

Have Kids, Will Travel!

The joys and pitfalls of globe-trotting with two tots

By Chris and Dara Robinson



A childless couple working in the travel industry, the first ten years of our marriage were marked by frequent drop-of-the-hat trips around the world. When our first son was born, it simply never occurred to us to curb our wanderlust because of a light and portable baby boy. Within eight weeks of Pip's arrival, we were heading off on a three-month round-the-world tour and the pattern was set. Have kids, will travel.

If we had had doubts as new

parents setting off on that world tour, today we wouldn't hesitate for a minute. Travelling with our sons has added a new dimension to our experience of other peoples and countries. Our children have opened strangers' hearts and homes to us in a way we never encountered travelling on our own.

In Canton, in southern China, we discovered that a blond western baby was a sufficient novelty to draw a crowd. The staring, silent,

hesitant group was quite intimidating until a young girl tickled Pip under the chin and lifted him from my arms to cuddle him. Mothers and grandmothers smiled their approval and lined up noisily to take their turn. Even a brigade of Red Guards who marched by turned their heads to see what all the fuss was about. And, if they didn't smile and coo, I swear one or two of the serious faces softened.

In Jordan, determined to visit the ancient ruins of Petra, we found that the only way to reach the unique and ancient city was on horseback. We arrived at the duly appointed spot to negotiate our mounts. The scene was chaotic at best.

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Our arrival, with five-year-old Pip and two-month-old Tim, evoked a spectacularly noisy eruption of shouting and wild gesticulations among the men and boys who hired out the horses. Confusing, and slightly scary. A passing tour guide, shepherding a group of elderly Americans, explained that the men were arguing over which was the quietest horse to carry a mother and baby.

A continent away, in Africa, we stopped at a tourist market at the side of the road in Zambia. Hungry for business, the traders called, cajoled and bullied us to buy. Peals of laughter softened the aggression. We found our two sons at a stall stacked high with musical instruments, singing along to an admiring audience and accompanying themselves on the drums – to the delight of the stall holder, who apparently had quite forgotten about trying to sell us anything. The song my sons had chosen for their recital? An esoteric little number called “Will the Real Boogie-Woogie Please Stand Up?”

If our travels with children have brought us closer to the local people, the wheels of those travels have also been greased by a thousand acts of kindness from strangers around the globe. How grateful we have been to all the good people who warmed our baby’s bottle or who, to let us discover their country, babysat for us.

One perfect South Pacific evening in Tahiti, we were about to enjoy a romantic meal at a beachfront restaurant, a glorious sunset an idyllic backdrop. No sooner had our meal arrived than Timmy, with the unerring instinct of the newborn, awoke and demanded attention. The waiter was no more than 18 years old, but without hesitation and with the obvious confidence of an older brother, he swept Tim up and waited table for the rest of the evening with the baby tucked under one arm.



Another time, in Africa, we were lucky enough to have the chance to go on a safari in an open jeep. The promise was to see lions at a kill at a mere arm’s length away. The problem was that this was no trip on which to take Pip, who was just a toddler. However, our diminutive

and handed Pip over. The trip was amazing, the highlight to land on beautiful Doubtful Sound fjord – a place so utterly remote that it would have taken two to three days to hike their. And Pip was perfectly happy, his diaper on backwards, when we returned.

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housekeeper, Elsie, took a sheet, deftly wrapped Pip up, and with one movement swept the solid little fellow over her shoulder. And we were off to the lions.

New Zealand’s South Island still enjoys vast tracks of unexplored forest, and some of the world’s most breath-taking coastal scenery. You can only truly appreciate the majesty of the spectacular fjords from the air. But our young pilot wasn’t comfortable about a baby on board for such a long trip in a twin-engine seaplane. Joking that his wife needed practice for their own family-to-be, he cheerfully interrupted her plans for the day

Travelling with young children can certainly be hard work. But children are hard work regardless. Why should travelling be different? After years of parental perseverance, Pip and Tim now sail through check-in procedures and, loaded with in-plane entertainment, are delightful travelling companions. They’ve endured the world’s longest non-stop scheduled flight (15 hours), appreciate the peoples and places they’ve visited and understand how fortunate they are to enjoy the standard of life in Canada. Our children have added a new dimension not only to our travels, but also our lives.

