



## Surviving the Family Road Trip

Ah, the summer family road trip. Your family laughs over a game of car bingo, you sing songs together, all your children are on the same bathroom schedule and you arrive at your destination relaxed and on time.

Keep dreaming.

Family road trips can be fun, but they can also drive you over sanity's edge. Cramping overworked adults, restless kids, a smelly pet or two and bags, snacks and games into the family car for a lengthy drive is not a recipe for serenity, but it can be survived and, dare say, enjoyed.

Our road trip tips won't sugarcoat the experience -- siblings will still poke each other, a bathroom is always needed 15 minutes after leaving a rest area and someone will inevitably whine, "Are we there yet?" -- but, they'll help you avoid a vehicular *or* mental breakdown on the road.

### DRIVING WITH KIDS

Every family has a different formula for a fun road trip, but here are some well-traveled tips and advice.

**Don't expect to make good time.** Remember the pre-kids days when you could drive to your favorite beach in four hours? With kids, count on five hours or more. Plan on stopping every two to three hours for potty and play breaks if you have young children. Many rest areas have playgrounds or you can bring a Frisbee or ball to release cooped-up energy. Just make sure children are *always* accompanied by an adult.

**Travel during sleepy time.** Many parents swear by traveling during the early morning or evening when children are sleeping. Driving to the sounds of slumbering rather than screaming children has its advantages, but always stop if you're tired even if it blows your itinerary. No matter what time you're driving, make the backseat a sleep-inducing area with comfy blankets and pillows.

**Special travel bags.** Give each child a small backpack full of games, toys and other fun stuff that's reserved for car trips. Let children decide what they want in their travel bag, but parents have veto power over talking toys. Make a practice of slipping in surprise goodies to increase anticipation.

**Multiple parts=lost parts.** Parents also have veto power over games with multiple parts. Parts invariably get sucked behind and under car seats out of reach of buckled-in kids. This usually results in a sweating parent inspecting every grimy crevice of the back seat only to find last year's lost part.

**Thank heavens for books on tape.** Audio books are fun to listen to, they're often educational and they keep kids quiet. Pop in an audio book after a full meal and you'll have droopy-eyed kids in minutes. Another benefit of audio books is that you can listen to them while looking out the window - good for kids prone to car sickness. Save money by checking out audio books from your public library or make your own.

**To VCR or not to VCR?** Many parents who swore they would never ever get a TV - VCR for the car now praise them as trip-savers that provide peace and quiet. Others feel it detracts from the togetherness and staring out the window daydreaming aspect of road trips. Your call.

**Play games.** There are hundreds of family car games. Here are a few favorites:

- Scavenger Hunt: Give your children a list of things to look for: church, grocery store, someone wearing a hat, an out of state license plate, highway patrol(!). Tailor the hunt to your route.
- I Spy: Take turns picking an object in the car or along the road and provide clues until someone else correctly guesses the object, "I spy with my little brown eye."
- GHOST: Going clockwise, each person adds one letter to spell a word. The object is to not have the word end on you. Each time the word ends on you, you receive a letter of the word 'ghost'. Bluffing is not allowed--the person following you can challenge you if she thinks you're spelling a bogus word. The loser of the challenge gets a letter from 'ghost'. The first person with 'ghost' spelled out loses. This is a great vocabulary game for older kids.
- Ice: This game gives adults mischievous delight. When you say "ice!" the kids freeze in whatever position they're in without talking. The one who can hold still the longest wins. Warning - any kid over eight will see through this game.

**Are we there yet?** Give your children a map highlighting your route. Print maps for each child from [MapQuest](#) or get a [road atlas](#) they can share. Whenever someone asks, "Are we there yet?" have them answer the question themselves by consulting the map. An older child can serve as the "Trip Navigator." ("Mom Navigator" overrides all, however.)

**Young shutterbugs.** Most kids love cameras. Give each child a disposable camera or two and encourage them to document your road trip.

**Eat healthy snacks.** Stay away from sticky and sweet snacks that will slime your car and unsettle young stomachs. Goldfish crackers, Cheerios, pretzels, baby carrots and apple slices pre-dipped in Sprite to keep from turning brown are great car munchies. Skip soda and drink water instead.

**"I don't feel so good"** Motion sickness is miserable for big and little people. Prevent car sickness by looking out the windows preferably at a distant point in front of the car, keeping the car cool, avoiding greasy food and not driving curvy roads like it's the Grand Prix.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT

Always make sure that these must-have items are within easy reach.

- First aid kit. Keep a kit with band-aids, ibuprofen, antibacterial ointment, tweezers, cold medicine, Kleenex and an ace bandage within easy reach.
- Extra batteries for your flashlight and Gameboys.
- Zip lock bags. These are great for stashing food, toys, trash and more.
- Pre-moistened towelettes. Use these to clean up before and after eating, and to remove travel grime.
- Large towel or two on the backseat to catch crumbs and other messes.
- Paper towels to use as napkins and to clean up messes.
- Bottled water
- Portable potty for toddler emergencies.

### TAKE CARE OF YOUR CAR

Avoid becoming the common roadside spectacle of the broken down family car by completing a [car maintenance checklist](#) before your trip.

Heat, heavy loads and extended use can wallop your car. At minimum, check your car's tires, and oil and coolant levels. Inflate your tires to the level recommended in your car owner's manual. Under-inflated tires, especially in warm weather, can cause tire blowouts and tread separation. Test your tread by sticking a penny into the tire tread Lincoln's head first. You need new tires if the tread only covers the top of Lincoln's forehead or less. Also, be prepared for a flat - make sure your spare is inflated, your jack is operational and you know how to safely handle both.

Overheating your car is another summertime hazard. Make sure you have coolant and the correct mixture: 50:50 coolant to water. To check your levels, use a simple and inexpensive coolant tester found in auto supply stores. Oil thins in warm weather, so refill it with the oil grade recommended by your owner's manual for the climate.

Last but not least, clean your car. It may seem like a waste of time to clean a car that will get trashed within minutes of your departure, but embarking in a clean, uncluttered car gives you a fresh start to what could prove to be an excellent family road trip.

You can always dream.

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**TIP:** Whenever your kids ask, "Are we there yet?" have them answer the question themselves by consulting a printed map of your route.