

9 Ways to Make Family Travel More Educational

As a college professor and a mom, I'm continually interested in ways to teach more effectively both in and outside of the classroom. Like you, I am a parent who wants my children to build a love of learning and curiosity since that is a skill that is essential to success in college and in life.

If you'd like to deepen those moments of learning and excitement on your family travels, there are many exciting ways to do so! I've included my tried-and-true ways of educating my kids on the fly in order to build on what we see and do on our travels.

The best part about this list is that you don't need to do much prep to have them be successful. Yet, the effects of this approach to learning will last a lifetime!

Action!

When in a museum, art gallery, or interpretive center, pick a piece of art or an exhibit to act out. For example, if your family was at the Louvre seeing the Mona Lisa, you could encourage your children to try and recreate her famous smile. Take a picture with the art in the background for an album worthy travel photo!

Ready to Read

A few of our go-to context series are the *I Survived* series, *Who Was?* series, and the *Ordinary People Change the World* series. We love these for our kids as they're inexpensive, easy-to-read, and accessible in their approach to history. We bought the *Ordinary People change the World: I am Martin Luther King, Jr.* for our kids before we visited the Lorraine Hotel Museum in Memphis, and the book was wonderful for providing context. We also did a read loud of *I Survived the Titanic* before we went to the Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Rhyme Time

While poetry can seem daunting, there are some amazing poems that are accessible to even preschoolers and kindergarteners. I highly recommend the National Geographic poetry book series. All have full-color photographs to accompany each of the kid-friendly poems. *The Poetry of the US* book is divided into regions, so you can read "Standing outside Graceland" while visiting Memphis or "Mass Ascension" when visiting the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. *The Book of Animal Poetry* is great when visiting a zoo, while the *Book of Nature Poetry* is the perfect accompaniment to a hike in a state or national park.

Go Google

Google Maps Treks provides an incredible resource for those who want to learn about important spots in the world. Each of the selected treks guides visitors through photos of the location, curated videos, and directed links to Google Streetview at that location. It's immersive, and it is a great way to introduce your children to places like Angkor Wat, Cambodia, or El Capitan, Yosemite National Park, before they arrive.

Find it

Some museums, like the Ogden Museum of Art in New Orleans, have kid-friendly scavenger hunts prepared for visitors, but they're pretty easy to make for everything from a nature hike to a visit to a historic house. Determine a small prize for your family's winner!

Go to the Source.

This is one incredible resource that people overlook—and it's great because the work is already done for you! On a museum website, look for a section entitled "Students," "Education," or "Teacher Resources," and see what they have available. While these materials were originally created for K-12 teachers who

are bringing kids on field trips, the value is there for educationally-minded parents, too! The British Museum, for example, has maps, videos, worksheets, and activities for kids who are visiting the museum. Many of the U.S. National Parks also offer free printables—and, in some cases, they have the entire Junior Ranger booklet available to print out at home.

Be sketchy.

This type of tactile learning provides crucial reinforcement of the things they're hearing on tours or reading in guidebooks.

We always make a special travel journal for each child for each trip we take (because I'm that kind of mom!), and I have them fill out pages for each place we visit.

Not only does it provide in-the-moment learning, but the completed journals are some of my kids' favorite things to read and re-read after the trip is over.

More artsy kids might enjoy a less directed sketchbook, where they can draw, paint, or sketch anything that catches their eyes.

Get the Legos.

Like most families, we have a big bucket of these childhood favorites, and my kids are constantly building with them. After we'd visited the Chihuly Collection in St. Petersburg, Florida, they had a blast trying to make their own versions of the chandeliers, boats, leaves, and more!

Fall down the rabbit hole.

Everything in history and literature is connected! Explaining those connections occur leads to a holistic understanding of history and culture. For example, if you visit Hampton Court Palace, they'll know that it was owned by King Henry VIII. You could use this fact to discuss the idea of divine rule, the differences between the Catholic and Anglican churches at this time, Henry's ties to Elizabeth I, the concept of primogeniture, the War of Roses, and on and on. If you'd also gone to Windsor Castle on that same vacation, you could discuss the ways that the current royal family is different than the Tudor royal family. Traveling opens up so many fun rabbit holes, so see which areas your kids want to know more about.

Resources Page

I hope you're inspired to add more learning to your family travels!

If you're ready to get started, I'd encourage you to click through these resources that were mentioned in the printable above to see which would work best for your family:

Note: this page contains affiliate links. If you choose to purchase through one of the below links, I will receive a small commission at no additional charge to you.

- ***I Survived* series by Lauren Tarshis**: These are fantastic middle grade readers for kids 8-12. Each focuses on a specific moment in history from a child's point of view. The series has a wide range of materials including Pompeii, the Chicago Fire of 1871, the American Revolution, and D-Day.
- ***Who Was?* series**: This series is aimed at a slightly younger audience than *I Survived* as there are more sketches throughout and shorter chapters. Covering everything from Pablo Picasso to Anne Frank, you're sure to find something among the more than 200 books that directly relates to your upcoming trip.
- ***Ordinary People Change the World* series by Brad Meltzer**: Best for preschool-early elementary children, these adorable picture books pack in a surprising amount of information about each spotlighted person. There are books on Dolly Parton, Abe Lincoln, Temple Grandin, Leonardo Da Vinci, and more. My 5 year old love them!
- ***National Geographic Book of Nature Poetry* by J. Patrick Lewis**: This book is such a beautiful introduction to poetry for kids. It completely demystifies this form of literature through big photographs and fun-to-say-aloud poems (many of them classics). Even if you were an English major, you'll find something new among this selection!
- ***National Geographic Poetry of the US* by J. Patrick Lewis**: Who knew that a book of poems could so completely capture the spirit of America in all of its different forms? Arranged by region for easy access, this book allows you to learn about your own backyard or venture to new regions across this vast nation through verse.
- ***National Geographic Book of Animal Poetry* by J. Patrick Lewis**: Cute baby animals will capture your kids' imaginations as they become familiar by the beautiful poems here.
- **Google Maps Treks**: This free resource allows you to view the world's wonders from your home: walk to the Pyramids of Giza, boat through the Amazon Basin, and explore Everest Base Camp in Nepal.
- **Children's sketchbook**: Use this as a sketchbook or as the basis for a unique travel journal. Either way, you'll help your children deepen their travel experience!