



Fun, Families & Camping

Planning and Packing for the whole brood

by Jeremy and Stephanie Puglisi

Enjoying a family RV trip begins long before you pull into the campground. Although some people love to travel on a whim, free of checklists and agendas, we believe that planning and preparation are the keys to happiness when RVing with kids. The real trick is finding a good balance. You definitely don't want to overschedule every day of the vacation, but without any itinerary at all, you may miss out on some really great experiences.

The same is true with packing. It can be tempting to bring a ton of stuff just in case, but then you might be organizing, sorting and cleaning up instead of relaxing on your trip. On the flip side, you certainly don't want to be constantly running to the store to pick up items you forgot to pack.

Here are two lists with our family's tried-and-true tips for finding that balance—planning and packing for our RV trips without getting stressed out, overwhelmed and overloaded.

STEP #1 preparing

1 Pick 'A-list' activities in advance

You probably won't be able to squeeze in every single activity and attraction that a destination has to offer. Eliminate family disagreements and stress by deciding on an A-list far in advance of the trip. We make sure our A-list includes picks from everyone in the family—including the kids. Then we make a loose schedule to ensure that we can actually fit everything in. After that, we also create a B-list and a rainy day list. These are the things we will do only if we have the time.

2 Learn about the RV destination

As educators, we know the value of preteaching, and we use that to our advantage when getting ready for a family RV vacation. Whether you're visiting a national park, a city or a historic monument, you can share books and show movies to get your kids interested in the destination. We watched "The Miracle on Ice" before visiting Lake Placid; we cooked shrimp and grits before heading to Charleston; and we read about the Founding Fathers before traveling to Washington, D.C. The entire family will get more out of a vacation experience with a little bit of background knowledge.

3 Build excitement and set expectations

Our boys are so excited when we arrive at a destination because we spend weeks in advance convincing them

that it will be absolutely awesome. We show them internet videos of the campground, and explore the websites of any activities and attractions we plan on visiting. We also make sure they have reasonable expectations for the vacation. Discussing in advance souvenir budgets, drive time and technology use will go a long way to preventing classic vacation meltdowns.

4 Make a flexible meal plan

If you try to plan out every RV meal in advance, you'll probably end up getting stressed out and wasting a lot of food. Sketch out a rotating menu of three breakfasts and three lunches. We like options such as oatmeal, cereal, tuna fish and peanut butter because they are all shelf-stable and simple. We also pack two or three freezer meals, like ziti or white chili, for the days when we are arriving at the campground or packing up to go home. Throw in some options for grilling and you should be set. Instead of stocking up on produce in advance, keep an eye out for farmers markets and roadside stands.

5 Schedule lots of downtime

One of the biggest benefits of RV travel is that a campground is infinitely more relaxing and enjoyable than a hotel. We make time every day to decompress and appreciate the amenities where we are staying. Whether it's bike riding, swimming, mini golf or whiffle ball, enjoying campground downtime with the family is often our kids' favorite part of any vacation.



STEP #2 packing

1 Bring familiar and special items

Packing the kids' favorite blanket and bedtime stories will help them feel comfortable and safe, even when traveling far from home. On the flip side, including special snacks, games and books that are new and different will get them excited about your RV adventures. A mixture of both the familiar and new works best when traveling with children.

2 Be prepared

Create a mini medicine cabinet to store in the RV while traveling. Beyond stocking the usual first aid kit, include any medicine you might keep at home for allergies or bug bites. This way, small bumps and bruises won't put an end to the campground fun. Also, be prepared for all kinds of weather. We pack our rain gear no matter what the forecast says. And we always travel with long pants and sweatshirts, even in the middle of summer, for those cooler evenings around the fire.

3 Stay organized

The small spaces in an RV can get chaotic very quickly. We use color-coded packing cubes for everyone in the family. Each child gets a set of three cubes and keeps them at the bottom of their own bunk. They also each get a small sack for holding any special trinkets or

souvenirs collected on the trip. Color-coded water bottles are also a big help, so we know exactly whose drink is whose, even when they leave them lying around the campsite!

4 Prepare a craft kit, a sports kit, and a rainy day kit

This can be done once and it will last you through the entire RV season—and maybe into next year also. We fill up one storage cube with fun, mess-free art supplies for laid-back afternoons at the campground. Stickers, activity books, and macaroni art are a big hit with our kids. Our sports bin includes whiffle ball supplies, jump ropes, sidewalk chalk and kickballs. The rainy day kit contains puzzles and games that only appear in inclement weather, keeping them new and exciting!

5 Give them guidelines, but allow your kids to get involved

Giving kids choices and options might be the most effective way to get them excited about a family vacation. Ask them what activity they want to do most, and then put it in on the schedule. Our boys love picking their five movies and five books for a week's vacation. They also love picking out one special treat for the RV pantry.

