



Travelling with Kids

Some Adventurous and Inspiring Case Studies!



For a lot of people, having kids seems to be a deal breaker when it comes to travelling. The widely held perception is that the two don't mix well.

We've tracked down some intrepid families who have proved an exception to this rule. We hope you find their stories as inspiring as we have.



Case study 1

Simon, Victoria, Connor and Kathleen (aged 10), UK based.

Victoria very kindly reminisced and shared her travel perspectives over a cup of tea. Simon is an old friend of my family and we were lucky to meet up with him during their trip in 2005 when we were Australia

Can you tell me about your trip?

We took 3 months out a few years ago now to travel to Thailand, Australia and New Zealand. Simon had travelled before but I wanted to visit my granddad in NZ. He's passed away now so I'm so glad we got to do that.



What's a stand out memory?

It was the twins 10th birthday. It's in early November so they should have been in school, but instead we were having one of the best days of our lives as a family. The kids often talk about that day, even now, and we have a photo of us sat on an elephant looking really happy.

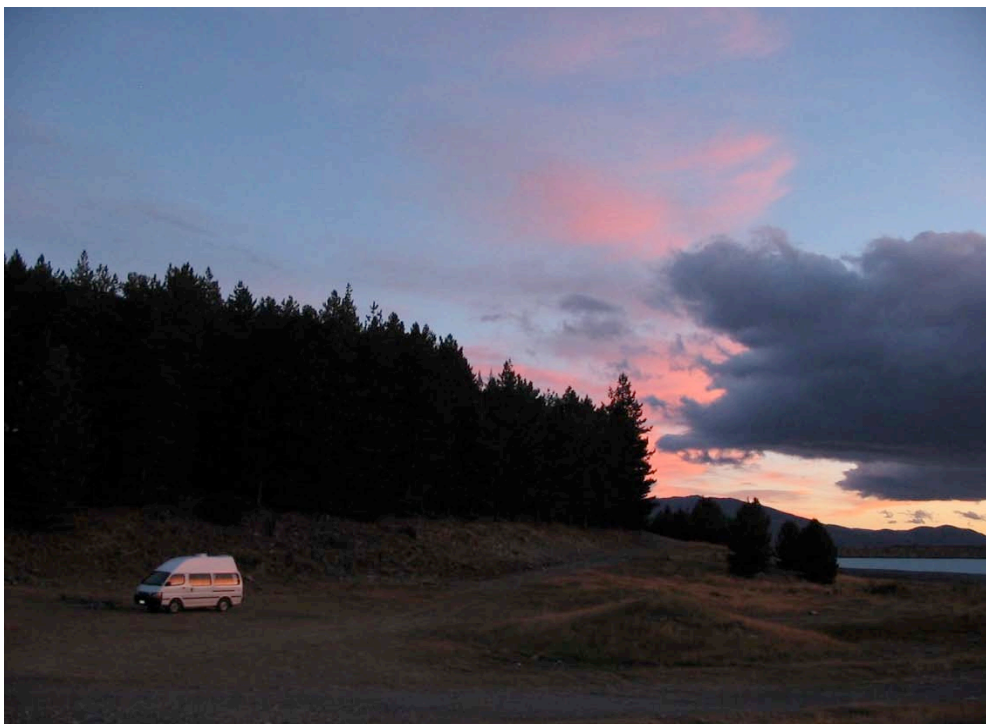


Were there any long term impacts of that trip on the children?

It was life changing, especially for the kids. They are 17 now, Connor wants to live in Australia for a while and that goal has given him so much more direction than he would have had otherwise. He is working towards something and planning it, all because of what he experienced when we were there.

Kathleen chose the course she is doing now which includes 6 weeks in France because she has no fear about travelling or being independent. A lot of her friends are much more hesitant and end up not doing it, but she knows what she is capable of. She hasn't got the fear factor because she has been out in the world and has experience of facing challenging things and getting through them.

It really made the kids close too. They know they can rely on each other. There is a lot we faced as a family, ups and downs that we had to deal with which made us all pull together. We had to be resourceful, we didn't have loads of money, so when the campervan would break down and one of us was stressed we would look out for each other and find solutions together.



The children learnt some really valuable life skills. They learnt not to worry about things - whatever the problem was, for instance where were we going to get a shower that day, or get food, or sleep, we would always work it out. Being at home kids don't have to think in the same way. On the trips the children grew strong and because they had a rucksack each they had to be responsible for their own stuff. They learnt what they could and couldn't have, because they had to carry it! They had to work out currency and to stick to a budget. Even cooking, in a campervan, was a good experience, they were learning but it was fun.



They really grew in terms of their social skills. They met a lot of new people and become more used to interacting with adults as well as kids. They were a bit unusual, kids travelling and staying in hostels, so they got a lot of attention.



What's great as well is how it made the kids look at things differently. They see something on the news now, about the earthquake in Christchurch for instance, and they have more compassion, are more aware, because they've been there and they have met people from there. They can make those connections.

Were there any issues around school?

We took school work for the children, although to be honest they were learning so much more on the road that we didn't do that much of it.

Off the record all the teachers, including the Head were really supportive of the plan. They could definitely see the benefits. It was just from the official point of view our position was shakier. We did explain about my granddad, that he wasn't well so there was a certain 'compassionate grounds' element to it as well in the end. But we also emphasised how educational it would be, it wasn't just going to be a holiday. We asked what we could do in return, and when we got back the twins did a presentation for their class that they had prepared which showed how much they had learnt.



Once you are in a school it's less likely that you will lose the place. You can phone the local education authority, speak to the Head Teacher and get them on side. Ask their teacher what they will miss. If you plan around school holidays they aren't doing much at the end of term anyway. If you can prove that their education won't be disrupted it helps. We asked what resources we should get, what work we needed to cover.

I loved that the twins could sit down and talk to my granddad and learn so much about their heritage and about the past, so much more than they would learn from school. Talking to my granddad about his experiences in WW2 put it all into context, especially with how it all fits together with our own family.



What advice would you have for other people?

That this sort of thing doesn't need to cost as much as you might think. We bought a campervan and sold it two months later without losing much and that covered all our accommodation and transport!

Before you go you worry about all sorts of things, paperwork, insurances etc, but once you lock your front door that's it, you don't worry about it anymore. When you come back, everything is the same. Except you have seen things you've never seen before and have all sorts of stories which you remember together as a family, just different things come up which you remember and laugh about.

Simon and Victoria run an entertainments business on the south coast <http://www.punchentertainments.co.uk>



Case study 2

Caz, Craig, Kalyra (aged 4) and baby Savannah



Caz and Craig have been travelling since 1997. Besides visiting over 35 countries, they've lived in London, Dublin, Bangkok, North Carolina, and their home country Australia. They've been married for nine years and had some amazing experiences, including visiting the Masai Warriors in Kenya, Hiking the Yangtze River in China, and road trips around the USA and Europe.



Caz trained as a teacher and Craig has worked in construction, although running their travel site and raising two children as they travel keeps them pretty busy for now!



Here is what Caz has to say:

‘Craig and I have chosen a rather unorthodox path in our life. We married and took off overseas to travel, and then had Kalyra and moved overseas once again. The comments we receive about our life and parenting choices are endless:

“She should be at home, so she can make friends..... She’ll be going to school soon.... You have to think of her happiness...” blah, blah, blah-blah-blah.

My underlying thought is always:

“How do you know if you have never pushed the barriers and tried things yourself?”

Of course, doubts are put into my head and I start to think “Am I a bad mother? Do I not look after my child’s best interest?”

I look at my three-year old daughter, her happiness, and how she has benefited so far from her life of travel, and this is what I see:

Global awareness and unlimited thinking

- She has no barriers or limiting thoughts as to what she can do. We watch a TV show about a travelling chef cooking amongst the rice terraces of Sapa, Vietnam. “Can I go there mummy and do that? It’s beautiful there.”

Social Interaction

- She has friends that look and sound different to her, and even though she is not with them now she talks about them all the time. These are friends of all ages.
- When we travel she talks to anyone, she finds children to play with in the park, she dances in the street. I don’t see her doing this when we are not travelling. She becomes more insular, reticent, and afraid.

Intelligence and Creativity

- She is highly imaginative, creates her own plays, reads her stories, can colour in neatly between the lines, knows her letters and numbers and can read her name. Travelling certainly hasn’t affected her ability to learn.
- She has a curiosity, awe and wonder about the world that is far beyond her years. She often stops to gaze and wonder, “Wow! It’s soooo beautiful.”

Most importantly when she travels she is happy, she glows with happiness. I’m not saying she wouldn’t be the same way if she didn’t travel, but many seem to think this is not possible.



In fact, I am more concerned for her happiness now that we are back in the “real world.”

Facing society’s concerns

Am I worried about schooling for her?

Absolutely not. I am a school teacher. I see what happens in classrooms every day. A teacher’s time is taken up with those who don’t want to learn and bureaucratic demands.

Parents will always be the first and foremost educators for their children and besides, schools are everywhere. Why does she have to be limited to one school, in one area, for her whole life?

What about friendships?

Kalyra can easily make friends. She may not make those long-term friendships, but is that really a bad thing? You have to question. What are the good things about it?

She learns that people come and go in your life, and that you can’t hold onto things. She learns how to get along with people who talk, look, believe and think differently to her. She learns that no matter where she is in the world, she can talk to someone and laugh with them and share special memories, even if they are only temporary.

What about her extended family?

This is always a hard one, but I will say exactly what I believe in regards to me and what my parents have always said to me. “This is your life, you have to do what makes you happy. You are not responsible for anyone’s happiness.”

With technology these days keeping in touch has never been easier and more instant.



What about developing her passions and interests?

This is my only major concern. Right now she loves ballet, and has just started classes. The challenge is to work out how to maintain this while we travel.

Considering we usually take the expat/digital nomad travel approach, she can always take classes wherever our new home may be. If not, maybe online classes??

What's the one thing you would say to the parents who wish they could travel but think having kids is a deal breaker?

This is so not true. There is no reason why you can't travel when you have children. Don't think of children as limiting you in this way. It is important to create beautiful memories together as a family, and it will help form a strong bond. Travel benefits children in so many ways, focus instead on those things.

Sure, it makes things a little more challenging and you will travel in a different way now, but it is definitely possible. Our four year old daughter has such an amazing global awareness, and she LOVES travel and is always asking when our next adventure is. It is the best gift I have ever been able to give my children.

What's the biggest obstacle to overcome and how do you do it?

I really had to sit and think about this question, because I rarely see things as obstacles, only as solutions. I guess this is my way of overcoming obstacles! :) I think you definitely have way more stuff to carry. You have to be very careful with packing and only take the essentials. A couple of toys, and just enough clothes. Never leave home without a baby carrier if your child is less than two.

It is also personally challenging to know that some aspects I loved about travel have gone for the moment. Like all day hikes up mountains and all night parties. You just have to not think about it and focus on the new joy of spending every minute with your family having amazing travel experiences.

What great tip or piece of advice could you share that they might not have thought about or might not hear elsewhere?

I think you need to spend months before you go away talking about it with your children. Be really excited and talk about all the amazing things you'll do. This will build up enthusiasm with your children. When you are travelling always talk about the experience you are sharing, and get your children to share their excitements. And then even months after continue to talk about the amazing times you had together. Kalyra always loves to talk about the things we have done as a family. It's all about the memories after all!



More thoughts

Living in a foreign country takes this fear away from your children. They learn that just because he sounds different to me, he still laughs like me so I have nothing to fear.

If we all learn from an early age that it is okay to be friends with someone who is different to you, then there may be less hatred in our world.

Living in a foreign country, particularly if you move from one country to another frequently, teaches your children the very important concept that life is transient.

Children are natural expats. I don't believe society gives children enough credit. They are highly **adaptable and flexible**; you've just got to see how their legs can stretch.

It's really us adults who aren't and so we impose this rigidity on our children and teach them that life must be lived by a set of rules.

There is no greater gift you can give to your child then the ability from a very young age to understand that there is so much diversity in the world, and although we may look, sound, act, and believe differently we are all the same and there is much to our differences to embrace and celebrate.





Living in a foreign country with your children is not as difficult as it sounds. Sure, it comes with some cons, but doesn't life in the country of our birth? It just means making a few changes and learning how to adapt to some new rules. The benefits far outweigh the negatives.

Children cannot learn this as well from books or movies. They learn this **global perspective best through experience**.

So many people have many issues in their life because they cannot deal with change. They have had rigid rules set up for them for their entire lives and if these rules don't work or become skewed for a while (which they will) they fall apart under the pressure. Living in another country teaches children life changes, but that is okay because you are really capable in adapting to the change.

It is not just different languages or accents that can add colour but it could be a new style of dress, different toys and games, exotic foods that are now part of their diet, and new ways of thinking.

Living abroad teaches children that life is flavourful and sometimes just sticking to our own herbs and spices can lead to a pretty bland and mundane way of being.

Cons of living in a foreign country with children

Distance from family is the only negative that I feel is hard to find a solution to or think positively about. Of course, every parent wants their children to grow up surrounded by their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

And while you may be living across oceans, the world is much smaller now. It's the world of instant communication, helping you to maintain quality relationships. There is the extra excuse now for either them to come and visit you, you to go home for a visit, or y'all can meet somewhere else around the world for a great family vacation.

Living in a foreign country with children will mean their connection with their home culture will be diminished somewhat. You can easily overcome this by making sure you spend time talking and sharing with them about their home culture. You can do this by playing games, watching shows, cooking, reading, writing, and so on.

I believe that although children are very good at adapting there is going to be a **phase of adaptation** and with that will come some unusual and trying behaviour. Allow your child the space they need to work out what is going on. Be supportive and encouraging. Talk to them about the changes and always make it seem like so much fun.

We struggled with our daughter adapting upon return to Australia. She was just that little bit older and we found she became quite withdrawn and more prone to temper tantrums. But, then again, she was three so it could have just been an age thing.

They just need time, like you do.

<http://www.ytravelblog.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/yTravelBlog>

<https://www.facebook.com/mojitomother.com>



Case study 3

Theodora and son Zac, 12

Travels with a Nine Year Old began as a record of Theodora and Zac's one-year journey around the world. A couple of years later, Zac isn't 9 anymore and the adventurous travelling lifestyle is set to continue...

Theodora writes a lot about what its like to take a child out of school and still make sure they learn and grow. Experience seems to have taught them both that teaching doesn't have to happen in a classroom, and learning doesn't have to be hard!



To understand others

Travel brings you into contact with people whose lives are vastly different from your own. If an urban, Western child can interact with nomadic hunter-gatherers, Buddhist monks, Asian politicians and the rural poor, sometimes without even a common language, they can understand and interact with anyone.

To have confidence in themselves

Whether it's achieving a climb that adults fail at, diving 40 feet below the sea, making their way alone across a big, new city, or making new friends when you arrive in town, the confidence that comes with these gains lasts a lifetime.

To see the world globally

Every country teaches the world and its history from its own perspective. Often (though not always), we present our own countries as the best. Learning the stories of other nations, in other nations, gives children a rounded perspective on the world — it's present, its past and its future.



To keep a sense of proportion

Witnessing the hard lives that 99% of the world lead — and how many maintain happiness throughout — provides a sense of perspective on your own life. Small challenges feel just that — small.

To be resilient

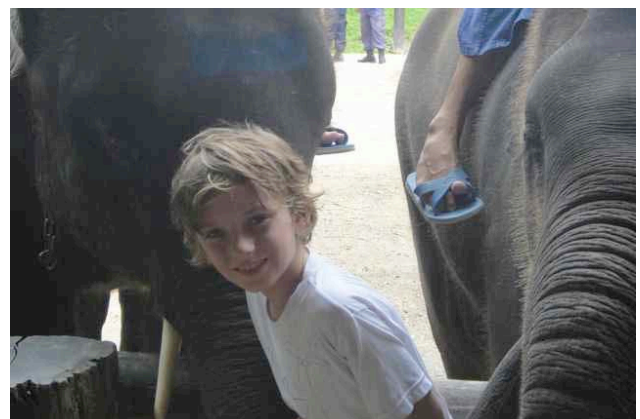
Longterm travel is an amazing lifestyle, but it isn't always easy. Whether it's emotional challenges, like meeting suffering children, physical challenges, like extreme cold or long, long hikes, or frustrations like being stuck on a broken down bus for 28 hours in searing heat, travel teaches you patience and strength.

To try new things

From eating insects, flowers or wild spices through to surfing or crafting silver, travel brings children new experiences to try — often, every single day. This reduces any fear of the new and builds a bank of life experiences some adults will never acquire.

To be wise

To understand the needs and sensitivities of different people, the history and beliefs of different cultures, and the elaborate workings of a big and complex world is, I think, wisdom. And travel brings kids that in spades.





About 'un-schooling'

One thing I didn't really know, though, was how the learning would work. So where we've ended up is with an educational philosophy called 'unschooling'.

Essentially, the child chooses how to learn and what to learn. You look for the learning in what's around you, find opportunities, then let it happen.

When you're travelling the world, the humanities pretty much teach themselves. You can't help but learn when you're meeting survivors of the Pol Pot Regime, visiting the Museum of War Remnants in Saigon, snorkelling World War II gunboats in the Philippines, exploring Angkor Wat or the Purple Palace, meeting young monks in a Cambodian monastery or participating in a Filipino Easter festival.

There are few more beautiful places to appreciate ecosystems in action than coral reef, where you regularly see predators hunting and killing, clownfish protecting their anemone nests, and parrotfish grazing on coral. Geology comes very easily when climbing an active volcano, or kayaking a mature karst landscape. And coconuts sprouting on the beach are germination writ, well, *huge*...

Even maths works well. Sir started to speculate about whether computers were moving humans "up or down the evolutionary tree", which brought up Moore's Law, arithmetic versus exponential growth and binary numbers. (We even did a graph!)

Roman numerals in chapter headings bring you onto teaching Roman numbers. Money conversions bring you onto market movements, interest rates, exchange rates. Diving theory brings you onto bars, pressures, partial pressures, switching between decimals and percentages. And so on...

Physically, the transformation since we left is astonishing. Since Z was born he's been long and thin, with the sort of appetite that made my grandmother talk about hollow legs. But he's much, much stronger and more active than he was. In London a chronic, nay, pathological, dawdler, he now steams ahead of me on hills.

He swims confidently. His balance is good and he climbs well. He's learning scuba and is teaching himself to meditate. We've played a bit of mini golf.

When it comes to languages, he's picking up bits and pieces of the local languages as we travel, and has been teaching himself a little French using Google Translate (when he starts spouting, I start talking back). We'll be learning Spanish together in Latin America next year.

He draws constantly. And, thanks to all those long train journeys, he's discovering Dickens (who works amazingly well in transit).

Certainly, compared to ploughing through worksheets or the Year 4 primary syllabus, let alone trying to mimic the type of education homeschoolers provide with a full library, a packed kitchen, ample art supplies and no 36-hour train journeys on the horizon, unschooling works very well. And it takes phenomenally little time.



Do you have any advice for single-parent families that are thinking of travelling for an extended period?

Go for it! Your children are only children once. If you can manage a job and a family, you can manage long term travel with your family.

- Don't try to cram too much in.
- You can always get childcare if you need it.
- Be flexible on time frames, if you can.
- Use Skype. Get friends and family using it too – critically, the other parent.
- Respect your children's privacy.
- Homeschooling works better done little and often.
- Prepare the children for downs as well as ups.
- Take a decent medical kit.
- Be honest about your feelings.
- Take only what you can carry yourself.
- Meet up with friends and family if you can. My parents were with us for two weeks in the Philippines, and it was great.

Theodora and Z were skiing when we got in touch but took some time off from the slopes to answer a few extra questions of ours:

How do you fit in earning a living as you travel?

I earn some money blogging and other income by freelance writing. You can work while travelling as you'd work from home, but you have to plan around the availability of internet. I've chosen to live a low-cost, low-work lifestyle, which means exploring cheaper destinations generally, so I need to work much less than I would to be, say, settled in the UK. So it entails some juggling, but it's workable.

How easy is it to form 'adult' bonds with a youngster in tow (must limit those nights out!!)

I've always been crap at forming adult bonds, so travel isn't as much of a disaster in that area as you'd think. I can always work in a night out when I need to -- Z's now of an age (11), where he's happy looking after himself for a night, and when he was younger folk where we were staying would be happy to keep an eye on him. I think he's quite keen for me to get a bloke so it's less challenging than you might imagine, though it's certainly harder to form travelling relationships than it is to form static ones.



Have you considered what you will do when Z is more at 'exams' age i.e. is there an alternative to formal schooling for teenagers?

I think we both have the cutoff for a permanent travel lifestyle at 13, both because of exams and because of teen needs for independence and to build relationships, etc. Z wants to go to a good university, and has already moved beyond my capacities in maths and science, so he unschools to his interests (physics) once a week via Skype with a fantastic teacher, which is good because he learns at his own pace and to his own level: he also studies Mandarin weekly via Skype. We're thinking Bali, where there are excellent international schools, and where we can continue to travel. He's a long way ahead on every metric except handwriting so I think our approach now is the best solution for his education at this stage of his life.

What does Z think is the best thing about his life 'on the road'? (if he doesn't mind answering?)

He likes the ability to move on constantly and to see new things all the time.

Keep up with Theodora and Z at:

<http://travelswithanineyearold.com/>

and have a read of Z's blog at:

<http://kidventurer.com>



Case study 4

Lea and Jonathan Woodward and Mali, aged 3



Lea & Jonathan Woodward were the first travelling small business owners to come up with a name for the concept of being "Location Independent." They have been running a fantastic resource for those aspiring to follow in their footsteps and those of us who already do, since 2007.

Lea & Jonathan have a home base in the UK but have travelled extensively for several years, both before their daughter came along and since her arrival as a family. They have a pretty comprehensive product and services range, proving that you don't have to jeopardise your income or creative path in order to live a more flexible lifestyle.

Lea has written loads of inspiring and informative content on travelling with families which you can find at www.locationindependent.com She covers practical tips from home-schooling to potty training and if you have some time to put aside it's WELL worth a browse.

But we caught up with her to get her take on a few of our own questions:

You've done a lot of travelling both before having Mali and since. What's the most unexpected or surprising result of travelling with a little one?

The fact that it enables us to see everything with new, fresh eyes again. We've been - and still are - so excited to show her all the things we've seen and can't wait to expand her little horizons to take in more of the world.

Of course she rarely reacts as we think she might - not delighted by the splendour of the scenery and instead enthralled by the nearest souvenir shop!! - but seeing the world through the eyes of a child again is a privilege and not something we'd ever really considered.



You've written a lot of articles which relate to travelling with a baby and toddler and we'll look forward to reading further tips as you go through different stages and ages with her. Are there resources you refer to for guidance on travelling with a child of an age you haven't reached with her just yet?

Google!! Also, having run the Location Independent site for so long, I've made lots of connections across the travel world and know of plenty of families doing the location independent thing with kids. Jenn Miller of The Edventure Project is one person I'd ask if I needed any tips on travel with kids of all ages. She'd probably be able to plug me into a world of other families doing it too.

What are the things you find most difficult (or impossible!) to do when you are travelling or settling overseas with a child?

Work! Or more specifically grow the business. We can run it quite comfortably in maintenance mode but we usually try and avoid travelling if we have specific business growth plans we want to implement as we just can't divide our time and energy to do it all when travelling.

Also, making new friends who share our mindset and values when we're moving around a lot can be tricky. It's been simpler in some ways with a child because we tend to seek out activities for Mali to do and we're then forced to meet new people (left to our own devices, we've never been the most socially active or outgoing couple!) but that doesn't mean they're "our" kind of people who get the lives we live and the way we do things.

Is there anything you wished you had known before you started a family in relation to location independence?

How easy travel is with a baby versus a toddler! More specifically the actual transport and getting to places. So much easier with a baby who can't move than with a toddler who wants to move all the time :)

Also, as your family and your own emotional needs change your definition and way of being and living location independent can also change. I've known this all along but many people have a very fixed definition of what location independence is i.e. nomadism and tend to forget that it's your lifestyle to create whichever way you want it. Make up your own definition of what being location independent means to you and your family and make it work for you.

www.inspiringventures.com

www.startuptrainingschool.com

www.leawoodward.com



Other great articles/sites

<http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/the-educational-value-of-long-term-travel-with-kids/>

<http://ourtravellifestyle.com/tips-and-planning/travel-tips/long-term-travel-young-kids-under-6-best-age/>

<http://kidsglobal.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.jetwithkids.com/>

<http://www.familytravelogue.com/>

<http://www.deliciousbaby.com/>

