

Six Tips for Surviving Long Road Trips with Kids

by Sheryl Grey



Photo by [Jim Strasma](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Close your eyes for just a moment, and picture your family on your next vacation. Your vehicle is all packed, and you're well on your way to your favorite amusement park, a beach with white sand, or Grandma's house in another state. Your children are cranky and bored. The batteries on their devices died at least 120 miles ago, and no one remembered to pack a portable charger. When they're not hungry, they're thirsty, so you spend \$38 on some snacks and drinks that would've cost you about half that much at the grocery store. Those refreshing beverages lead to an excessive number of restroom stops. You've had a headache for an hour, but your acetaminophen is buried somewhere in the back of your vehicle. And to top that all off, it's your turn to drive at the next stop.

Traveling hundreds of miles with children in a mini-van may sound like a relaxing experience to some people, but I have yet to meet one of them. Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to make your next trip go a little more smoothly. Taking family vacations is a great way to make wonderful memories with your children, so if you plan on trekking cross-country, or even across a few states with your kids, here are a few suggestions.

1. Bring activity bags.

Before your trip, give your children their own personal tote bags that they can fill with things to do to help them to pass the time. They can fill their bags with whatever they want to bring in the car with them, such as books, a deck of cards, electronic devices, a notebook and pen (for the older ones), and small stuffed animals or toys.

2. Chill some refreshments.

Make sure to pack a small cooler with bottles of water, sports drinks, or juice boxes, as well as some snacks for the road. This can save both time and money that would otherwise be spent in gas station convenience stores.

3. Vacuum your stuff.

Space bags – you know, those plastic bags that you hook a vacuum cleaner hose up to and suck the air out of – can be great space savers on your trip. These bags can be used to store pillows, bedding, or other bulky items that you may need while staying with relatives. Just borrow a vacuum cleaner before you leave to remove the air again. You can leave them in the car on the nights when you stay at a hotel, since you won't need them there.

4. Pack a bag of emergency or essential items.

Keep your emergency and essential items, such as a first aid kit, bug spray, flashlight, paper towels, wet wipes, and medication, together in one bag, and keep it where you can reach it, rather than buried in the back somewhere under the luggage.

5. Play road games.

There are many ideas for road games out there, such as trying to find license plates from every state or finding all the letters in the alphabet on road signs. One game that is particularly creative is to take turns creating stories about people you see while on the road. For example, the woman driving that Altima is named Henrietta, and she just passed us because she is running late on her way to a yard sale. Someone is selling a rowboat, and she wants to snatch it up before anyone else does so she can take it camping next weekend. Kids have such vivid imaginations that these stories can be pretty hilarious.

6. Preplan your hotel accommodations.

If you know that you want to drive a certain distance or number of hours before stopping for the night, check online ahead of time for hotels in the area where you plan to stop. Look for hotels that serve a breakfast buffet. Even if the room price is a little higher, you won't have to pay separately for breakfast at a restaurant, so you'll probably come out ahead. Making hotel reservations ahead of time also allows you more freedom to choose where you will stay, instead of trying to find a place in the middle of the night when you're exhausted, or having to stay in a sub-standard hotel that doesn't serve breakfast or isn't directly on your route.

When traveling with children, a little planning goes a long way toward having a more enjoyable trip. And remember, you're making memories with them, so the less stressed you are, the more you can relax and enjoy your time together.