

Surviving a Trip With an Infant [FINAL Edition]

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Spit-up. Puke. Barf. Spittle. Whatever you call the stuff that comes out of your sweet baby's mouth (not to mention other parts of the body), containing it on a cramped, eight-hour international flight can take on trauma proportions.

Maureen Wheeler, Helen Gillman and Susan Forsyth, mothers and authors of several Lonely Planet international travel books, including "Travel With Children," offer the following general tips for baby-travel sanity, especially in cultures that don't have a word for "toilet paper," much less diapers.

* En route, don't forget a change of clothing for yourself. An hour before arrival, you and your little pumpkin can change into something less sour. And wear synthetic fabrics that rinse easily in a sink and dry quickly.

* Look for the middle seats on long overseas flights. Your chances increase in finding several unused seats for your baby (and you) to stretch out across. Remember that bulkhead seats, the favorite for baby travel on shorter flights, often have locked armrests.

* Go disposable. Thick cotton diapers simply take too long to dry. Plus, rubber pants cause rashes in humid, tropical climates. Many countries do not carry disposable diapers (called "nappies" in international lingo), so bring your own. (Also bring two cloth diapers, in case you run out.) For disposal, bring small paper or plastic bags (Washington Post newspaper sleeves work great!), and try to leave the load with the hotel staff, especially in countries that lack trash cans or garbage collection. God willing, the staff will bring the mess to the local dump.

And remember, you may not find toilet paper, tissues or hand wipes of any kind in most developing countries. (Non-western, disposable-friendly places: Hong Kong, major cities in Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, South and Central America, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya.) When possible, let your kids run naked like the locals. But always insist on shoes: The ground in certain countries is often covered with animal and human feces that carry parasites and other worms that can tunnel through the skin.

* Carry bottled water throughout your trip. Water differs not only in contamination levels, but also in mineral and chlorine content from one city or country to the next, upsetting tummies of delicate infants. Even breast-fed bambinos will need water for cereal and drinking. Unfortunately, water is heavy. (See next item.)

* Choose between two travel approaches (don't settle for a sloppy in between):

A. Travel light. Many international family travelers recommend one bag for the entire family, one bag for disposable diapers (you can fill it with purchases as the diaper supply dwindles) and one light backpack per child for small toys and books. Add one baby-carrying device (stroller vs. Snuggli? See below).

B. Set up camp and stay put. An alternate to super-light trekking. Pick one or two cities, find comfortable hotels with kitchenettes and stay there the entire time, taking day trips to other cities and sites via rental car. Bring a portable crib or playpen, car seat, toys, anything the airline will tolerate, and make sure you can find a way to lug it from baggage claim to hotel. Many international family travelers swear by this technique. You might see fewer "sights," but you get to know the local lifestyle. Plus, you always know where the infant ibuprofen is located at 2 a.m.

For both kinds of travel, foldable, high-tech stoves, available at camp supply stores and catalogues, heat water in about two minutes.

* Bring a stroller for larger, more Western cities, and a baby back/front carrier for less developed countries. Strollers do not roll on cobblestones, broken pavement, gravel or mud. A folding, reclining (turns into a bed!) stroller with big wheels and a basket work best. Strollers also double as high chairs for eating. Snugglis, or similar backpack-style baby carriers, obviously work on jungle paths, but one Lonely Planet writer said that by the end of the day he felt "compressed." Plus, no high chair. Either way, in non-Western countries expect a lot of curious fanfare over your various baby-carrier contraptions.

* Go as upscale as you can afford. You do not want to spend all your time worrying that your toddler will fall into the toilet--which can be just a hole in the floor--or host some parasite from unclean, concrete floors or unwashed beds.

* Leave your hotel if the baby is wailing at 2 a.m. All family travelers agree on this one. Your infant cries in the middle of the night? Belly full? Butt clean? Take him for a walk, away from sleeping guests. Hotel walls are thin. So are nerves.

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