

# **STEP BY STEP** **GUIDE TO SELF** **ORGANISE** **YOUR FAMILY** **ADVENTURES**



Hej!

I'm glad you downloaded this guide, this is your first step to a new way of travelling!

Why did I create this guide?

-I want to help you to appreciate that travelling with small kids is not just possible but actually you can organise amazing trips, without the help of travel agency or buying package holiday, that will allow you to save money, have a much more flexible schedule, and have an amazing time!

At the end you will also find a bullet point summary that is easy to print!

The whole experience is a journey and you will discover how to enjoy every trip so much more!



## Book your flights

- **Define if you are going to arrive and depart from the same city (loop trip) or if it is better to arrive and depart from 2 different points.**

Of course the clearer your ideal itinerary is the better. Sometimes you may need to hold on a couple of days so you have enough time to get at least an idea of what is achievable in the time you have available.

*For example: when I organised a trip to visit the deep south USA, I wanted to visit Texas and then move east to Florida and the keys. I had 3 weeks available and thought it would have been enough time, so I bought the tickets to arrive in Austin and come back from Miami. Unfortunately I didn't consider how many things there were to see and so 3 weeks were not enough and we would have been better stopping earlier and leaving Florida for another trip!*

This step is also important when you fly internationally because, even if you need to come back to your arrival city, sometimes an internal flight booked together with your international flight can be much cheaper.

*HOT TIP: if you are planning a bit last minute, before to book your flight don't forget to check if a VISA is required to enter the country you want to visit, or if that country requires you to have a minimum amount of time left on your passport before the expiring date. Depending on the country where you are going to and the country where you live, VISAs etc could take a few weeks, so keep that in mind.*

# 2 | Define the outline itinerary

- **Define how long you want to stay in each city/area and how much you want to move around**

Start to look at some guide books, blogs, or other online resources to see what you are interested in. When I first start to plan to visit a new country I get super excited and usually scribble down 10-15 possible itineraries before I settle on the right one. This is perfectly normal and sometimes it's ok even to move on to the next steps then come back here and make some changes.

I try to get an overview of the full country, and then try to understand how long it takes to move around different areas, how much does it cost, and so on. Of course everything also depends on the time you have available and your priorities.

When we went to Egypt for example, I wanted to see all the historical places but in my priority list there was also some relaxing time by the beach and a Nile cruise. As we only had 12 days, after many attempts, I have had to sacrifice the trip to Abu Simbel...



## | Book accommodation

- **Research the different areas of the city, or region where you are going to stop and book *refundable* hotels**

Ok, at this point you need to make some research. You don't need to go deep yet, but you need to have an idea of what you would like to see, how long does it take to move from area to area, if parking is an issue, and the environment you prefer. What do you want to prioritize? I'll make a couple of example to make it clear.

*For example: when we went to Tokyo, after a long search I decided to book an hotel in Ginza 5 min walking from the Tokyo station. Our twins were 18 months old and so for me the priority was to move around in the easiest possible way because we were still carrying a lot of stuff with us. The train from the airport was arriving directly there, the train for our day trip to Nikko was departing from there as well as the train to move to the next stop in the trip. Tokyo station was also one stop on the main tube line for the most common areas to visit and with easy access with lift. Ginza is a vibrant upmarket neighbourhood with lots of shops and restaurants...It was perfect.*

At this stage I book refundable hotels because the itinerary is not finalised yet, you could for example discover that some of the connections you need only run on specific days, or a tour you want to do is not available during your ideal stay, and so you have to decide to shorten or lengthen the time in a specific location.

*HOT TIPS: If travelling with a baby check if the hotel provides cots. If travelling with more than one child and you have difficulty to find reasonably priced rooms then search for a smaller number eg a room for 2 adults, and read the hotel policy carefully, many hotels allow 1 or even 2 kids to stay for free if they are sleeping with parents (in Japan this was really common)*



# 4 | Research transfers/connections

- **Look back to the outline itinerary and research all the connecting flights, trains, buses etc. that you need**

By this stage you should have a much better picture of your itinerary so it is time to look at how to connect to each of your stops. At this stage I suggest not to book your transfers/connections yet but only to research them, unless of course you find an unbeatable offer. You still want to keep some flexibility in case, when you decide what to do in each location (next step), you discover that some activities are only available on specific days for example.

*This step can also work in reverse, for example: on our trip to Peru I decided I really wanted to experience the PeruRail Titicaca from Cusco to Puno, but this train is only running on specific days a couple of times a week, so I have adjusted the itinerary to accommodate it.*

# 5 | Research/book activities, tours, opening hours...

## - Time to discover what each location has to offer

This is a fun time, you can start to look at the daily details of your trip. I recommend researching as much information as possible. You can start with a guide book that will offer you an overview of most things available. After or instead of that you can check google or Pinterest that should bring you the most relevant content. Travel blogs will also help you to find some off the beaten path things to do. Sometimes for activities and tours even tripadvisor can be source of inspiration.

When you find activities you like to do, or places you would like to visit don't forget to double check their own website to get the most up to date info regarding costs or opening times.

*This step is really important because many courses, tours or other activities/visits are not available every day or need pre-booking , so you want to make sure you are not leaving a place the day before there is the amazing Thai cooking course you want to do! Or, like us, you arrive in front of the entrance of the stunning Greek theatre in Taormina just to see the guard closing the gate!*

If you are visiting a big city I recommend you also take another step. You should mark on a map where all the sightseeing, tour and courses are located and try to group them and schedule them together by proximity, otherwise your time will be wasted in unnecessary travelling.



## | Finalise the itinerary

### - Time to confirm bookings

At this stage you should now have 75% of your trip defined. It is now time to go back to the flights, car rental, and all the other connections/transfer you previously selected and book them.

*This of course also depends on how far in advance you are booking. Rental cars for example seem to be more expensive if you buy too far in advance. I usually get good price around a couple of months before the trip. Car rentals are usually cancellable for free until 24 or 48 hours before the rental starts, so you can book it and then check again to see if you find it cheaper.*

If you are not happy with the flight prices you can monitor them for a while to see if the price goes down. Google flight has an amazing feature that will notify you every time there is price variation.

As I mentioned before I usually book refundable hotels, but at this stage I'm going back to check if a better price for a non refundable room is available. Usually if the difference is minimal I keep the refundable booking for flexibility, but sometimes close to the departure date the price drops a lot, so I make the change.

When it is getting close to the departure date, around 2 weeks before I also tend to confirm and if necessary prepay the most important activities, tours or courses I'm sure I want to participate in.



## Select and book restaurants

- **Search what and where to eat, book if necessary.**

This is an optional step, for me it is really important. When I moved to London from Italy, for some time I took for granted that a full restaurant is a good restaurant, but quite soon I realised that this formula doesn't work in all countries. When I went to the USA for the first time I was really disappointed while the second time I visited New York I had one of the best food experiences of all my trips because I had researched and chosen where to eat. With all the information now available on the internet there are no more excuses to eat bad food when on holiday.

This step could prove to be really overwhelming and unfortunately I don't have many short cuts, when possible I usually try to take part in a food tour to have the possibility to taste some typical dishes and get some insight of what to expect from local cuisine.

Another recommendation is to not use tripadvisor to make your selection. Tripadvisor could be a great source of ideas and reference for what to do but restaurant judgement is heavily influenced by so many factors, such as food interest, peoples country of origin, personal preferences, so it is really difficult to base decisions on that.

There are people who go on holiday to eat and people that maybe eat while on holiday...





## | Write everything down

### - Create your spreadsheet/form

If you haven't started yet, then this is the moment to put together all your trip information and add all the details you can in a spreadsheet

Many people look at me horrified when I mention I fill a spreadsheet, like I'm going to work instead of going on a leisure trip, well I'm guessing it is up to you... but for me this is a crucial part of an enjoyable well organised trip. I think it is really useful to have as much information and as detailed an itinerary as possible, but if something better comes along I don't have problems making changes and to move things around.

I usually include as much as possible, for example if we need to take a train I put in my spreadsheet the ideal time we want, the cost, where to get the tickets and how long does it take to get to the station from the previous point. If I want to visit a museum I write down how long it takes to get there, the cost, the opening times, the closing days. For flights and other bookings I put down reservation number, cost, date you can cancel by...etc.

This could seem a lot of work but when you organise a touring trip the more info you have the smoother it will be.

The spreadsheet is also really important to keep an eye on budget, when you have everything filled you can have quite a clear idea of what you are going to spend and if needed you can go back and adjust to save some money in accommodation or various activities. The more info you have then the less surprises you will get.

The spreadsheet together with the map I mentioned before are the life and sanity savers of any of my trips!



# SUMMARY

1 Evaluate if it's better a loop trip or to arrive to A and depart from B

Book flights

Check if a VISA is needed and check time left on your passport

2 Search how long to stay in each city/area based on what to do/see

Outline-itinerary

3 Search the area where to stay based on your priorities

Book accomodation

Book refundable hotels

4 Search internal connections and best way to move from the different city/areas

Search transfer

Monitor flights but don't book anything yet unless you find a really good price

5 Research for tours and activities you want to do

Search tours/activities

Get in touch and find out how far in advance you need to book

6 Finalise bookings

Finalise itinerary

Time to book all transfers/connections

7 Research and book restaurants/food tours

Book rest-aurants

Change accommodation booking where non refundable is much cheaper

8 If you are familiar with Excel then create a spreadsheet with all the itinerary info

Write everything