1. Have a packing strategy.

Pack for the worst, but hope for the best. In other words: make sure you're equipped to handle messes, bad weather, meltdowns, and illness, but don't feel pressured to pack three suitcases full of kid stuff.

Bring the things you need to keep germs at bay (hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, masks) as well as medications and comforts in case someone gets ill. It's also a great idea to spread your children's things among various pieces of luggage so you're not left in the lurch if one all-important bag gets lost.

School-aged children can and should be able to pack their own carry-on backpack *and* carry it themselves. Teach them how to plan outfits, prioritize their wants, and keep track of essential items.

2. Research the travel documents your kids need.

Do kids need an ID to fly? Children under 18 can fly without an ID in the U.S., although unaccompanied minors who are eligible for TSA Pre-Check must show an approved ID in order to receive expedited screening.[1]

For international travel, all children need a passport. Babies need passports too, even if they're just a few weeks old. Kids may need visas and vaccination records as well. Check the current travel requirements for your destination country in this interactive map.

If only one parent is traveling internationally with a child under 18, they should bring a letter of consent to travel that's signed by the other custodial parent.

3. Get travel insurance that protects your children.

When you're traveling with children, having reliable travel insurance is the best way to get peace of mind. Look for a plan that can reimburse covered expenses for you and your kids in case of a medical emergency, trip interruption, baggage mishap, trip delay, unexpected cancellation, and other situations.

Our most popular choice for family vacations, OneTrip Prime can cover kids 17 and under for free when traveling with a parent or grandparent (not available on policies issued to Pennsylvania residents). For families that travel often, AllTrips Premier can provide 365 days of protection.

4. Keep the kids' routines, with some minor adjustments.

Plucking kids out of their daily routine to get on a plane or train or go on a long car ride can cause some chaos. You'll have better family vacations by making sure you maintain as much of your child's routine as possible, including naptime, downtime, and meal times.

If you're traveling internationally, you may want to begin adjusting to your destination's time zone several days before you leave. This can ease jet lag symptoms and help kids stay on an even keel.

5. When traveling with children, know their limits.

While you want your kids to experience a destination to the fullest, they just don't have the same stamina that you do. Walking for miles, standing in long lines, and staying out in the heat or the cold for hours will push even the most easygoing kid over the edge. Build in lots of time for breaks, meals, and treats. Avoid scheduling a ton of activities on day 1 of your trip.

If you're traveling with a neurodivergent child who's extra-sensitive to their environment and changes in routine, you may want to choose airlines, hotels, resorts, and destinations that are known for serving young travelers with special needs. Here's a short list of autism-friendly destinations and travel tips.

6. Don't neglect your own needs.

Often, traveling with children doesn't feel like a vacation. You're still doing the work of parenting, which means your kids' needs come first. But remember: You deserve to enjoy yourself too. If you're traveling with your spouse, partner, or another adult family member, take turns watching the kids. Plan something you enjoy, whether that's a kid-free morning in the museum or a massage on the beach. If you're on a cruise ship or at a resort, take advantage of the kids' club or babysitting services offered. Need to find trustworthy child care while traveling? Contact your travel concierge: a benefit included in several Allianz Travel Insurance plans.

7. For entertainment, think beyond screens.

Tablets and handheld video games can be lifesavers on long trips with kids. But kids can overdose on screen time, and so it's good to have analog options. Some of the best ways to entertain kids on a long trip include the tried and true:

- Card games
- Coloring books and sketchpads (older kids may enjoy "how to draw" instruction books)

- Magnetic toys
- Puzzle books and sticker books (just watch where they put those stickers!)
- "I Spy" or "Where's Waldo" seek-and-find books
- Balloons

Many parents swear by this tip for traveling with young children: Wrap little gifts for them to unwrap every hour. These surprises can be small, such as snacks, candy, crayons, toys, etc.

8. Try a ride-on suitcase.

When kids are too old for a stroller but too young to trek from Terminal A to Terminal G, a ride-on suitcase is the answer. Some function like scooters, allowing a kid to propel themselves with their feet, while others are designed to be pulled by a parent. Make sure it's safe, light, and maneuverable enough for your child to pull themselves, as well. Travel+Leisure tested several models to find the best ride-on suitcases.

9. Set clear expectations for behavior.

Before you board the plane, train, or cruise ship, talk to your kids about what they can and cannot do. Then, hold the line. The big behavior no-nos for kids when traveling:

- No running away in a crowded place.
- No joking in the security line.
- No kicking the seat in front of you or putting your feet on someone's armrest. (Buying a foot hammock for planes can prevent this problem.)
- No unbuckling your seatbelt in the car, or when it's required in the airplane.
- No touching/hitting/harassing your siblings.

Also be clear about the consequences for breaking the rules, whether that's a time-out, loss of screen time, or missing out on an activity.

10. Make it an adventure.

Remember your ultimate goal: Teaching your children to become considerate and independent travelers when they're grown. You can nurture a child's sense of adventure at a very young age and spark their natural curiosity by asking questions. Push them out of their comfort zone by trying new activities. Teach them how to read a map and greet people politely in the local

language. Give them more responsibility by involving them in the vacation planning. The more your kids are involved, the more unforgettable the experience will be for all of you.

Summer safety tip 1: Drowning is quiet.

Everyone thinks that people who are drowning yell, thrash and splash. They don't. Drowning doesn't look like drowning, as former Coast Guard rescue swimmer Mario Vittone explains. People in serious distress lose their ability to call out for help or wave. Instead, their instinctive drowning response causes them to hover upright at the surface of the water with their head tilted back and mouth open, gasping or hyperventilating.

Summer safety tip 2: Use "touch supervision" with young children around pools.

Home — or vacation home — swimming pools are a particular hazard for very young children (aged 1 to 4). It may be tempting to dive into a magazine or a cocktail while you're sitting poolside, but if young children are around you should stay focused on them. Amid the chaos of a family beach rental, it only takes a moment of inattention to place a child at risk of drowning.

The CDC recommends designating one adult to watch all children swimming or playing in or around water. Supervisors of preschool children should practice "touch supervision," which means being close enough to reach the child at all times. About half of child drownings take place within 25 yards of an adult.[1]

Summer safety tip 3: Know the warning signs of sharks.

Compared to other summer vacation safety threats, shark attacks are extremely unlikely. However, they do happen. Here are a few tips for avoiding sharks:

- Don't swim at dawn or dusk, or after heavy rains.
- Don't swim near fishing piers, where sharks may be attracted by bait.
- If you see small fish schooling and jumping out of the water, a shark may be nearby.
- Sharks are attracted to mouths of rivers, channels, deep drops and areas between sandbars.
- Watch for blue or purple flags, which indicate sharks, jellyfish or other dangerous marine life.[2]

Summer safety tip 4: Know your vehicle load limits.

Can't fit the kids, the beach chairs and all the suitcases in your vehicle? A rooftop carrier makes packing for your summer vacation much easier. But don't stuff it to the gills. Read the car's manual first to figure out the dynamic weight limit for the roof rack. It's probably less than you think; on average, 165 pounds is the max.[3] And remember that adding rooftop cargo raises the center of gravity, which can cause an SUV to sway or become less stable on the road.

Summer safety tip 5: Don't trust your GPS/phone maps.

A Texas college student was sightseeing near the Grand Canyon when she followed her GPS down a road that wasn't actually there.[4] She ran out of gas and endured five days in the desert before being located — thanks to the efforts of rescuers and her decision to leave a note in her abandoned car, explaining where she had gone. The story illustrates one of the most important travel safety tips: Always have a backup plan. Paper maps are a good idea to carry, along with emergency water, food, and other supplies.

Summer safety tip 6: Steer clear of wildlife.

Many wild animals are drawn to campgrounds because they can forage in trash or snag snacks from tourists. Every year brings news accounts of people being attacked on their summer vacation by animals like bears and bison. The key thing to remember is that most animal attacks are provoked. Never, never feed or harass wildlife, even if you see other people doing it. And remember that bees, deer, dogs and cows kill a lot more people than alligators and bears.

Summer safety tip 7: Spray your shoes.

Picking off a few ticks used to be a normal rite of summer vacation. Now it's cause for alarm, as scientists have discovered more than 14 diseases spread by ticks, including Lyme disease, babesiosis and powassan virus.[5] Ticks are spreading, and reports of disease have shot up. How can you keep your family safe? Science writer Melinda Wenner Moyer recommends spraying children's and adults' shoes with permethrin and doing daily tick checks.

Summer safety tip 8: Use the teddy-bear system.

No parent ever thinks he or she would leave a child locked in a car. But tragically, children die from heatstroke in hot cars every year, often because a distracted parent simply forgets the child's in the back seat. To prevent this, keep a teddy bear in the child's safety seat. When the child's buckled in, move the teddy to the front seat as a reminder that the back seat is occupied.[6]

Summer safety tip 9: Plan ahead to keep pets safe.

Like young children, pets are vulnerable to injury when left in hot cars. Even when the outside temperature is 60 degrees, the sun can raise it to 110.[6] If your dog is coming along on your summer vacation road trip, plan ahead for how you'll keep him cool. Can you pack picnic lunches, or find restaurants that allow dogs on the patio? What will you do if you need to run an emergency errand?

Summer safety tip 10: Make sure you're protected in case of medical emergencies.

If your summer travel plans take you on a cruise, out of the country, or to more remote areas of the United States, you should have travel insurance with emergency medical benefits and emergency medical transportation benefits. These benefits can cover your medical care and/or emergency transportation if you experience a covered medical emergency while traveling, protecting you from unexpected (and enormous) medical bills. Find a plan today.