

Road-tripping with children - how to survive the journey

By  Ané Theron

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Road trips. Love them or hate them, one thing is for sure - if the children are happy, the adults are happy. Here are some tips on how to keep the little ones chipper, without the 24-hour help of a tablet.



1. Select music before the trip, and get the kids to help you. Compile a playlist or select CDs that appeal to everyone in the car (even Dad), and take turns to listen to albums or songs. If everyone can sing along, even better.
2. Keep the children fed and hydrated. Hungry children are cranky children, and kids hyped up on sugar are even worse. A nutritious 'padkos' pack should contain foods with a low Glycaemic Index – in other words, their blood sugar stays even, and they don't get crazy. Nuts, biltong, droewors, fresh fruit, or the obligatory egg-mayo sandwiches made with seeded bread. To drink, still water never hurt anyone, but if they can't bear it, a 50/50 juice/water mixture won't turn them into Gremlins.
3. Cover the seats with a towel or a sheet before you set off. Not only will it protect your car from spills and messes en route (if your car's seats are material), it will also protect bottoms from burning after coming back from lunch at the Quickstop. Shake the towel out post-journey, and voila - it's still relatively clean.

4. Cover the windows with sun shades/screens to prevent sunburn. Inexpensive and easy to use, it's the one thing I have remembered not to forget on every journey. Have hats and sunscreen on hand as well, it's very easy to burn through car windows when the air-conditioning is blowing, because you don't always feel the heat where the sun touches your skin.
5. Play "Guess what I am?" A child selects an object or animal, and everybody else tries to guess what it is by asking questions that can only be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'. For example: Do you live on land? Do you live in the sea? Do you eat small fish? And so forth.
6. Do not allow anything inside the car such as talking dolls, or anything noisy that you wouldn't be able to tolerate for longer than 15 minutes at home. It can also distract (and irritate) the driver beyond belief – and no-one likes a grumpy driver.
7. Pack a bag of tricks. Travel Scrabble for the older children, magnetic draughts, playing cards, trump cards, snap cards, super animal cards... hours of entertainment. A whiteboard and a few markers can be used to draw pictures, or to play Hangman with.
8. Make up a story, any story, and the occupants have to guess whether it is true or false. It turns out that the truth is sometimes much stranger than fiction. Having had quite a few adventures in my life, the kids were quite surprised when most of my stories were true.
9. Get the kids to 'help' you navigate. My 8-year old daughter loves to read me the directions from Google Maps (even if I know the way) and informs me of speed traps and the speed limit, as well as where we find ourselves, and of towns nearby. It makes them feel useful.
10. Lastly, and most importantly – kids can sometimes get carsick, so have that little bag nearby at all times, as you will never be able to get rid of the smell if someone has a little 'oopsie'. You'll have to drive your car until you die, because you will never sell it. To ease car-sickness naturally, try ginger lollies and ginger ale, that helps combat nausea.

Good luck!

ABOUT ANÉ THERON

Ané Theron started her career in motoring journalism at Rapport, and moved over to City Press after a few years, before settling into a full time career at AutoTrader SA. She's at her happiest driving along twisty coastal roads, or crawling across rugged terrain in a beefy 4x4, or driving through the desolate Karoo. And taking photos along the way, of course.

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