



The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Travel and Tourism

Children, Traveling With

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Book Title: The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Travel and Tourism

Chapter Title: "Children, Traveling With"

Pub. Date: 2017

Access Date: July 11, 2017

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc

City: Thousand Oaks

Print ISBN: 9781483368948

Online ISBN: 9781483368924

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483368924.n102>

Print pages: 257-259

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Parents have become more likely to travel with their children due to the proliferation of various technologies, efficient vehicles, and myriad opportunities that facilitate easy movement and transportation. Family travel is a welcome prospect as long as the accommodation is familiar and reliable and the food can be trusted. The process of traveling with children, however, has been humorously described as a bit like taking a herd of wild goats on holiday; it disrupts family routines and places new and often perplexing demands on both adults and children. Issues with health, cross-border documentation, packing, accommodation, and food pose challenges that only careful and informed planning can resolve. Travel experts advise planning ahead together with one's child or children as a way to significantly decrease travel stress.

Immunization Before Traveling

For both domestic and international travel, adults planning to travel with children should ensure that they find out about any health risks at their destination from a reliable source, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). Health risks abound in travel, especially international travel, and a child may be at risk of a number of vaccine-preventable illnesses while traveling. A child may require vaccines to travel to certain regions of the world. A child's doctor or clinic should be contacted at least six weeks before a planned trip to allow a health expert to review the immunization history of the child and to discuss with the parent or guardian any health concerns he or she may have concerning the trip, the current health challenges at the intended destination, and any immunization requirements. This also provides an opportunity for a child to receive any needed vaccines prior to traveling.

Documentation for Children

Persons under 18 years old need the appropriate documentation to travel abroad, especially when they are traveling with only one parent or a nonfamily group. A parent or guardian needs to prepare well before the time of travel to ensure the child has all of the necessary documents. These can include:

- Passport and visa;
- Consent letter (if a child is traveling with only one parent or another adult, such as a relative or friend);
- Supporting identification (citizenship card, copy of birth certificate, etc.); and,
- Health insurance documents.

Children with special medical concerns, such as chronic illnesses, must be accompanied by a copy of recent medical reports, a list of necessary medications, and phone numbers of contact persons. This information must be kept handy in case of an emergency health concern.

Packing for Children

Deciding what goes into a child's luggage is a daunting task. Questions such as "Where are we going?" and "What is the nature and duration of our excursion and how long will we be away?" should guide packing decisions. Essential items include (but are not limited to): food, first aid kit, toiletries, clothing, and recreational gear. Babies and toddlers require special items such as car seats and infant carriers, wipes, disposable change mats, diapers, diaper

bags, diaper rash cream, bottles, and baby food formula. It is helpful to prepare a checklist when deciding what to take. Items that may be on the list include:

- Drinks and food: water, beverages, and familiar edibles and snacks children will eat such as cookies, muesli bars, crackers, canned edibles, and dried fruits. Baby bottles, plastic plates and spoons, bottle brushes, and washing soap must accompany these.
- First aid kit: bandages; antiseptic/antibiotic cream or ointment for minor infections, cuts, scrapes, and bruises; thermometer; motion sickness reliever; children's pain reliever; teething and allergy reliever; sunscreen; and insect repellents.
- Toiletries: mini soap bars, sponge, towels, toothbrushes, toothpaste, face towels, deodorant (for adolescents), sanitary wipes, and floss.
- Clothing: underwear, socks, shoes, body warmers (for cold climates), swimsuits, hats, raincoats, umbrellas, and robes.
- Other: small durable toys and books, pacifiers, candies or chewing gum to ease ear pressure, and plastic bags for motion sickness.

Air, Land, and Water Travel

There are many ways to travel. These include flying; driving; riding a train or bus; and cruising in a watercraft such as a boat, yacht, or ship. Usually, time, distance, and budget determine the type of transportation to be used. Plane travel may be best for traveling to a faraway country for a short stay, to make the most of limited time. A bus trip may be best for a shorter journey. Whichever option is chosen must meet the needs of the travelers. The travelers have to be abreast of and abide by the official requirements for the travel. Adults should ensure that safety measures, such as the use of safety belts, are followed by the children when on board a vehicle.

Airplane Travel

Airplane travel can be exciting, yet discomfoting for many children. Children tend to become dehydrated during flights and must drink a lot of water. Parents should bring along drinks, snacks, and familiar foods. These help when travel is delayed or when meals available on the flight are unsuitable for a child. For babies, parents may need to bring jars of baby food, expressed breast milk, and/or powdered formula. Many countries have restrictions on the types and quantity of liquid that can be carried in hand baggage through an airport security checkpoint, but allow those traveling with infants or toddlers to carry breast milk and formula.

Many children experience pressure-induced ear "popping" and pain when planes take off and land. Fortunately, these painful sensations subside. However, for young flyers suffering from ear infections and common colds, the discomfort may be greater than usual. Doctors suggest avoiding air travel if a child develops an ear infection or is diagnosed with excess fluid behind the eardrums. Ear pain may be checked by:

- Getting a child to strongly chew sugar-free gum, swallow saliva rapidly, or suck a candy during take-off and landing to unclog the ears. A child must be awake during take-off and landing, to allow swallowing and yawning, which helps to unclog or "decongest" the ears. Babies and infants can be helped by breastfeeding them or having them suck on feeding bottles or pacifiers.
- Getting the child to drink enough fluid or use nasal sprays or drops during take-off and landing.
- Giving the child antihistamines, according to doctor's directions, about 25–30 minutes

prior to take-off and/or landing.

Bus and Train Travel

Taking a bus or train is often a cost-effective traveling method. It can be enjoyable to sit back and enjoy the view and not have to worry about maps or driving. Children, especially, can find the natural scenery rushing past their windows exciting. However, the scenery can get boring and the space of train cabins and buses confining and restrictive during long trips. There is no worse harassment than the nagging of a bored, overtired, hungry child on a long bus or train journey. The supervising adult(s) should carry edibles along for the children when traveling by these vehicles. The requirements for an enjoyable journey by road or rail are similar to those for air travel: Snacks must be available; pack interesting books, toys, and games that can occupy the children; and be willing as a parent or guardian to engage children in conversation during the trip. Long bus trips may be made more comfortable by traveling with child pillows and emergency clothes and plastic bags for travel sickness.

Boat and Ship Travel

Travel on water can be exciting for a child but can easily become boring after a long period has been spent on board. Parents and guardians should ensure that children have interesting hobbies to occupy them. Children should be educated to keep off the edges of the craft and to know how to use a life jacket. As much as possible adults responsible for children should keep them close by and not let them stray, to avoid drowning accidents. Children are more prone to travel/motion sickness, so parents should keep on hand spare clothes and a container in case the child becomes sick. The child's doctor can recommend an appropriate medication for children who suffer from travel sickness. Other ways to relieve travel sickness in children are:

- Allow children to eat nonfatty light snacks, before or during the journey, because travel sickness is worse on an empty stomach.
- Nausea can be reduced in some children if they keep their head still during travel. Others must be encouraged to sleep, or at least, not to read while in motion.
- Let in the fresh air and breeze. A pale and/or sweaty and nauseous child should be encouraged to breathe fresh air for relief.

Caring for Children at Destination

Sleeping

After a long plane, train, or car trip and arrival at the intended destination, travelers are exhausted. The fatigue should induce sleep, but children often find it difficult to sleep because of the presence of unfamiliar noises and/or images. A child can be helped to adjust to sleeping in a new "strange" place in a number of ways. One helpful practice is to encourage children preparing to travel to try sleeping at different places, for example, at the homes of relatives or friends. This is to help them get used to sleeping outside the familiar environs of their own home. Another way is to take along on the journey a comforting toy or blanket for the child. White noise—any constant, soothing sound that drowns out other sounds, making unfamiliar night noises a non-issue—may help a child sleep soundly. A mother's familiar song in the ear, a radio tuned to static, a portable white noise machine, or a fan all help to drown out disturbing sounds.

Eating and Drinking

Eating food or drinking beverages contaminated by bacteria, parasites, or viruses is one of the most common causes of illnesses among young travelers. A guiding adult must always take precautions with food and water to keep children from getting sick. Depending on the location of travel, water may need to be boiled and food eaten hot. Food from unhygienic street vendors must be avoided. Fruits and vegetables may be eaten but only if, under supervision, they were washed well and peeled with clean hands. Commercially prepared water in sealed bottles is generally safe to drink. Children's hands must be cleaned by washing or using hand sanitizer before eating.

Health and Safety

Parents and guardians do not wish a child to fall ill, have an accident, or get lost during an excursion, but these can happen, so adult guides must be prepared. They must read about the health care concerns in the destination region, particularly for children, and be familiar with the local medical system, pack a first aid kit, and have insurance coverage. They should observe symptoms, ask for a translator as needed, and have the child's medical records with them to make sure everything can be done for the child in case of illness. Rules must be made for children to keep them safe in foreign lands; for instance, children must not wander off in crowds, so they must hold the hands of adults. By taking photos each day as the family goes out, a lost child can be described in detail, including the clothes he or she is wearing. A rallying point to go to if somebody gets lost or separated should be found whenever a family or group arrives at a new destination.

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See also [Airline Travel](#); [Cruise Tourism](#); [Immunizations](#); [Recreation and Leisure](#); [Ship Travel](#); [Travel Sickness](#)

Further Readings

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