

The 2 Idiots Travel Blog

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Tips for Traveling with a Toddler on a Plane

Yes, it's vacation time... nope just kidding. You are a parent traveling with a child. It's an 18 hour long flight, jet lag, screaming toddlers, judgy passengers, non-helpful flight attendant and bad airline food. It feel likes the halloween version of vacation.

Trust us, we know how you feel and it's really not that bad and in this post we have some tried and tested tips for you. By the time our son was two and a half, he'd already been on 40 international flights with us, spanning some 19 different airlines. So, we have some decent experience—and in this blog, we're going to share a few of the lessons we learned along the way. (We've also embedded a few links to some favorite products for air travel, so that you can click and buy them instantly.)

Get Your Mind Right

First, though, let's set some expectations.

It's reasonable to hope for a plane ride where everyone remains fairly comfortable; where mom and dad aren't drowning in stress, and where the little one isn't either bored stiff or going completely crazy. That's what we're aiming for with this post.

But please remember: Kids are kids, and a lot of air travel can take its toll on *any* of us. There are probably going to be some tense moments or some tantrums. (Hopefully, they're all from the child—not the parents.) Our recommendations are very practical, we think, but they're not miracles.

Plans and Preparations

With that out of the way, the first thing we recommend is **getting an FAA-approved harness**. [We've blogged about this already](#), but we bring it up here because it makes it easy for your child to sit comfortably or even to sleep on the plane—especially on an overnight flight that coincides with your little one's bedtime (this harness is only for children over a year old; when our child was an infant we carried him in our lap and used the lap belt provided by the airline).

Something else you're going to want to have? **A clear plan for when things go wrong**. Because again, there *may* be some tough moments. It's good to have the right mindset, and to know even before you head to the airport which parent will handle the kid, what you're going to do, and what you're not going to do if a tantrum occurs. (More on this in a moment.)

Another pre-flight task? **Book the right seats.** Whenever possible, we got bulkhead seats, which gave us all a little extra room, and gave our son a little bit of space to play on the floor. On some flights we were even able to set up a small crib for him to sleep—admittedly, something that only works when your child is quite small. Bulkhead seating is great whenever you can book it.

Next, let's talk about **what you should take on your flight.** We always brought one small bag for our son, which had his toys inside it. Our child likes numbers and letters, so we [packed a device](#) that allowed him to [write out his numbers and letters](#). We also brought a [whiteboard](#) for him to write on, and a handful of favorite books. Obviously, your little bag may look a little different; it's simply a matter of finding the things that keep your child entertained, ideally with minimal noise and not too many moving parts. (Something else to keep in mind: For kids, anything can be a toy! Ours spent a lot of time playing with spoons, cups, ice, etc.—so don't hesitate to ask for these things from the flight attendant! And, if your child wears headphones—which ours didn't, incidentally—you can leverage in-flight entertainment options, which usually have some kid-friendly options.)

And don't forget to **load some educational apps on your devices.** Now, we understand that there is some stigma associated with apps and devices—but in our view, learning is always a good thing, whether that's through books or iPad apps. We'll post some favorite apps in a later post.

Another recommendation: **Subscribe to YouTube Red**, which has a lot of great, kid-friendly channels and videos that can *downloaded offline*. Downloading offline content from Netflix can also work, though we honestly found more good stuff on YouTube. One final note about devices: We limited apps and devices on the day of the flight, which really helped the experience on the plane.

A common worry parents have with any new behaviors such as giving kids devices is that it will affect their regular home habits. Our experience has showed that kids are super adaptable and will get back to their regular habits as soon as they get back home. **Your goal is to get through the flight** and if your child needs to drinks 3 glasses of sprite or 10 M&M's to be calm (this is what we needed to do), do it.

Meeting Basic Needs

If your child is potty-trained, we recommend **bringing along a [portable potty](#)**, which can make the entire process a bit easier. And if you're in a situation where your child needs to go and you feel like you can't get up—for instance, if the seatbelt sign is on—ring for a flight attendant. We always found that they were great with kids, and happy to help.

Also, one thing we learned the hard way is that a lot of international flights don't have milk. **If your child likes milk, make sure to get some in the airport;** if you can't find any at a

convenience store, try a coffee shop. And naturally, you'll want to take plenty of snacks, especially on long flights—but that's something most parents won't need to be told!

A final thought: What happens if your child's ears hurt due to changes in air pressure? We generally found that **giving him a milk bottle to suck on**—or a candy such as Starburst—did the trick. Make sure you have these things handy!

Maintaining Sanity

So what happens if your child *does* go crazy and has a tantrum? Every parent is going to handle it differently, but our main takeaway is that, when your child is acting out, it's easy to focus on what the people around you are thinking or doing. Try to block them out and be really engaged with your child, and what your child needs in that moment. It's tough to do, but worth the effort.

It's also important for parents to do what they need to do to maintain some sanity. We gave each other breaks, especially on the longer flights—for instance, AJ would be on child duty for 20 minutes and Natasha got to disappear into her headphones, then vice versa. We actually used stopwatches to block off this time, and found it to be a good approach. And, if you have a couple of kids, the parents can rotate from the more challenging child to the easier one—another way of making sure everyone gets a little break.

And so long as you and your spouse or co-parent are on the same page, we think you can actually have some fun taking your child on flights, and giving your little one a special experience. We hope these tips point you in that direction.

Useful resources/links

- [Our product recommendation on FAA-approved harness](#)
- [OXO 2-1 Portable Potty](#)
- Toys that we recommend to take on a flight:
 - [Leap Frog Mr. Pencil](#)
 - [Melissa and Doug Water Wow Water Pad](#)
 - [Mini-magnetic drawing pad](#)