

Brenda Elwell writes a popular monthly Single Parent Travel Newsletter available on e-mail through her Web site, www.SingleParentTravel.net. Her new book entitled, "The Single Parent Travel Handbook," is now available and may be ordered through her Web site. A veteran of over thirty years in the travel industry, she has traveled to over 60 countries and 45 states, half of them with her two kids in tow. Brenda may be reached via e-mail at Brenda@SingleParentTravel.net.

SINGLE PARENT SURVIVAL TIPS FOR HOLIDAY TRAVEL by Brenda Elwell, CTC

For some, this holiday period may be the first time you are traveling as a single parent with your child or children. As a single mom you may have to assume responsibilities that often were the domain of your husband. As a single dad, you may have to provide for your child by doing things that your wife always did. We hope these tips will ease your journey and make it more enjoyable and safe for everyone. Although basic in nature, the tips are a good review for the more experienced traveler as well.

Let's start with some tips for new single parent moms:

Are you driving to your destination? Then do the following:

1. Get your car thoroughly checked before your trip.
2. Pack the car with every navigational tool you will need - directions, city and state maps - and study them before the trip.
3. If your kids are not old enough to read and you need to follow complicated directions to your destination, write them out in a big black marker or in bold type on your computer and tape them to your dashboard so you can drive and read at the same time.
4. Make sure your car has every tool needed to signal a breakdown or fix a flat tire.
5. Consider investing in a cell phone

Are you flying to your destination and renting a car? Heed the following:

1. When you reserve your rental car, sign up for one of their membership programs that allow you speedy check-in so you can bypass the long counter lines.
2. Pre-reserve any kid's seats you need. Got a teen-ager? Pre- request a CD or tape player.
3. Before reserving your rental car, call your car insurance and credit card companies so you know what insurance coverage you have. You may not need to purchase any additional insurance for the car rental.
4. Once you get to your rental car, before you leave the parking space, familiarize yourself with the operation of the car - wipers, lights, etc. If you have any questions, seek out an attendant before you leave the garage.

5. Collect a local rental car map and pay attention to how to get back to the rental car lot. Directional signs are usually excellent when returning cars back to airports, but there are glaring exceptions, especially when an airport is under construction.
6. Keep the rental car agreement out of sight and in the glove compartment.

What else can a woman do to make the trip easier and safer for her family?

1. Type up an itinerary. Include all confirmation numbers, directions to hotel, etc. on the itinerary. Get the kids involved in the planning stage.
2. Carry your money in more than one place. Pin some big bills to your bra. Get rid of a bulky purse and use a fanny pack instead. You want to travel hands free.
3. Walk with confidence. Know where you are going before you leave the hotel or your family's or friend's home.
4. Be aware of your environment. Trust your instincts. If you feel an area to be unsafe, duck into a restaurant and have them call a cab for you. Better yet, inquire as to safe areas, before you leave for your walk.

Now for some travel suggestions for new single parent dads:

1. Type up an itinerary and involve the kids in planning any special activities you will be doing as a family.
2. Use a packing list. This is helpful whether you or your child is doing the packing. There are samples on my Web site:
<http://www.singleparenttravel.net/Writing/Pack/index.htm>
3. Pack healthy snacks with a little junk stuff thrown in for a treat. Some healthy examples are sandwiches, fresh fruit, cut-up bagels & cream cheese, cut-up veggies such as carrots and celery. Let the kids help you prepare the snacks. Throw in some chips or cookies, plus lots of water and you are all set for auto or flight travel.
4. Bring comfort items on the trip for your child or children - a favorite pillow, a teddy bear, and a few favorite books. Also bring some new items - books, games they can play in the car or on the plane.
5. If you are flying to your destination be prepared to entertain your child the entire trip, if necessary. If you are driving, be prepared to stop every couple of hours for "run-around" time.
6. The last tip comes from a single parent dad who wrote a story in my book. If you are the father of a little girl, when you take her to the ladies' room, make certain there is only one exit or you may be waiting for her in the wrong spot.

My book, "The Single Parent Travel Handbook," is loaded with travel tips and entertaining stories for both the beginner and experienced traveler. Treat yourself or someone you care about for Christmas and order a copy at any online or physical bookstore or from my Web site.

One last important tip for both moms and dads: If you are traveling out of the country with your child, you may need to have a notarized letter of consent from the absentee parent. Check out my documentation page for further details:

<http://www.singleparenttravel.net/Writing/Documentation/index.htm>

Happy Holidays!