



TRAVEL GUIDE

Top 5 Autism Family Travel Pitfalls

And How to Avoid Them

BONUS:
*Printable planner
for your child.*

Dr. Temple Grandin says, “travel, when made accessible, allows individuals with autism to experience the world fully in their own way.”



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

- ➔ To encourage you and empower your family to take that next step, around the corner or around the world.

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Introduction

Let The Journey Begin

Travel is more than just a change of scenery, It's a bridge to connection, discovery, and joy. But for families navigating the world with a child on the autism spectrum, travel can also be layered with stress, unpredictability, and missed opportunities.

We know that sometimes it may be the trip around the corner or across town that needs to happen but seems like it is an impossible journey.

We know, because we've been there.

This book was born from that lived experience.

From the rushed mornings trying to catch a flight.

From the park days cut short by sensory overload.

From the joyful moments we almost missed because we were too overwhelmed to see them.

We didn't set out to become travel experts.

We set out to make memories.

And along the way, we discovered that with the right tools, travel doesn't have to feel impossible. It can become empowering.

That's why we are building Awayster and that's why we wrote this guide-book.



The Authors

WHO WE ARE

We are Lee and Julie Horning, parents to three amazing kids and founders of Awayster: a travel planning platform designed specifically for families in the autism community.



When our son was first diagnosed, we noticed that all the other travel apps and tools didn't meet our needs. They were built for neurotypical families who could make plans on the fly, jump between activities, and improvise meals, wait times, and transitions. We couldn't do that.

So we started documenting what worked.

We created visual schedules and food routines.

We mapped sensory rooms and planned slow itineraries.

We learned from trial and error, and from other families on the same path.

Now, with Awayster and this guide, we want to share what we've learned.



The Guide



WHAT THIS GUIDE IS

This short but power packed guide-book focuses on five of the most common travel pitfalls that families in the autism community make when traveling and how to avoid them. Not with judgment, but with insight, grace, and practical tips. These pitfalls aren't failures. They're opportunities for adjustments. And we've been through every one of them.

Each chapter is designed to help you:

- Plan more confidently
- Anticipate challenges before they happen
- Equip your child for success
- Reduce stress and create more joy

You'll find real-life stories, sensory-first strategies, packing lists, restaurant tips, meltdown-prevention tools, and encouragement throughout.

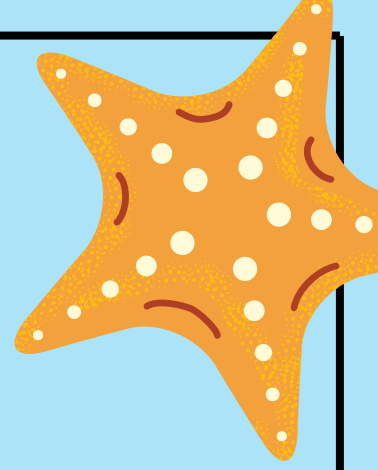
Whether you're planning your first road trip or your tenth flight, we hope this guide meets you where you are and gives you what you need to go further than you thought possible.

We want you to know that, whatever your "travel" or "trip" looks like, you have a community of families to encourage and share resources to get you there with confidence.



Chapter 1

Not Preparing Your Child for the Trip



The Surprise That Wasn't So Fun

It was supposed to be a fun surprise.

We had booked a weekend beach getaway to soak up the sun and to break up a long week. Our eight-year-old son had been having a hard time, and we thought this impromptu escape would lift everyone's spirits. We packed the bags in secret and joyfully announced: "We're going to the beach!"

What followed was not squeals of joy.

He froze. His face crumpled. He clutched his backpack like a life vest and said, "No thank you. I want to go home."

He didn't speak the rest of the ride. When we arrived at our destination, he refused to go inside. Eventually, we coaxed him into the room, but the next 24 hours were spent trying to comfort and calm him. The beach was beautiful, the room was cozy, the weather was perfect.

But we had skipped the most essential part of planning:

We didn't prepare him.

Dr. Kerry Magro, (autistic speaker and travel advocate) says, "Traveling as someone with autism can be hard, but when we have the right supports, it opens doors to confidence, communication, and connection."



Why This Happens

In the whirlwind of booking flights, reserving hotels, confirming attractions, and managing family logistics, emotional prep often takes a backseat. For neurotypical children, surprises may lead to excitement. For children on the autism spectrum, surprises can feel like losing control.

Routine and predictability are essential for many autistic kids. When a plan is dropped on them without warning, they're forced to process new environments, new people, new expectations, all without the framework they use to stay grounded.

It's not about resisting fun.

It's about feeling safe.

The earlier you begin preparing your child, the more grounded they will feel when the real adventure begins.

What It Feels Like for Your Child

Imagine you wake up one morning, and someone tells you you're going to a new job today. Different city. New coworkers. No time to pack. No explanation of the job duties. Oh, and the commute involves a method of transportation you've never used before.

Now multiply that feeling by ten.

That is how unprepared travel can feel for an autistic child. The world is already full of overwhelming sights, sounds, and textures. Without preparation, their brain is forced to run emergency processing mode for hours or even days.

You may see a meltdown.

You may see silence.

You may see defiance.



But what they are actually experiencing is disorientation, fear, and the loss of their internal compass.

What You Can Do Instead

Here are step-by-step ways to prepare your child and give them back a sense of predictability and safety:

1. Start Talking Early

Begin discussing the trip as soon as it's confirmed. Share the who, what, when, where, and why.

"We are going to visit Grandma in Florida."

"We will fly on an airplane on Tuesday morning."

"We will sleep at a hotel for three nights."

2. Use Visual Schedules

Create a simple timeline using images or icons: suitcase, airplane, hotel, beach, restaurant, etc. Tape it to the fridge or print it out to keep in their room.

Visual learners benefit from seeing the flow of events. Repetition over days builds familiarity.

3. Incorporate Social Stories

A social story is a short narrative written from the child's perspective, explaining what to expect.

"When we go to the airport, we will go through security. I may have to take off my shoes. I will walk through a scanner. It is not scary. My parents will be with me."

You can create your own or find free printable ones online tailored for flying, hotel stays, amusement parks, and more.



4. Rehearse Routines

Try a pretend airport day at home. Line up chairs like airplane seats. Practice "boarding" with your suitcase. Watch YouTube videos of real security lines or airplane cabins together.

If you're traveling by car, rehearse packing the car, buckling up, and making pit stops. Use a toy or map to show your route.

5. Request an Airport Walkthrough

Many airports offer walkthrough programs for neurodivergent travelers. Contact the airport's customer service or accessibility coordinator. Some airports even have sensory rooms or mock security lines for practice.

Explore TSA Cares Website:
This program connects families
with agents trained in supporting travelers with disabilities.



TSA CARES

Tools to Try

Visual Schedule Templates: Canva, Boardmaker, or free printable PECS cards.

Social Story Creator Apps: Book Creator, Pictello, and Story Creator.

YouTube Walkthroughs: Search your airport or hotel name + "tour" or "walkthrough."

First/Then Cards: Printable or digital tools showing "First we do this, Then we do that."

Countdown Calendars: Dry-erase boards or printed calendars they can mark off daily.



Reflection Questions for Families

1. What part of this trip might feel unfamiliar to my child?
2. How can I make those parts more predictable in advance?
3. What visual tools might help my child feel more confident?
4. What practice scenarios can we do this week?

Final Thoughts

The goal isn't to eliminate all surprises. That's impossible in travel. But if your child knows the structure, flow, and core details of what's ahead, they can process surprises within a stable framework.

And when your child feels safe, everyone travels better.

Preparation isn't just a checklist.
It's a powerful act of love.

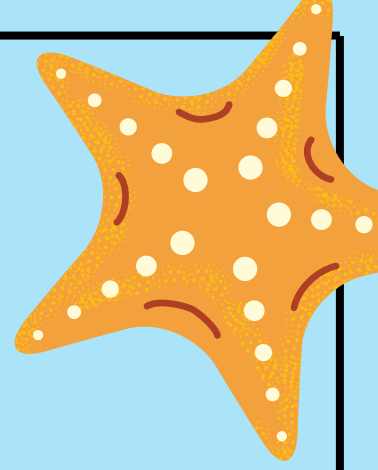
You've got this.

In Chapter 2, we'll explore another common travel trap: overloading the itinerary. Spoiler: slower days often lead to bigger wins.



Chapter 2

Overloading the Itinerary



The Mount Rushmore Misstep

In the summer of 2016, we loaded the car for what we thought would be an epic family adventure. We had planned a jam-packed itinerary that included Mount Rushmore, the Badlands, Custer State Park, Crazy Horse Memorial, and as many roadside attractions as we could squeeze in.

We thought we were being efficient.
We thought we were being fun.
We were wrong.

The trip turned into a carousel of meltdowns, early exits, and frayed nerves. Our kiddo was overwhelmed, overstimulated, and exhausted. Looking back, we now realize we were measuring success by how many boxes we could check, not by how our family actually experienced the trip.

Why This Happens

We live in a culture that praises productivity and efficiency. That mindset often spills into family vacations: "If we're going all this way, we might as well see everything."

Social media doesn't help either. We scroll through perfect family photos at theme parks, national landmarks, and bucket-list destinations. We feel pressure to make our trip look or feel the same.



So we plan too much. We forget the unique needs of our child and assume more equals better.

But for autistic children, every new place, sound, smell, texture, or transition is a data point their brain must process.

The more we pile on, the more we ask them to do neurological heavy lifting with no breaks.

What It Feels Like for Your Child

Imagine if every room you entered had music playing at a different volume. The lighting constantly changed. People were speaking in unfamiliar tones. You couldn't predict what was coming next. And every hour, you had to go somewhere else entirely new.

Would you be able to enjoy yourself?

That's what it feels like when a trip has no downtime, no flexibility, and no space to just be.

For an autistic child, rapid transitions and constant sensory exposure can lead to dysregulation. Once dysregulated, it can take a long time to come back to baseline. That's when meltdowns happen. That's when the fun stops.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

What You Can Do Instead

1. One Main Activity Per Day

This might be the single biggest game-changer for autism travel. Instead of trying to hit multiple major attractions in one day, pick one meaningful experience and center the day around it.



This creates:

- Predictability
- Opportunity for prep and decompression
- Space for joy and exploration

2. Build in Intentional Breaks

Downtime isn't wasted time. It's recovery time. It allows your child to regulate, rest, and re-engage.

- Plan 1–2 hour breaks in the hotel or at a quiet park.
- Use mealtimes as slow transition points.
- Include activities that don't involve lines, crowds, or structured interactions.

3. Be Willing to Adjust

We know the feeling, you've paid for a full-day pass or driven hours to see a landmark. But sometimes the best decision is to leave early or pivot completely.

Remember the Dollywood story?

We had just finished lunch on a warm April day. Our kiddo had been on a very stimulating ride and was starting to unravel. They announced, "I'm going to the car. With or without you."

We called the number on the back of our Dollywood pass and were quickly directed to a sensory room. In less than five minutes, we were in an air-conditioned, private space. They reset. We reset. And we ended up closing the park down.

Being willing to leave early relieved pressure. Ironically, that's what allowed us to stay longer.



4. Stay Close to the Action

One of the best investments you can make is in lodging that's close to your main attractions. This gives you the freedom to:

- Take unscheduled breaks
- Head back for naps
- Drop off gear and change clothes

Even if it costs a bit more upfront, the mental health savings are worth it.

5. Color-Code Your Itinerary

This is a simple trick to visualize the intensity of your schedule:

- Green = Go:** Simple, easy, familiar activities
- Yellow = Caution:** Medium energy, sensory exposure, or new location
- Red = Alert:** High intensity, high stimulation, long duration

Try to avoid back-to-back "red" days. Pair red with green or insert a break.

Real-World Tools

- Printable Itinerary Template:** Include icons for each activity and a place to color code.
- Dry-Erase Family Calendar:** Update daily with plans, changes, and rest periods.
- Rest Day Cards:** Let your child pick one day or half-day where they choose the activity (even if it's "stay in bed and play tablet").
- Flexible Booking: Use refundable tickets and activities when possible.



Reflection Questions for Families

1. Which part of our past trips felt the most overwhelming?
2. Are we currently planning too much in one day?
3. Where can we build in breaks?
4. Can we identify our "red day" and balance it with recovery time?

Final Thoughts

Planning less does not mean your child experiences less.

It means they actually get to experience more, because they can absorb, reflect, and enjoy without being overwhelmed. Travel becomes a positive memory instead of a stressful blur.

The best family trip we ever took wasn't the one where we did everything.

It was the one where we learned to listen.

Slowing down isn't failure.

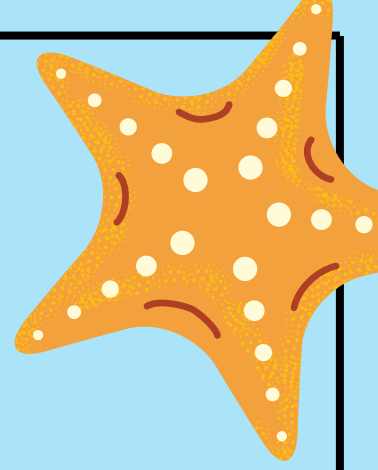
It's freedom.

In Chapter 3, we'll dive into sensory strategies and how a personalized toolkit can turn chaos into calm, anywhere you go.



Chapter 3

Not Having a Sensory Toolkit



When It All Fell Apart in the Aquarium

We had just stepped into one of the largest aquariums in the country. The entrance tunnel surrounded us in shimmering blue light, glass walls filled with graceful stingrays, sharks, and schools of colorful fish. It was breathtaking. We were only five minutes in when the overhead speakers suddenly boomed to life.

"Welcome to our undersea world!"

The volume was intense. Lights flashed.

Our kiddo dropped to the floor, hands over ears, panicked and sobbing.

We had nothing. No headphones. No fidget. No sunglasses. No exit plan.

We left the aquarium before we even made it to the jellyfish.

That's when we knew we needed a sensory toolkit.

Why This Happens

Many parents don't build or pack a sensory toolkit for one of three reasons:

1. They're unaware their child needs one.
2. They assume their child can "push through" or adapt.
3. They think venues will provide everything needed.



But sensory processing differences are not momentary inconveniences. They are neurological realities. Lights, sounds, smells, textures, crowds, transitions, each of these can send an autistic child into fight-or-flight mode.

The toolkit isn't just comfort.
It's regulation. It's safety. It's freedom.

When your child has the right tools, they have what they need to stay connected, recover from overload, and re-engage on their terms.

What It Feels Like for Your Child

Imagine walking into a space where the walls move, the lights strobe, the floor vibrates, and everyone is shouting in a language you don't understand. Now imagine you have to stay there for hours with no way to get relief or escape.

Sensory overwhelm isn't just annoying.
It can feel dangerous.

And when children don't have tools to regulate themselves, or don't feel empowered to use them, they may shut down or act out. It's not behavioral. It's biological.

What You Can Do Instead

1. Build a Sensory Toolkit Together

This isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. Start by asking:

- What helps your child calm down?
- What do they already use to feel safe or grounded?
- What are their known sensitivities?

Let your child help choose what goes into their kit. Involve them in packing and personalizing it.



2. Use the Toolkit Proactively

Don't wait for a meltdown. Use tools before entering high-stimulation environments or after transitions.

- Headphones before entering a loud exhibit
- Fidgets or chewelry in the car or in line
- Visual timers for managing wait times

3. Make It Portable and Accessible

Use a small backpack, crossbody bag, or belt pouch that your child can access. Make it a regular part of their travel gear.

Let them know: "You are allowed to use your tools whenever you need."

4. Teach Others in the Family to Support the Toolkit

Siblings and other caregivers should know:

- What the items are for
- When to offer them
- How to model acceptance and support

This promotes consistency and reduces stigma.

Suggested Sensory Toolkit Items

Choose the items that work for your child. You don't need all of them!

For Noise Sensitivity:

- Noise-canceling headphones
- Earplugs (foam or custom-fit)
- Calming music playlist or white noise app



For Touch Regulation:

- Fidget toys (spinners, cubes, squishies)
- Theraputty or clay
- Soft comfort cloth or textured fabric
- Mini weighted lap pad or shoulder wrap

For Oral Needs:

- Chewelry
- Chewy snacks (dried fruit, fruit leather)
- Flavored toothpicks or chew tubes

For Visual Support:

- Sunglasses or tinted lenses
- Visual schedule (printed or tablet-based)
- Calming jar or glitter bottle
- Small flashlight or night light

For Transitions and Timing:

- Visual timers or apps
- "First/Then" card deck
- Mini whiteboard and marker for expectations

For Emotional Comfort:

- Favorite stuffed animal or toy
- Scented sticker or essential oil roller (test before using)
- Breathing cards (with simple visuals for deep breaths)

For Food and Drink Regulation:

- Familiar snacks
- Water bottle with spout or straw
- Gum or crunchy/chewy foods



Other Helpful Additions:

- Stretchy resistance band
- Tablet with calming apps or preloaded videos
- Wet wipes or dry cloths (for unexpected textures)

Tips for Use

- Test items at home before packing them for travel.
- Refresh the kit for each new trip or season.
- Let your child carry or organize their own kit if appropriate.
- Praise the use of tools! It's a sign of self-awareness and regulation.

Real-Life Example

We once visited a bustling science museum. Before entering the main exhibit hall, we paused. We offered our kiddo a choice: headphones or sunglasses. They chose both.

Later, they used a visual timer to manage their time in a loud hands-on area. At lunch, they pulled out their chewelry without prompting. When things got too loud, they stepped outside with a parent and played a calming video on their tablet.

That was one of the first big trips where we didn't experience a single meltdown.

Not because the environment was easier.
But because they were equipped.

Reflection Questions for Families

1. What are the top 2–3 triggers my child experiences on trips?
2. What self-soothing tools already work for them?
3. How can we practice using the toolkit before our next trip?
4. Who else in our family or care circle needs to know how to support this toolkit?



Final Thoughts

A sensory toolkit is not just a bag of gadgets. It's an act of empowerment.

It says to your child: You have the tools. You have permission. You are safe.

When your child has what they need to self-regulate, the entire family wins. Trips become opportunities, not obstacles.

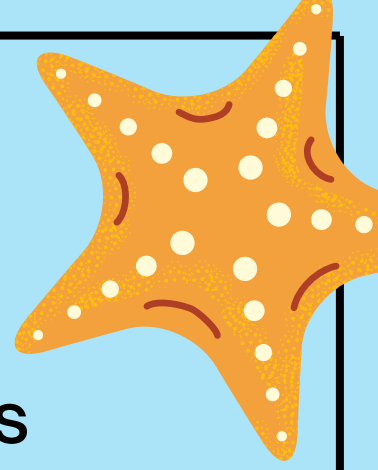
And next time the lights flash or the volume spikes, you'll be ready, not to escape, but to stay.

Next up in Chapter 4: Food challenges, picky eaters, and how to plan ahead so meals don't derail the day.



Chapter 4

Forgetting to Plan for Food Challenges



The Snack Pack That Saved the Day

We were deep into a full-day adventure at a national park. Hiking trails, photo ops, ranger talks, it was a packed itinerary. Around midday, things started to go south. Our kiddo became irritable, unfocused, and refused to engage.

We realized what we had missed.

Lunch.

We had passed several roadside diners and food trucks, but none of them offered the few familiar foods our child would actually eat. By the time we located a sandwich shop, the meltdown was already in motion. We stood outside in the heat while they cried, overwhelmed by hunger, fatigue, and too much stimulation.

Then we remembered: the emergency snack pack in the car.

Crackers. Applesauce. Granola bars. Juice box.

It wasn't a feast, but it was familiar. And it saved the day.

Why This Happens

Food is often taken for granted during travel planning. For many families, stopping for food is just part of the adventure. But for autism families, it's a make-or-break factor.



Why?

- Many children with autism have “sensory-based food preferences”
- Some eat only textures, colors or brands
- New environments can suppress appetite or increase resistance
- Long travel days mean delayed or unpredictable mealtimes
- Food options may be loud, smelly, crowded, or completely unfamiliar

The result? Stress. Power struggles. Blood sugar crashes. Meltdowns.

But with some planning, food doesn't have to derail the day.

What It Feels Like for Your Child

Imagine being in a new place, hungry, and surrounded by food you don't recognize. Maybe the smells make your stomach turn. Maybe the menu makes no sense. Maybe the room is too loud to even think about what you want.

Now imagine your parents are frustrated and telling you to "just eat something."

It doesn't feel like a meal.
It feels like pressure.

When your child can't access familiar food, it's not just about pickiness, it's about comfort, safety, and trust. If they don't feel those things, their nervous system begins to unravel.



What You Can Do Instead

1. Pack Familiar Foods

Always bring snacks your child loves. Pack more than you think you need. For longer trips, include both non-perishables and cooler-friendly options.

Consider:

- Dry cereal
- Crackers or pretzels
- Applesauce pouches
- Fruit leather
- Protein bars
- Yogurt tubes (on ice)
- Cheese sticks
- Water bottles with spouts

Tip: Make a "snack tackle box" with dividers for variety.

2. Research Restaurants in Advance

Look up dining options near your destination and preview menus with your child. Some helpful tools:

- Google Maps reviews
- Yelp with photos
- Restaurant websites with kid menus

Call ahead if needed to ask about:

- Quiet seating
- Menu flexibility
- Bring-your-own-food policies



3. Practice Trying New Foods at Home

If you're going somewhere with limited food options, introduce a few new items slowly in advance. Use a reward system for trying bites, even if they don't like it.

Our family rule: one small bite earns a big smile and a favorite treat later.

Celebrate the try, not the finish.

4. Choose Lodging with a Kitchen or Fridge

Having access to a microwave or kitchenette gives you control. You can:

- Heat up favorite foods
- Store backup meals
- Prepare simple breakfasts or snacks

Sometimes a bowl of familiar mac and cheese or cereal at the end of the day can regulate everything.

5. Let Your Child Help With the Food Plan

Give them input on what to pack, what to eat, and where to go.

- Offer two restaurant choices with pre-reviewed menus
- Let them pack their own snack bag from approved options
- Make a visual food schedule for the day

This sense of control eases anxiety and increases cooperation.



Sample Snack List for Travel Days

Easy-to-Pack Options:

- Goldfish or animal crackers
- Granola bars
- Gummy snacks (if tolerated)
- Trail mix (with or without nuts)
- Cheese crisps
- Rice cakes
- Fruit cups (with spoon)
- Hard-boiled eggs (in cooler)
- Milk boxes or drinkable yogurts

Comfort Carbs:

- Bagels with butter
- Dry waffles
- Pancake bites
- Plain pasta or rice in containers

Hydration Helpers:

- Juice boxes
- Coconut water
- Flavored straws for plain water
- Slushy thermos drinks

Dining Out Tips

- Ask for booths, corners, or quieter seats
- Request no automatic drink refills (noise and spills!)
- Bring a fidget or screen to use while waiting
- Avoid peak mealtimes if your child struggles with crowds
- Let them eat a packed snack before the restaurant if needed
- Thank servers ahead of time for patience



Real Story: The Bite That Changed Everything

We were at a beachside restaurant and ordered chicken tenders and fries, our go-to "safe food." Our kiddo glanced at our grilled shrimp. "What does that taste like?" I said, "Kind of like salty chicken. Want a tiny bite?"

They took it. Made a face. Laughed. Said, "Yuck. Where's my reward?" We handed them a lollipop and gave high fives. Two days later, they asked, "Can I try that salty chicken again?"

Progress isn't a clean plate. It's a single bite. A giggle. A willingness to try again.

Reflection Questions for Families

1. What are my child's top 5 safe foods?
2. What backup meals or snacks can I always have ready?
3. Where are the food pinch-points in our travel plan?
4. How can we make food feel fun and safe, not stressful?

Final Thoughts

Food isn't just fuel for autistic children.
It's emotional regulation. It's sensory safety. It's part of their coping system.

When you plan food well, you build trust.
When you prepare for the unexpected, you reduce pressure.

And when you celebrate effort over outcome, your child feels supported, seen, and empowered.

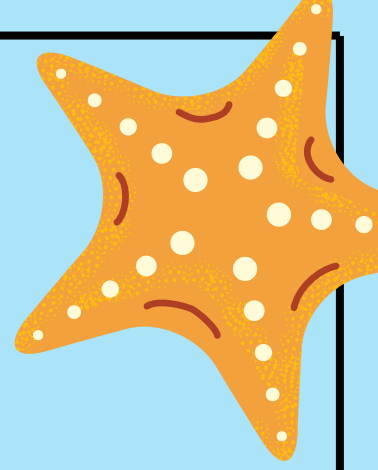
Even one familiar snack, packed with love, can turn a hard day into a connected one.

In Chapter 5, we'll explore why asking for accommodations matters, how to do it well, and how it transforms travel for everyone involved.



Chapter 5

Not Asking for Accommodations



The Ask I Was Afraid to Make

I used to have no problem asking for a hotel room upgrade.

More pillows? Early check-in? Late checkout? Sure.

But asking for accommodations for my autistic child? That felt different. It felt vulnerable. It felt like I was opening myself up to judgment, misunderstanding, or eye rolls.

At a popular amusement park, we waited in line for 40 minutes. My child began pacing, biting their nails, and finally dropped to the ground, overwhelmed and overstimulated. People stared. I felt helpless.

Later, I found out there was a sensory pass.

We could have bypassed the line entirely.

We could have avoided the panic.

All I had to do was ask.

Why This Happens

Many autism parents hesitate to ask for accommodations due to:

- Embarrassment or fear of judgment
- Not knowing what's available
- Worrying about seeming entitled or difficult
- Assuming we can "handle it on our own"



But here's the truth:
If you don't ask, you don't get.

Travel venues, airlines, hotels, and attractions increasingly offer accommodations for neurodivergent guests. But they often don't advertise them. You have to know what to ask for.

And when you do, it can change everything.

What It Feels Like for Your Child

When a child is forced into a sensory environment they can't manage, it can feel like being dropped into a war zone with no armor.

Lights. Sounds. Crowds. Rules. Lines.

Every moment is a challenge. If they feel unsafe or unsupported, their ability to enjoy the trip disappears.

Accommodations are not special treatment. They're equal access. They're lifelines.

They say to your child: "You belong here, too."

What You Can Do Instead

1. Do Your Homework

Before your trip, research accommodations that may be available. Search the venue's website for terms like:

- Accessibility
- Guest services
- Sensory-friendly
- Special needs support
- Disability accommodations

Also check Facebook groups, autism travel blogs, and forums for firsthand experiences.



2. Reach Out Directly

Email or call the venue in advance. Use clear, respectful language: "Hi, I'm planning a visit with my child who is on the autism spectrum. Do you offer any accommodations for guests with sensory sensitivities or developmental differences?"

If they say yes, ask for details:

- What do I need to show (doctor note, Hidden Disabilities card)?
- How do you access the service (in person, online, guest services)?
- Are there specific hours or areas for sensory-friendly experiences?

If they say no, thank them and politely suggest they consider it. Change happens when people speak up.

3. Ask at Arrival

Even if you didn't contact in advance, you can still ask at check-in or ticketing:

- "Do you have quiet spaces available?"
- "Is there an alternate entry or waiting option for neurodivergent guests?"
- "Are there any sensory supports or resources available?"

Sometimes accommodations are unofficial but still offered.

4. Use Identification Tools (Optional)

Some families find it helpful to use tools like:

- Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard
- A letter from a professional: such as a teacher, ABA, or life coach
- Custom badge or card stating needs

These can alert staff without requiring a lengthy explanation.



Types of Accommodations to Ask About

Attractions and Amusement Parks:

- Skip-the-line passes
- Sensory rooms or chill-out zones
- Quiet hours or early entry
- Companion passes

Airports and Airlines:

- TSA Cares support
- Pre-boarding access
- Seat buffering (empty seat next to you)
- Notification to flight staff

Hotels and Lodging:

- Quiet room location (away from elevators or pools)
- Fridge for special dietary items
- Fans, weighted blankets or waterproof mattress covers
- Room service flexibility
- Early check-in / late checkout for transitions

Restaurants and Venues:

- Advance seating requests
- Menu preview or pre-orders
- Dim lighting or music turned down



Real Story: The Room That Made the Trip

We were staying at a beach resort and had been assigned a room on the fourth floor, right next to the elevator. Every ding and hallway footstep echoed like thunder.

Our kiddo couldn't sleep. Night one was a disaster.

The next morning, I asked the front desk if we could move. I explained we were traveling with a child on the spectrum who was sound-sensitive.

They moved us to a first-floor corner room by the garden:

It was quiet.

He slept through the night.

And we got to enjoy the rest of our vacation.

Quick Scripts for Advocating

"Hi, we're traveling with a neurodivergent child and looking for quieter seating."

"Do you have any early entry options for guests with sensory differences?"

"Are there any calm spaces or relief areas we can access if things get overwhelming?"

"Can you note on our reservation that we need a quieter room or space with less foot traffic?"

You don't have to overshare. Just be specific, polite, and clear.



Reflection Questions for Families

- 1.What accommodations have we never asked for, but probably should?
- 2.What holds us back from asking?
- 3.What language can we prepare ahead of time to self-advocate more confidently?
- 4.Who can help us gather and request support when we need it?

Final Thoughts

Every time you ask, you're not just advocating for your child, you're paving the way for other families, too.

Asking for accommodations does not show weakness. It's leadership. It's love. It's inclusion.

Your child deserves safe, joyful, and accessible travel experiences.

And the people around you? More often than not, they want to help, they just don't know how until you ask.

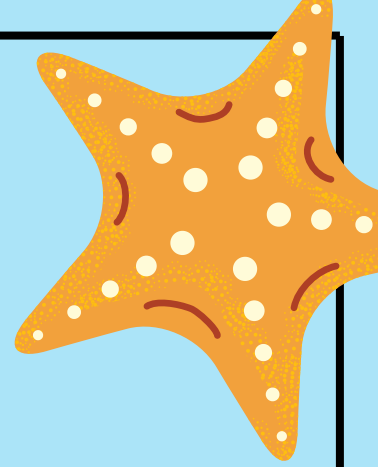
So be brave. Be kind. Be clear.

Your ask might be the thing that transforms the whole trip.

In our final chapter, we'll tie it all together with encouragement, practical next steps, and how Awayster can help you grow your confidence and travel joy.



Conclusion



Progress Over Perfection

There is no such thing as a perfect family trip for any family.

There will be delays. Forgotten items. Bad meals. Unexpected crowds. There may be a meltdown in the parking lot or a quiet moment in the hotel room when you wonder, "Was this even worth it?"

But those moments don't define your trip.
They reveal your resilience.

Traveling with a child on the autism spectrum isn't about flawless execution. It's about flexibility, presence, and progress. It's about building the muscle of adaptability as a family, and learning how to make the world more accessible, one journey at a time.

If you prepared, packed, pivoted, paused, and kept going? That's success.

What These Five Chapters Taught Us

Let's take a moment to reflect:

Chapter 1: Prepare Your Child

We learned that giving our kids time to process what's coming sets the tone for the whole trip. Whether it's a countdown calendar, a social story, or a pretend airport in your living room, preparation communicates safety.



Chapter 2: Don't Overload the Itinerary

We realized that fewer activities often lead to richer experiences. One big moment, well-paced, can leave a deeper impression than five rushed ones. Our kids need space to regulate. And so do we.

Chapter 3: Build and Use a Sensory Toolkit

We embraced the idea that comfort items and regulation tools aren't distractions, they're empowerment. A toolkit is permission to take control when the world becomes too much.

Chapter 4: Plan for Food Realities

We explored how food is more than fuel. For many kids, it's a sensory experience, a familiarity anchor, and an emotional regulator. We've seen how a simple snack can make or break a day.

Chapter 5: Ask for What You Need

And finally, we learned that advocacy opens doors. Whether it's a quiet room, early boarding, or a helpful staff member, asking for accommodations creates access, not only for your child, but for every child that follows.

These aren't just travel tips. They're mindset shifts. Tools for life. And they show us that what might feel like a mistake can become the catalyst for change.

The Power of a Family Debrief

One of the most valuable rituals you can create is the post-trip debrief.

It doesn't have to be formal. It doesn't require forms or ratings. It just means taking time, together, to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and what you want to remember.



Try questions like:

- What part of the trip made you feel happiest?
- Was there a moment that felt tricky or too much?
- What was your favorite food or place?
- What's something new you want to try next time?

Even if your child can't answer these out loud, you can answer on their behalf, or have them draw it, act it out, or use photos.

Make it fun. Celebrate the highlights. Honor the hard parts. And document the lessons you want to carry forward.

Because next time?

You'll have an even stronger foundation to build from.

You're Part of Something Bigger

If you've ever felt alone in your travel struggles, you're not.

If you've ever wondered if the effort is worth it, it is.

If you've ever second-guessed your choices, you're doing more right than you realize.

Across the country and around the world, thousands of autism families are finding new ways to move, explore, connect, and belong. Every time you take a trip, big or small, you're joining a movement that says: "My child deserves the world, not just the quiet corner."

You're building something that lasts.

And others are walking this road with you.



You've Got This

You don't need to do it perfectly.

You don't need to get it all right the first time.

Every trip you take, every adjustment you make, every meltdown you survive and every moment you celebrate, it's all part of building a travel legacy for your family.

We believe in you.

We believe in your child.

Whether around the corner or around the world, we can't wait to see where you go next.

Safe travels,

The Awayster Team



Fill-In-the-Blank Travel Planner

My Name Is: _____

Leave Date: _____

Return Date: _____

Chapter 1: Where Am I Going?

I am going to:

This place is in the state/country of:

I found it on the map! *(Draw or paste a map here)*

I will be there for _____ days.

We picked this place because:

Picture of the place: *(Draw or glue a picture here)*

Chapter 2: How Will I Get There?

I will travel by: (Circle one or more)

 Car

 Plane

 Bus

 Boat

 Train

 Walking

My ride will start and we will try to leave at this time: _____

I might pack a bag with: _____

What I might see on the way:

Picture of my travel vehicle:

(Draw or glue a picture here)

Chapter 3: Who Is Going With Me?

I will travel with:

1..

2.

3.

I can talk to _____ if I feel nervous.

Picture of my travel buddies:

(Draw or glue a picture here)

Chapter 4: Where Will I Stay?

I will sleep at: (Circle one or more)

Hotel

Cabin

House

RV

Other:

My room will have:

What will help me feel comfortable there:

Picture of my place to stay:

(Draw or glue a picture here)



Chapter 5: What Will I Do There?

I will visit:

1.

2.

3.

I am excited about:

One thing I want to remember to bring:

Things I want to try:

Picture of a fun thing to do:

(Draw or glue a picture here)

Chapter 6: When Do I Come Home?

I will come home on:

I will leave at:

I will travel home by:

Things I want to remember on the way back:

Picture of my ride home:

(Draw or glue a picture here)

Chapter 7: My Memories

My favorite part of the trip was:

Someone I met or saw was:

One thing that made me smile:

Picture or drawing of something I loved:

(Draw or glue a picture here)



Notes and Drawings

(Use this page for anything else you'd like to remember or draw!)