

— by Rebecca Hastings

Holiday Travel Hacks: 10 Tips Every Parent Needs

Ah, holiday travel—the time of year when families pile into cars, board planes, or hop on trains in pursuit of creating magical memories. But let's be honest: traveling with kids during the holiday season can feel more like surviving a marathon than strolling through a winter wonderland. Between the crowded airports, unexpected traffic jams, and the endless barrage of "Are we there yet?" it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

But you can make holiday travel feel easier! With a little planning and some practical tips, you can actually enjoy the trip, and maybe even make it through without too many meltdowns (from the kids or from you!)

Here's how to make your holiday travel experience a little less stressful and a lot more joyful:

1. START EARLY WITH PLANNING

Give yourself plenty of time to prepare. Book flights or accommodations well in advance, and plan out routes if you're driving. Traveling during off-peak times, like early morning, can help avoid crowds and delays. Also consider places to stop and stretch little legs, playgrounds to get some energy out, and bathroom breaks!

2. PACK SMART, BUT LIGHT

Pack only the essentials and avoid overpacking. Bring versatile clothing, a few key toys or activities, and plenty of snacks. Having a lighter load makes it easier to move around, especially in busy airports or rest stops.

3. CREATE A "GO BAG"

Keep a small bag with must-have items like wipes, snacks, hand sanitizer, a change of clothes, and small toys. This will help you handle quick needs without digging through all your luggage. Make sure this bag is easily accessible under the airplane seat or near the front of the car.

4. USE TECHNOLOGY WISELY

Yes, we all want to limit screen time, but let's be real—sometimes, that tablet is a lifesaver. Especially on long trips. Download kid-friendly movies, games, or audiobooks to keep children entertained during long stretches. Bring headphones and chargers to avoid low battery stress, and balance screen time with other activities.

5. BRING COMFORT ITEMS

Pack a familiar blanket, stuffed animal, or pillow to help your kids feel more at ease in new environments. These comfort items can also be useful for naps on the go. Just be sure to keep it with you and always have an extra at home in case one gets left behind.

6. PREPARE FOR MESSES

Expect spills and accidents. Pack extra wipes, zip-lock bags for dirty clothes, and easily washable clothing to make quick cleanups easier. Even an extra shirt for mom and dad can be a lifesaver for long travel days when unexpected messes happen.

7. TIME TRAVEL AROUND SLEEP

Whenever possible, plan trips around nap or bedtime to make traveling easier. A travel pillow, a small blanket, and even a portable white noise machine can help recreate some of the comforts of their usual sleep environment. Kids may fall asleep on planes or in the car, reducing restlessness and making the trip a bit easier for everyone.

8. KEEP SNACKS HANDY

Kids get cranky when they're hungry. Bring a variety of snacks like fruit, crackers, and granola bars. Healthy, familiar options can help keep energy up and avoid sugar crashes. Just be sure to follow all TSA food guidelines for air travel.

9. MAKE IT FUN

Incorporate games like "I Spy" or travel bingo into your journey to keep kids entertained. An activity book or dry-erase board can be an easy travel companion that keeps kids happy. Offering small surprises or new toys at intervals can also break up long trips and keep spirits high.

10. STAY CALM AND FLEXIBLE

Expect delays and changes. Stay patient and positive, as your mood can influence how your kids react to disruptions. Focus on making the experience fun, even if it's not perfect. Calm parents make for calmer kids.

IT WON'T BE PERFECT — AND THAT'S OKAY!

Holiday travel with kids doesn't have to be a nightmare. With a little planning, some flexibility, and a few handy tricks up your sleeve, you can turn what might feel like a chaotic adventure into a meaningful, fun experience for everyone.

So go ahead, parents—embrace the journey, make new traditions, and savor the moments, messy as they may be. After all, the holidays are all about spending time together, wherever you may be. Safe travels!

THE HEART OF THE HOLIDAYS *continued...*

Give Time and Acts of Service: Children can volunteer at a local shelter, food bank, library, or participate in a community clean up or donation drive. In addition to developing a sense of social responsibility, volunteering teaches children the joy of sharing their time with others.

Sharing Moments of Gratitude: Encourage kids to share something they are grateful for each day of the holiday season and to find ways to express their gratitude to the people around them — whether through a conversation at dinner, a handwritten note, or perhaps keeping a daily "grateful" calendar.

Spreading Kindness Within the Community: Create "holiday kindness challenges" where kids are encouraged to complete acts of generosity like donating toys, giving compliments, or baking treats for local workers.

Children learn by example. Given consistent opportunities to practice generosity is an invaluable asset for kids to practice now and as they grow into adulthood. Why is nurturing generosity in our children important? Simply stated, every act of generosity helps to shape our world in a positive way.

Terri Lilga, a retired elementary school teacher from Western New York, lives in the Village of Hamburg with her husband Pete and their mini-golden doodle, Sushi. Following her teaching career, she rekindled her passion for writing children's literature, including "Santa's Simon" and her upcoming book "There's a Hubbard in My Cupboard" (2025), both sharing messages of courage and kindness.

WHY WE DON'T HAVE A CHRISTMAS TREE *continued...*

turns reading the Haggadah at the Passover Seder, while my brother and I joked in whispers at the kids' table. I remember getting together with Jewish family friends who were as much family as blood relatives, every Christmas Eve for Chinese food and ice cream sundaes. I remember going on a teen tour to Israel and feeling totally at home with 40 teenagers I'd never met before, an ocean away from my parents.

I also remember the deep longing I felt for a Christmas tree and a stocking full of Lip Smackers and scrunchies every December.

But if I had the chance, I wouldn't trade that longing for the fulfillment of my childhood wishes, because the sum of all these experiences have shaped my values. I believe it's more important to be who I am than to be like everyone else, even when it's uncomfortable. If I can pass that belief on to my daughters, I will have given them a greater gift than anything I could put under a Christmas tree.

This article was originally published on Motherly.

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