



Packing Essentials for Travelling with Children

By Judy Arnall

My husband and I enjoy holidays away from home. We have visited England and Ireland several times during the past 17 years, and we have just returned from a six-week trip to Singapore and Australia with our five children aged between 5 and 16.

We have traveled by airplane, car, ship and train. We have stayed with relatives, with friends, at hotels, at rental houses, at beach cabins, and in trailers and tents. We have learned the hard way about the challenges of travelling with children, including jet-lagged babies wide-awake at midnight, toddler tantrums on crowded airplanes, car-sick and home-sick children, and bored teens enduring an endless torment of art galleries and museums. From our experience, I have developed the following list of essentials for travelling with children.

- **Small stuffed critters (stuffedies):** Youngsters (and older ones too, though they won't admit it) appreciate a stuffy each, as a reminder of home, and as a pillow. Makes a strange bed more welcoming. Just make sure it's not a special one because it could get lost.
- **Entertainment technology:** A handheld game console, Mp3 player, or portable movie player can be a lifesaver in the middle of the night for an exhausted parent trying to settle a wide-awake child. Or to distract bored children from fighting or climbing the drapes while you are chatting with relatives in their homes containing glass-sided cabinets of crystal and china. Or to make long flights shorter. Or to provide familiar music for homesick teens. Or even to sooth parents whose patience is ragged from endless "How much longer, are we there yet?" Be sure to check voltage of the electronics chargers. You can damage the items by plugging in the wrong voltage in foreign places.
- **Batteries and chargers:** You can never have too many batteries. Don't forget the outlet converters.
- **Cheap and useful activity toys:** Flashlight, roll of tape, pair of scissors, deck of cards, Rubik's cube, tape measure, markers, pads of paper, dice, dictionary, ball of string and lump of playdough. Very versatile for keeping kids busy. Flashlights can be used to play ceiling tag at bedtime. The roll of tape is great for toddlers to pull off pieces and stick them anywhere. Toddlers also love tape measures, playdough and balls of string. Markers and pads of paper can be used by school-aged children, to draw paper dolls, animals and various scenes to play dolls with. Drawing, coloring and cutting out are all part of the fun of playing dolls.

- **Plastic shovels and pails:** Some of our best moments have been on a park or beach bench with glass of wine, while the children dig holes, make sand-castles, and nature soup, and collect rocks, shells, twigs, beetles and frogs.
- **Digital camera:** For teens and school-aged children
- **Laptop computer:** Laptop computers typically contain basic software such as Paint and solitaire, and most can play DVD movies. Useful for teens to make a journal, make a photo scrapbook of the trip, and catch up on e-mail with their friend's back home. Many libraries and visitor centers have cheap Internet access.
- **Pillowcases:** The most versatile item for a trip. We try to find inexpensive accommodation, and often find ourselves short of pillows. A pillowcase can be stuffed with coats to make a huge pillow for the plane or for the hotel. They are easy to pack, lightweight, foldable and cheap. Here are some other uses for pillowcases.

Hotel comfort item – something from home that you can put over their pillows. Helps children deal with their homesickness when they see a familiar pillow.

Extra beach bag - for wet towels, garbage, food containers, toys, and clothes.

Bib- You need a safety pin or clothes pin to fasten.

Cape- for little boys and girls to present they are superheroes.

Spare pillow - Stuff with coats, jackets, hats and mitts for a nice BIG pillow on the plane or in the car. Keeps everything together in winter.

Picnic placemat – A clean cloth to put plates and cups on at the beach or picnic area.

Spare diaper change mat – Be sure to wash after!

Spare shopping bag – handy for drippy items because it's easy to wash.

Laundry bag – for clean or dirty clothes.

Instant gift wrap – for a hostess gift.

Spare towel – for the beach or pool.

- **Cheap lightweight sleeping bags:** You only need inexpensive little summer-weight sleeping bags from outlets like Canadian Tire (unless you're crossing Baffin Island by skidoo). About the size of a rolled-up beach towel, it can be spread to make an instant bed on or a sofa, or carpet, and can be used as a pillow in airplane or car.
- **Lighter:** You'd be surprised how much you'll need a lighter when travelling. Try lighting a strange gas stove without one.
- **Snacks:** Always travel with a bag of non-spoiling snacks such as crackers, granola bars and boxed juice. Travel food is often expensive, and not always available.
- **Wipes and roll of kitchen paper towels:** Always useful.
- **Leave the cribs, strollers and big items at home.** You can always rent or borrow.
- **Large clear-zip up kitchen food bags:** Perfect as wet swimsuit and dirty wash-bags, as food bags, and perfect containment for potentially messy things like toothpaste. You would be horrified how far shampoo can spread within your suitcase during depressurization.
- **Hand sanitizer:** Public washrooms usually do not provide soap.
- **Duct tape:** Great for covering sockets, taping drawers shut, closing toilet seats and fridge doors, and taping up lamp and drape cords. In a pinch, it's great for quick repair of toys, equipment, glasses and clothes.
- **Medications:** Plan for sickness. Bring Tylenol, thermometer, rehydrating solutions, bandages, local health care number, and a first aid kit.
- **Backpack:** Much easier to carry than a diaper bag.

- **Clothes:** Pack three outfits per child (one to wear, one drying and one spare). Leave pajamas at home – they can sleep in the next day’s clean clothes. Bring washing powder and thin rope to hang clothes up. A spare pair of shoes is essential. Pack an extra shirt for you, for times they may get sick on you.

Finally, always pack as light as possible when going. You will always bring more back home, so don’t forget the extra empty pack-flat travel bags for the souvenirs, toys and clothes that you will inevitably accumulate as you travel. Bon voyage!

Judy Arnall is a professional international award-winning *Parenting Speaker*, and *Trainer*, Mom of five children, and author of the best-selling book, “***Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery***” and the new DVD, “***Plugged-In Parenting: Connecting with the Digital Generation for Health, Safety and Love***”
www.professionalparenting.ca (403) 714-6766 jarnall@shaw.ca

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