

# HITTING THE ROAD

As many of us prepare to jet off for the summer, **Kate Farr** gleans some top travel tips from mums who have braved the best and the worst of times both on the ground and at 33,000 feet.



**T**his summer, like many others, I'll be packing up my two boys and hitting the airport for a well-earned long-haul holiday. But while I'm perfectly happy calculating luggage allowances and transfer times, I'll admit to a few butterflies in my stomach about flying solo with two kids (including one very wilful toddler). I decided to soothe my nerves by chatting to four seasoned travellers about what I can do to ensure our trip is memorable – for all the right reasons!

 Nicola Burke of family travel blog Jetlag And Mayhem (jetlagandmayhem.com) suggests planning well ahead of time, starting with an area of travel that we often overlook. "Travel insurance is vital. Good insurance is relatively inexpensive and will cover you for everything from minor events such as lost luggage, to emergency medical care," she says. "Check your existing coverage from health insurance plans, as well as coverage that comes included with certain credit cards. In some cases you may not need to buy extra travel insurance, however, unless you're fully covered for medical expenses, don't risk it."

And check those credit and debit cards too - many banks require permission before they will release funds via overseas retail outlets or ATMs. There's nothing worse than being stranded in some far-flung location with grumpy toddlers and no cash.

Mum-of-two Monica Davies swears by zip-lock plastic files. She takes one every trip, containing all passports and identity cards as well as printouts of tickets, car hire, insurance documentation and hotel reservations. "It keeps everything in one place - plus I like to have hard-copies of everything just in case. I once had to produce written documentation of our return flight details before a car hire company would release our vehicle. Luckily I had it all stashed in my pouch."

Once the paperwork is sorted, it's time to think about packing for your trip. Mum-of-two and seasoned globe-trotter Jane Richards finds that a relaxed approach to packing works best for her family.



"When I first started travelling with a baby I was nervous, so I would write lists. Now I have a system in place, so I pack just before we leave and take the minimum possible." Richards' zen approach helps her to minimise stress when unexpected hiccups do occur. "Depending on where you're going, most things can be bought. I was recently reminded of this when, after a 20-hour flight

travelling solo with my eldest son while pregnant, the airline lost our luggage. It makes you appreciate that the only real essentials are your passports, money, and most importantly, the toy your child sleeps with. As long as you have those, you can handle anything else."

When it comes to hand luggage, Tania Reinert of online lifestyle and travel journal Nika Kai Travels (nikakaitravels.com) knows that keeping her daughter entertained is the key to a successful journey. "I usually pack a small bag with surprise toys for her, along with a few reading books, sticker books, her favourite soft toys and snacks."

Fun solutions include packs of film-based stickers (available from most stationery shops) that peel off surfaces easily and can be re-applied - after all nobody wants to face the wrath of airline staff when it discovers a plane window meticulously covered in adhesive stickers. Another top tip is square-crayons or pencils - they don't roll the length of the plane when dropped on the floor.

Reinert also advises considering the overall travel time, not just the flight itself. "Bring entertainment for all the parts of the journey. Don't assume you'll only need it for when you're airborne - your flight might be delayed or you may have a connection. Be prepared."

And that goes for formula milk, nappies and snacks, too. Don't forget the rules for liquids at the security check-in - security staff is at liberty to refuse cartons of ready-made formula, expressed breast milk and bottled water if it exceeds guidelines (check with your airline). Australian-bound flights currently refuse any liquid on board including anything bought airside - be prepared for additional checks at the gate. Laptop bans are also becoming increasingly prevalent - again, check with your airline.

Travel blogger Marianne Rogerson of Mum On The Move (mumonthemove.com) agrees that entertainment is essential - for everyone. "I pack noise-cancelling headphones for myself, along with iPads for the kids with their own headphones, as I cannot stand it when people let their kids watch tablets on the plane with no headphones, especially on a night flight." Rogerson's other smart essential? "Wet wipes. Kids are always spilling things on planes."

Another hack if you're going to use the flight entertainment system is to consider bringing child-sized headphones that fit your offspring properly. The flight-issue 'phones are often too big and it can become waring

constantly re-adjusting them for frustrated tots.

"I-pads - lock and load," advises Expat Parent editor Carolynne Dear. "I am old enough to remember toddler travel before the i-pad existed and believe me, there are only so many hours of a flight you can remain enthusiastic about Peppa Pig Snap. Be kind to yourself - if your kids are happy to lap up Fireman Sam while you have a break, save the creative play for when you've landed."

Once you're settled in, it's often time to eat, and here, Reinert has a sneaky hack to ensure that tiny tummies aren't left rumbling too long. "Always order special meals in advance. I tend to order vegan or vegetarian for me and a kids' meal for my daughter - that way we're served first." She also recommends bringing homemade snacks along if time allows. These are both healthier than the on-board options, and also

“ There's no easy solution for jetlag. Fresh air and exercise are your friends here. ”

comfortingly familiar, particularly for younger children. Boxes of dried raisins are fabulous time-wasters for tiny digits.

Fed and entertained, it's time to tackle the thorny issue of sleep. Burke recommends resisting the temptation to catch that new release film and grabbing the opportunity for shut-eye whenever you can. "Sleep when your kids sleep. You never know when that magic window will open again."

Of course, even assuming your kids sleep peacefully en route, jetlag is still an issue that long-haul travellers of all ages have to tackle. Reinert cautions there is "no magic solution with kids." There is, however, always the option of simply wearing them out. "To exhaust them during the day get them to swim - be it the sea, a pool or even just a bathtub filled with toys - anything works. Run around with them or go for a short hike - fresh air, water and exercise are your best friends here."

Rogerson agrees that keeping busy can ease everyone's symptoms. "Get out and

Expert advice...

I asked our experts to share their own biggest travel disasters, and discovered that when it comes to travelling with kids, you should always brace yourself for bodily functions.

"The worst flight I ever took was 12 hours solo with my seven-month old daughter when I had the norovirus. I spent the entire flight on the floor of the toilet vomiting, although luckily she slept in the bassinet for most of it."

Nicola Burke

"A few months ago my daughter decided she wanted to pee at take-off. She screamed for ten minutes and then peed on me, and I didn't have any spare clothes. It's a good thing that the air on the plane is so dry as your clothes dry very quickly! Unfortunately it was a three-day trip and those were my only jeans..."

Tania Reinert

"I once forgot to pack a single pair of shoes for my son, and we were flying to Amsterdam where it was about two degrees Celsius. We had to run straight to H&M for a new pair the moment the shops opened."

Jane Richards

"Flying back from Phuket a couple of years ago when my son was ill. His nappy leaked all over two changes of jeans, he was sick all over my top - and to top it off my daughter fell asleep and wet herself on my husband's lap. We had to go through immigration - my son wearing his sister's flowery leggings, me covered in vomit and my husband with a large wet patch looking like he'd wet himself."

Marianne Rogerson

"We were about two hours into a 21-hour trip from London to Sydney and, with my nine-month old daughter (finally) napping on my lap, I thought I'd try my luck with a relaxing glass of red. Unfortunately just as it was served to me my daughter woke up, jugged the tray-table and upended the whole lot all over my trousers. And yes, I was of course wearing a nice pair of cream tracksuit pants!"

Carolynne Dear

about in the sunshine and stay active during the day." She also advises parents to try their best to soldier through the worst of the tiredness wherever possible. "Don't be tempted to take that afternoon nap. If the kids do fall asleep, try to only let them nap for a maximum of one hour at a time."

And a final sage word of advice from Richards, "Stay patient, and if necessary, drink wine!" That sounds like advice that we can all get on board with. Safe travels! ☑

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