

#TRAVEL

AIR TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

A parent's guide to stress-free flights

Travelling with children is an adventure in itself, with varying ages bringing unique challenges. For instance, flying with a 12-year-old is certainly not the same as taking a trip with an infant or a toddler, the latter requiring more attention. However, as children grow older and get used to the experience, air travel with them becomes increasingly stress-free!

Travelling with infants

My daughter's maiden flight was from Minneapolis to New York City; she was nine months old.

I had seen babies crying non-stop during flights, so I was certainly a little nervous about flying with my infant for the first time. In the hope of getting some useful tips for our upcoming journey, we consulted with her paediatrician, who explained that most babies cry during flights because of the ear pain caused by changes in the air pressure during takeoff and landing, as the eustachian tubes, which equalise pressure in the ears, are not fully developed in infants.

He suggested that we offer her milk during takeoff and landing to alleviate the discomfort.

We followed the paediatrician's advice; we changed her into a fresh diaper at the airport restroom and prepared her infant formula before boarding. When the plane started taking off, we offered her the milk. The result? No wailing, no fussing!

To my great relief, she was a happy baby during the entire two-and-a-half hours flight. We fed her again when the plane began to land.

As a parent, make sure you pack an adequate supply of diapers,

wipes, and baby formula in the diaper bag. For convenience, consider packing the original baby formula can in the checked baggage and carrying smaller, refillable formula dispensers in the diaper bag.

When you are travelling with babies and infants, you can carry your own warm water through airport security, and flight attendants are also happy to provide it onboard.

Terrible twos

Don't we always spot parents chasing after their toddlers at the airport? On a plane, these tiny humans bring challenges not only to their parents but to fellow passengers as well. During a flight, if you have a toddler sitting directly behind you, you know that they will kick your seat until they tire themselves out!

Although we often say that two is the most terrible age for a child, the truth is that toddlers in general can be quite challenging. Children aged two to five have frequent tantrums and meltdowns. Toddlers expect the world to work as per their wishes and when it does not happen, they throw fits!

Therefore, when you are flying with toddlers, remember that you may have to face unique challenges during every step of the journey. We always offered the window seat to our

daughter when she was a toddler — the outside scene kept her entertained.

For long-haul flights, those lasting more than 7 hours, evening flights are better because, after dinner, the lights are turned off, creating an atmosphere that signals to toddlers that it's time for sleep.

Limiting screen time before flights also helps toddlers to unwind and relax on board. While packing, do not forget to pack your child's favourite soft toy or blanket for some extra comfort in the unfamiliar aeroplane environment. Packing colouring books, small games, and storybooks to keep them engaged during the flight is also a wonderful idea.

Last but not least, pack their favourite snacks in the carry-on luggage. You do not know if they will like the aeroplane food and surely, a hungry toddler is the last thing you want to manage at 30,000 feet in the air.

Older children and pre-teens

Flying with older children is so much easier than flying with younger children. You no longer need to deal with diaper changes in the cramped aircraft lavatory!

As a mum of a pre-teen daughter, my air travels are now pretty

much stress-free. Older children are willing to follow rules and know how to keep themselves busy, which is a huge blessing.

To get your child excited about air travel, let your child pack their own things. A 10 or 12-year-old can assume the responsibility of packing and carrying their own carry-on bag. All you need to do is tell them what essentials they need to pack.

As a mum who raised an 'analogue baby' in the 'digital age', I think I often struggle less with my child. I introduced her to the world of books at a very young age, which instilled in her a deep love for reading, which I hope will last a lifetime.

For our upcoming trip to Dhaka, my pre-teen will be going to the local public library to borrow fiction. These fictions will keep her entertained during the long flights to and from Bangladesh.

Therefore, if you have a child who loves to read, buy or borrow books to keep them occupied during flights. If they love to draw, check if they have packed their sketchpad and pencils in the carry-on bag. If they will be enjoying the aeroplane's entertainment system, make sure that they are watching age-appropriate content.

Travelling with children, especially by air, can be tough. However, the good news is that it gets easier with time. As children mature, they learn to follow rules and instructions and become more patient and empathetic, making family travel a 'child's play'!

By Wara Karim
Photo: Collected

