



*Enjoying the beach
in family friendly
Zihuatanejo.*

AGE 3

There are things to consider — long airplane rides, daily needs made complicated by foreign language, and safety and health concerns. Although my husband and I had been to Mexico almost a dozen times, we felt disoriented. Would staying in a remote village still be a good idea? What about food safety? And most important, would it still be the relaxing experience that we remembered, or were we fooling ourselves?

Happily, we found that with some forethought, a Mexican holiday with a young child could be relatively stress-free. Here are a few tips for traveling to Mexico with preschool-age children.

Learn about Mexico. Read books about Mexico and get children's books about Mexican culture from the library. Brush up on your Spanish and teach a few easy phrases to your child. Knowing a little Spanish can go a long way when needing help with directions or locating supplies.

Research kid-friendly destinations. Visit online travel sites to find out which Mexican cities are more oriented toward children. Beaches with calm water are preferable, as are cities with easy access to medical care. Online travel message boards are an excellent way to find out details from people who have been there. Are places safe, clean and kid-friendly? Do hotels or condos have easy access to beaches and towns? Keep in mind that long walks and steep hill climbs are hard on little legs.

Find lodging with plenty of room. Suites or rental houses work best for families and are worth the extra money. For everyone's sanity and sleep schedule, find a place with at least two rooms. A kitchen allows you to easily make meals for picky eaters who may not be used to Mexican flavors. Most grocery stores in Mexico

continued on page 16

AGES 3 TO 5

Enjoying Mexico with a preschooler

By Lisette Austin

A FEW MONTHS after our son Zane turned 3, we were ready for a break in the routine. The stress of the holiday season was quickly approaching, and we'd already had enough of the rain. As adventurous travelers, we were craving an international vacation that was both relaxing and culturally stimulating. But as parents, we needed

somewhere we could easily take a 3-year-old. Where could we go that would satisfy both needs?

Like many local families, we turned our sights toward Mexico. Relatively close and inexpensive, Mexico is an increasingly popular destination for Northwest parents with young children. Coastal towns and villages offer beach fun for kids and relaxation for adults. Larger cities have zoos and aquariums, as well as resorts that cater specifically to families. For some, an annual trip to Mexico has become a holiday tradition.

However, traveling internationally with a preschooler can seem daunting.

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CHILDREN'S BOOKS ABOUT MEXICO

Mexico ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Mexico, Sarah Heiman, Todd Ouren

My Mexico — Mexico Mio, Tony Johnston

Look what came from Mexico, Miles Harvey

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AGES

AGES 3 TO 5

continued from page 15

carry products that are familiar to American children.

Travel with friends. Traveling with other families can be more fun for everyone. Children have built-in playmates, and adults can trade babysitting and get some time away. Also be prepared to make new friends, as traveling with small children usually invites more interaction with local residents.

Keep travel simple. Try to get the most direct flight possible. It may not be worth going somewhere that requires additional travel by bus or boat, unless you can break travel into two days. Bring toys and books for the flight, and look into getting a bulkhead seat with more room to stretch out. Consider bringing a car seat as they aren't always readily available in Mexico.

Bring proper documentation. U.S. citizens traveling to Mexico need to have a valid U.S. passport or a birth certificate along with photo identification. Children are not required to have photo ID, but do need a birth certificate. If you are a non-U.S. citizen, you may need additional documents.

Think about health needs. Health officials recommend that children's immunizations be up to date when traveling to Mexico. Visit your doctor if you aren't sure of their status or if you have questions about medical issues. You can purchase most health care necessities in Mexico but do bring items you might need in a pinch, such as anti-diarrhea or allergy medicine.

Antiseptic wipes come in handy and sunscreen is a must.

Watch what you eat. Once in Mexico, be careful about what your family eats. Steer clear of raw fruits and vegetables that can't be peeled, and only drink bottled water and juices. Always ask if ice is made from filtered water. Restaurants that frequently cater to tourists usually maintain higher levels of cleanliness; street vendors are probably not worth the risk. It is useful to bring iodine tablets to treat water before washing fruits and vegetables.

Pace yourselves. Although the temptation will be to pack in as much as you can, don't try to do too much. Plan one or two things a day. Preschoolers still need a regular routine and some down time.

So how was our trip? We enjoyed seven glorious, sun-drenched days in Zihuatanejo, a family friendly, coastal fishing town. We hung out with friends who traveled from Wisconsin with their 2-year-old son. We held baby alligators, spoke Spanish with parrots and drank lemonade on the beach. Zane was fascinated by the new sights and sounds, and made friends wherever he went. We had memorable adventures, got plenty of rest and came back refreshed.

Would we do it again? You bet. In fact, we'll be in Mexico a few months from now. ☐

Lisette Austin contributes regularly to local publications. She lives in Seattle with her husband and 4-year-old son.



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ONLINE RESOURCES

www.mexperience.com/discover/discv_mexforkids.htm

Mexico travel site with practical information about traveling with children.

www.visitmexico.com

Mexico Tourism Board site with general information about Mexico.

<http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/preschooler/ptravel/index>

Tips on traveling with preschoolers.