

## Introduction

Long haul flights were routine for us as we spent seven years as expatriates. When my daughter was born in Hong Kong (7,500 miles away from our families in California), we obviously were going to have to fly her home for visits. I had anxiety about this for years before I was pregnant.

When the time came, I didn't sleep well for the week prior and thought about cancelling the trip multiple times. My newborn baby was fussier than most, had major acid reflux and I had to fly alone with her. To top it off, I booked our flights at the last minute, so we had to connect in Tokyo instead of flying directly to Los Angeles. After landing at LAX, we faced a 2-hour car ride to Santa Barbara where my parents lived. Door to door, the entire journey took about 24 hours. In the end, we were just fine.

Since then, I've flown with my daughter both long haul and domestically more times than I can count, usually without my husband, due to his work schedule. I now enjoy the adventure with her, but getting to this point was challenging. I bought tons of useless gear and spent countless hours scouring the Internet for information. I was very interested in how other parents handled flying with kids. The purpose of this ebook is to share how I plan my flights, what I bring in my carry-on, gear I like, my experiences onboard (keeping kids entertained, food, sleeping), how to cope with jet lag, and more. I hope you will find some helpful information here, regardless of how long your flight is.

## Planning Your Flight

**Scheduling your flight:** If it's an option, schedule your flight in a manner that allows your child to remain on the same daily schedule as at home. Shift your child's schedule to the new time zone after you arrive at your final destination. This also helps with jet lag, which we'll discuss in detail later.

For example, my first flight from Hong Kong to Tokyo (4 hours long) put us on the plane exactly when my daughter napped in the morning. Therefore, it was easier for me to get her to sleep on the airplane. I was able to watch a movie, eat lunch, and even enjoy a glass of wine during this blissful time.

**The worst flight I ever took:** I booked a midnight flight from LAX to Hong Kong when my daughter was 5 months old. Flights to Asia are often scheduled this way because they land first thing in the morning and allow business travelers to get in a full day of work. This flight scheduling also helps passengers cope with jet lag. They can sleep onboard the airplane, since it is nighttime in the US and they wake up when it's morning in Asia.

Anyway, my daughter was not used to this much activity so late at night. She slept in the car on the way to the airport, but remained awake after that. She fell asleep shortly after take-off, but once the captain came on the PA system to deliver his message, she was shocked awake and never fell back asleep. She became so overtired, unsettled, and confused that she screamed the entire bloody way to Hong Kong. That's 15 hours straight, more or less.

Some of my friends have had excellent luck with late night, long haul flights. However, if your child is dependent on his or her routine, I would think twice about booking one.

**Seat assignments:** Most families request bulkhead seats when traveling with young children. This makes sense because if you have an active child, there is no seat in front of them to bump into or lose toys under. The bassinets are also typically here. Check with your airline to verify the location of the bassinets, because they are not in every bulkhead row. Remember that you can't store bags during take-off or landing in bulkhead seats because there's no seat in front of you to slide them under.

If you aren't able to reserve the bulkhead, speak with your airline or check [Seatguru](#) to determine which seats on the plane will be best for your family. Seatguru allows you to search by airline and airplane model to find the exact seating configuration. They will even warn you if, for example, a particular row of seats doesn't have fully reclining chairs. I like to check Seatguru regardless, just so I can get a good idea of the plane's layout, especially regarding where the bathrooms are relative to our seats.

**Onboard outlets:** Of course, an airline may change the model of aircraft without notice, but it does help to know what style of outlet is available on your flight, if any. Some planes have the cigarette lighter-style adaptors while others have regular plugs. Some airlines will show you on their websites where these outlets are located. Make your seating assignments accordingly. However, I do bring the cigarette lighter charger, regular (two pronged) power cord and an external battery for my daughter's DVD player just to be safe. I've been on two flights where the outlets just plain didn't work.

**Manage expectations:** Once your child is able to understand, start talking about the flight well before departure. Read children's books about flying and travel. Tell them what to expect from the time they leave home to when they arrive at the final destination. Emphasize that there'll be a time at the beginning and the end of the flight where they'll have to stay in their seats with their seat belt on. Mention that they won't be able to use anything with batteries and tell them what activities they can do during this time.

## Plan for Extra Time at the Airport

Your ability to relax is critical. When my daughter was a baby, I arrived at the airport at least an hour earlier than necessary. This allowed me to get through security, change her diaper, and feed her before boarding the plane, all in a relatively relaxed manner. Your child will sense if you are stressed, so do everything you can to prevent this. Getting to the airport early helps.

**Feeding:** Getting your child to eat prior to boarding the airplane is less of a concern if you are breastfeeding. However, make sure that your baby is hungry enough to breastfeed during take-off and landing. This will help prevent their ears from bothering them as a result of the change in cabin pressure. A good cover-up is invaluable and will help make your fellow passengers more comfortable. I used one from [Bebe Au Lait](#).

When my daughter was starting solid foods, I fed her as much as possible prior to boarding the plane. The reason is two-fold. One, we could get stuck on the tarmac or at the gate. Two, the seatbelt sign could remain on longer than usual due to turbulence after take-off. As you can imagine, feeding jarred food on the plane to a baby is hard to do with the seatbelt sign on,

unless your child is sitting in a car seat next to you. It was especially difficult for me, given that my daughter had acid reflux and hated her car seat. And, babies can't sit upright in their seats very well, so I often found myself juggling the jar, spoon, and baby on my lap. There wasn't much I could do, in the event of a supreme mess, until the seatbelt sign was turned off. Not to mention that if you requested bulkhead seats, you won't have access to your bags, since you can't store them at your feet.

**Going through security:** For travel to or within the United States, you may read the [TSA's traveling with kids section](#) for more information. It says that they'll let you take reasonable quantities of juice or water that exceed 100 ml through security for babies and toddlers. I just flew to New York City and the TSA forced me to dump out my 4-year-old's Thermos water, even though I said it was for her. I am not certain that you can rely on bringing quantities over 100 ml of juice or water for kids who are not considered babies or toddlers. Remember that you will have to declare these items. If you pass them through the X-ray and wait for the TSA to find them, you'll be re-screened.

If you toss out liquid in bottles or sippy cups, water can usually be purchased on the other side of security. Check the airport map to be sure there are vendors on the other side. I have friends who were able to take through special purified water for mixing with formula, by just showing it to the security agents. It also depends on where you're traveling to and from. In Asia, I was able to show my daughter's sippy cup full of juice to the security agents and they let us through. It's hit or miss, though.

When I traveled with breast milk, all I did was show it to the agents. I have heard other moms say that they had to taste it to prove it wasn't toxic or some kind of explosive. The TSA says on their website that they will not ask you to taste anything and that even if you are a breast-feeding mother traveling without your child, you may still take breast milk as carry-on. Some airports have family lines. The staff and passengers here are typically more patient. I also make sure my daughter is wearing slip on shoes so that it's easy for us to take them on and off during security and on the plane. Remember that their feet can swell on longer flights, so make sure their shoes have a little give in them.

Prepare your child that their precious security blanket or stuffed animal must go through the X-ray machine. They may also have to walk through the metal detector by themselves. I've seen meltdowns and scared children hold up the line.

When you are juggling a stroller, gear, and kids, the last thing you want to do is get held up at security. Be mindful of what you've packed and mentally prepared for what you may have to explain.

**Lounges:** I find that airport lounges make travel with children much easier. There are clean bathrooms, amenities, comfortable chairs, snacks and more available while you wait for your flight. You can charge electronic devices and surf the Internet, too. If you have priority status and are flying overseas, you're likely to be able to take advantage of a lounge free of charge. This in itself is worthy of getting to the airport early. Lounges are a great way to decompress. If you're flying American Airlines, the Admirals Club is available for \$50 per adult with up to 3 children (under the age of 18) free with one paid adult. They have snacks, usually give you a few drink tickets, and have meals available for purchase. If you don't have access to an airline lounge, you may want to consider a [Priority Pass](#) VIP lounge. They have 600 across the world and membership tiers based on how often you travel. Depending on your circumstances, the benefits of using the lounge may outweigh the cost.

