Traveling with Grandchildren

A National Park Geek's Tips For Travel

Workshop | Discussion | Planning tools



Brought to you by Jo-Anne Tucker-Zemlak
Experienced traveler and single grandparent of 5
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What to Expect

Together, we will look at building an experience for you and your grandkids.

Remember, be realistic in your expectations. **Any time you get to impart your wisdom or stories is precious**, regardless of whether you spend 4 hours or 14 days together.

Start with Yourself

A Realistic Self-check

Movement

How long can you comfortably walk or stand? Are stairs, hills, sand, or uneven paths manageable? Pick a pace level and search for activities that match, e.g., Easy, Moderate, Active

Recovery and Rest

How much sleep, quiet time, and recovery time do you need? What is realistic as far as how long this trip should be?

Your Medical Needs

What health, medication, dietary, or accessibility needs must you plan for, e.g., eating times for diabetics, walking sticks, folding seat

Your Limits

Can you manage luggage, driving, and supervision at the same time? How many adults are sharing these responsibilities?

Step 1 - Preliminary Planning

Tips to Make Your Trip More Comfortable and Enjoyable

1. **Have everyone use carry-on-sized rolling luggage.**
   This will help you keep track of your belongings and make transporting them easier on your body. You will also want to confirm luggage capacity ahead of time.

2. **Plan for rest time in the schedule.**
   It does no one any good to overextend yourself. Stop and change drivers, take snack breaks. Additionally, keep the first day light; traveling is an activity too. Once you are there, you can spend time enjoying the pool at a hotel or doing a low-energy activity.

3. **Choose the right lodging.**
   Choose lodging that makes rest easy: location, beds, bathrooms, elevator, free breakfast, a heated pool, etc. Verify room layout, sleeping arrangements, parking, and cancellation terms.

4. **Confirm and double-check your travel details.**
   Confirm the finer details of your trip before embarking. This should include rental car needs, travel time, expected rest stops, etc. Follow current child passenger-safety requirements and the vehicle/seat manufacturer's instructions.



Set the Budget Before Picking the Trip

Setting a budget helps you realistically plan for this experience. You will want to make sure to include parking, baggage, tips, resort fees, pet/house care, travel insurance, and emergency money for unplanned hotel stays or lost/left behind items such as toiletries or clothing.

Choose experiences that fit the budget.

You do not need to "keep up with the Joneses." This trip is about having special memories together and should not put you under financial strain.

Do your research

Investigate hotels and flights before promising the trip and while setting the budget.

Quick Exercise:

Name three costs that are most likely to surprise you. Add them to your estimate.

Think About Them

Planning Smarter, Not Harder

Establish a baseline.

What are the children's ages, interests, stamina, and comfort with travel?

Learn and accommodate their routines and needs.

What is their routine? When do they eat meals, take their medications, and go to bed? How long can they last at any one activity? Do they need any fidgets or sensory activities?

Have their parents set clear expectations.

While this is a grandparent-grandchild experience, it is important to respect the parents' wishes and rules for their child.

Gear the experience to your grandchildren's interests.

We often want to give our grandchildren the experiences we had or wished we could have had, but it is important to question whether the activity you have selected is a match for their interests and age.

Step 3 - Planning for the grandchildren

Tips for Planning

1. **Start small.**
   If you have never traveled with grandchildren before, think about starting with a day trip to a local site or museum.

2. **Mix child-focused activities with things adults enjoy too.**
   Keep in mind, if your grand can't handle being still or quiet enough for an art museum, plan something else.

3. **Pack snacks**

4. **Get them excited and involved.**
   Explain the trip to them. Tell them what to expect and, if possible, give them something to be involved in as part of the planning process.

5. **Choose the right trip length and date.**
   Account for drive/flight time, time zones, weather, crowds, and seasonal closures when selecting this. Also keep in mind their school schedules.

6. **Consider Shabbat observance.**



Build a Daily Itinerary That is Flexible

What kind of day Is it?
Are you trying to cover lots of mileage in a day with short excursions, or having a solid experiential excursion day?

What is my anchor?
Choose one anchor activity each day; that can be the highlight, then other smaller activities (e.g., the Grand Canyon is the major activity, and seeing sights along the way or small hikes are the extras)

Have I planned for our basic needs?
This includes snacks, lunch, hydration, bathroom stops, rest, and activities for the kids!

Have I accounted for travel time and potential delays/quick pivots?
This could include extra stops, traffic, inclement weather, sudden closures, or a child's disinterest in an activity.

Did I do my research?
Check tickets, opening hours, reservations, weather, and accessibility before leaving.

Plan less than you think you can do. A little unscheduled time is a feature, not a failure.

Step 4 - Building Your Itinerary

When the Plan Changes

1. **If someone is tired: shorten the outing.**
   I usually stay in hotels with pools for this reason.
2. **If weather or transport disrupts plans, use the backup activity.**
   Sometimes, in order to stay on schedule, you will just have to miss an activity.
3. **If the child is upset, pause, explain, and set new expectations.**
   Give yourself permission to cancel an activity without calling the trip a failure.
4. **Be ready to add an activity if something catches your eye or theirs.**
5. **If you need ideas, stopping at welcome centers or the front desk of a hotel can provide easy access to local alternatives.**



Step 5 - Necessary Precautions

Safety, Permissions, & Important Info.

Emergencies
Before your trip, discuss medical allergies, medications, health conditions, and what to do in an emergency with the parents of your grandchildren. Make sure you have a copy of their insurance cards, emergency contacts, medication lists, and a signed consent to act as their representative on the trip on your person.

Travel Custody Paperwork
Make sure you have any necessary forms and paperwork filled out and signed by the parents of your grandchildren prior to travel.

Up-to-Date Passports
If traveling out of the country, ensure the child has all of the necessary documentation and a passport prior to travel.

Requirements differ by destination, carrier, and family circumstances.
Confirm official rules before travel.

Step 5 - Necessary Precautions

Safety Tips

1. Share the plan, budget, rules, and daily rhythm with parents and children.
2. Teach children what to do if separated: stop, find a designated safe adult/place, and know contact details. Go over this information every day.
3. Use clear meeting points and a simple check-in routine in busy places.
4. Purchase and have a Road ID, a small ID bracelet that has information on it so that if, heaven forbid, anything happens, an adult will be able to call parents.
5. Carry emergency devices and first aid kits on you at all times – e.g., Epi Pens, Inhalers etc.





Planning Tools

Workshop Activities | Checklists | Packing Tips

Workshop Exercise: How I, Jo-Anne, Plan a Trip

1. Pick a destination and trip length.
2. Decide on the theme/goal of the trip.
3. Do your research on the internet or use maps to see the larger picture.
4. Play with routes and what you want them to see, taking into account everyone's different physical capabilities.
5. Write the adults' and kids' top three needs and limits. ***E.g., no more than 7 hours a day in the car.***
6. Name the children's ages and top interests. ***For some kids this is hard to define.***
7. Set a budget range and choose lodging/transportation priorities. ***E.g., $4,000 for a road trip.***
8. Add one anchor activity per day, downtime, and one backup plan.
9. Identify the biggest safety or logistics question to resolve before booking.

TRAVEL TIP - if driving is not your ideal, there are grandparent National Geo trips that may help.

Beyond the Worksheet: The Must-Have Items

Technology: Devices and extra phone, computer, and iPad chargers (ports and cords).

Weather-appropriate clothes, comfort items, toiletries, snacks, water bottles, activity kits, fidgets.

Medical: IDs, booking details, consent/medical forms, insurance info, emergency contacts, Motrin and Children's Pepto for sudden illness and/or motion sickness, barf bags, first aid kit. Keep critical medicines, documents, and essentials accessible — not buried in the trunk or in your luggage.

Grab and Go: A small day bag with water, snacks, hand sanitizer or wipes, sunscreen, hats, tissues, and smaller/basic first-aid items. Additionally, ensure that all of your coats, walking sticks, and other necessary tools are accessible.

TRAVEL TIP - In each kid's backpack which should always be IN THE CAR, is a change of clothes, a hoodie/ sweatpants and rain gear, and car activities. I would encourage you to keep a hold of devices to only use when needed.

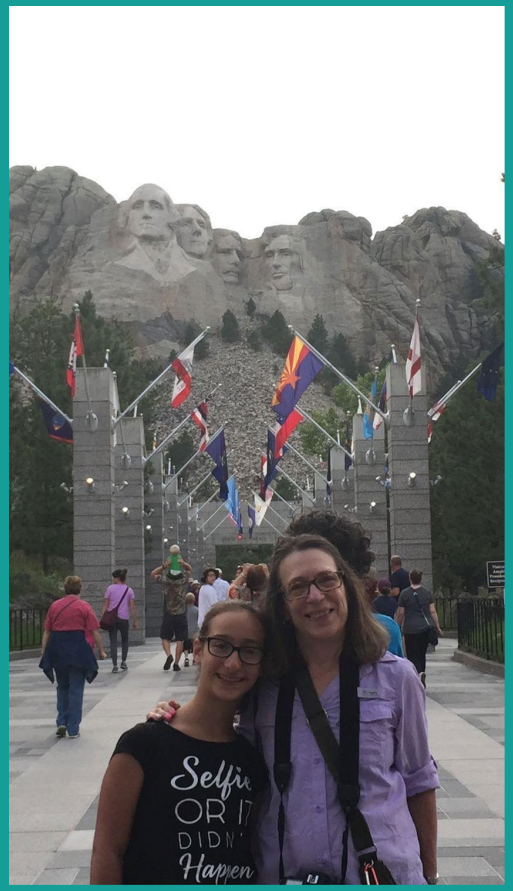






















Safta on Wheels

Thanks for tuning in and always remember…

The real souvenirs are all of the memories

The best trips are the ones where the adults feel capable, the children feel included, and everyone has room to enjoy being together, so, plan thoughtfully, travel flexibly, and enjoy the moments.



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