

TRAVELLING TO A BEACH

What to carry: Swimming costume along with other paraphernalia like goggles and hats, flip-flops, a good quality child-proof beach set, a beach ball, a good sunscreen.

Care for their skin: Avoid the ocean during twilight hours and try to avoid a lot of sun exposure when the sun is very strong. Always use a good sunscreen for your kids. "A sunscreen of SPF 20 is good for kid who is four-five years of age, but the application should be restricted to exposed areas and when absolutely essential," says Dr Sonali Langar, dermatologist, Apollo Hospital, Noida.

Be careful about the food:

Carry dry snacks which do not spoil. If you plan to take sandwiches, avoid butter, mayonnaise and vegetables. Take puris with pickle instead, which are non-perishable. The heat at the beach can spoil food easily. Loads of water should be carried and consumed by everyone.

Teachable moments: Sand can be great to teach young children to write. It is much easier to form letters with fingers without the hassle of holding a pencil. Prachi Johar's four-year-old daughter Gayatri learnt her cursive writing on sand. "She found it much easier to manoeuvre the strokes and picked up the writing in a matter of two days!" Prachi enthuses.

Enjoying the beach: Let your kids enjoy standing on the wet sand and mark their footprints. They will love to see them get wiped away by the sea water. Lying on the dry side with hands stretched out laterally and waving them to make 'sand angels' is something kids enjoy doing too.

We have some fab tricks to stay sane when you travel with your kiddies, straight from the mouths of experts! Here's to your next vacation... may it be truly happy and stress-free!

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The super-duper travel checklist for mums!

A TRAVELLER'S OBSERVATION

Lakshmi Sharath, a Bengaluru-based avid traveller, comments on some of the things that parents need to look into while travelling with children:

- * Be responsible parents. If you think your infant would need milk feed at a certain time, try not to plan a jeep safari at that time. Your antics and your kid's cries may not be taken well by other tourists.
- * Do your research before booking into a hotel. If your child cannot do without dosa for breakfast, make sure you book yourself into one that offers it. Making undue demands after checking in may not go well with the hotel staff and may end up spoiling your mood.
- * Set an example for your kids. If you get excited on spotting an animal while on a boat cruise and jump in your boat, your kids won't be far behind. Do think about the boat and your co-tourists before you attempt this!
- * Educate your kid before visiting a place. Make sure she would be interested before you take her along. If your child doesn't enjoy heritage spots in your city, she is not likely to enjoy them at other places as well.

TRAVELLING TO A PLACE OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

What to carry: A good camera and lots of information about the place you visit to tell your children stories on the way.

Use an audio or human guide: Hire a human guide, wherever possible. Your child will love the way he tells them juicy stories about the place and brings the kings and queens alive. "My 10-year-old daughter remembers each and every place that she visited ever since she was three, because we always made sure we turned everything into an interesting story for her and took pictures of her at important places. Now, whenever she looks at those pictures, she can relate to the story," says Shivani Sharma, mother to Mahika. Many kids are mesmerised by the audio tours available at most historic sites. "We found that when our daughter had her audio tour she happily walked through the cathedral or castle listening to every word and we were able to do the same," says Suzanne Saxe-Roux, California-based mum to 10-year-old Zoe-Pascale and co-author of *Courage and Croissants, Inspiring Joyful Living, A Story and Life Guidebook*. Take the tourist bus: Most Indian cities have buses to take you around important places and kids enjoy the ride. Take a short ride which doesn't keep you tied up for long or get down and take a taxi home whenever your child gets cranky. "Most villages throughout Europe also have a small train that takes you and your children around the village or town. It provides a wonderful

adventure for them and a great view of the entire city for the adults," says Suzanne.

Look for collectibles: A doll, a sword, a feather, rocks, books. Kids, especially little girls, can spend hours looking for the right doll that they can add to their collections. "It is a great opportunity to start teaching them about money and budgets as well," says Suzanne.

Do a virtual tour: Before you leave, take time off to check more about the place online. Show your kid some pictures. He will be thrilled to see a familiar monument in front of him when you reach. It is also a good time to explain the importance of the place to him. "You can also check online for any special programmes or activities for kids," says Eileen Ogintz, syndicated family travel columnist based in Connecticut and mum to three children. She is the creator of www.takingthekids.com. "Buy some postcards when you enter and have a scavenger hunt along the way, to keep them interested," she adds.

Don't miss the sound and light show: It will leave your kids mesmerised. Just remember to apply a lot of mosquito repellent onto yourself and your children's exposed areas. Better still, carry mosquito coils. These shows begin after twilight when mosquitoes are most active. Avoid museums. Young kids are unlikely to enjoy these unless they're specially created for kids.

A GENERAL CHECKLIST BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

- Teach your young ones to stay within eyesight.
- Mark a place for them to reach in case they get lost.
- Always carry your baby's medicines, a first aid box and a hand sanitiser.
- While deciding on a hotel, look for a room which offers a dry kitchenette with a microwave and a refrigerator. This helps take care of some of your meals and can become a money-saver as well as a convenience factor.
- Another major plus is having separate living room and bedroom areas. You can put the kids to bed at night, but unlike a hotel room where you're all crammed together, the parents can hang out in the living room or separate bedroom for fun vacation time.
- "Consider inviting your child's favourite cousin with you for the trip so you get some 'adult' time," says Eileen.
- Or she says, "You can also join forces with another family with similar aged kids to share childcare chores and costs."
- Check the local tourist office to find out more about the parks, museums, etc. meant for kids. Newspapers are also a great help if you need to get information about any fairs or exhibitions scheduled around that time. If you don't have the time for this, take help from the locals. A parent belonging to that place would know of kids' attractions more than anyone else and will always help you willingly.
- "It is always good to bring some 'comforting' objects from home," suggests Eileen. A sheet from a crib, night light, a favourite toy... they can all be great pacifiers!
- Always carry a good torch.
- A tip from a been-there, done-that parent, American Robert Dodenhoff: "I have taken my three boys to 23 countries, beginning when they were very young. I always put together a name tag with pertinent information, sometimes in three languages, and then laminate it. My kids wear these around their necks on lanyards," he says.



TRAVELLING TO A RELIGIOUS PLACE

Check the rules: Especially if you are in a new place. Before taking your children to a place of worship, find out what the religious norms are. For instance, if you are not supposed to show your back to the deity, ensure that you don't do it even when your kid distracts you. If your tot cannot sit still, decide whether sitting through the ceremony is a good idea at all. Also check if you can take a baby bottle and feed your child while inside or if you can carry the pram within the premises.

Teachable moments: Tell your child about the deity you are going to visit. Teach him the rules to follow when you are in at a place of worship. "Tell him that this is a special place where you should lower your voice or whisper once you are in," says Eileen. If you are visiting a place of worship of a different community, use this opportunity to talk about different faiths.

Sit near the exit: If you have to take a baby inside a place of worship, it is advisable to be close to the exit so that you can easily make your way out when he gets cranky. Remember, loud noises of bells, etc. can irritate a baby.

While in a temple: "Hold your child close to you given the crowd in temples these days," says Pavitra Prasad, mother to two-year-old Niharika. You don't want your child to get trampled, do you? "I only give my child elaichi-daana out of the different kinds of prasad available, that too after washing," says Renu Bhanot, mother to two-year-old Riti. After all, it is always good to take precautions when you are out rather than have a cranky baby with an upset tummy! Another word of caution for you mums and dads – beware of the monkeys outside temples. Langurs with greedy hands seem to have become a common feature at many places of worship these days!

TRAVELLING TO THE HILLS

What to carry: Always use pants with thick denims which do not wet easily. Carry rain pants if possible. They will protect your child's cotton trousers from getting wet in case of snow. "Your child may not feel too comfortable wearing heavy clothing, so give him some time to adjust," advises Eileen. A pair of shoes with a good grip are a must too.

Altitude is important: "The most important thing to remember before going to the mountains is the altitude," says Eileen. If you are going to a place located at an altitude of 6,000-7,000 feet, which includes places like Ooty and Mussoorie, you will have to take care that your child doesn't run up and down the stairs the very first day. If you intend travelling to higher altitudes, eg, places like Leh or Gulmarg, it is a must that you and your kids acclimatise to the height before getting into any vigorous activity as this could lead to breathlessness or even altitude sickness. Involve him in indoor activities like board games, drawing and colouring. Check for organised activities for kids in the hotel/resort you are staying. Kids make friends easily and love group activities. "In case your kid is asthmatic or suffers from any lung problem, you must consult your paediatrician before making the trip," says Sonali Mohanty, mother to Ayush, 10 and Ananya, six.

Ride the toy train: Hill stations like Ooty, Darjeeling and Simla offer toy train (narrow gauge) rides which your child will love. Don't miss it.

IN SHORT...

The trick to a trouble-free holiday with kids is to remember that it is a holiday for them as well. Let them enjoy themselves and do things that they are not allowed to do on a regular basis. Treat them to lots of chocolates if they prefer that. Let them have wafers and chips and juice (do avoid the fresh juices though. They can be the commonest source of infections). Choose a place which is easy to get to. Remain calm if things go wrong. A good sense of humour can go a long way in keeping you stress-free and your kids happy!

There's no reason why you cannot have a hassle-free trip if you leave home well-planned for your journey and destination. Each experience can, in fact, become more memorable and exhilarating with your children. "Travelling with a young baby connects you to a local culture like nothing else," says Corinne McDermott, mother to Megan, five, and Riley, 18 months, who has travelled extensively to various countries with her kids. A resident of Toronto, Canada, and creator of www.havebabywilltravel.com, she says, "All the new sights, sounds, smells and tastes are doubly exciting, because you get to see your baby experience them for the first time too. I will never forget my daughter's face as she saw a palm tree for the first time, and scampered across the beach like a little crab!"

