



# GOOD TRAVELS ADVISOR



## Steps for Having Meaningful Travel Experiences with Your Family

Family travel can be eye-opening and foster curiosity and emotional growth in children. Exposure to diverse groups of people and settings can broaden your child's horizon's while offering many teachable moments. Parents, with the help of their travel advisor, should prepare children for what they will encounter before and during the trip. And there are many creative ways to build on your family travel experiences after your trip.

Family trips come in many forms and purposes. Trips involving grandparents or other relatives are now quite popular. These inter-generational trips allow families to pass down stories and share new experiences (e.g. a grandmother takes her grandson to a location where she worked on her Peace Corp project).

Each child is unique and how they respond to their experiences and observations will depend on their situation. Younger children respond best to concrete examples while older children can grasp more abstract concepts such as social inequities. Parents play a vital role in translating encounters into positive learning opportunities.

Having a meaningful family vacation does not always require a visit to an exotic location or a stay in an expensive resort. Time spent together in the sharing of experiences creates new connections and traditions for the family. Some families want their children to stretch beyond the experiences they have everyday, such as a visit to a museum or animal park, while others are ready for a volunteer trip abroad. Before exposing children to extreme changes in social and cultural environments however, a series of progressive trips may be best.

Any new travel experience with children requires advance planning, preparation and patience. Consult your travel advisor early on as they may be able to save you time and money!

Below are steps you and your family can take to ensure a fun and meaningful trip, along with ideas on how your children can take action if they wish to give back.

### **Step #1: Decide on the destination**

While many families know they want to take a vacation, few will have decided where to go. Get the kids involved and begin exploring and researching places and experiences. You may give them parameters (e.g. in the U.S.) or none at all. You might be surprised by their recommendations.

Families have many options when it comes to places to stay (e.g. family friendly eco-hotels) and things to do (instead of a historical walk, try a walk down the local toy street in Hong Kong or Hanoi). Try to work their interests into the itinerary, e.g., for train lovers, visit a train station. By engaging them earlier on, you can get them excited about the trip.



### **Step #2: Prepare for the trip**

Traveling is a great way to teach children observation, planning and research skills. Before the trip, prepare your child by discussing what they will experience. Together, do research about the people, culture, history, wildlife, language and traditions in the region. During the trip, you can point out things you see from your research.

If you are going on an overseas trip, try to find a restaurant in your area that serves the ethnic cuisine. For example, visit a local Thai restaurant and try a few dishes. Once you get to Thailand, you can compare the dishes at home and in the destination. Other ways to prepare your child include a visit to a local museum if they are hosting a relevant exhibit or help them learn a few phrases (e.g. “What is your name?”) and identify common words or characters before leaving home (e.g. numbers).

### **Step #3: Make the most of your stay**

At your hotel or during visits to cultural or historical sites, you may encounter local children or other tourists with children. Many children have a natural curiosity of other children and if provided the right conditions, they will strike up a conversation or play together. If appropriate, encourage your child to learn the names of other children and give them time to play together.

Design activities for your child that keeps them engaged during the trip (e.g. [spotting cats](#)) or on long drives to and from site visits (e.g. give them a camera to take photos and document the trip).

### **Step #4: Share the trip**

You can help your child remember the trip by documenting their experiences. If they took photos, you can help them put together a photo book or journal or if they took videos, you can make a video of the trip together. Encourage them to share the work with their class or with friends.

## Helping Kids Give Back

During travels, your child will be exposed to people that are different from them and who may be in less fortunate circumstances. Having conversations about differences and similarities will help them understand the concept of income inequality and access to opportunities. Given the support and freedom to ask questions, children can begin to develop compassion and appreciation of their own circumstances and the situation of others.

Parents can also encourage empathy by using “I” messages to model self-awareness. They can help the child identify their feelings and validate those emotions. Once the child understands their own feelings, they can begin to understand other people’s feelings.

If you encounter beggars or a homeless person on your travels, your child may have questions. Let them bring up the topic and try to gauge what your child understands. Don’t avoid their questions; use their curiosity to create a conversation and provide simple explanations. For older children, you can talk to them about your own personal responses. For example, if you do not give to people asking for money on the streets but choose to donate to a homeless shelter or food bank instead, explain your reasons for doing so in a positive manner. Assure your child that there are organizations that provide help for those struggling with homelessness and that there are people who care.

Your physical cues are just as important as your verbal ones, so be aware of how you are reacting. Children model their parents’ behavior and absorb their parents’ values at an early age. Sharing your philanthropic values with them helps shape their awareness of others.

## Help Kids Take Action

You can address your child’s desire to help others by listening to them and supporting their interests. Offer choices and serve as a resource by identifying and connecting them to causes they care about, if appropriate. Kids can participate in activities that encourage empathy and gratitude, from volunteering to donating new or no longer-used toys, to saving a portion of their allowance to give to an organization or cause of choice.

Below are some examples of how you can help your child develop a lifelong habit of giving back.

## Getting Others Involved: Fundraisers for your cause can be fun and educational

Your child may want to do something fun and cool about a cause they want to support that was inspired by the family trip.

They can put together a lemonade stand, bake sale or a sell a product that ties back to the destination. Kids learn how to organize, get their friends involved, make the product and come up with an advertising plan. It could be creating flyers to pass out in the neighborhood, or via social media if they are older. Every customer is another opportunity for the child to talk about who they are helping and why. The child can write thank you notes to customers for their participation and share the amount raised - this encourages accountability and transparency.

The child can deliver the funds to the group or as part of a return trip. They can put together a “trip report” or memory book with pictures, drawings and notes of who the funds helped and how, including what the child learned.



## Holiday Family Rituals: Sharing and caring for others

Rituals around the holidays are especially meaningful when they are incorporated with the value of giving.

During your travels, you may have celebrated or learned about a local holiday. Discuss with your child the meaning behind the celebration and if there are any similar holidays you see at home. Ask the child if he/she wants to collect donations in lieu of gifts for others during your own holiday celebrations. For example, the child can have a birthday party but instead of gifts for himself/herself, guests can give gifts to the community that the child designates.

Families can time a return trip to a local holiday and take part in the event and share the gifts the child has collected with the local community.

## Family Volunteer Vacations: Being good global citizens together

Specialized travel companies and cruise lines now offer family volunteer vacation trips. These trips allow volunteers to enjoy the local sites and give back to the local community. Opportunities range from helping local farmers plant crops to cleaning up beaches. The age of the children should be taken into account when deciding on the destination and project. Children should be ready to follow instructions and be of help, but mature enough to see the bigger picture. At the same time, identifying a site that is in-line with your child's interests will keep them engaged.

Have your child research the options and involve them in selecting a destination. Encourage them to keep a journal and take their own photos. When they return, they can create a photo book or presentation to share at school or with their friends.

Your travel agent is a certified Good Travels Advisor, part of an industry training and learning community focused on maximizing travel giving and volunteering so you can make the greatest impact possible – and have the greatest experience possible!



Sources: [14 Ways to Effectively Explain Homelessness and Poverty to Your Children](#), [From Mine to Ours: Nurturing Empathy in Children](#), [Volunteering Abroad with Kids](#), [Travel with Riveted Kids](#)