

Holidaying with Babies and Young Children

Whether you're staying in a caravan in the Lake District or flying to Cuba this summer, preparing for your holidays once you have children takes military precision! Here some well-travelled Leeds mums offer you some tips to make it that little bit easier.



First things first, "acknowledge that travelling is exciting and holds lots of unexpected things", says Esther, mother to Richard and Lilian. "Even if everything goes smoothly, children simply can't/don't understand why things are happening the way they are (first car, then airport, then aeroplane, then airport again, then bus, then strange temporary home). And if adults don't like waiting, how about children who basically have no patience at all ... unless you keep them entertained. So, entertain your children by involving them in what's going on. They might not understand a word, but looking for the next train or making a play out of your own impatience (making a grumpy face, stamping with your feet, "Where's that train?") a) lets you share with your child and - more importantly - b) will just pass the time".



Packing

It may sound impossible, but the main thing that all mothers agree is **travel light**. "You don't need a weeks' worth of baby stuff with you. Unless you are going to Outer Mongolia, you can go shopping when you get there," says Donna, mother to James. "We took our 8 month old vegetarian baby to a one-shop town in France and still managed to keep him well kitted out with nappies, milk and baby food".

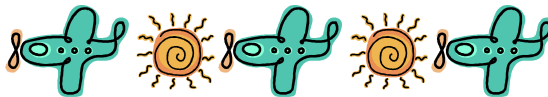
So what do you need? Here are a few recommended things:

- For baby food, take jars for the journey, dried food which is light and easy to transport for the first few days, and then go shopping when you get there. For older children, make sure you have plenty of small snacks (crackers, raisins, breadsticks, carrot sticks, grapes, etc.) and water for the journey. Hungry children only add to stress levels.

- You only ever wear half what you take - so take half of what you would normally - travel wash is useful and easy to pack.
- If you are flying, pack everything which is essential in your hand luggage. When Donna flew abroad earlier this year she found that "for milk you can only take 120ml bottles on the plane and they need to be in zip lock plastic bags together with the jars of food - all of those bags should be in a separate carrier bag and not in your actual hand luggage. If you take bottles of water and individual sachets of milk powder you can make them up as you need them. Take all the medicines you think you may need in your hand luggage - Calpol and ibuprofen come in handy sachets which avoids the need for bottles, which again need to pass the security checks."
- Whether you are flying or travelling by car, a lightweight buggy is essential – even the biggest boot would struggle to fit a large pram as well as all your luggage. Buggies might not be that suitable everywhere, however, as Liz found: "We took our buggy to Greece when Leah was a baby and regretted it - they don't go on sand, round ancient sites and on most of their rocky pavements! Better to take a backpack or sling".
- Liz also recommends: "If you can, take your car seat as luggage as car seats from hire companies in Europe are often very dodgy."
- "Don't bother taking loads of toys with you", says Claire, mother to Holly and Lily. "I know people who have had to pay excess luggage charges for this. Instead, buy a few choice items when you get to your destination and leave them there (either for the cleaning staff's children or, in a self catering place, for the next people)."
- Mo has recently been on holiday with her girls Millie and Poppy: "We put a load of CD stories on my iPod to take on holiday so we didn't have to take any books. It was very successful: with earphones my 4 year old could listen on the plane or when we were out and about. We also bought a cheap set of speakers whilst abroad (they were fairly easy to come by, and cost about £9) so they could both listen to the stories in our accommodation."
- "Even if you travel light your cases will be full so think about buying bulky items such as beach towels and inflatable toys when you get there and leaving them behind", says Donna. "It may sound extravagant but such things are generally dirt cheap abroad and it cuts down on luggage

space and weight."

- Whether you are holidaying in the UK or abroad, sun lotion is a must. Monica, mother to Varun, adds: "babies under one should be in the sun as little as possible so hats, long-sleeved t-shirts and trousers, parasols attached to the buggy, and plenty of drinking water is all very important."
- "Varun went to India when he was 2½ years old and insect repellent, mosquito repellent, bottled water and cartons of milk are precautions we took", says Monica.



Flying

When asked for travel tips, one mother said "if you have an active one year old, DON'T"! If you do decide to ignore this advice (!) and are flying with your little ones this summer, the following tips may be useful:

- Monica recommends: "Try a short flight (couple of hours) for the first one. Varun didn't enjoy the first flight to Palma (he was 8 months) but was fine on the subsequent two to Paris and India. The older they get, the more they want to wander up and down the aisles and be entertained so pack books, crayons and paper, etc. Don't rely on the airlines to have any children's goodies, or specific children's food."
- Donna advises: "If you can, plan your schedule around your baby's. For example, lunch after check in, nap on the flight, tea on arrival, nap during the transfer, arrive relaxed and ready to play!"
- Says Liz: "When we travelled with Leah as a baby we asked for a seat by an exit so she could use the 'cot' which they have on board - essentially a box! But it was great - we put her down for a sleep for an hour and she did actually go off, allowing us to eat and read for a bit. Be prepared to breastfeed for a while though! Sucking helps them on takeoff and landing with ears popping and of course, sends them to sleep which is what you want. Ensure you have been to the toilet yourself and got everything sorted before they fall asleep on you as you can't get out of one of those economy seats with a sleeping baby and get away with it!!"

- Donna agrees about the sucking: "Sucking on a dummy, a bottle or a digit helps stop painful ears on take off and landing and chewing/playing with finger food, no matter how messy, is a good way to fill in those boring bits so take lots of treats."
- If your baby can't or won't go to sleep on the plane, "as soon as the seat belt lights go off get up and walk about the plane with baby", Donna recommends. "Make friends with the air hostess and generally avoid being squashed into the seats."
- Claire advises: "Take an activity pack for the plane: crayons, playing cards, paper and buy a magazine in the airport". Another top tip from Claire is: "When queuing at check-in, get one parent to find somewhere to sit/play with the children and join your partner when they are near the desk."
- "Even if you are on a package holiday, if possible get a private transfer", Donna recommends. "Otherwise you end up hanging around at the destination airport waiting for other flights to land or people who have lost their luggage and this can be a nightmare – also you end up having to leave the resort 12 hours before your flight is due to leave and spend 10 hours at an airport with no air conditioning and no facilities..."

If you are worried at all about flying with children, take solace in Esther's experience: "The one time I took the children on a trip on my own the flight back was cancelled! A nightmare in itself but with small kids at half past ten in the evening? ... you might say 'horror'. To be honest, it wasn't that bad. Sure, the kids were overexcited and overtired and rather short-fused, but it was me who was most anxious. Luckily there was another mum travelling on her own with her daughter so not only did the children keep themselves busy, but I also had somebody to share the experience with which was ever so helpful."



Sailing

If boats are more your thing, then Monica has some advice: "We took Varun on a Mediterranean cruise at 8 months old. Travel sickness

medicines tend to be from three years plus, but luckily Varun didn't have a problem with motion sickness anyway. We were on an Ocean Village cruise and the restaurants only had a couple of varieties of jar foods (all pasta based) and no formula milk so take your own supplies."

And some final top tips:

- "Only take child-friendly people with you – it's a straight NO to anyone who isn't likely to understand or pull their weight," recommends Ruth.

And from Donna:

- Take grandma with you to baby sit when you get there!
- Have fun - and don't forget your camera!

Happy holidays to everyone!

