older children can be given their own disposable camera for the trip. The additional responsibility is good for the child and will provide a new way for them to participate. Remember, too, that your interests will not always

coincide with the kids': give a few extra moments at a play-ground, a waterfall or a "gem mine" that you might not otherwise have stopped to visit. Older children can be encouraged to keep a journal of their trip, recording their impressions and memories of the adventure.

Keep kids well hydrated, even if it means more frequent bathroom stops. Also, remember that children's sinus cavities are more sensitive than your own and may painfully react to changes in air pressure when flying, particularly if the child has a cold or ear infection. Bottles of formula for babies and chewy foods or gum for older children may help. If you are concerned, ask your doctor prior to flying with children about any specific recommendations.

If your baby begins to cry on a plane, remember that what you are witnessing is discomfort. While you may feel troubled by the disruption to other passengers, don't hesitate to first comfort your child. The other passengers will, or should, understand the circumstances and be sympathetic. For older children, discipline on an airplane or a train can be a task at times. Talk about your expectations for their behavior and agree on a way to monitor it - perhaps include a reward.

If at all possible, stick to a sleeping and eating schedule that mimics home. If traveling in a foreign country, give special attention and consideration to safety precautions against food and water borne illnesses; before you leave, visiting a physician who specializes in travel medicine is always a good idea.

While it's tempting to choose a relaxing holiday where the kids stay with relatives over toting them with you across the world - keep the little ones on the road. Travel is a terrific opportunity to encourage children to be responsible world citizens and to respect other people and cultures.

Once you know where you're going and how you'll get there, take a little time to develop a travel strategy that includes the good and the bad: appropriate diversions, activities, expectations, consequences, and, most of all, opportunities for memory-making... discuss and review it with your family so everyone is on the same page - and truly excited about the trip. A good activity to plan for on the way home is a conversation to recap the trip, day-by-day. Everyone talks about what you did, what they liked, what they want to do again - and you can record it all for posterity.

Great memories are made on family vacations, so travel should not be reserved only for the adults of the world!

