



#TRAVEL

Travelling with the mother and the family

Once upon a time, there was a young girl who loved to travel. That girl was me. My mother used to work for British Airways, a little detail I was very proud of because it meant we got free tickets. I remember the first time I encountered London. It was after a long flight from Dhaka which was overbooked. Somehow, my mother's gift of the gab got us on the flight — seated in aeroplane crew seats (shocking what they let you get away with in the '90s!). While my four-or-five-year-old self was delighted, I am sure my own mother was tired and stressed out from travelling with a child.

Back in London, that trip was the first time I remember seeing snow. My mother's friend met us at the airport and took us back to her tiny flat in London. Being used to the independent houses in Dhaka in the late '80s and early '90s, I was stunned that someone could live in a place that small. I named it the Dollhouse. The whole time my mum, of course, had to manage all the logistical work of travelling and managing me.

What I have not mentioned yet, is that my mother was a single mum. We used to travel every year, sometimes, several times a year until my mother married my stepfather, and after that the three of us would travel together.

But, I am also sure it was not as easy as I thought it was for my mum to travel with me. I remember throwing up on the plane, not once, but several times. I also remember one time that I was very sick and had a terrible cough. My mother and I were flying into JFK and she was very worried that they might deport us. So, she gave me a higher dose of my cough medicine, which I am sure she regretted



later. After we landed at the airport, I was so groggy and disoriented, I could not recognise my mother and threw a tantrum. Despite some of these hiccups, the travels with my mother as well as the following family holidays later on were some of the most formative memories of my life.

The young girl who used to love travelling with her parents has now grown up and now she has children of her own. Travelling with them and as a family is truly something I cherish. I must add, though, travelling with the children is not really a "holiday" by any means.

The first time my husband and I travelled together with my stepdaughter, she got sick and had to be taken to the hospital in Thailand. The kind nurses were trying to help her unclog her stuffy nose by doing a sinus wash and in her

indignance, my stepdaughter threw up on all of them. Cleaning up all kinds of messes comes with the territory of travelling with kids. It's basically karma for all the times we puked on our parents on holiday.

On that trip, I learnt how to manage a stroller for the first time. My husband always reminds me of how I almost dropped the stroller (and my stepdaughter in it!) while manoeuvring it on the escalator. That same trip, I also learnt how delightful children are as travel mates, with their curiosity and sense of fun. That trip allowed my stepdaughter and I to bond in a new way, and cement our relationship with each other.

By the time my son was born and the first time we travelled with both children, just before the COVID-19 lockdown, I was

already pretty experienced at travelling with a child but not with a baby. As a true millennial mum, I dutifully googled and made checklists and made sure I had everything but the kitchen sink. I was anxious about being that parent that gets dirty looks from all the passengers because their baby is crying.

My son was breastfeeding at the time and since babies usually cry because of ear pressure, to help them, you just need to give them something to suck on or drink. Bundled up in my BabyBjorn and makeshift nursing shawl, I breastfed and he truly 'slept like a baby'. I was also prepared with pacifiers which came in very handy.

Thankfully, even now, my son is an excellent traveller and usually sleeps on the plane or watches movies and is pretty flexible and easy-going. But, he is also extremely curious like most toddlers and manages to get himself into a lot of sticky situations.

Looking back, I cannot even imagine how I would manage him on my own at an airport. Whenever the four of us travel together, we divide up tasks — which includes making sure the little tot does not run away and we have a Home Alone situation on our hands. For any new parents who are planning to travel with your baby, fret not. Google and checklists really are your best friends. Trust yourself, prepare and plan as much as you can but be willing to go with the flow. Expect messes to clean up, naps in the stroller and some of the best memories of you and your children's lives.

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Photo: Collected

