

How to Increase Your Chances of Survival when Traveling by Plane with Small Children

Travel with Infants:

- Travel before they can move. While they are still breastfeeding or drinking from a bottle is best. Movement and independence are your #1 enemy.
- Baby carriers are a must. Twice I have traveled 24 hours with a child strapped to my body. Having both hands free was very important.

Travel with Toddlers & Preschool Age Children:

- If they are walking but not yet 2, buy them a seat and BRING THEIR CAR SEAT. Best thing EVER. Especially if you are on your own with more than one. The ability to lock 'em down for even 20-minute intervals is worth the extra money.
- For younger travelers...no walking on the plane. Carry them on, carry them to the toilet...if they don't know that they are allowed to walk up and down the aisle, they won't want to!
- If it is a night flight put pajamas on the kid just like they are home. Bring a familiar bedtime object...blanket or stuffed animal in your carry on. Read a book and settle into rest (hopefully sleep).
- Deprive children when they are of a certain age (say, 4ish) from all screen time for at least 2 weeks, go for 3, prior to travel. Our kid then sat for the entire 10-hour flight without blinking, he was SO happy to have a TV all to himself. No joke. (But you need to make sure the airline or you provide in-flight entertainment to last that long!)
- Pack a small backpack just for the individual kid. Let him/her help pick out the small toys.
- Buy a few new toys (toy car, train, princess figurines, etc.) and wrap them like Christmas.
- Buy a box of Band-Aids that the kid can open and stick each one. This helps during take off and landing when they HAVE to be seated and belted.
- Stickers, new colored pencils and an empty notebook. This has saved us when we were delayed on the plane and when iPads were not permitted.
- Speaking of iPads...bring an iPad. If you don't have an iPad...go buy one tomorrow. Then load it with new apps that don't require Internet. Some current favorites are: Dora, Lightning McQueen, Reading Eggs, Fancy Nancy Dress-up. We also have a ton of educational apps on our iPad, which makes me feel less guilty. I make them do some of that before they do any games.
- Child size headphones are super helpful. Get kids used to wearing them in the weeks leading up to your flight.
- A backpack that clips in the front and has a leash is helpful. Our son was a runner when he was younger. This gave him freedom to run, but not get away!

Food

- Kinder surprises – they are a 2 in 1 - a little chocolate and about 20 minutes of playing with a new 'toy' until it breaks
- Bring any food that is 'stab-able', and toothpicks. Gummi bears, raisins, any dried fruits. Make a game of stabbing the food or use them like mini-chopsticks. You can also make patterns and drawings with the food. Basically, let them play with their food.
- Lollipops are a must, especially when you're descending. It helps with the ears. I recommend tootsie roll pops because they seem to last longer and there's some motivation to keep going. More practical than ones with gum inside.

- Always pack at least ONE FULL MEAL per kid, per 5 hours travel. We've been stuck on a runway for 4 hours. I fed 3 families (6 kids) and EVERYONE was happier. It's worth the sore shoulder, just in case! (it was just carrot sticks, PBJ, some slices of cheese and an apple - or something like that, nothing fancy, nothing healthy.)
- Every hour or so pull some snacks out. Some ideas are: carrots, cheese, finger sandwiches, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes. After cleaning the tray (top, bottom, sides, I'm crazy about germs) put the snacks on the tray and have the kid make pictures with the food (faces, flowers, boats) and then eat the 'nose' off Auntie Phyllis.
- Try and pack snacks that have limited sugar.

What Else to Bring:

- A kid-friendly water bottle - but not the straw kind - they leak and spill with changes in pressure - so you want something more like a sippy cup - because they actually need to drink a lot on the plane to help them not feel so gross and act so ugly. What also works is Gatorade or something like that that you can let them choose and buy after you've gone through all the x-rays and pat-downs - if you leave the cap up, they don't explode, and they've chosen it, so they tend to be more excited about it... and it's a treat.
- Diapers - one per hour of travel and you'll never (hopefully) have too few.
- Silpat mat - a silicone mat for on the kids' tray-tables to stop shit from sliding all over the place. People always laugh at me when I pull mine out, but when their kid's cup (not in a sippy-cup) goes sliding all over their new Ferragamo handbag - jokes on them.
- Clothing - bring a change for each kid, that's obvious - but for the love of god - bring a change for you AND the husband. I ALWAYS have leggings and a t-shirt and bra and undies - I've been vomited on enough to know it goes through, and I can't handle the smell eau de barf, so a change is needed. Just a t-shirt and maybe sweats for the husband...because you likely don't care that he looks like shit, but you want to be able to breath next to him.
- WET WIPES. And tissues. And a small garbage bag. Possibly to put over your head for some deep breathing...
- Headphones for you, so if all else fails, you don't have to listen to their shit.

Just Good Solid Advice:

- The most fidgety kid sits by the window so they can't escape.
- Charge all electronic devices the night before!
- The check-in lady at your counter is your friend. I have unashamedly charmed the ladies at the counter to give me a whole row because I am traveling with an infant (even though I didn't buy a seat for her) and it has worked both ways when we traveled to Phuket. Having a whole row was definitely helpful!
- Play-up the "kid card" as much as you can.
- Don't forget that if you have kids, you can board first and cut all those people in line. This is the ONE perk to traveling with children! Use it!
- The #1 piece of advice is that "good parenting" goes out the door when traveling on an airplane. Your job is to just too keep your kids quiet and not bother the other passengers too much. This means lots of snack food, iPads, video games, whatever. I think my girls actually look forward to flights because they know they get to zone out on the iPad for hours.
- Drink, you deserve it. Hopefully it's free. If not, it'll totally be worth it.

Many thanks to the lovely and well-traveled mamas Leah Edwards, Hannah Northcott, Pam McMannus, Cara Tebo and Megan Settle for all of the above wisdom! Y'all rock!