FREE GUIDE · FROM @NIGELCLARKETV

The Long-Haul Survival Guide

Flying with a toddler (and two teens): **95% fine.** Here's how we did it.



The Clarkes Do Bali

Real tips from a real family. Not perfect, just present.

BEFORE WE START

"Travelling with a toddler is a nightmare."

That's what everyone told us. And I get it. A long-haul flight takes away everything a little one relies on: the routine, the nap, the cot, the space to run about.

But we did 20 hours of travel from London to Bali with our 3-year-old, Cass, and our two teenagers, and for about 95% of it? Things were fine. Not because we got lucky, but because we stopped fighting it and leant into it.

This is everything that worked for us, plus the stuff we wish someone had told us first. Take what helps, leave what doesn't. You know your kids best.

Nigel x

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01 Before you fly

> The calmest flights start days before you get to the airport.

- **Talk it up.** Start chatting about the plane a week before. Watch airport videos, play "pilots" at home. Familiar is less scary, and excited is half the battle.
- **Pick your seats early.** Aisle makes toilet runs and walkabouts easier. Window gives you a ready-made distraction. If you can, get both on the same row.
- **Pre-order the kids' meals.** Most airlines let you do it a day or two ahead, and children's meals often come out first. A fed toddler is a happier toddler.
- **Check in online and download the boarding passes.** Less time in queues means more patience left for the flight.
- **Check your airport's liquids rules.** They differ, and food or milk for little ones often has its own allowance. Know before you pack, not at security.
- **Burn off the energy at the airport.** Walk, explore, find the play area. Every lap of the terminal now is one less lap of the aisle later.
- **Take the buggy to the gate.** Most airlines let you, and it's a lifesaver in a long terminal (and for a sleepy toddler when you land).

DAD TIP

Boarding first isn't always best. Weigh up whether getting on early really works for you. If your little one is happier running about, less time sat still on the plane before you've even moved may be to your advantage.

02 The toddler carry-on

> Pack it like a lucky dip. Bring things out one at a time, and don't blow the lot before take-off.

THINGS TO DO

- [ ] Colouring book and chunky crayons
- [ ] Sticker books (reusable ones are gold)
- [ ] Puzzle and activity books
- [ ] 2 or 3 small toys they've never seen
- [ ] Wrap the new toys, unwrapping buys time
- [ ] A favourite teddy or comforter

THINGS TO LISTEN TO

- [ ] Yoto (or similar) loaded with stories
- [ ] Kids' headphones, volume-limited
- [ ] Shows downloaded to watch offline
- [ ] Charger and a power bank

THE ESSENTIALS

- [ ] Two spare outfits for them
- [ ] A spare top for you (trust me)
- [ ] Wipes, and more wipes
- [ ] Nappies or pull-ups, even if they're potty trained
- [ ] A bag for wet or sticky clothes
- [ ] Loads of different snacks
- [ ] Empty water bottle to fill airside
- [ ] Any medicines you might need, in original packaging
- [ ] Something to suck or sip on for take-off and landing
- [ ] A light blanket and a warm layer

03 Keeping the teens on side

> Older siblings can be your secret weapon, as long as they feel like part of the team and not the unpaid staff.

- **Give them a proper shift.** Not "help out a bit", but "you've got the little one from 2 till 3". A clear start and finish makes it fair.
- **Make it worth their while.** First pick of the snacks, the window seat for the second leg, a treat at the other end. Whatever works in your house.
- **Put them in charge of something real.** The passports (if you trust them), the snack bag, the boarding passes. Responsibility beats being bossed about.
- **Let them sort their own stuff.** Their own charger, their own downloads, their own headphones. Ask them to do it the night before, not at the gate.
- **Give them their downtime too.** When it's not their shift, let them switch off. Headphones in is allowed.
- **Say thank you, out loud.** In front of the little one if you can. It goes a long way.

WHAT WORKED FOR US

Little ones often think their big brothers and sisters are the coolest people on earth. Twenty minutes with them can do what an hour with Mum and Dad can't.

04 On the plane

> Everything is out of routine, so stop trying to keep the routine. Use the new instead.

- **Make it an adventure.** The tiny window, the tray table, the seatbelt sign, the trolley coming down the aisle. To a toddler it's all brand new. "Look, that's OUR plane!" When it's all new, the excitement is your best friend.
- **Tag team it.** Work in shifts: one parent, then the other, then the teens. Walking the aisle for the fourth time is far easier when you know someone's taking over next.
- **Ration the lucky dip.** One new thing at a time. Save something special for the hardest stretch, usually the last couple of hours.
- **Bring the sleep cues from home.** The same teddy, the same blanket, the same bedtime story on the Yoto. It tells them it's sleep time, even at 30,000 feet.
- **Help their ears.** Sucking or swallowing during take-off and landing helps with the pressure. A drink, a dummy or a lolly, whatever they'll take.
- **Dress everyone in layers.** Planes swing from hot to cold. Easy on, easy off.
- **Lower the bar.** More screen time than usual is fine. Snacks for dinner is fine. A good flight is one where everybody gets there.

OUR MVP

Cass's Yoto and his own headphones. His stories, his songs. A little bit of home at thirty-odd thousand feet.

05 Landing and jet lag

You've landed. Now be kind to yourselves for a couple of days.

- **Plan nothing for day one.** Seriously. Pool, food, sleep. The adventures can wait.
- **Get outside in daylight.** Natural light is the quickest way to help everyone's body clock catch up.
- **Eat on local time.** Breakfast, lunch and dinner at the new times, even if nobody's that hungry.
- **Keep naps short.** A power nap helps. A four-hour afternoon sleep means a 2am party.
- **Push towards local bedtime.** It doesn't have to be perfect on night one. Get a bit closer each night.
- **Expect a wobbly night or two.** Early wake-ups are normal. Have snacks and a quiet activity ready by the bed.
- **Take turns on the night shift.** Same as the plane. One of you sleeps, one of you's on.

REMEMBER

Every child is different. If yours takes a few extra days to settle, you haven't done anything wrong. You've just done a really long journey.

THE HONEST BIT

5%

And when it does go wrong?

It will, at some point. For us it was tears, aeroplane food he didn't want, and a few hugs needed along the way. Here's the plan for when it happens.

- **Breathe first.** They feel your stress. Calm you is the best thing you can give them.
- **Change the scene.** Stand up, walk to the back, look out a different window. Moving often resets a meltdown.
- **Tag out.** If you're losing it, hand over. That's what the team is for.
- **Forget the audience.** Most people on that plane have been there, or will be. Nobody is judging you as much as you think.
- **Ride it out.** It feels like forever. It's usually ten minutes.

NOT PERFECT, JUST PRESENT

It won't be perfect. It doesn't need to be. Be there for every minute of it, and that's the bit they'll remember.



THE CLARKES DO BALI

That was just getting there.

We're sharing the whole trip, one day at a time. Two teens, one toddler and a family holiday six years in the making.

@instaclarkes
The whole family trip, day by day

@instaclarkes_mama
How we actually pulled it off: the villas, the planning, the honest reviews

@nigelclarketv
The dad's-eye view. Not perfect, just present.

#ClarkesDoBali