

UP IN THE AIR

• • • **WITH** • • •

KIDS



Chantell Ghosh, The Director of Brand for Spirit Airlines, has five kids. And despite their best efforts, they have not ruined her love of travel. The Ghosh clan has hit the skies for South America, Europe, Hawaii, the Caribbean and all over North America. Here she will share a full on download of her traveling Mommy tips ...

We have found ourselves traveling with kids on a plane a lot. Like 15-20 times a year for the last 10 years, and even more now that I work for Spirit. We have five children, with a 15 year age span. And we are not only avid travelers but have spent all of our time living away from some or all of our extended family — so that means lots of trips and lots of flights — as new kids arrived they learned to be expert travelers from the womb. In fact our youngest had enough airline points by the time she was 5 for a round trip North American first class flight. And considering she flew free for the first two years of her life that is pretty impressive.

I am almost positive that my two youngest kids could train TSA officers and are experts on how to streamline the security experience...

You may be contemplating your very first flight with your new baby or kids or looking to make your next experience better. I am going to do a traveling mom download to sort you out — I will mainly deal with younger kids because once our kids reached 10 we expected them to carry their own stuff and plan for their own entertainment (with a little help from mom of course).

BEFORE YOU BOOK

- Consider your destination and flight time and plan accordingly. Is it dinner time? Nap time? Are you flying over night?
- Check out the seat configuration and choose wisely. You can't sit in exit rows with kids under a certain age but the row behind usually gives you a little more room. Although that front row bulkhead seat might be tempting the arms don't usually lift up, making it difficult for kids to put their head in your lap for a snooze. You also can't keep your carry on at hand during takeoff and landing because there is nowhere to stow it, making it very inconvenient.
- If you have a longer connection, consider purchasing lounge access or checking with your credit card companies if any of them give you access. This lets kids have a quieter spot to rest up and stretch their legs — many of the lounges have closed off TV rooms for kids too.
- If you are traveling with a lap child choose a seat or seats towards the rear of the plane leaving a middle seat open next to you. You may get lucky and have no one choose to sit there, giving you an extra seat- this has worked for us about half the time. If someone does sit there and you are separated from one of your party, EVERYONE will agree to trade for a window or an aisle.
- Go online and check out airport amenities — breastfeeding rooms, family restrooms, playgrounds ... you name it. It can save you hassle and time.



GETTING READY FOR THE FLIGHT

One great thing about traveling with babies is that they get used to going on a plane just like they are going in a car; it's no big deal, they know the drill. If your kids are older or nervous about flying there are some things you can do to make it less stressful for them:

- Talk about the trip you are taking, who you are visiting or where you are going and that you are taking a plane.
- Check out some great books about plane trips and perhaps the destination you are going to get the kids excited.
- Play “Going On A Trip” where you can make believe pack, pretend to check in your bag, go through security, get on the plane and buckle up.

So much of kids' stress (and let's face it, ours too) is about not knowing what to expect. A little preparation goes a long way.

STROLLERS AND CARSEATS AND SNUGLIES, OH MY...

We all know how much stuff kids, especially babies and toddlers seem to need. In fact, I think for every pound of kid you seem to need 10 pounds of STUFF. So a 10 pound baby comes with a 100 pounds of diaper bag, car seat, portable crib, and stroller. After many flights of wrestling with strollers, bags, car seats and the like, here is my best advice;

- For an infant, get a baby carrier and wear your baby through the airport and on the plane. Check the car seat and the stroller (most baby stuff travels for free) because you will want all that stuff at the other end and finding/renting it can be difficult and expensive. A baby carrier will keep you from having to wrestle with a folding stroller, haul your stuff out of the bottom and have a lineup of people watch you struggle as 76 cents in change, 3 tampons, a spare diaper and your lip gloss hit the ground and your baby dangles precariously from your hip while you try to empty and fold a stroller on the ramp getting on to the plane. You will also have to fold and unfold the stroller for security before that and trust me, all that same pile of stuff will fall out.
- If you have more than one kid then a stroller is helpful, and almost necessary to get through the airport with your stuff — especially when you have to walk long distances, so choose a lighter weight easy fold stroller with a little storage basket on the bottom. Don't put anything in the storage basket for the airport to avoid the aforementioned avalanche of garbage at security and getting on the plane. Do NOT try to bring a double stroller because you have two kids unless you have no other option ... I have worn my littlest one and had the toddler in the stroller. Once the youngest was too big to wear in a carrier the older one could walk and little one could go in the single stroller. Bringing a double stroller for an air travel experience is like having a hippo do ballet in a china shop ... theoretically possible but not a good idea.



- You cannot use your car seats/boosters on the airplane unless they are FAA approved and there are very, very few of those, and each country has its own requirements so if you are doing international travel it is a total gamble. But for little ones what I have found awesome is the CARES airline approved 5 point harness that keeps your squirmy kid who is too small for the seat belt safe and STUCK IN HIS SEAT, hooray. Find it here: <http://kidsflysafe.com>. It can also be used on tour buses and at restaurants in a pinch. I do not get paid commission by these people but I should.
- If you need a portable crib at your destination most hotels have them; if you are staying with family see if they can borrow one rather than checking an awkward and heavy item. In a pinch, we have made perfectly good little baby “nests” on the floor using a magic combination of rolled up towels and a bedsheet ... probably not the fanciest but baby slept like a log and we didn’t have to worry about her rolling anywhere or falling — because she was already on the floor.

WHAT DO I NEED ON THE PLANE?

So ... you are trying to pack your carry-on for the plane. Repeat after me, “I am not a Sherpa.”

Yes, you can bring a suitcase and personal item for each person who has a ticket but if some of those people are too little to carry their own crap why would you? Remember, you bring it, you sling it ... and as discussed, you can’t just shove it all in the bottom of the stroller. Because you will have to take it out — at least twice — and then carry it.

So here is the plan.

Unless your kids can carry their own bags, they don’t get one of their own on the plane. Instead, pack a larger carry on such as a back pack or diaper bag you can carry on your body. Then give yourself a cross body purse that you can wear, preferably with a little outside pocket that you can put travel docs and boarding passes in. The whole point is to leave your hands as free as possible to deal with your little people. If you are wearing your baby and have a backpack consider the weight of all of it ... remember, “I Am Not a Sherpa”.

What goes in the bag?

Here is the magical list, and remember, you can bring food/medicine and formula for babies through security, but there are more limitations on liquids et al as they get older and you will likely have to purchase some things air-side.

- Pack diapers and wipes if your kids aren’t trained, twice as many as you think you will need; as well as baby bottles of water and powder separately or individual ready made cans if you are bottle feeding. If you don’t premix your formula, you don’t have to keep it chilled and



don't have to have a cooler bag. If you are nursing it is even easier. If you need baby food, bring that in sealed jars. Don't count on being able to warm anything up so pick things your kid will eat cold.

- In a clear plastic bag — in amounts less than 3 ounces — put hand sanitizer, any liquid medications etc.
- In a large plastic bag, a change of clothes for the kids and a spare shirt for you — preferably a long fitted t-shirt. When kids pee or throw up or spill, they don't just do it on themselves. A clean long t-shirt in a neutral color will be your best option until you have a chance for a full clean up. Dirties go back in the plastic bag away from the rest of your stuff.
- If you are bringing tablets with movies and games (highly recommend for older kids) you will need big fluffy earphones that fit kids' heads. The earbuds don't work for little ears and are frustrating for everyone.
- Large clear plastic bag and chargers for all your electronic devices — and an extra battery pack for good measure. A seal-able clear plastic bag keeps things like juice from ending up in your iPad in transit.
- Sippy cups or straws — those airline cups are useless for little ones and the straws are the stir sticks for the coffee so if you want to get your kids a juice from them have your own secure cup or at the very least a long straw. Remember if you brought juice boxes — the pressure does strange things and you will end up with a stream of juice on you or your kids ... be careful when opening. Avoid carbonated drinks for your kids — all those bubbles can cause tummy troubles. Water is really the best option for hydration...or buy some milk in the terminal, they usually only have some for coffee on the plane and its freshness might be questionable.
- Speaking of tummy troubles, talk to your pediatrician or pharmacist about the best thing for airsickness for your kids and if this is the first time they have flown, have it on hand. You really don't want to take chances.
- A large clear plastic bag with some age appropriate toys and activities; don't blow your wad all at once, introduce the toys or activities one at a time — crayons with a small paper flip pad, playing cards, word finds ... these are all good.
- If we are traveling somewhere sunny with a pool or a beach I pack a swimsuit for the kids and one of the adults just in case the luggage is delayed. It is hard to find kids' suits in the right size at your destination sometimes and there is nothing worse than your kids seeing the cool, blue water after a long trip and not bring able to go in. Luckily kids bathing suits are small so they don't take much room.
- If you see a theme here, you are right — the clear plastic bags that can zip closed are your friends. They make it easy to find stuff, organize stuff and keep stuff clean. If they get dirty, rinse them, turn them inside out and let them dry so you can use them for you return trip.



PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE ON THE PLANE WITH YOUR KIDS ... AND OTHER PEOPLE

I know it is tough to travel with kids, they are out of their element, limited options for movement and entertainment, and most passengers will sympathize with you when things aren't going well BUT do not be THAT parent who simply lets their kids run wild and disturb everyone with little to no effort to try and engage them and control their behavior. So here are some general guidelines:

- Don't let kids roam up and down the aisle; It isn't safe, it interferes with food and beverage service, and other passengers trying to get to the bathroom and people will want to stick your kid in the overhead bin after their third lap.
- Don't let your kid repeatedly kick the seat in front of them, slam the tray up and down or recline and then raise their seat over and over again ... international incidents have started with smaller things.
- Hey, have a glass of wine if you like — you aren't driving but DON'T get all hammered up and then fall asleep. It happens. Really.
- Don't change your kid's diaper on the seat, or leave a poopy diaper in the seat pocket. Really. I didn't think this needed to be said but yes, yes it does. Go to the lavatory, there is a changing table in there.
- In the event you have a screaming, overtired, sore eared baby or toddler and all your usual methods are fruitless people will not hate you as long as you are making some sort of effort. And who knows, it might even work. I have had people offer to walk my baby because they could see I was at my wit's end or didn't want to leave my toddler to his own devices — I felt okay with this because it was usually a granny looking character, rather than a dude with face tattoos and a white van and where were they going to go with my baby anyway? This gave me a chance to reset and remember that this was an adventure!

The great news is you are giving your kids a love of travel and teaching them the skills of rolling with the punches and resilience. They will be able to sleep anywhere and will want to try new things ... and you will REALLY appreciate when you get to take trips just on your own.

