

ARE WE THERE YET?



Make your long summer road trips even more memorable with snacks and games for your kids — young and old

BY HEATHER HUDSON

Remember your childhood road trips? Your essentials probably included a music player with foam-tipped headphones, a notebook and pencil case, a couple of books and a pillow. You whiled away the hours staring out the window, fighting with your siblings and counting the minutes until you got to your destination.

Today's road trip has a different vibe: smartphones, tablets, gaming devices, laptops and other screens ensure each passenger has their own zone of private entertainment.

There might be fewer skirmishes in the backseat, but one could argue that modern travel is lacking a connection to the world outside the car — and the loved ones inside it.

This summer, drive back in time with an old-fashioned road trip that puts family time over screen time. Here are some family-tested tips for keeping the peace in the backseat and kicking off your summer vacation on a high note.



FOOD AND EXERCISE

Kids and adults alike are naturally testier when their blood sugar is low. Fill a cooler with healthy snacks like raw veggies, cheese and crackers and homemade muffins — and

keep them coming so no one has a chance to get “hangry.”

Save sugary treats, including juices, until about 30 minutes before you make a pit stop. Then look for playgrounds or green spaces and give everyone time to burn off some energy.

This will extend the road trip, but discovering play equipment is an adventure most kids will remember fondly. Make it even more memorable by having a family game of catch, tag or “Mother, May I?” before piling back into the car.



GAMES

Classic car-friendly games that require nothing more than an imagination include:

- Cycling through the alphabet naming things like animals, food or cities;
- Telling a story, word by word, with each person contributing in turn;
- Guessing which noun a person is thinking of in 21 questions (e.g. giraffe, banana, spaceship, lamp);
- Starting with “I’m going on a picnic... and I’m bringing an apple,” each person adds one more thing to the picnic basket while listing all the previous ones.





For more hands-on fun, bring along a collection of travel-size magnetic games like checkers, tic-tac-toe and Snakes and Ladders. If you're driving on long stretches of flat roads, backseat passengers could even play card games like Old Maid, Crazy Eights and Go Fish.

No matter what the passengers decide to play, take care not to distract the driver, who should have eyes on the road at all times!



MYSTERY PACKAGES

It never fails. At home, you help your child fill a bag with activities and books for the ride — only to have them dump it out in the first five minutes and declare it all boring.

This year, consider meting out their activities one by one. Number paper lunch bags and drop in a car-friendly treat to each bag — it might be something new or a toy from home they didn't know was along for the ride.

At an interval of your choice (hourly, daily), ask them to pick a number and hand over the corresponding bag for a fresh new activity. Ideas include:

- Travel games
- Comic/picture book or graphic novels
- Small dolls or vehicles
- A souvenir from the previous day's travel
- Lollipop or gum
- Stuffed animals from home
- Notebook and crayons/markers

Be sure none of the items are sharp, heavy or could cause injury if the car needs to come to a sudden stop.



MUSIC

Every road trip needs a soundtrack! Curate a special road trip playlist with something for everyone. Not only will you enjoy it on your travels, but hearing the songs later will instantly bring back memories of your trip.

Choose a selection of everyone's favourites and include a wide variety from a bunch of genres, such as oldies, pop, jazz, country, folk and rock. Bonus points for choosing songs that tie in with your journey and destination.



AUDIO BOOKS/PODCASTS

Have you been meaning to read a classic children's story with your kids? Let an audio book do it for you! A road trip is the perfect time for the whole family to enjoy classics and newer titles. Storytelling podcasts are also a great way to enjoy quiet time.



TECHNOLOGY TIME

If you fear banning electronics will incite a mutiny in the backseat, carve out designated technology time. When played in moderation, kids enjoy video games and movies more. Plus, they'll be more likely to put them aside when they know they'll have time to plug in later.

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