
Travelling with children

Summary

- Check in advance with travel agents, airlines and your accommodation for child-friendly suggestions.
 - Children have short attention spans and get tired very quickly.
 - Make sure there will be enough family events and child-oriented activities to keep them amused while away.
 - Take a medical kit containing items such as baby paracetamol, thermometer, anti-itching lotion, oral rehydration preparation and bandaids.
 - Pack plenty of toys and favourite snacks.
 - When flying, encourage your child to eat or drink during take-off and landing to prevent earache.
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Travelling with children is challenging, but a bit of forethought can help reduce parental stress. If your child is old enough, involve them in planning for the trip so they can get excited about it. Make sure to include enough family events and child-oriented activities to amuse them while on holidays.

In many cases, keeping your trip simple will reduce the number of problems. Remember that young children have short attention spans and get tired very quickly. Complicated trips requiring lots of travelling, jam-packed itineraries or too many visits to adult-oriented attractions, such as museums, can be difficult for children and aggravating for parents.

Suggestions for travelling with children

General tips to make travel with children a little easier include:

- Ask your travel agent for suggestions.
- Choose appropriate accommodation, such as self-contained apartments with two or more bedrooms.
- Hire baby furniture items, such as pram, stroller, cot and highchair, rather than lug your own.
- Take a good supply of disposable nappies and wipes.
- When visiting attractions with older children, try the 'trade-off' method – activities for adults in the morning balanced with activities for the kids after lunch, for instance.
- Use the babysitting facilities at your hotel from time to time so you can have a break.
- Remember that the price of 'kids' clubs' at some resorts is an extra expense.
- Older children will like having their own (disposable) camera and holiday diary so they can record their own impressions.

Keeping your child amused while travelling

Suggestions to keep children amused while the family gets from point A to B include:

- Pack plenty of toys.
- Offer the toys one at a time, replacing each toy with a fresh one once the child shows signs of boredom.
- To cut down on fights over sharing, make sure each child has their own stash of toys.
- Play family games such as 'I-spy'.
- Pack a picnic lunch.
- For older children, show them a map beforehand and point out landmarks as you go.

Meal routines for children travelling

Toddlers and young children are often fussy eaters. Travelling to unfamiliar places with new foods and different mealtime routines can further disrupt your child's eating habits. Suggestions include:

- Relax and remember that a healthy child will never voluntarily starve themselves. Trust them to eat when they're hungry.
- Try to keep a little bit of familiar mealtime routine, such as having breakfast in the usual way.
- Don't assume you'll always find something they'll like on a restaurant menu. Carry plenty of their favourite snacks and drinks when touring around.
- Ring ahead and see if the restaurant you're planning to visit has a children's menu.

Travellers' diarrhoea in children

Children with travellers' diarrhoea are susceptible to dehydration. Suggestions to reduce the risk of travellers' diarrhoea include:

- Avoid risky foods such as seafood, undercooked meats, peeled and raw fruits and vegetables, and unpasteurised dairy products.
- If you are unsure of the water supply, only drink bottled water, carbonated soft drinks or bottled fruit juices.
- Use bottled water when brushing teeth.
- Wash your child's hands frequently.
- Avoid eating foods from street vendors.

Safety issues when travelling with children

General safety tips include:

- See your doctor about immunisations beforehand, if appropriate.
- Pack sunscreen, hats and insect repellent.
- Be particularly careful about the potential dangers of unfamiliar places, such as unfenced swimming pools or balconies.
- Take all sterilising equipment with you if your child is bottle-fed.
- Avoid animals such as dogs, cats and monkeys, to reduce the risk of bites.
- Take a medical kit containing items such as baby paracetamol, thermometer, anti-itching lotion, oral rehydration preparation and bandaids.

Suggestions for keeping children safe while the family gets from point A to B include:

- In a car, always use appropriate restraints, such as seatbelts or car seats. Don't stack items on the back ledge of the car or over the steering wheel, as these items will become dangerous flying projectiles if you have to brake suddenly. Use shade cloth to keep the sun from shining in your child's face. Plan for plenty of toilet stops. Frequent rest stops help to reduce the risk of motion sickness.
- On a bus or train, use seatbelts if available. Don't allow your child to crawl or walk around while the vehicle is moving because they may fall. Keep your child seated or on your lap.

Motion sickness in children

The symptoms of motion sickness include blanching (becoming pale), headache, dizziness, complaints of feeling sick and, ultimately, vomiting. Motion sickness can occur on any mode of transport, but is more likely when travelling by boat.

Suggestions to reduce the risk of motion sickness include:

- When travelling by car, take frequent rest stops.
- Make sure your child looks out the window, rather than at a stationary object inside the vehicle (such as a book).
- Fresh air can help, so open a window if possible.
- Anti-nausea medications are available, but check with your doctor first as some medications may not be suitable for children.
- Make sure your child eats something before travelling, but avoid heavy or greasy foods.

Children and air travel

Travelling by air with children can be challenging, but planning ahead can reduce parental stress. Young children may find the confinement difficult to handle, especially during long flights, and the change of cabin pressure during take-off and landing can hurt their ears.

On the other hand, travelling by plane can be an exciting adventure for children. The trick is to meet their needs and focus on the fun.

Newborns are vulnerable to infections, and the recirculated air inside a plane can increase their risk of illness. Unless the situation demands travel, it is generally better to wait until your baby is a little older. Be advised by your doctor.

Pre-flight suggestions for flying with children

Planning ahead can make the flight more enjoyable for your child. Specific suggestions include:

- Take your child to the doctor for a medical check-up.
- Ask friends or your travel agent for advice on child-friendly airlines. Some airlines are more helpful than others.
- If you are the only adult travelling, ask the airline if it is possible to have an 'assistant' who will help you at each stop. For example, the staff member might collect your luggage for you.
- Arrange in advance for children's meals.
- Children aged two years and over must have their own seats on international flights.
- Children aged three years and over must have their own seats on domestic flights.
- Ask for bulkhead seats or seats near an exit to give your child a safe spot to play on the floor.
- If you have a young baby, arrange with the airline for a bassinette.
- A car seat can be taken on board, but you will need to book a seat for it.
- Older children will like having a window seat.
- If flying over a long distance, try to book an overnight flight to coincide with your child's sleeping habits.

Carry-on bag for air travel with children

Make sure your carry-on bag holds every item your child is likely to need during the flight. Suggestions include:

- change of clothes
- change mat
- nappies
- extra plastic pants
- baby wipes
- tissues
- nappy-rash creams
- bottles of milk
- favourite snacks, such as cheese or biscuits
- dummy
- spill-proof drinks
- any medication they need on a regular basis
- paracetamol appropriate to your child's age and weight
- toys and games.

At the airport with children

Suggestions include:

- Dress your child in bright clothes so that they stand out in a crowd.
- Get to the airport early so that your child can run around or play for a while.
- Change your baby's nappy before boarding, as space is cramped inside plane toilets.

On the plane with children

Suggestions include:

- Dress your child in a couple of light layers, so you can add or remove layers as necessary. Remember that blankets are available.
- Don't hesitate to ask your flight attendants for help. For example, they may be allowed to warm bottles for you.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids to reduce the risk of dehydration.
- Don't try to change your baby's nappy on your lap – plane toilets have pull-down change tables.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids to reduce the risk of dehydration.
- Take toys that don't take up too much luggage space – like books, pencils and drawing or colouring books, and handheld computer games.
- Younger children will like having their favourite 'security' toy on the flight.
- Ask flight attendants for playing cards or colouring books and pencils, which many airlines supply free to young passengers.
- Older children may enjoy a trip to the flight deck. Ask your flight attendant.

Ear pain in children while flying

The change in cabin pressure during aeroplane take-off and, in particular, during descent and landing can hurt a child's ears. Swallowing eases the pressure, but the trick is getting your child to swallow at the right time.

Suggestions include:

- Try to feed your baby or child while taking off and landing.
- Give your child something to drink or eat.
- If your child isn't thirsty or hungry, give them lollies (if they are old enough).
- Drops that numb the eardrum (Auralgan) can ease the pain. You can buy these without a prescription.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Pharmacist
- Travel agent
- Family and friends for advice
- Airline

Things to remember

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