



On the road again... Planning a family-friendly car trip

There is nothing like a road trip to experience the unique terrain, food and culture each state and region have to offer. However the hours of driving in tight quarters with quarrelling children scares some people off. Don't let it. With a little planning it can be a very memorable experience.

1) Get comfy. Be safe. Allow enough leg room so that everyone is comfortable. Forget about squeezing bags, coolers or suitcases into the passenger area. Keep the dash and back window clear of stuff, so things don't go flying at every stop. If extra bags can't fit in the trunk or the cargo area, look into renting a car carrier.

Check for visibility in your rear and side view mirrors and rearrange if necessary. Keep a flashlight in the glove box. Pack a first aid kit. Bring along a pillow in case someone wants to take a nap.

2) Create a Trip Navigating Kit. This can be as simple as a pocket folder with prongs. Insert a few plastic sleeves in the prong section and slide information into the sleeves. Keep maps in the pockets. Type up your daily itinerary, to include phone numbers of hotels and confirmation numbers, and keep that information in the plastic sleeves. That way everything is at our finger tips.

3) Prepare for Snack Attacks. If you buy snacks at the gas stations along the way you'll be paying a premium. Purchase large bags of your favorite snacks and give each person a Glad ware container with a lid. When you stop at the rest stops, fill the containers. If someone can't finish, they can cover it, which should prevent potential messes. Bringing a cooler provides even more options. It's a great way to store grapes, juice, pop, even sandwich fixings. If you stay at motels or hotels replenish your ice from their machines. Use large Ziploc *freezer* bags.

4) Have a kid-zone. Create an activity basket that sits between the seats. Stock it with magnetic board games, car bingo, books or a sketch pad. Have kids bring along a friend...of the stuffed variety. In the past, our guys each took a beanie baby on trips to share in the adventure. And of course you can always use a DVD player as a fall back.

5) Preserve memories. The reason most of us take car trips is to build lasting memories with our kids. Encourage your children to record the experience in a journal. If they are young have them draw pictures. If they aren't too wordy, have them pick out a postcard each day. They can write a line or two about what they did. At the end of the trip, hole punch all the cards and clip them together on a ring. It'll be fun to look back on their perceptions in the years to come. Another fun idea is to buy each child a disposable camera, so they can capture their own memories. Those pictures are priceless. You literally see things through their eyes.

6) Stop and smell the roses. Take plenty of breaks. I read a tip that suggested stopping for ten minutes every two hours when traveling with young kids. My brother thought you'd never get there at that rate! You know your own kids and what they'll tolerate.

We enjoy picnics at parks or rest areas. We make lunch from the cooler and let the kids run around and get their jiggles out. There are only so many times you can stop at McDonald's!

7) Park it. Look up State and National Parks online beforehand. If you are in the neighborhood, it's a great place to stretch your legs and experience nature. www.nationalparks.org Consider buying an annual National Park pass. The cost is \$80. but it buys you entrance into the whole network. If you stop at a few parks it pays to buy the pass.

8) Unpack your bags. If you end up staying in a hotel for more than one night, unpack. Use their drawers, hang things up in the closet and stash the suitcases. It's easier than constantly rummaging through half-opened suitcases. It might seem like more work at first, but there is less clutter and it's easier to maneuver in the tight space.

9) Add a day. Plan for a decompression day upon your return. Let's face it a family vacation is really a trip. It's not a vacation. Allow yourself a day to buy some groceries and do the laundry and *relax*, before you jump back into your regular schedule.

10) Go digital. If you've taken a ton of pictures and you aren't sure you want 4x6 copies of all of them, make a photo book online. I've made two. Within ten days of the trip you could be snuggled up on the sofa reliving the memories!

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