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The Jetsetter's Guide

to Holiday Travel with Children

BY TIFFANY JANSEN

There certainly is no place like home for the holidays. Only now, as an expat, the long car ride to Grandma's has been replaced with hours in an airplane – a prospect that can be very intimidating when traveling with children.

Jet-setting with the kids, however, doesn't have to add to the stress of the holiday season. With some advance planning and a little ingenuity, family travel can be transformed from a frightening prospect into an enjoyable adventure.

Here, we've compiled a stocking-full of top tips from travel experts to get you home for the holidays in one piece – and perhaps with a scrap of sanity.

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Before your trip

Prevention is better than cure, so the saying goes, and that applies to travel with kids as well. The better prepared you are prior to the trip, the smoother your journey will be. Mathias Friess, CEO of Webjet.com, travels extensively with his two girls and is a big proponent of choosing your travel days wisely.

“Traveling with kids already comes with a heightened level of tension and stress,” he says. “There’s no need to add additional levels of stress by opting to travel on one of the busiest travel days of the year.”

He recommends flying out on a Monday or Tuesday and planning your return trip for a Friday evening or a Saturday. This may also save 30-50% on airfare. Added bonus!

If possible, go for a non-stop flight

“A plane change automatically means you’ll have to grab all your stuff, and go through the hassle of finding the connecting flight, which may require terminal changes and train rides to get from one gate to the next,” Friess warns.

Non-stop not an option? Travel writer Elizabeth Thorp, who has written travel content for The Huffington Post and PeterGreenberg.com, among others, books flights for her family that allow more time between connections whenever possible.

Another tip comes from Ethan Gelber, a Lonely Planet freelancer who frequently travels with his little ones to visit his wife’s family in Australia: “Carefully choose flights during which the kids may be able to sleep a good portion of the trip.” Overnights and flights that fall during nap times are your best bet as kids will be used to sleeping during that time anyway.

At the airport

Don’t forget to make use of services offered through the airline or at the airport. Our experts came up with these

eight amenities you should be taking advantage of:

Online check-in. Many airlines let passengers check in online 24-hours prior to their flight. You can usually fill in passport information, check bags, and print out boarding passes – all well in advance of your departure, saving time and avoiding stress.

Come on, get app-y

Want to track the status of your flight? There’s an app for that. Has your flight been missed or canceled and you need to know when the next available flight is? There’s an app for that. Need to check in or having trouble finding your way around the airport? There’s an app for that. Interested in keeping tabs on your checked luggage? There’s an app for that. Want food delivered to you at your gate? Yes, there’s an app for that too. Let the apps do the work while you relax and enjoy the trip.

Ask TSA about the family line

Ask the Transportation Security Administration officer if there’s a family line. “I always do this,” Rachel Stephens, TrendyKids co-founder and children’s packing and travel expert says, “and they place me in the shortest line – or in the express lane. Always worth asking!” This is especially handy when traveling solo with kids.

Join the club

Thorp recommends purchasing a day pass to the airline’s lounge or club. The lounges come equipped with WiFi, televisions, snacks and drinks, saving you from having to wander around the terminals. “You can stay out of the hustle and bustle of the airport, get extra assistance, be productive or relax in the quieter atmosphere,” Thorp adds.

Board early

Many airlines allow those needing special assistance,

and passengers traveling with infants or small children to board the plane first. These passengers often take the longest to board, so getting them on first makes life easier not just for them, but for the other passengers as well.

Order a kid’s meal

“Airlines don’t typically advertise this great option,” says Friess, “but almost all will offer a vegetarian or kid’s meal if ordered 48 hours prior to departure. Most of the time, the meals are more accessible to young taste buds and, most importantly, special meals are always delivered first. This can be extremely valuable if your children are hungry, exhausted and an afternoon or evening sleep is due.” Baby food can also be requested if you’re traveling with an infant.

Request a bassinet

If you’re sitting in the bulkhead on an international aircraft, you have the option of requesting a bassinet. They’re free to use, but very limited. There are a few restrictions regarding the use of a bassinet: the child must weigh 22 pounds (10 kilo) or less, and the bassinet cannot be used during take-off, landing, or while the ‘fasten seatbelt’ sign is lit

– but many parents traveling with babies swear by it.

Apply for Global Entry

“If you can apply for Global Entry for international travel, it makes it a lot easier,” offers Stephens. “You go to a special line and scan your passport and you’re done.”

Experiencing a bit of turbulence?

If a passenger’s worst nightmare is being stuck on a plane with – or worse yet, near – a screaming child, every parent’s worst nightmare is being the one with the screaming child. Unfortunately, all the preparation in the world can’t always prevent a meltdown. But there are some important things to keep in mind should a meltdown occur.

“First and foremost, don’t worry about what anyone else thinks,” Gelber urges. “Ignore other people’s looks and shut your ears to their murmurings. They are not your problem and they should know better than to add to yours.”

“It’s really important,” adds Shelly Rivoli, author of the award-winning *Travels with Baby* guidebooks, “for parents to remember that the [child] will sense their anxiety or frustration, and if mom and dad are stressing out, a tough situation may get even more difficult.”

Gelber recommends getting to the root of the problem and trying to solve it. Ear pain caused by cabin pressure can often be the problem, Thorp points out, but nothing that a little gum or hard candy, nursing or a pacifier/dummy can’t fix. Your child may also be hungry, so make sure you have plenty of snacks or formula on hand. Rivoli suggests taking your child to the lavatory, away from the noise and unfamiliar faces, to calm them down.

“Traveling is often stressful for big people too,” Gelber reminds us, “so we need to be understanding if our little ones don’t take it completely in stride.” ■

WHAT’S IN THEIR CARRY-ON?

Ethan Gelber (travel writer)
Complete change of clothes for everyone, including parents.

Elizabeth Thorp (travel writer/blogger)
Healthy snacks - boxes of raisins, granola bars, pretzels, bananas.

Rachel Stephens (TrendyKid co-founder)
Documents pouch with passports and other travel documents.

Mathias Friess (CEO, Webjet.com)
New coloring books, washable markers, small toys that don’t make noise, and puzzles, individually wrapped. Every hour get one gift out to be unwrapped and explored.

Shelly Rivoli (*Travels with Baby* author)
Lots and lots of plastic bags for dirty diapers.

