



By Jill Besnoy

*My husband and I loved to travel before we had children and made a conscious decision to not let having babies get in our way. Now that my two boys are out of their baby stage, I can look back fondly on the “challenges” that I endured. My first trip from New York to Los Angeles with my 3-month old was memorable to say the least, but I pressed onward. I was brazen with my choices. Before my oldest was 2 years old he had already been to 10 different states including Alaska. Although I enjoyed having my family by my side, traveling with a baby tested my patience. Yet the more places we visited the more I learned to adjust the way I travel. These top ten tips are what I’ve learned, but not always followed, during my travels with my babies (who sadly aren’t babies anymore).*

**Location, Location, Location.** Choose your vacation spot wisely. Realize that the days of going on a serene romantic getaway are over...at least when you’ve got the baby in tow. You can still visit beautiful places, just make sure they’re kid friendly and you’re not dealing with the glares of honeymooners. Pay attention to how you get there. Driving 20 hours straight with a 6-month-old might not be the wisest choice. Taking three connecting flights before you even begin your vacation, again not wise. Make getting there simple and you’ll have more time to relax.

**Love Those Kid Perks.** Take advantage of all the perks you can. If taking an airplane, make sure to get the 50 percent discount for kids under 2- years old. Don’t forget to pre-board the airplane. We parents can use all the extra time we can get. Use the car rental’s car seat if they offer it. Request the hotel room closest to the elevator

or pool so you don’t have to walk as far. Choose a hotel that provides a crib in the room or high chairs at dinner. The more they have, the less you have to lug along. (My husband would be carrying so many things at the airport, he looked like a pack mule). Family perks are there for a reason, to make your life easier, so use them!

**Taking Baby Steps.** Slow down and plan extra time for dealing with your baby. It might take most of the morning for you to pack the diaper bag and get out of your hotel room. If you don’t create unnecessary time constraints and leave it loose, then you’ll be okay. Trust me, don’t try to change the baby’s leaking diaper before the last ferry pulls away from the dock (I missed it). Plan for frequent stops if driving and make sure you have chunks of free time each day. Don’t over-schedule. If sightseeing, only plan one big location each day. Remember to allow time for the unexpected.

**A Comfortable Baby is a Happy Baby.** Bring all the right equipment to ensure your baby isn’t roughing it. A portable crib if they won’t provide it, plenty of extra formula or snacks for off-hour hunger, extra pacifiers, bottles, sippy cups, teethingers, etc. Basically anything your little dictator may demand that you won’t be able to get in the middle of the night or quick enough before a melt down. If you’re doing a road trip I recommend lots of blankets and pillows for the car. If you’re taking a plane, bring lotion (in a 3 oz. container) and buy lots of bottled water once you’re through security. Remember your baby doesn’t care that this is your vacation. Make sure you have all the accoutrements that your little prince/princess has become accustomed to.

**Handling the Sun.** Too much sun exposure can ruin a vacation quicker than you can say SPF. Make sure your baby wears a hat and use lots of sun tan lotion (SPF at least 30). Don’t forget to re-swath throughout the day, especially if your baby is fair. Remember, just because you’re in the shade doesn’t mean there’s no UV rays poking through. There are all sorts of gear out there to protect your baby; beach tents, cover ups, special bathing suits, high end sun tan lotion, etc. Choose your weapon and stay on top of it!

**Give up on Schedules (or don’t).** Rigid nap and feeding times can be a downer on vacation. If your baby let’s you, be flexible. Try not to be the mom who runs from the picturesque scene of dolphins leaping in the air to get baby down for his noon nap. Let the baby fall asleep on a blanket in the grass rather than sit inside the hotel room for two hours of naptime. We all know some babies stick to their schedule no matter where they may be and sometimes breaking a routine will wreak havoc when you return from your trip. But sometimes it’s freeing to let it all go on vacation. Of course, if you can only breastfeed in a quiet room, or you have to head back to the hotel for naptime, it’s okay. Depending on the kid, sometimes routine makes your vacation go smoother. Do what works for your family.

**Entertainment is Under-Rated.** Make sure to have plenty of books, your baby’s

favorite music and engaging toys on hand. These will help during any rough patches. If your baby watches television, I highly recommend bringing a DVD player with their favorite program. Believe me it will come in handy. Great diversions (depending on age) include, stickers, pretend car keys, doodle pads, mirrors, and playdoh. Of course bribery is okay when you’re on vacation; secret treats or brand new toys are part of a clever parent’s arsenal.

**Having a Medical Emergency Free Vacation.** Now is not the time to have your 10-month-old try eggs for the first time. Allergies are the number one vacation spoiler. Don’t leave home without Benadryl or some other antihistamine. Also take along Tylenol, or Motrin, band-aids, etc. You never know what can happen. When you arrive in your room do a quick scan for dangerous things like, small objects that are choking hazards, exposed outlets, or wide-open balconies. Obviously be careful in the in the pool or ocean, I don’t need to tell you that one...

**Cleaning Up Gracefully.** Let’s be honest. Babies are not neat. They poop on you, pee on you, vomit on you, spit up on you, stick their hands where they don’t belong. They’re a mess! And you need to be prepared. All parents traveling with a baby should have on hand - disinfectant, anti-bacterial soap, wipes, plastic bags and multiple changes of clothing for baby. And when you are on a plane ride or long car ride, I recommend a change of clothes for you (especially if you have somewhere to go afterwards). You don’t want to hear the story about my husband’s meeting he had to attend smelling like baby throw up.

**Embrace Imperfect Parenting.** Keep your sense of humor and realize it won’t go perfectly. Traveling without children can sometimes be difficult but having a baby with you almost guarantees it won’t go smoothly. Most importantly remember that this is family time. Enjoy it and laugh at the bumps in the road.

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