

Seven Secrets to Successful Travel With a Young Child

If you're a new parent, we suggest you think of your young traveling companion as someone who'll add a whole new dimension to your travel experiences. Be sure you dial down your expectations, set realistic goals, and take it nice 'n' easy. Here are some parent-tested suggestions for traveling with a young child:

- 1. Be flexible:** Traveling with children can be a wonderful experience - if you go with the flow. Too many new sights and sounds at once can overstimulate your baby, and toddlers get bored having to sit still or sightsee for long periods of time instead of being able to run around and explore at their own energetic pace. Keep your itinerary simple - limit it to one activity a day - and you'll find it much easier to make last-minute adjustments if your child gets tired or just wants to spend the afternoon playing in the hotel's wading pool.
- 2. Pick a family-friendly destination:** Choose a relaxing destination that's used to young visitors so you don't have to sweat the details. Use a travel guide such as Rand McNally TripMaker Deluxe to find hotels designated as KidStops, places with children's facilities.
- 3. Bring water and plenty of snacks:** A bag of snacks and a water bottle are critical components of any trip. Children can get dehydrated during a flight, and toddlers can't always wait for food service. Best bets include treats such as raisins, bananas, animal crackers, granola bars, small juice cartons, Fig Newtons, and small boxes of Cheerios or other dry cereal. Bring along moist towelettes for cleaning up.
- 4. Plan frequent rest stops:** If you're driving, break up your trip so your kids can stretch and run around to blow off some pent-up energy. Pack a rubber or foam ball for a game of catch and some simple board books for quiet time. Pick out picnic areas, parks, or playgrounds on your route by using an online mapping service such as MapQuest or Zip2, or city guides such as Sidewalk and CitySearch. End your driving day early so all of you have time to unwind after a long day on the road.
- 5. Think safety:** Bring along a basic childproofing kit to use at your destination. If you are taking a road trip, make sure your baby's car seat is properly secured; up to 70 percent of all car seats aren't installed correctly. Use removable window shades to keep the sun off your baby. You may want to dress your toddler in a brightly colored outfit so he's easy to spot in a crowd, and put a small card with identification information on it in one of his pockets in case you get separated.
- 6. Pack a goodie bag:** A good way to keep kids content on a trip is to take along a goodie bag with more toys and doodads than you think you'll need. Include favorite toys, games, books, and some surprises. For toddlers, you might consider puzzles, dolls, action figures, puppets, brightly colored paper, non-toxic crayons, stickers for the car windows, story tapes, and the like. For infants, possibilities include shiny new objects, baby-proof mirrors, rattles, musical toys, soft animals, pop-up toys, plastic keys, or teething rings.
- 7. Take practice trips:** Make sure your child is ready for a long traveling experience. Lead up to the big trip with short day trips or weekend getaways to see how your child adjusts, then work your way up to a longer trip. Show your toddler pictures of your destination and talk about whom you'll see and what you'll be doing there. Your child will take his cue from you: If you convey excitement and positive feelings about your upcoming adventure, chances are your little one will approach the trip the same way..