
TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN



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FOREWORD

When I wrote the first edition of *Travel With Children*, Tashi and Kieran (our children) were four and two years old and we had just moved to California to set up the Lonely Planet office.

Although they were very young, they were already veteran travellers. At eight months Tashi had her first taste of life as a Lonely Planet baby, updating our Southeast Asia book. When Kieran was three months we all went to Indonesia, and later that same year to India, Nepal (including a trek) and Sri Lanka.

Travelling was what Tony and I did, and it seemed completely natural to us that when the babies came they would travel with us. Of course, other people thought we were mad, and there were times when I would have agreed. It wasn't always easy; we travelled by public transport or drove ourselves. We stayed in pleasant, family-run places which had local facilities, but not much in the way

of the normal amenities families in Australia or other Western developed countries took for granted. When we finally took the children to Europe, Tashi found it hard to believe that

she could drink water from the tap in every country we visited.

The children learned a lot – Kieran, aged five, when asked to do a show and tell of his trip to Egypt, insisted that the Sphinx had a moustache. When his teacher gently sug-

gested it was a beard, Kieran asked him had he been there? The result was that an entire class went through primary school convinced that the Sphinx had a moustache, because, after all, Kieran had been there and seen it with his own eyes.

When Tashi was three we were updating the Sri Lanka book and Tony took her with him when he went to check out some hotels. In one of them, the owner, recognising Tony from an earlier trip, offered them some tea. They chatted for a while and then Tony got up to leave. Tashi tugged on his arm and said, 'Daddy, aren't we going to check the toilets?'

Years later, when Tashi was 13, we decided to spend a week at a beach resort with family friends. After a few days, Tashi came to me and asked, 'So, we stay here, we don't go from place to place, we go to the same beach every day – we just hang out?' I replied, 'Yes, that's it'. 'So is this what you call a holiday?'

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she asked and I realised that although we had travelled all her life, this was indeed her first holiday.

People always assume that it must have been a wonderful

childhood, constantly travelling, seeing new places and encountering so many different people and cultures, and it was, but of course it wasn't always easy. Our children were often a curiosity to local people, and they would find a place they loved, but we never stayed



ABOVE. MAUREEN AND TONY WHEELER WITH THEIR CHILDREN, TASHI AND KIERAN

more than a few days. Kieran, even at three months, knew he would rather be home; Tashi loved being on the road. However, travel is woven into the fabric of their lives and both of them can't imagine a future without plans to travel. Kieran spent eight months travelling in Southeast Asia and has since visited India and Europe, and Tashi lived in London for three years and travels whenever she can get the time and money together.

As parents we want to give our children so much, not just material things, but memories and experiences that will help them navigate the rest of their lives. Travelling with your children opens up the world to them and gives you the chance to see it again through fresh eyes, and despite the inevitable anxious moments and the sheer hard work involved, I would do it all again.

Maureen Wheeler

INTRODUCTION

Family holidays, the poor cousin of all other travel genres, tend to get a lot of bad press. You could be forgiven for thinking they're all about package resorts with beaches that look like the human version of a penguin colony. Or group confinement with reviled relatives. Or sulking teens glued to their phones, bemoaning their boredom. Or maybe you've been led to believe that the trip starts with your baby keeping all other plane passengers awake and just goes downhill from there. Mention the idea of travelling with children to some people and they just say, 'Don't!'

But these gloomy images are getting a makeover, as more and more families take to the road with gusto and return with positive tales to tell. Seasoned independent travellers aren't stopping just because they've had children, and some families who've never travelled before are taking the plunge. No-frill airlines, increasing affluence and a recognition of the value of travelling together as a family are all playing a part.

If you want to spend quality time with your children, help them learn, grow and gain a better understanding of the world and humanity, then travelling is a great way to do it. As a travelling family you'll talk and share experiences, which these days we often struggle to find time for in our

busy lives. If you've been stuck in a pattern of 'telling off' and whining, travel can get things off to a fresh start. Your children may surprise you with their adaptability and affability when the hold of regular routines loosens. Watching your children engage with different surroundings can change your perspective and invigorate you with a renewed sense of wonder. As your children blossom before your eyes in response to new encounters and experiences, it's hard not to share their excitement. Their questions will reveal the depths of their intelligence and the scope of their understanding, which in turn will enrich your appreciation of your children. Their horizons quite literally expand as they realise that the world is bigger than your home town or city, and with it comes an appreciation of

'Travel with children provides insights into local cultures that you often just don't get travelling childless. In most cultures children are welcomed, if not revered, and become the centre of attention. As a parent, you'll be caught up in the interest generated by your child and will have closer encounters with the locals as a result.'

cultural diversity, the seeds of tolerance and empathy, which will stay with them for the rest of their lives. For young children this may come with the simple realisation that

people speak different languages – and as their ears become attuned to new sounds they'll probably even pick up a few words in the local tongue.

Travel with children provides insights into local cultures that you often just don't get travelling childless. In most cultures children are welcomed, if not revered, and become

the centre of attention. As a parent, you'll be caught up in the interest generated by your child and will have closer encounters with the locals as a result. And although your life may be very different from that of others you'll meet on your travels, parenting provides a strong common bond with people all over the world.

Of course, it isn't always easy travelling with children. Schlepping the luggage while trying to hurry along someone who wants to dawdle every step of the way can be stressful to say the least. But there's a lot you can do up front to minimise aggravation and difficulties. Getting the pace right is vital, and planning and taking the right bits and pieces with you, including the right mental attitude, are key. Starting out in a positive frame of mind and aiming to stay that way will help to deflect tensions. Remaining flexible will save you when your carefully laid plans go off the rails. If you approach the journey with a spirit of adventure, and involve your children in the planning and problem solving, you'll have a better chance of converting setbacks into opportunities.

A big part of getting the planning right comes with choosing a suitable destination and type of holiday for your family. In this edition we've put a lot of thought into providing really useful information on all your options, from camping to activity holidays

to resorts and cruises to settling in another country long-term. We've also expanded coverage of our favourite destinations for family travel, by adding new detail on the most interesting places to visit and hotels that welcome children. In order to provide in-depth information, we've chosen to use our limited space to focus on the very best places to go. Each country we cover has been carefully chosen because it is safe and well-suited to family travel.

One of the nice things about this book is that it's not just one person telling you about travel with children – it's a global team of authors with children, offering their best tips and passing on practical information. This book has grown over 23 years and enshrines the knowledge Lonely Planet cofounder Maureen Wheeler gained travelling with her children in their first 15 years, as well as the experiences of Lonely Planet authors, staff and readers.

Travelling with children might not be glamorous, relaxing or extremely thrill-seeking, but families who travel are having their own sort of adventure and deserve to be applauded, encouraged and respected. With a positive attitude and a bit of forethought, travelling happily with your offspring is easily achieved. Things won't always go as planned, of course, but then they never do with travel or with kids.



ABOVE. DIVING WITH A GREEN SEA TURTLE, HAWAII



ABOVE. A SURF LIFE-SAVING CARNIVAL AT NOOSA, AUSTRALIA

BEACH HOLIDAYS

COSTA DEL SUD (SARDINIA **P142**)

Although you have to drive to the beaches, the water is clean, the sand is white and there aren't too many people: Sardinian beaches are far better than many on the Italian mainland.

www.sardegnaturismo.it

COTTESLOE (AUSTRALIA **P181**)

Just north of Fremantle and west of Perth in Western Australia, Cottesloe has a beautifully safe beach for kids to swim or snorkel at, and the weather always seems to be perfect.

www.cottesloe.wa.gov.au

DURBAN (SOUTH AFRICA **P254**)

Washed by the warm Indian Ocean, Durban's city beaches have plenty of free children's swimming pools and lots of family entertainment such as Sea World and Ushaka Marine World.

www.durban.gov.za

KARON BEACH (THAILAND **P207**)

Family-friendly Karon, with its Flintstone-themed fun park, is a great base for exploring Phuket's beaches and reserves, including Phuket Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre.

www.phuket.com/island/beaches_karon.htm

KAUAI (HAWAII, USA **P160**)

Home to plenty of beaches where children can snorkel in very shallow waters and an excellent Children's Discovery Museum.

www.kauai-hawaii.com

AITUTAKI (COOK ISLANDS **P193**)

Soft sand beaches edge a turquoise lagoon filled with tropical fish. Kayaking, snorkelling and boat cruises are also part of the picture.

<http://cookislands.travel/index>

NOOSA (AUSTRALIA **P181**)

Recommended by lots of parents at Lonely Planet's head office as a wonderful place to take the kids. Great beaches, beautiful natural environment (Noosa National Park) and very child-friendly.

www.noosa.qld.gov.au/aboutnoosa

TAVIRA (PORTUGAL **P136**)

At the eastern end of the Portuguese south coast, this quiet town has a magnificent untamed beach that goes on for miles. And, best of all, you take a boat to get to the beach.

www.visitportugal.com

SAYULITA (MEXICO **P227**)

A safe, laid-back beach town full of hip North American and European families where you and the kids get 'back to basics'. Every evening both local and gringo kids congregate in the town square to eat ice cream and play games.

www.sayulitalife.com

SANUR (BALI **P224**)

A quiet little town close to the 'happening' area of Bali with a great little collection of *warungs* (outdoor restaurants) lining the beach at both ends; full of friendly local people.

www.baliturismboard.org

Part 1.

BEFORE YOU GO



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BEING PREPARED

Good preparation and planning is the key to travelling with children. This doesn't mean mapping out your entire route or booking every night's accommodation but with children in tow you constantly need to think ahead and anticipate everyone's needs. If your child is old enough, they will enjoy being involved in your pre-departure planning: children like to contribute, to 'help' and, more than anything, they love looking forward to something special (as long as it isn't too far ahead).

Travelling with children is hard work: in fact, you'll probably come back from your trip more in need of holiday than ever before. But, if you've researched your destination, packed the right equipment and prepared the children, you're well on your way to a successful and workable time away.

CHILDREN'S AGES

There's no right or wrong age to start travelling with children: your trip can be just as enjoyable with a baby or a teenager. Each age group or stage in your child's development comes with its own rewards and challenges, and your travels need to be mapped out with your child's abilities and requirements in mind. However, a good holiday or trip is one that works for everyone – both children and adults – so remember to take your own travel plans or wishes into consideration too.

Babies

There are lots of advantages to travelling with babies. They have no views on where you go, what you do and how you get there (make the most of it!). In many ways, your first baby need not make a huge difference to the way you travelled pre-children.

Babies are extremely portable, they sleep a lot and they are easily entertained either in the stroller or in a baby carrier/sling strapped to your front. If you want to spend your days out and about, visiting museums, seeing the sights and ending up in a nice restaurant at night then, for most of the time, your baby

will be happy either snuggled up to your front in the baby carrier or being pushed (asleep or awake) in a stroller. For the first eight to ten weeks your baby will probably face towards you when in the baby carrier but after that they can face outwards and start to take an interest in their surroundings. When you're on the move, even though you'll need to stop regularly for feeds and nappy changes, you will have a lot of freedom when travelling with a baby. One of the real perks of this age is that you're still able to go out at night. As long as you're not somewhere smoky or too noisy, babies do not have to go back to their accommodation for bedtime but will often sleep anywhere. In addition, having a baby actively improves your social life when travelling: there's nothing like a baby to stimulate interest and interaction from local people or other travellers.

However, there are some downsides. As the health and safety of your baby is paramount, you'll need to choose your destinations carefully. For more information, see the Staying Healthy & Keeping Safe chapter (p34) as well as the country profiles in Part 4 of this book. This is crucial when travelling with babies (or any child too young to communicate properly) because they can't

LONG-TERM TRAVEL & LIVING ABROAD

It's a quiet revolution but it's happening: career breakers and travel addicts are packing up the kids and going – long-term. And it's not as hard as it sounds! While some people choose to be nomads on round-the-world trips or continent exploration, other families decide to keep the adventure focused on a single destination where they can live, learn the language, find local employment or work as a volunteer (see the boxed text on p115). The choice really depends on the disposition of your family but, in general, kids get tired of moving around sooner than adults do – vast exploratory trips might need to be slowed down to keep kids happy. A good way to cover more ground is to intersperse wandering with settling in one place every few weeks (see p72).

Most parents who choose to live abroad with their families are missionaries, academics, students, teachers, military personnel or international business people. If you're one of these, there are books, websites and even psychological studies on the subject (see p114); there is little support, however, for long-term wanderers or folks who want to live abroad independently on a budget.

Going to one place for an extended time with children has plenty of benefits. During short trips you might end up missing lots of 'boring' museums, sights and nightlife; however, when you stick around one place, chances are you'll find a good babysitter or activities for your kids, giving you the time to enjoy the nuances of a place. If kids are in school or have the chance to meet other children, their immersion into a culture can often exceed that of their parents; the doors to integration can often be opened through your children. From a child's perspective, going on a long trip means living out of the box – when they get home they might find themselves less wrapped up in the school rat-race and more free to be unique. Kids who don't like school will appreciate the change and maybe appreciate school more when

they return. Whatever the case, most families find that they spend more time together when they are travelling long-term or living abroad. This is a time to bond, work through problems and really get to know each other on terms different from the everyday routine.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Culture shock (see p63) and schedule upheaval is hard for some kids but exhilarating to others. For babies and very young children, keeping to a schedule and easing slowly into any necessary dietary changes will help them adjust. Unfortunately some kids have a hard time with sleep especially if you are moving around a lot, and the only thing that helps (and even this isn't a sure bet) is to stay put awhile somewhere.

PREPARATION

It's good to keep kids over the age of eight informed of your travel plans as early on as possible. Younger children can be told three months prior or slightly later – if told too early they could become overanxious. If you're moving, get as much information as you can about your new home and share it with your

kids. When there will be a different language it can be fun to listen to some language CDs or switch DVDs to that language so the sounds will be more familiar.

Some toddlers and young children will feel like the people they are leaving will never be seen again. Older children and teens, especially those who are very social, might find that being away from friends is the hardest issue. If kids are anxious about leaving friends and family, consider throwing a predeparture party. Take lots of pictures and have everyone personally contribute to a small going-away gift (such as a book with drawings from all the guests) that can be packed as a memento. On the road give kids plenty of opportunity to email, call or write to their friends and family.

A limited number of countries allow you to pack the pets and bring them along without having to quarantine them (see www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/pets for a list of

approved countries). Otherwise you'll have to find a willing friend, relative or pet-sitter (call your local SPCA or see Listings on p114) to take care of Fido and Fluffy while you're gone.

One of the biggest questions folks have is what to do with all their stuff and how to tie up loose ends. A particularly family friendly option if you own your own home is a home swap (see Listings on p114). Besides saving money on lodging, and having someone take care of your home, trading with a family with children in the same age group gets you a house that will probably have everything you need including a whole new set of toys. Otherwise, you'll have to arrange selling or letting out your home, find a housesitter or even leave it empty. Renters have the option of just packing everything into storage or finding out if it's possible to sublet for the time you are expecting to be away.

For information about how to manage school issues, see p28.



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