

Tips for Travel with Babies and Toddlers

by Regan Forsyth, Eat Play Sleep Family Wellness



If you are planning a family trip or getaway with a baby or toddler, it really is important to consider how travel plans are going to affect your child's sleep routine. This is even more important if you have recently undertaken any sleep coaching or sleep shaping, because recently learned healthy sleep habits are more prone to regression, than those that are long ingrained. Keep in mind that often the biggest sleep related problems related to traveling, rear their ugly heads once you're back home!

Often, the point of going away on a trip with your family is for fun, relaxation, and enjoyment. The last thing you are probably hoping for is an over-extended, exhausted, anxious child but fortunately, with a little planning, you can organize your trip in such a way that will promote very little disruption. You surely want to have a happy, alert, and well rested baby or toddler so that the whole family can enjoy themselves...instead of doing damage control for the entire holiday!

The following are some helpful hints to keep in mind, so that everyone gets the sleep they need during your travels *and afterward*:

1. Refrain From Bed-sharing ESPECIALLY if your little one previously had a dependance on sleeping with you or having you in a bed beside them.

One night can change your life for months. If you've worked hard to get your little one sleeping independently, you don't want to start the decline down the slippery slope of re-introducing yourself as a sleep 'crutch'. Even if you've never co-slept, just one or two nights can still create a mess once you get home, because your baby can decide this is the preferred way to sleep from now on.

I remember bringing my son into my bed JUST ONCE when he was 18 months, because my husband was away and I thought it would be cozy for both of us. (I laugh now.)

*Prior to that, he had slept only in his crib (or playpen when away) every single night since he was moved from his bassinet at 6 weeks. Here's how **that** went:*

Firstly, he was used to having the confines of his crib sides to keep him safe, so he rolled and turned so much, and woke himself up when he didn't feel that security (or I moved him) that he had a horrible sleep. Secondly, not one minute of that entire night was 'cozy' and relaxing for me. He was so used to having his own private sleeping space, that he wanted nothing to do with being snuggled up with me. He saw cuddles as an awake time thing for us to do together and not a night time thing so would push away (with his feet - fun!) on whatever part of my body was in his sleep space, which usually ended up being my face. Now, I was additionally restless, worrying about him taking a dive off my bed, since I couldn't have

an arm around him or really even touch him. He ended up back in his bed at 2am so we could both be rested, but he did NOT forget the new routine of brushing teeth, getting his sleep sack on and coming into my bed.

So, to this day (a year later), he still expects to lay with me for a few minutes before going to bed because it's now part of his preferred routine. There is no more teeth brushing and then into his bed. Bedtime routine now takes at least 20 minutes instead of 10.

So yes, ONE NIGHT, is all it takes!

The moral of the story - always have the hotel/family member/friend provide a crib or cot, or bring along a playpen so your child has their own sleep space. Very important. Further, if *at all possible* (in a house or condo, etc.) and better yet, have the kids in their own room.

2. Remain Consistent with Bedtime and Routines

While some slight changes (a nap in the stroller or bedtime an hour later than normal, one night) probably won't have any detrimental and lasting affects, having naps that are completely out of routine and a much later than normal bedtime a few days in a row, will inevitably result in a baby who is cranky, over tired, and out of sorts. And NO ONE wants to endure constant meltdowns on top of the regular stresses of traveling with kids.

So, do try to keep nap times at their regular intervals (after whatever the normal amount of awake time is) or even sooner if you've been active and swimming, playing on the beach, or spending a lot of time outside. A busy baby or toddler will need a nap a little sooner. Keep bedtimes as close as you can to regular time too, to keep things on track as much as possible.

3. Avoid Over-extending Your Little Ones

While on vacation, especially if it's your first with children, you may be tempted to still plan outings as activities as you always have. Well, you may not now be able to spend the entire day at the beach or go for a full afternoon of lunching and shopping. If you want things to go as smoothly as possible, it is best to keep a pace similar to that which you might have at home, where you take into consideration nap times and bedtime, for the most part. These are part of your baby or toddler's daily schedule, just like at home; too much wiggle room with them will lead you down an unhappy road. It will lead **everyone** down an unpleasant road.

4. Make the Sleep Environment as Familiar as Possible

Take along the same crib sheet, blanket, lovey, and so on, that your child has for sleep at home. This will help him or her to feel as secure as they do at home and get used to the new bed for a little while. They are more likely to sleep restfully if they are reminded of home.

5. Be Prepared for Resistance

It's normal and even expected that babies and toddlers are going to be confused and push the boundaries and sleep rules when they are somewhere new or out of routine. If they can see you, for example, or the room is lighter, chances are they are not going to just lay down and drift off as they do at home. Plan ahead for this, by starting the bedtime routine a little earlier and by being relaxed and patient yourself. Don't expect to tuck them in and leave the room immediately as you might at home.

In other words, avoid making set dinner plans for 7:30 PM if bedtime is normally at 7 PM. You'll probably get a call from your in-laws before you even sit down to order a glass of wine.

Even the most excellent sleeper will be a little out of sorts in a different environment and you can save yourselves both any anxiety by being prepared for it.

So, please do keep in mind that at first, when in new surroundings, your baby might fuss for a while at bedtime or wake up at throughout the night. You should handle this the same way you would at home. Remain consistent with your rules/techniques/routine and how you handle bedtime and night waking. As creatures of habit, a baby will sense uncertainty in you and feel even more out of sorts. Likewise, If you are prepared, calm, not rushed, and consistent...your child is much more likely to adjust to the new environment and will be sleeping well again within a couple of nights.

Most of all, have fun and enjoy your adventures as a family. A well rested family!