

Traveling with Children

By Justine Jacobson

Traveling with children can seem a very daunting task and because of this, many people allow it to affect their travel plans or even put a pause in them “until the kids get older”. Coming from South Africa, I have had no choice but to take on this monster and tame it.

There are a number of things to take into consideration whether you are traveling on a road trip or airplane. Timing, toys, games and “must haves”.

First of all, when it comes to somewhat small car trips the best thing to do is plan it around the children’s nap schedule and coincide your travel time with their naps. If you are traveling a further distance you can even choose to start your travels as they are ready to go to sleep for the night. When it comes to airplane travel however you do not have that luxury so the best thing to do is try and adjust your children’s nap and sleep time around the schedule of the flights.

Realizing that is easier said than done, for all those “awake” times you need to have your little bag of back-up supplies. Depending on the age of your children there are a number of things you can bring along with you as a quick distraction. A small pad of paper and crayons for games such as Tic-Tac-Toe, Connect the Dots or just doodling. Activity books are also great for the older children. For the younger child “Aqua Doodle” has made a special little travel book that comes with a pen that you just have to fill with water...no mess! Matchbox cars, small action figures and small little dolls such as Polly Pockets or ZuZu Pets make for a little time of imaginative play. Puzzles that are small enough for you to put together on the airplane tray or bring along your own tray in the car (a cereal box works great). Small containers of play dough, books, and then for the children who have attention long enough to sustain watching a movie, a couple of DVD’s and a portable DVD player. As painful as it may seem to some of you...a CD with kid’s music is also a good idea.

Various travel games such as “I spy” or being the first one to spot a stop sign, red truck, airplane etc. are always sure to pass a bit of time. I also play a game by giving the children 2 clues about something I am thinking about and ask them to guess. They can ask questions if they cannot get it. This game always lasts quite a while because everybody has to have a turn. For airplane travel it is also a good idea to bring along a deck of cards. There are endless games you can play and the good part is that they are usually quite lengthy.

There are one or two other things that you shouldn’t forget. A change of clothes that are readily accessible and not tucked away in the luggage somewhere are a good idea because you just never know. Depending on the time of day, taking a break and putting the kids in their pajamas is a good idea. Something else to remember is LOTS of wipes and a towel. You may ask “why” but the rides to and from the grocery store might not have brought out the motion sickness in your child. When you turn around and notice your little cherub looks a bit like a ghost...PULL OVER! If you cannot pull over, grab

the handy little paper bag they give you on the plane. You'll be thankful you have the towel, change of clothes and wipes!

Don't forget the usual snacks your child likes to eat and I also try to find something new to introduce as a special traveling treat. Also something to drink (although not too much so as to avoid a lot of potty stops).

Finally out of desperation I have turned to the good old faithful "Old MacDonald" songs and more. Although that might not seem such a good idea on an airplane, the sound of your off-key singing will seem a far better option than the sound of your crying child. You just never know...others might just join in and you will be very surprised at how quickly your child will become distracted by your songs even if it is just for a short while.

Traveling with children is definitely a challenge, but most of us can remember taking trips with our families or at least hear our families reminiscing about the adventures that our travels have brought with them. Our children are only children for such a short time and if we can embrace the challenge traveling with them brings, it is sure to bring us joy at the end of the day. Good luck!