



LIFESTYLE

10 Tips for Successful Summer Travel with Kids

Get ready for your next vacation with these kid-friendly travel tips, perfect for traveling across country or even globetrotting around the world.

By [Wendy Altschuler](#) | Published on May 13, 2024



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The summer season is just around the corner, which means that memory-making adventures are on the horizon. After all, the biggest gift we can give our kids is time: time creating, time discovering, and time together. When planning a vacation, whether you'll be [traveling internationally](#), [road-tripping across the country](#), or romping around in nature at a nearby forest preserve, there's much to consider.

As a seasoned travel writer and a mother of three, I've been all over the globe with my brood, exploring not only far-flung destinations like Peru, Japan, and India but also closer-to-home outdoorsy locales like our national and state parks. Let me tell you, I've learned some helpful tips along the way. Additionally, I've reached out to other parents and caregivers, including a pediatric doctor, to get their tips for successful summer travel with kids.

Take a Deep Breath

Traveling with kiddos for the first time? [Akanksha Shrivastava Hanna, MD](#), pediatrician in Park Ridge, Illinois, says that you should start by taking a deep breath.

"Parents want to make sure we plan for everyone and everything to create the best trip possible," says Hanna. "A great step to take is to acknowledge we won't see or do everything, and that's fine. Set reasonable goals, [have] a flexible itinerary, be as prepared as you can, and be ready to pivot since travel is not always a smooth process. Making lists is helpful and think of your child's needs for an entire day, including meals, toiletries, car travel, and safe sleep equipment."



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Find a Playground or Outdoor Space

Playing outside is a great way to burn off energy and have a healthy reset. [Go on a hike](#), stop at a local playground, or take the dogs to a fenced-in park. Your little ones will thank you.

Janette Thompson is currently enjoying a gap year with her family in tow as they travel across Asia. “While traveling we usually research the surrounding areas for playgrounds, parks, and other child-friendly activities,” Thompson says.

Pack Light

If you can swing it, [pack everything you need in carry-on luggage](#). The last thing you want to do on vacation is constantly worry about managing and schlepping everyone’s large suitcases. Rather than checking luggage, waiting for it on the other end at the baggage carousel, or trying to figure out what to do if it gets lost or misplaced, if you carry on what you need, you can fly through the airport much faster. Plus, light luggage makes it easier when switching hotels and locales.

“Moving large luggage multiple times on a trip is exhausting and logistically challenging,” says Thompson.

Don’t Stuff Too Much into the Itinerary

I have a confession to make. As a curious traveler, I often operate with FOMO: fear of missing out. When I’m traveling by myself, I like a full itinerary with lots of activities and very little downtime. I want to make the most of my experience, especially if I’m visiting a country I’ve never been to before. But here’s the thing: kids need breaks. Lots of breaks. If you plan too much and don’t leave enough space for their needs or interests, you might find that moods shift and sour.

Producer, TV host, photographer, and writer, [Rachel Rudwall](#), travels with her family somewhere warm at least once per year. “Take, for example, our journey to Sardinia, Italy from Portland, Oregon. Not a single person would argue that this trip is logistically simple,” Rudwall says. “We would, however, argue that this journey was both doable and worth the haul—even [with our then 14-month-old in tow](#).”

Sardinia was where her toddler took his first steps, creating an indelible memory not soon forgotten. While the beach time and Italian food were expected highlights, the multi-hour flight itinerary from the U.S. to Sardinia was less than desirable. Rudwall thought ahead and arranged for a two-night stopover in Amsterdam, creating space to deal with jet lag. “This layover allowed us a soft spot to land between our flights, plus a beautiful couple days noshing on pastries and enjoying leisurely strolls in another wonderful European destination,” Rudwall says. “If I were to offer one piece of advice it would be this: wherever you go with your kids, build in buffers. These bonus windows of time will offer you the space to breathe, top up on snacks, and better navigate logistical challenges. Plus, they just might inspire some of your favorite moments of the journey.”

Bring a Travel Medical Kit

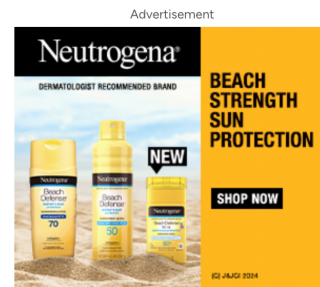
While we all hope that nothing goes wrong on a trip, you’ll want to be prepared and plan accordingly. Put together a [travel medical kit](#) that includes over-the-counter medicines and supplies.

“This can include fever-reducing/pain medications, antihistamines, antibacterial ointment, band-aids, tweezers, and Vaseline,” says Hanna. “Make note of your child’s weight for dosing certain medications and make sure you have a supply of prescription medicines ahead of time. Discuss with your medical team if your child has medical conditions.”

“In warmer climates remember to pack reef-safe sunscreens (and



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reapply), bug sprays, and protective clothing (hats, sunglasses, UV-protected clothing)," Hanna says. "If heading outdoors, be sure to keep most skin covered and check bodies and hair for ticks daily. Before traveling internationally, consider notifying your child's pediatrician if any additional recommended immunizations can be given. I guide parents to [CDC.GOV/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel) which breaks down pertinent information by country of travel."

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Research the Hotel and Destination Ahead of Time

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While it's advisable to leave plenty of open space on the itinerary, it's important to research where you're going and to know what activities and cultural experiences are available. What is the area known for and what are the highlights that everyone should know about? You'll also want to know what the hotel amenities are so you can plan accordingly. Is there a swimming pool at the hotel? On-site laundry? Does the resort have a concierge that can arrange tours? Finding a property that is fun for both the parents and the kids is key.

Let the Kids Be Part of the Planning

If children are part of the planning process, they'll be more invested in the trip. Let them decide which restaurant your family eats at or what activity everyone participates in. Teach kids how to navigate and read maps. Bring journals and encourage them to write about their daily adventures.

"Parents can get caught up in the things they want to do on vacation since kids don't exactly plan these things out, but we've made it a priority to make sure that the kids think of it as their vacation too, so if we pass by something that interests them, we want to make those things happen as much as possible," says Thompson.

Keep the Ages of Kids in Mind When Planning and Packing

Whether you're traveling with toddlers or teens, you'll want to consider your children's ages when structuring an itinerary or thinking about safety issues.

"With younger children we want them to be comfortable and safe, so keep some soothing items from home such as blankets, pacifiers, a few toys, or a stuffy," says Hanna. "Older kids can enjoy music, books, card games or using their electronic device[s]—remember, parents get to decide how much screen time their child consumes, and don't forget the chargers!"

Of course, safety should always be top of mind. Depending on your children's ages, have discussions with them to go over the rules. "In new environments, review the safety plans regarding water play (never leave a child unattended near water) and review parent phone numbers—consider putting them inside their pockets," says Hanna. "Trusting our older kids with more responsibility comes with varying comfort levels, but in a semi-controlled environment, this can be a good opportunity for them to demonstrate it, i.e., reading the map, guiding you through the airport, having them order their meals or pay for souvenirs. Learning how to budget on a trip with spending money is a nice exercise."

Bring a Bag O' Fun

For every car trip I've ever planned, I've always brought a "bag o' fun". This could be a deck of cards, snacks, new books, or mini-Lego sets. The idea is to bring along little surprises or fun things to do that will brighten up the moment.

Anastasia Gonzalez and her husband Gilbert take their grandchildren to

South Padre Island every summer for fishing and exploring. One year they rented an RV to travel from Illinois to Texas. "It was the most beautiful experience," Gonzalez says. "The driving, the board games, camping out, taking showers at the campsites, sleeping in the RV, and cuddling with those two boys was wonderful and cozy."

Her advice for grandparents? "Allow your grandchildren to be themselves with you on your trip," Gonzalez says. "Go with the idea of having fun. Break some rules. Ask what they want but have a plan. Make meals interesting and make one night a special meal night."

Attitudes, Good or Bad, are Contagious

Most parents who travel with their kids will tell you that if one person has a bad attitude, that same mood can transfer to siblings or even adults. Staying positive is key, especially if you're on a long vacation away from the comforts of home.

"Kids love time with their family, but they are humans, and we all get moody sometimes," says Hanna. "Our kids learn by our example, so parents take the lead with many deep breaths, exercise when possible, be mindful about handling stressful situations, and take lots of pictures. Parental well-being trickles down into children's well-being."

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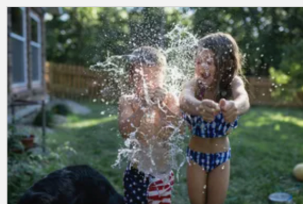
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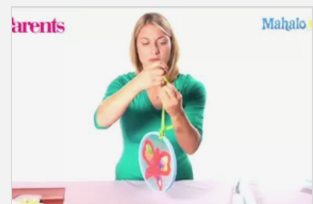
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