

PARENTING ON THE FLY

Erica Levine and husband Chris are behind Insta-hit travel blog THE WORLDWIDE WEBERS. Here they share their experiences and very best family travel advice



LEFT: Nala took her first steps in New Delhi, India RIGHT: Meeting the Myanmar Buddhist monks



When we realised I was pregnant we decided to fulfil a long-held dream; to parent around the world. We set out on this journey in 2013 and in those five years, we have lived in five countries on four continents and visited 40 countries.

We wanted our memories of bringing up our kids to be different from the norm. Sitting in our New York City apartment nearly a decade ago, Chris and I dreamed of breaking free from the concrete jungle and exploring some real ones. Having spent seven years working in global translations and him in commodities, we realised that if we pitched it correctly, our international industries could afford us opportunities for positions abroad. (And if we pitched it right to our parents, they may not disown us.)

Our first stop was Singapore, where we were able to travel around southeast Asia every weekend. Just six months later, an opportunity in South Africa popped up, which let both

of us continue in our industries and explore the wonderful world of safari attire, so we went for it.

Travelling as a couple was one dream, but having our first baby abroad was a whole other ballgame. Unsure of how to prepare, I did what anybody would do, and binge-watched *The Lion King* mixed with *Knocked Up* to get ready. And before I knew it, our daughter, Nala, joined our travelling circus late one night in a birthing centre in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2015.

Due to safety concerns, we decided South Africa wasn't the place we wanted to raise our family, so after two years, we headed for Geneva, Switzerland, where my husband's company had an office.

Being centrally located in Europe motivated us to spend our weekends

everywhere from the churches of Russia to the beaches of Malta. I hiked to Buddhist monastery Tiger's Nest in Bhutan with a 14-month-old strapped to my back and an unannounced baby in my belly. We even introduced our toddler to Olaf in the Arctic Circle and found out that nap time while on the back of a dog sled is, in fact, better than a white noise machine.

Then we moved on to London, thanks to a new job for Chris, where we welcomed our Sumo-sized son, Metta. This marked a new phase for our family as well as our family travel, as we realised that travelling with two means man-on-man defence. This brings us to our return to Geneva, yet another job-related move. It's where I currently blog and boob the baby full time while travel planning, and keeping the toddler and dogs alive.

So the best and worst bits? On the highlight reel are moments like watching my daughter take her first steps in a rug shop in New Delhi, India, at 14 months old – not only because crawling on the floor in India made my germophobic husband cringe. And seeing my son taste his first chocolate on a cacao farm in Colombia is a memory I won't need my iCloud storage to remember in vivid colour.

But family travel with two kids under three isn't exactly vacay and Rosé. Toddler tantrums and baby blowouts have no time zones or postcodes. It's safe to say we've seen it all and are quite certain some countries would request that we don't return. From



ABOVE: Exploring the waterways of Venice as a family of four
BELOW: Erica enjoyed the views while hiking with a toddler strapped to her back in Indonesia



"We've seen it all and are certain some countries would request we don't return"

LEFT: Visiting the impressive Myanmar temples
RIGHT: The Buddhist Tiger's Nest in Bhutan
BELOW: Babies have no time zones or postcodes



order of supplies ahead of time and ask restaurants to make a kid-friendly dish that's not on the menu.

TRAVEL LIKE A TODDLER: Stop fighting the nap schedule and give into it! We love getting up and out in the morning to do a half-day tour of a city, ending in a great lunch spot. Then it's often siesta time for the whole family, exhausted parents included.

DOCUMENTS: Travelling pregnant or with kids can bring a whole slew of new issues and quite a few international hospitals to add to the itinerary. No matter how far into the pregnancy, we always travelled with a Fit to Fly letter. We also keep photos of the kids' up-to-date vaccination cards in our email so all their important information is just a click away if needed.

NEGOTIATE: Get your lap kid off your lap by asking the airline staff if the flight is full and if any open seats can be given to you so your child can be more comfortable and quiet... Quiet is the key selling point. If you're persistent and polite enough this pro move works like a charm.

STRATEGIC SEATING: Pick a window and an aisle seat in the hope that no one will sit in the middle so your lap child can snag it.

BE EXTRA: If you think babies are the only ones that need extra outfits, you haven't met a toddler. I'll spare you all the gross fluids that toddlers bring to the equation, but let's just say that three extra outfits for an infant, and two for a toddler, will be a sanity-saving move you'll thank me for later.

DON'T BRING BABY GEAR: Book transport and tour guides with car seats included or stay central and use public transport. Ask hotels or apartments if they can include a baby cot, even if they don't initially list it as an amenity.

WIPE OUT: Antibacterial wipes, butt wipes, refreshing wipes, table wipes, you name the problem and there's a wipe for it. My travel baby bag is basically 50 per cent wipes and 50 per cent snacks, and that is the perfect ratio for anything I might encounter.

Check out *The Worldwide Webers* on Instagram and Facebook, or at theworldwidewebers.com

these moments we've learned that fresh air and ice cream fixes almost any public embarrassment, flights do get easier once they have the attention span for some tablet time, and if she's going to lose her mind, we might as well be on a boat in Greece instead of the supermarket checkout line.

Will travel with our kids at this young age change their entire personality and life direction? Probably not. For now, I'm just happy that it has had an impact on our adaptability as a family. Being a believer in routine meant I sometimes felt confined by the rigid schedule we have at home. Yet during travel, we as parents are challenged to create a new routine within the unstructured and unfamiliar, and as kids, they're pushed to adapt to new cribs, new foods, and sometimes unideal flight times.

Travellers, expats, fugitives... it's hard to know the exact hashtag we should be using these days. While we may not be able to tell you where we'll be a year or two from now, we do know that kids are kids whether at home or away, so you might as well be chasing them around an Indonesian temple instead of your local softplay. So gathered on the hop, here are my very best gems of advice.

ASK: It's amazing how family-friendly travel can be when you simply ask for help. Ask hotels for a room configuration that's helpful for your family, ask airport staff if there's a play zone, ask hotels or rented apartments if you can send an Amazon

