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I've always believed that one of our main responsibilities as parents is to expose our children to the larger world around them. To enjoy living in this world and to succeed in this world, children need to experience and understand it.

Travel has become more affordable and as parents we should take every opportunity to take our children on a journey of discovery. I think it is a great idea for parents to plan 1-2 trips every year where they are taking their children to places they have never seen before.

It's important not to confine the holiday to the hotel and shopping malls. It's strange when during a holiday we end up doing what we usually do anyway at home. Travel is about embracing new experiences, trying new food, visiting places that are unique to that local community, immersing ourselves in the local culture. The following are some ideas on how to make a family holiday a journey of discovery and learning for your child as well.

**Get children to plan the itinerary**

By the age of 6 or 7 years most children are capable of planning a 3-4 day holiday itinerary which includes places to visit and a travel timetable. Empowering a child in this way not only boosts their confidence, it also creates enthusiasm about the trip.

Planning this will require the child to do some research through books or the internet on the place you will be visiting. This, of course, already begins the journey of discovery. There are many great resources on the net like the Lonely Planet guide which will give children information like the historical background, places of interest and even local customs.

Jack and Kim take regular holidays with their 10 year old daughter and 7 year old son. Jack explains, "wherever we go, we get the children to plan the whole trip. They decide what we should do every day and where we should go. They download all the information from the internet, including pictures. They get so excited when they actually visit the real site, and it looks just as it does on the picture!"

**Get children to compile travel journals**

An excellent way to encourage children to really immerse themselves in the travel experience is to get them to keep a travel journal, or log, for each trip. It can be something creative, incorporating drawings, photos, stuck on items, like tickets and postcards, as well as short and simple narratives of what they experienced every day.

Younger children who may not be able to write their own descriptions yet, can dictate what they want written down to their parents. The idea is to get them thinking about what they have observed. The act of observation is the cornerstone of healthy discovery and travel. It encourages the child to give in to their intellectual curiosity about the world around them.

Writing travel journals are also an invaluable way to develop language skills which include creative expression.

**Mix fun with education**

While we've been talking so far about holidays being an educational experience, we must not forget the main purpose of a holiday is still to have a good time together as a family. So, don't overdo the education part to the extent that the children feel like they're on a class field trip.

It's important, for example, that we don't force children into experiences against their will. Give them options, describe how each of the options can be interesting and fun, and where possible, give them some say over what they want to do. I think it is reasonable in a family holiday for children to have a say over 50% of each day. I think this is a good compromise.

So, along with the historical sites and the local cultural spots, throw in a few activities that may not have a lot of educational value, but have certainly lots of fun value, like an amusement theme park, or a toy shop. Helen, who recently brought her daughter, aged 6 to London, on a holiday shares her experience. "I brought her to all the museums and the art galleries, and made her draw stuff in her journal, but I also took her to the Harrod's toy department which was heaven for her, and let her ride the carousel in Leicester Square, and let her choose the West End show for one night (she chose Lion King). It was a good balance of fun and exposure."

Similarly, when Mr and Mrs Lim took their three children to Hong Kong they "went to all the theme parks of course like Disneyland and Ocean Park", explains Mrs Lim, "but the deal we made with them was if we

took them to all the theme parks, they should also be willing to enjoy some of the more historical parts of Hong Kong, and they should learn a bit about the culture and the history of the place.”

### **Lead by example**

Enthusiasm is infectious. When our children see how excited and enthusiastic we can be about going to a new place, seeing new things, trying new things, they too will start to embody the same passion and interest.

Unfortunately some of us are very conservative when it comes to travel. We go to the same places, to the road well tread, to the familiar and comfortable. There is nothing wrong with that, of course. Sometimes it is restful and relaxing to go back to the same holiday spot, but from time to time it is also good to show some sense of adventure.

Remember, children do what we do, not what we say.

We must take part in the process of discovery and education if we want our children to be part of this.

Don't just send them out to learn things for themselves. Go with them. Experience things with them.

Discover things with them.

Marie, a mother of two boys, best sums up it when she says “I realize that I must model for my children what it means to be a world traveler. I need to be in love with new places and new experiences, so that my children are inspired by my example.”

### **Conclusion**

The world is a wonderful, fascinating mystery. Let's be adventurers with our children.

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