

Are we there yet?

Tips for successful car holidays with children

By Kate Tapping

You've spent ages planning the holiday, packing the car, getting the little ones into their car seats. You make it to the end of the street and up pipes a little voice from the backseat, "Are we there yet?" It's a stereotype for a reason; most kids utter these words at some time in their life.

So how do you ensure your road trip with your little loved ones is more a road to paradise than a highway to hell? Here are some strategies that have worked for us.

Give us a break

Break up the journey depending on the age of your children and how long they will sit happily in the car for. Younger children may appreciate a break every hour or so, while older children can generally be stretched out for longer periods. A break from the car is a great chance for children to stretch their legs, go to the toilet and, if there is a playground involved, burn off any cooped up energy. If there is no playground, you could take a ball to throw around or devise some running games and races - anything to tire the kids out for the next stint in the car.

Sleep tight

If your children still have a daytime nap, try to coincide long stretches in the car with when they would normally be asleep. This works at the very start and end of the day as well; however, ensuring the driver has also had enough sleep is always more important than

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driving through the night.

Music soothes the savage beast

CDs of children's songs and nursery rhymes can be entertaining for the kids, as long as they don't drive the adult passengers too crazy. The local library is a great place to stock up on new CDs before a holiday, providing you are not going for too long or have the ability to renew what you've borrowed online whilst you're away. For older children, CDs of stories can potentially fill in hours of driving time, and the older the children, the more chance the adults will enjoy the story too.

Food glorious food

A stash of healthy snacks is essential to keep the hungry mob in the back satiated, but also to help save money on expensive and potentially unhealthy snacks at petrol stations and convenience stores along your drive. A supply of fresh and dried fruit and sandwiches is easy to prepare before you leave. A drink bottle for each child ensures everyone

has their own supply of fresh drinking water. A rubbish bag to collect any discarded skins and wrappers is handy to have on hand to keep the car relatively tidy.

Plugged in

Sometimes you just have to embrace technology and its convenience. If you have to drive from Melbourne to Sydney, maybe the best solution is to invest in the appropriate number of portable DVD players and give your children a choice of movies to watch. Ditto for handheld games and the like. Chances are if you're on your way on holidays there will be plenty of sightseeing and activities at your destination, so is it a biggie if your children have a couple of hours extra screen time on the journey? Like pretty much all parenting decisions, it's up to the individual.

B is for bored

A family game of I Spy has got to be good for at least half an hour of the journey. If your children are too young to spell, try colours instead: "I spy something... green". The alphabet game is also a good family game - try to think of a country for every letter A to Z: America, Brazil, Canada, Denmark. Categories for this game are only limited by your imagination.

Obviously the tactics you'll find the most useful will depend on the age of your children, their temperament, and how long you are travelling for. Happy travels!



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Car travel with kids - a road to paradise or a highway to hell?

Road trips from Melbourne

Within one hour...

Depending what side of Melbourne you're from, head to the other side. If you live out east, head west to bayside Geelong for a sea change. If you live out west, head east to the gorgeous Dandenong Ranges for a tree change. Geelong and the Dandenong Ranges both boast tourist

attractions featuring trains - ideal for the Thomas the Tank Engine enthusiasts amongst your children.

Within two hours...

Add some sparkle to your little ones' lives, with a trip to the historic town of Ballarat. A visit to Sovereign Hill, complete with gold panning, may result in you coming back richer than you started.

Within three hours...

Head north to the glorious

Murray River at Echuca. Show your children the towering gum trees that line the river and step back in time with a paddle steamer ride on the Emmy Lou - if your children are lucky they may even get to blow the whistle.

Further afield...

If you're super keen on a road trip, the eleven hour drive to Sydney could be an option. Children will delight in all Sydney has to offer, including the sunny days, super beaches and ferry rides on the harbour.

Your holiday attitude

Whether you're travelling by car, plane, boat or train; whether your kids are two, twelve, or anywhere in between; whether you're going for the weekend or a month; a bit of mental preparation, can make all the difference between a fabulous family holiday and one of those nightmare holidays you come back from more exhausted than you started.

Julie, mother of three

energetic boys, says no matter what age your children, where you're going, or how you're getting there, the biggest hurdle to fun holidays with children is your attitude.

"The sooner parents accept that holidays with their children will not be the same as holidays pre-children, the better. Not to say they are worse, but they will almost certainly be different," says Julie.

A pre-children holiday to the hotel pool could mean a couple of hours quiet in the sunshine reading a book. The same visit with children could potentially

include constant vigilance to ensure no-one drowns; actually having to hop into the water to ensure no-one drowns - even if the water feels like it has come straight from Antarctica - and proving you can do a 'bombie' to gain credibility with your six-year old.

Julie says this is a common experience. "If you go to the pool expecting to relax, you will be disappointed. If you go to the pool expecting to get wet, loud and most probably silly with your kids, you will get exactly what you expected."



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Baby on Board: Kids love a sea change