

## Travel is a Good Education

What is the best way to open our children's minds to the world beyond their doors, the world beyond southern California, and the USA? Travel opens children's minds and exposes them to the seas of difference and commonality in the world beyond our daily lives. We can travel to the ends of the earth and find many fascinating superficial differences, and many deep rooted commonalities. Coming from a privileged society, travel also gives our children an appreciation for what they have. Appreciation and gratitude are the roots of happiness. So travel can also give your child a happier life. Travel literally expands the mind and is something we should encourage our kids to experience.

I've had the good fortune to have traveled far and wide. In the process it has forced me to change seemingly hard held beliefs, constantly reaffirmed my faith in the good of humanity, learn languages (expand my mind!), and spark an ever greater curiosity and thirst for knowledge and experience.

### **Travel inspires a Love for Learning**

A love for learning is really not a lot more than a strong appetite for curiosity. How does that computer work? What are those people saying? What do frogs, snails, snakes, country rats, grass hoppers, and guinea pigs really taste like? Walked upon correctly, the open road is an open education. Keep in mind that by travel I mean an immersion into other customs and cultures, not a Club Med bubble beach break. There is nothing like travel to inspire and spark a greater desire for knowledge in all of us.

### **Travel and Language can lead to a Healthier Mind**

Expand the mind you say? Travel to parts of the world where people speak a different language is likely the best way to show your child that learning another language is worth the effort. Speaking more than one language has been shown to improve mental health in old age and greatly **limit the impact of Alzheimer's**. In addition speaking a second language opens huge doors when you travel, allowing you to reach a far greater level of immersion. You can speak to the locals and ask them what they think about things, and you will be amazed by their responses. I still recall simple conversations with local Ecuadorians when I was first learning Spanish, conversations that led to

changes in my world view. I still remember being blown away by a man explaining to me that he had to work every day just to eat, and he had little hope of anything more. For some reason I had never truly appreciated how lucky I had been to have options, where work could be a means to a better life not just survival. It's hard to think of a better gift to give your child than a second language.

### **When is the right age?**

Travelling with children is not to be undertaken too lightly. If the kids are too young, you will spend all your time at the local playground and the kids will simply not perceive many of the benefits of travel. On the other hand if we leave it too late our kids might not be open to cultural immersions and the like. We've found that as our kids reach 6-7 years of age, they can appreciate travel. I suspect that once they reach 14-16 years of age that they might be more resistant.

### **How to Live like a Local and Immerse Yourself (and save some \$)**

The best way to travel is to live like a local - remember the point is immersion. Not only will this approach greatly expand your experience and your immersion into local life, but it can also save you a lot of money. Use [Airbnb](#) to hire an apartment or a house in a local neighborhood. Not only is this usually a lot cheaper than a hotel, but it's often a lot more comfortable, and it will usually put you straight into the middle of someone's neighborhood and typical daily life. We have rented luxurious apartments for about \$70 a night whose owner went out of the way to give us a personal tour of the immediate neighborhood, its restaurants, supermarkets, and the like. As a result we got a little taste for what it was like to live there. In Europe there are also fantastic experiences (and deals) to be had by staying at farms or rural houses (for example [agriturismo](#) in Italy and [Gites](#) in France). We recently rented a beautiful two bedroom apartment inside a remodeled old barn on an organic vineyard by the Tyrrhenian Sea - the price was very affordable (it had to be!) and the kids were told by the farmers to help themselves to the organic produce and go play with the local kids. Unfortunately the cost of airfares means that we aren't likely to go back to Europe for a while, but they had a great experience. Within the US we have often used localized apps on our smartphones (e.g. [Yelp!](#)) to find nice local restaurants, parks, and events. The ease and generally low price of motels in the US can encourage what I would call lazy travelling, but push

yourself to do some Internet research and find a more local experience in accommodation.

### **Some Time and Money Required**

So you are asking, when am I going to actually get the time and/or the money to travel? Well that's a hard question, and not an easy one to answer. Ideally you could move the family to Mexico or South America for a few months to learn Spanish. You could fund this by renting out your house online, or doing a house swap with another family. Most employers are not going to let you take three months off though! People have told me of great experiences from house swapping, but I haven't done it myself. I read (and dream) about families that sell all their worldly possessions to buy a yacht and sail the world with their family. So far I've not found the courage (or means) to do this - and my kids are still too young for this style of travel. Our kids learn the basics of how to live from us, and if we're afraid to travel and expand our horizons, they are more likely to do the same. Even if you can't afford to go to Europe or Asia, be creative in finding opportunities to discover the rich diversity of the USA. A well traveled life is richer, possibly longer, and most definitely happier.

### **If you can't Travel, Read ...**

If you can't afford the time and/or the money (and you need both) to travel, you can always read. As Dr. Seuss pointed out:

'The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.'

I'm sure that a large part of what Seuss was talking about was reading as empowerment, as reading leading to more opportunities and choices. He may also have meant that the simple act of reading led to the mind being able to travel without leaving one's armchair. Ultimately we want to go full circle - reading inspires travel, and travel inspires curiosity and further learning. This would be a great virtuous cycle to bestow upon our children.