

*This post is not a theoretical essay on long-distance traveling with children: it is a collection of my own experiences as a mother of three who, for at least two months every year, packs her bags and takes her young on an adventurous journey. And no, it is not always a cheerful, problem-free scenario, and it sure requires lots of energy. But the workload at home is already heavy enough for a 3-times mother... So off to India!*

By Daniela Luschin-Wangail (Mother of Elvis, 8, Luis Thayas, 4, and Emil Kenrab, 0)

## The ultimate thrill

Are you one of those people who are always on the lookout for a new kick? Bungee jumping, skydiving and base jumping make you yawn? Then I have a great suggestion on how to get your adrenaline fix: take a baby, a stubborn child with Down Syndrome who loves nothing more than to resist parental authority and a know-all pre-pubescent boy, and sit with them in an airplane. Oh, did I forget to mention that the father is already at the destination point and won't be flying with you? So forget any hopes of an adult helping hand. Believe me, there have been many exciting moments in my life, but none as nerve-racking as this. I was so worried I started losing my sleep several days before the actual trip. And then, surprisingly, it all works out (almost) like clockwork. The children somehow know that you can't manage without their help and behave exemplary (the two younger ones were asleep most of the time). The stewardesses come in 5-minute intervals and ask kindly (pityingly, even) whether they can help you in any way, and you can even watch almost an entire movie on the screen in front of you. The babies that cry all around do not belong to you, and none of the passengers look disapprovingly at you, with that self-righteous expression that means something like "What kind of mother are you that can't control your kid? Make it stop already!"



Travelling with children? An extra pair of hands would be very useful!

Was I just lucky? Maybe. But then I was lucky because I have been traveling to and in India, with my child(ren), for eight years already. And there have been certainly some complications when flying with my boys, but nothing unsolvable. For example, a kid's nose that wouldn't stop bleeding even after trying different (and completely contradictory) methods suggested by the very excited flight attendants, until a doctor, answering to an on board call over the speakers, came as an angel and provided both immediate clotting and general relief. For the child I had a change of clothes ready (please never forget to bring one!), but I had nothing with what to replace my own blood-drenched outfit which caused a little chaos at the arrival port as some people thought I needed first aid.

Then there was that time when my dear middle son threw up an abnormal amount of his stomach contents all over the seat. The flight attendants, suddenly victims themselves of severe nausea, weren't able to clean the mess, so I threw a couple of paper tissues on top, removed the bigger food bits I could find, and covered the seat with a clean towel from my hand luggage (Tip #2: Always pack a towel in your hand luggage!). My son, exhausted and with an empty stomach, slept peacefully the rest of the flight.

But in spite of all the stressful moments and energy-draining situations that take place during a flight with my children, I wouldn't stay home for anything in the world. Even at home, things happen that will bring us to the brink of a nervous breakdown, and even there we are sometimes helpless and desperate. So why not change at least the scenery, so that the everyday horror scenarios shine with a new light? That's another reason why I enjoy alternating my residence between Austria and India.



Here we go, baby!

# India is a paradise for kids

Only on the surface is Austria a great country for children. “Do not do that!”, “This isn’t right!”, “Please, be quiet!”, “Behave!”... I don’t know how many times I have to tell my children these things whenever we leave our house to go to public spaces (or other people’s houses). At the supermarket, at the restaurant, at the city offices, on the train, at the doctor, at relatives’ or friends’... Everything is clean, beautiful, calm and orderly. And it should stay that way. Children here become quickly disruptive factors. I am not one of those anti-authoritarian mothers who let their children do whatever they want. We are in Austria, after all, and they have to behave according to the country’s cultural rules. And they do... after I tell them so two or three or four times in a row ☐ But it’s sooo hard!

India on the other hand is just like a paradise! Children can be children. Run around. Be loud. Be naughty. Protest. Get dirty. Break stuff. Here, the burned-out, responsibility-choked mother can finally breathe and stop worrying. No one looks at you, shaking his head in disapproval. No one feels disturbed when your child runs endlessly in circles inside the restaurant. If you’re visiting someone’s home and something breaks or gets stained, and you reflexively scold the children, you are immediately stopped by the hosts, who tell you not to be so strict. They are still children after all! This will warm your heart and make you remember: *oh, yeah, I’m in India!* J



Daniela and two of her kids at Pangong lake

# Lock up your worries

When someone asks me for advice about traveling with children, the first thing it occurs to me is that you need to stop worrying so much. Positive thinking brings positive experiences. Believe in yourself and your luck, ask the children to cooperate (even babies seem to understand this!). Don't overthink things, don't try to prepare for all that could go wrong. And this brings me to a very important aspect of long-distance travel with children: healthcare. For many parents, this is the top priority and seems to require a lot of thinking and preparation... well, I don't consider it that big of a deal. I usually carry nothing but a Nureflex bottle (thank God for this miraculous panacea ;-)) and some band aids. There are no other drugs to be found in my luggage. Negligent? No, practical. India is one of the largest producers of generic pharmaceutical remedies in the world, so there's no reason to worry, in case my children, or I, would need medication. Also, the country is home to many fantastic doctors - both trained in conventional medicine, or with an Ayurvedic or homeopathic background. I usually feel better supplied here than in Austria.

I don't want to give the impression that our trips with the kids are always smooth and relaxed. But the alternative - staying at home - is, for me (us), out of the question.

I prefer to spice up the soup called life! ☐



Moments like this in Kerala compensate for everything