



## Traveling with kids doesn't have to be a hassle

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By Donna Wallace-King - email

(RNN) – It's time to make summer vacation plans and families who will be traveling with children have more to consider when making their plans. But traveling with youngsters doesn't have to be a hassle. Several experts share some tips that will help make all aspects of your trip with your children easier.

### Preparing for the trip

Start out by getting your kids involved in planning and packing for the trip.

"Preparation is the key," Cynthia Edwards, professor of psychology at Meredith College said via email. "Involving kids (of whatever age) in that preparation will give them ownership, teach them planning skills and help them mentally prepare and anticipate the event."

Make a list of those 'must pack' items that you want to be certain to bring on your trip. Travel expert and Director of Marketing for [WanderWe.com](#) Allison McGuire says sunscreen, bug spray, sunglasses, prescription and OTC medicine and EpiPens are just a few items you don't want to forget at home.

If you're driving, she suggests researching the route to your destination to find seasonal events or historical sites that your family might enjoy. This will help break the monotony of a long car trip.

For families with small kids, try to avoid road trips longer than 500 miles. "Having children sit still for much longer can be challenging and potentially take away from the fun of the vacation," McGuire said.

If you're bringing a baby on vacation, Bob Diener, co-founder of [getaroom.com](#), says don't assume you will find diapers, wipes and other supplies that you need. Bring your own and make sure you have enough for the duration of the trip.

When you get ready to book rooms, be sure to check the hotel's kid policy beforehand.

"Every hotel has a different policy regarding allowing kids to stay free, some as high as 19," Diener said. "But some charge for ages two and above."

If you plan on flying, remember that children younger than 2 years old do not need a ticket for most domestic carriers, but they'll have to sit on a parent's lap, Warren Chang, vice president and general manager of [fly.com](#), says. Just be sure to ask first.

Kids who are traveling overseas must have a [passport](#), regardless of age. Keep in mind that it takes roughly four to eight weeks for routine passport request to be processed.

A fun way to get kids excited for an overseas trip is to get some foreign currency from your local bank before the trip, Chang says.

Advice columnist April Masini says that for family vacations, it's a must to plan on having both structured and unstructured time once you're at your destination. It's important not to over schedule a vacation, but having too much unstructured time could result in bored kids. And let's face it, vacations should be fun for all.

### On the road

Traveling by car can be tough on kids since they have to be cooped up and buckled in for long stretches of time. Some kids take well to car travel, napping, listening to music or playing games, but others aren't as easily pacified. Having plenty of distractions and snacks on hand is vital to making a road trip go smoothly.

Mina Olivera, co-founder of [Novica](#), suggests bringing gift-wrapped toys on trips. Whether you're flying or driving, this gives the kids something to look forward to, especially when they get bored. Try to borrow the toys from friends or relatives in order to save money.

Electronics are a great way to occupy time while on the road. Load the devices with favorite videos, music and even download some new apps. Make sure everything is fully charged and be sure to bring along car chargers.

But don't just rely on electronics to keep your kids occupied in the car. For some family bonding, McGuire suggests playing interactive games like *I Spy*, *The License Plate Game* and *20 Questions*. When a parent needs some quiet time, have a *Silence Contest*, where the person who keeps quiet the longest gets a prize.

Make regular stops along the way to allow everyone to get out and stretch their legs. And on long road trips, seek out a playground to give kids a chance to burn off some energy.

Children's health advocate Merilee A. Kern is the author of *Making Healthy Choices - A Story to Inspire Fit, Weight-Wise Kids*. She suggests bringing a hula hoop or jump rope along to help kids burn off a little steam, especially if there isn't a playground nearby. Walking or running, dancing, yoga and stretching are all great activities to get kids moving whether they're at a rest stop or in a hotel room.

### In the air

Keeping younger kids occupied on a flight can be quite the task for parents. No one wants to be the parent with the screaming kids on a plane.

With that in mind, Olivera says to try to get your family get onboard last, so that the kids won't have to wait as long for takeoff.

She also stresses to her kids that planes are for sleeping and encourages them to sleep on the plane so that when they wake up, they will be in a new place. It may not work for all children, but it's worth a try.

Have as many toys and snacks as possible with you on the plane to keep the children occupied. It's also a good idea to bring a child's favorite blanket or stuffed animal for comfort, Chang said. It will help them relax and sleep easier.

Also be sure to have gum or hard candy for older kids if they have trouble with air pressure in their ears. Younger kids should be encouraged to take a bottle, pacifier or breast feed in order to avoid or soothe ear pain.

**Eating on the road**

It's a difficult task to eat healthy foods while on vacation and snacks are a big part of taking trips with kids.

Kern says it's easy to prepare healthy, travel friendly snacks. Prewashed fresh fruit and dried fruits are a hit with kids. Roasted nuts, popcorn, string cheese, pretzels and baked chips are also healthy snacks that are easily portable.

At mealtimes, she says that parents should steer children toward the more nutritious menu selections available at sit-down restaurants and fast food places. Most restaurants offer grilled or baked items and will even prepare food to your specifications.

Marnie Swedberg, author and mommy mentor, has a great suggestion for eating healthy while on the road: swing by a buffet for cheap, healthy meals that will please even the fussiest eater.

"Unknown to many, most buffets offer 'to-go' containers charged by the pound," Swedberg said. "American buffets offer excellent salad bars while Asian buffets specialize in cooked vegetables. By requiring kids to fill their box with food, they'll eat in no less than five colors. You can grab and go for typically \$2 to \$5 per person."

You and your family should stick with your normal meal times as much as possible while on vacation. This helps keep your internal clock on track and helps prevent you from overeating.

**At your destination**

Once you arrive at your destination, give your kids time to stretch out and let off a little steam before going about the business of unpacking and getting ready for activities.

Keep in mind that new places can sometimes be overwhelming to some kids, so give them time to adjust before jumping into activities.

And finally, try to plan your trip so that you arrive home near the kid's bedtime, so they can just go on to bed. "The next morning, ask them about their favorite parts of the trip," McGuire said. "You may be surprised by their answers."

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