

Travelling with Baby

So you've decided to travel with your baby – whatever the reason, whether it be for a vacation, unforeseen circumstances, attending a family gathering or relocation, travelling with a baby is quite a different experience compared to travelling on your own. And the 2 key words for any parent are: Preparation and Flexibility. Coupled with doses of humour and a positive attitude, you'll be able to walk where many parents have ventured before you without losing your sanity.

There are numerous variables when traveling with a baby and we'll deal with each in turn.

1) How Old is Baby?

Firstly, if your infant is below 3 months old, check with your pediatrician before going ahead to book that trip. Besides dealing with air pressure, which may be very uncomfortable for an infant, you should also be aware that the exposure to radiation at high altitudes is inevitable. The infant may also be vulnerable to germs in an enclosed space like an airplane cabin. The advantage with a young infant however, is their diet. You won't have to battle with carrying baby food and worrying about their meals. If you are completely breastfeeding your baby, packing will be even easier as you won't have to pack baby bottles and sterilizing equipment.

If your child has started on solids, then there'll be more packing to do, but this can be overcome. If you are traveling by plane, check if the airline serve baby food. Most reputable airlines do, but you have to request for this in advance. In terms of sterilizing equipment, using sterilizing tablets are the easiest and take up the least space in your luggage. Otherwise, you'll have to pack a microwave sterilizer or electric sterilizer, which are bulkier and take up space. (Remember to carry a travel adapter with you!)

As baby grows older and starts to crawl and walk, they may not be content being confined to a bassinet or staying in their seat. You'll then have to be prepared to walk baby up and down the airplane aisle or pack lots of entertainment!

2) Mode of Transport

When traveling with a baby, we have found that driving is by far the easiest and most convenient means of transport. It allows you total flexibility over your itinerary, and you have lots of space to pack baby's gear, unlike restrictions when travelling by air. If you are thinking of taking a short trip, consider a nearby destination that you can get to by car. Do make sure your car is in good shape and ensure that you have your route planned out. You will also need more rest stops, as baby is unlikely to sit quietly in a car seat for hours on end. Plan your departure during baby's nap time if possible, so that it gives you a good head start and you can cover more distance whilst baby sleeps peacefully. If your destination is 8 hours or more away, considering staying overnight at a location in between to break your journey.

If you are traveling by air, make sure that you request for a bassinet at the time of making your reservation. Most airlines are able to confirm that you have been allocated a bassinet before your departure and some may be able to even lock in your bassinet seat much earlier. Remind your travel agent or call the airline personally to make sure this is confirmed, as traveling for a long period of time with an infant on your lap is no easy feat!

Besides reserving a meal for baby if baby has started on solids (as mentioned in 1 above), ensure that you have a handy pack of items to keep baby entertained. Remember that if you get a bassinet seat, you won't have the luxury of putting your bag under the seat in front of you. So pack several small bags with items that baby will

require during the take-off and landing and store them in the pocket in the seat in front of you.

If your baby cries during take-off and landing – don't stress! It's the best way for baby to deal with air pressure as they naturally clear the pressure in their ears when they cry. And don't feel bad for the other passengers on board – travelling with a crying baby is part and parcel of air travel! So ignore their stares and keep calm.

Some airlines allow you to carry an infant capsule or car seat on board so that you can fasten baby securely in the seat beside you. Do check with the airlines beforehand.

You should also prepare for the unexpected and pack a little extra, just in case there are travel delays. Depending on your destination and stopover locations, there may be a nursing or parents' room at the airport. Do try to find out beforehand so that you are not caught by surprise.

3) Itinerary & Location

At your destination, will you be chilling out at your residence, sightseeing or visiting relatives? This will determine what you should pack for baby. A stroller is an essential and you should bring this with you onto the plane if you are travelling by air. Most airlines will allow you to use your stroller until you reach the boarding gate, where you will have to leave your stroller. The airline staff will tag your stroller and carry it on board to be stored.

You should also pack a baby carrier. There will be periods of time during when you will not be able to use your stroller and you will require both hands free to handle luggage, surrender your boarding pass, etc. A carrier is also useful when sightseeing, if you should be hiking or taking nature walks where the ground may not be stroller-friendly.

If you are not staying with relatives or friends, select a hotel or apartment that is close to shops and transport. The most baby-friendly accommodation by far are

serviced apartments. Most come with a small kitchen and fridge, an essential for preparing baby's food, washing and sterilizing bottles.

At the time of your reservation, request for a baby cot. If you are driving and are not certain if the hotel or apartment will have a cot for your baby, bring a travel cot with you. We have been to several hotels which supplied us with a baby cot which was wholly unsuitable for an infant. Some were too old and worn whilst others had large gaps between the rails. Remember that different countries have different safety standards, don't take it for granted that baby equipment will be of the same standard as your home country. If your baby can roll around the cot, bringing a set of cot bumpers may be useful, as most hotels don't supply cot bumpers with their cots.

Do adjust your expectations when traveling with your baby. You won't be able to pack a hectic schedule like your dating or pre-baby days and your itinerary is likely to revolve around baby's nap and feed times. One of the best holidays we've had with our infant son was when he was 3 months old. We stayed at a fantastic hotel connected to a mall! We took turns to shop and go for massages whilst our son napped in the hotel. We even managed to enjoy the local fare by getting takeaway and bringing it back to the hotel to eat whilst our son retired for the evening in his cot!

Do refer to our Baby Travel Checklist in our Handy Resources section for a more detailed packing checklist in preparation for your trip.

<http://www.babywishes.com.sg/BabyWishes/handyresourceshome.aspx>

In the meantime, remember to stay positive and enjoy your time with baby!