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Family roadtrips: helping hints for happy faces

If family roadtrips conjure up memories of long hours staring out of the window, infinite games of eye spy and occasional shouts of 'I feel sick!' you may be cautious about packing up the kids and heading out for the open road this year.

But it needn't be all boredom and 'are we nearly there yet?' There are some really good reasons for firing up your engine, filling up the boot and exploring our very own island, with all it has to offer.



For a start, going by car could save quite a bit on the cost of your holiday. Package and overseas breaks have dipped in popularity since the economic crisis, as people tighten their belts and look for alternative ways to get away from it all. With airline fuel costs increasing, it isn't getting any cheaper to hop on a plane.

On the other hand, Chancellor George Osborne has just announced a 1p decrease in fuel duty, making motoring costs for families a little more affordable. Coupled with the fact that going by car is so much more environmentally sustainable than going by plane _ your kids will thank you for that _ it seems the family roadtrip has its merits after all.

Perhaps the best reason for buckling up and braving the British roads is that you get to see some of the stunning sights the country has to offer. It's just one big adventure _ you can go anywhere in

the UK you fancy. And why not get the kids involved? Unfold those dusty maps, log on to the computer and pick the place that seems to excite you all.

These are all great reasons to go by road this year_ but when it comes to those long hours behind the wheel with the kids in tow _ it can seem more like a never-ending nightmare than a glorious adventure. So we've come up with some helping hints to remove the stress from your family roadtrip and keep those faces smiling.

Helping hints for happy faces

1. Be prepared, just like the best scout leaders. About a week before the trip, make a list of what everyone need to pack, including personal hygiene supplies, clothing, toys, outdoor or activity gear. This encourages each family member to be responsible for making the trip a success.
2. Get everyone involved! Give the kids maps to look at, encourage them to plot the route and pick out interesting viewpoints, landmarks and tourist spots on the way. You could even plan to stop off at a few on the way and take some pictures.
3. Take along a good selection of audio books on CD, and DVDs if you have a portable DVD player. It'll keep the kids quiet and occupied for a good chunk of time while you focus on other things. Make sure everyone has their own personal headset _ they're not expensive and can save a lot of arguing.
4. Games are good. And things have moved on a lot since 'eye spy'. If your children don't suffer with motion sickness, they could have hours of fun with kids bingo, flashcards, sticker books and hand-held consoles. And if they do suffer with motion sickness, try asking them to look at the far horizon _ it can often do the trick. If all that tires them out, be sure to take a pillow or cosy along so they can get comfortable for a nap.
5. Packing the right kind of roadtrip food can have a big impact on everyone's mood. Avoid anything that is high in sugar or caffeine _ which can lead to peaks and crashes in energy _ opting for fruit and protein-rich foods that help you feel full for longer, like cheese sticks, nuts and hard-boiled eggs. They can be easily packed. Giving a sweet treat now and then can help motivate younger passengers and a packet of baby wipes will always come in handy for sticky fingers!

UK hotspots great for kids

Brecon Beacons National Park: This area of mid-Wales is renowned for its natural beauty, rolling landscape and fabulous
The Peak District: Pop in to any visitor centre set within the

kayaking, white-water rafting and pony trekking to get stuck in to.

The Peak District: Pop in to any visitor centre set within the breath-taking scenery of the Peak District and you won't fail to find something for everyone. You may not be able to do it all, but choose from fell walking, fishing, caving, rock climbing and guided walks_ or even just a leisurely picnic on a hillside.



The Scottish Highlands:

Boasting Britain's highest peak Ben Nevis, the highlands of Scotland provide some of the most dramatic views in the UK. They also offer a healthy variety of outdoor pursuits, like game-shooting, mountain biking and boating on the magnificent lakes, or 'lochs'.

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