

A Family Travel Guide with Exclusive Tips and Recommendations

TRAVEL INDIA WITH A TODDLER

ANDAMAN ISLANDS - KASHMIR - MEGHALAYA

**TRAVELING
WITH
NEMIT**

Neha Sharma

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Recommendations

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Andaman Islands - Kashmir - Meghalaya

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Traveling with Nemit

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Written By
Neha Sharma

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Travel India with a Toddler

Dedicating this book
to all parents who love traveling,
or want to start traveling with their kids
keeping their fears aside.

And, also to my mother,
who sent me on my first trip,
when I was only 4!

Thank you for letting me dream.

Acknowledgements

I can't believe this is actually happening since it was not part of the plan. About 2 years ago (May 2017), I had no idea that my life was going to take a 360 degree turn and land me in a completely new field of blogosphere. My journey had been so gratifying and I feel so touched by all the love and motivation I have received. My sincere thanks to each one of you who contributed to my journey from being a Mother to Blogger and now an Author. I want to thank my loving husband, Sumit for being a partner in crime and my biggest supporter. I love you! I feel thankful to my mother for staying by my side when I needed her and my mother in law for never questioning my dreams. Tight hugs to you!

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Can I end it without mentioning my son, Nemit who is definitely the most important driving force behind all my endeavours? Thanks my baby!

About the author

Neha Sharma is a Mom Blogger from India who writes about her parenting experiences in her blog. She's an avid traveler and loves exploring new destinations with her family. She considers herself 'happy-go-lucky' looking at how her life amuses her with every interesting turn. Once a science student turned an MBA in hope to get a decent job, left her job to understand what she actually wants from her life. But had to tie a knot under societal pressure only to realize she will find her soulmate. Later, her motherhood turned out to be a blessing & guiding light and she finally found solace in being her own boss. With her debut book 'Travel India with a Toddler' she aims to inspire parents to travel more with their kids and enjoy life even after parenthood.



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For more travel pictures and stories from Neha, you can follow hashtag [#TravelingWithNemit](https://www.instagram.com/TravelingWithNemit) on Instagram!

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Preface

When Neha was entering a beautiful phase of her life called motherhood, her near and dear ones kept reminding her that ‘her life is going to change and it will ask for many sacrifices’. When she asked if she would have to give up her dream of traveling the world, people laughed and said ‘your family is your world now’. She took it seriously and decided to break the barriers attached with life after motherhood. Now, she travels with her world!

- Do you miss traveling after becoming a parent?
- Do you hesitate to travel with your kids?
- How to make traveling with kids a fun family affair?

In this book, she has shared three of her most memorable trips with her 2-year-old son Nemit, who turned out to be a travel & adventure lover just like his parents. You can read their travel expeditions from South, Middle and North Andaman, their memories from Kashmir and their thrilling adventures from Meghalaya. And, you can’t miss the pragmatic travel tips she has shared based on her experience which can make your travel planning an easy-peasy task. Get inspired to travel more and live your dream life!

Introduction

We are a travel loving family of 3 or should I say a family of 5!

Hey guys, I'm Neha, a 30 something mother of two (we lost our furry baby dog Caesar last year) who refuses to grow old in the traditional boring way. Age is just a number; I believe in growing with experience and living life to the fullest. My cute little family is everything to me. The husbandman Sumit is the man from future, my biggest supporter & the love of my life.



My 3-year-old son Nemit is just like any other kid who doesn't like going to school. I'm sure it's because he doesn't believe in conventional teaching methods just like his mother. He's got the perfect bunch of genes from his parents which also explain his love for nature, animals and traveling.



Our family is incomplete without our two mothers, who don't live with us but are a part of most of our mischiefs. Nemit calls them Nani & Dadi and you'll see them a lot in our travel stories. They are the boss ladies!

One thing which I hear a lot from parents is that traveling with kids is difficult; especially with toddlers. Of course, it is hard, kids are an added responsibility on a vacation when what we actually want to do is relax & rejuvenate and have some stress-free time. But this is also true that if travel is planned right with a positive mindset, it can turn out to be a fun & memorable experience.

Year 2018 was a year of 'family travel' for us. We traveled a lot (yes, a lot) with our toddler. To be precise, we visited 9 new destinations in 12 months. And, it included almost all types of travel; road trip, weekend getaway, adventure trip, train travel, long & short flights, beach holiday, hill stations, almost everything except the international travel.

Travel India with a Toddler

Some of our trips were 7-10 days long and were quite hectic too. But thanks to our love for traveling and excellent planning skills (not exaggerating), we made the best out of all those travels.

I promise you this book will change the way you look at family travel. Also, because I don't want to sound preachy at all, this book is more of an experiential writing rather than a guide book. And, I'm very sure when you'll read how we travel with a toddler, you'll feel it's not a big deal & anyone can do it! And that's exactly what I want to achieve with my book.

Since, it's my first attempt at writing a book, you might feel bored at some portions but to compensate that I'm adding some of our best travel pictures (hoping that these may keep you glued till the end).

So, this book has our travel experiences from 3 amazing Indian destinations that we visited in 2018 with our boy, Nemit (then 2-year-old). I have tried to add all that information which we struggled to find on the internet when we were planning our trips. I'm sure these tips and recommendations will be the cherry on the cake for you.

Come with us and travel India with a toddler!

How to make Traveling a fun family affair?

We all wish to go on family vacations and have a wonderful time with our kids. But many of us don't even take that first step because of the misconceptions about traveling with kids.



1- Clear out the misconceptions

The biggest misconception most parents have even before taking a vacation is-

- ✓ Traveling with kids is the most difficult thing to do.
- ✓ Or, you should not travel with babies, it's a lot more work.
- ✓ And, of course, toddlers can make your life hell on a vacation with their tantrums.

NOT TRUE AT ALL!!!

- ✓ Traveling with kids can be a little difficult but it's so much fun. If you'll look closely, kids teach us the actual meaning of having fun.
- ✓ I found traveling with a baby much easier. You may need to carry a few extra things but that's all, your baby won't even put his preferences. But your toddler can turn out to be your best travel partner.
- ✓ We have traveled the most with our toddler, 3 international trips and 14 trips within the country in the last 2 years. Do I need to say more!

C'mon guys, traveling is not that difficult with kids, it only needs a bit of preparation & planning. So, before planning a vacation, make sure you clear out all such misconceptions from your mind.

Also, stop listening to people who discourage you from traveling with your kid. Trust me, you don't need such advice!

2- Proper planning is the key

I always put a lot of emphasis on planning and it is actually an umbrella term & covers a lot many aspects of traveling. It includes planning trip itineraries, hotel stays, making checklists of what to pack, finalizing day trips, deciding activities for kids, etc. And, if it is your first trip with your toddler, then planning plays the most important role.

A well-planned trip can turn your first travel experience with your toddler into the best experience of your life. Our first ever road trip to Amritsar with Nemit (then 2-month-old) was a blunder due to lack of proper planning. But we learned from our mistakes and our next trip to Goa with Nemit (when 7-month-old) turned out to be super fun & we even extended it by 4 more days.

If you are not sure about traveling with your child, try taking a day trip or a weekend trip. You'll get to know the problems and you can plan better for longer trips.

3- Follow a schedule & keep it simple

Most young children usually have a fixed day & night schedule. If your kid doesn't have a daily routine, I suggest you help them set into one, it will make your task a lot easier while on a vacation & even at home. You can start as early as possible, begin with a feeding schedule, followed by a sleep schedule.

The most common mistake which parents do is not following this schedule. Instead of planning things as per their child's routine, they make the child adjust to their plan. This obviously will lead to tantrums in toddlers & crankiness in babies.

Apart from vacation, this routine will turn out to be a boon for stay at home mothers & working mothers alike!

4- Keep ample time for free play

Kids have a huge reserve of energy which if not burnt out can turn them into deadly volcanoes. And, you wouldn't want that volcano to erupt while you are on a relaxing vacation. So, make sure that you provide them ample free play time to burn out all their energy.

You can take them to the pool or to the kids' play area in the hotel. Each parent can take turns to keep a watch while the other takes a break. Or, better you join your child and make it a family play time.

Nothing can make kids happier to see their parents spend quality time with them.



5- A family vacation is a family vacation!

Another very important point to remember is to enjoy a family vacation like a family vacation only. You can't expect thrills of traveling with a group of friends out of your family vacation. It's the expectations which can ruin the things.

I have seen a few families in which taking care of the child is solely a mother's responsibility. I can totally understand how that would feel to the mother on a vacation. She's still doing everything which she does at home whereas her husband is in full vacay mode, enjoying & relaxing. Vacation or No vacation, it's one and the same thing for her.

When both partners work together in sync in raising a child, then only they can truly enjoy the family bonding. I know I've diverted from the main topic but it is one of the major reasons for parents not taking up family vacations.

There's a dire need for equal parenting. Think about it!

How to plan a kid-friendly holiday?

Now that you have cleared out the misconceptions and made up your mind to go on a family vacation, the next step is to plan & make your vacation kid-friendly. Just like us, it's a vacation for kids as well.

We all know how our lives change after having kids. We try to fit into our old routine but no, that's not happening. Life becomes challenging with kids but do we stop living it?

No!!! Right? We try to find out ways to make it simple and fun on day to day basis.

So, when you think of planning a vacation with your kids, you need to think of ways how you can make it kid-friendly.

I'm listing down some ways which have helped us in planning kid-friendly holiday every time –

1- Start with booking the right mode of travel.

Depending on whether you are taking a road trip, train journey or a flight, you need to book your mode of travel. The road journey is a bit tricky especially if you have a hyperactive toddler. Whereas flights & train journeys are lot more fun.

Choose a flight time when your kid is usually low in energy or around his nap time. In our case, morning flight & overnight train journey always works better.

For road trips, try to start early in the morning & take breaks every 2 hours.



2- Then comes the hotel booking.

Try to select the hotel/resort which has a dedicated play area for kids (indoor/outdoor). If you can't find a hotel with a play area, at least check if they have an open lawn. If you are going for a beach holiday, try to book a beach resort so that you don't have to travel far and have easy and quick access to a clean beach. You may also book an [Airbnb](#) private cottage/villa.

3- Kid-friendly holiday itinerary.

Before finalizing the itinerary, do search out places for kids' activities, be it a children's park or kid's play area, or an amusement park/theme park, etc. And plan a day dedicated just for your child.

We usually take Nemit to a kid's park and let him enjoy in his own way. Or allow him to play in the pool for as long as he wants. Or let him get messy on the beach. In short, let kids be kids.

4- Things to keep in mind.

If you are planning a trip with your child for the first time, make it a short one and a leisure trip probably. Stay at only one hotel and visit nearby places. Take cues from your child, if your child is happy, excited and comfortable take it as a positive sign. If you see your child is not interested in trying out something new, it's better to take a back seat and follow his lead or at least take a break & then try again. Also, start talking about the holiday at least 7-10 days before taking the trip.

I can add many more points to this list, but I feel if these 4 things are taken care of properly, it will make you confident enough to go on a vacation with your kids.

Stay Connected with Grandparents

As I mentioned in the beginning of this book that Nemit's Nani & Dadi (grandmothers) are an important part of our family and we love to travel with them. More than us, it's Nemit who gets excited to know that his Nani-Dadi will be coming along with us on a vacation. In the last 3 years, we had been on 4 amazing vacations with both our mothers and this book contains 2 of these travel stories for you.

We planned these vacations keeping in mind the comfort of our kid and his grandmothers. I believe this is the best you can gift to your parents and children which they will cherish forever. So, if you too wish to take your parents along on a vacation you can check out the tips below.



5 Best Tips for Traveling with Kids and their Grandparents

The definition of travel holds a completely different meaning when your travel partners are children and the big children (yes, the elderly!). You can't just pick a destination and make last minute plans. Obviously, we made a lot of mistakes during our trips since we had no guide book to

make it easy. But those trips taught us a lot about how to make the vacation more fun and comfortable for both; kid and his grandparents.

1- Start planning your trip at least 2-3 months prior to the actual date of travel.

Planning early not only gives you the freedom to book flights at a cheaper rate but you can select the best seats too. Involve the kids and grandparents while planning the destination, you'll be amazed to hear their inputs. When you have a lot of time on your hands before the vacation, you can invest more time in choosing the best resort for your stay. We make sure that the resort is kid-friendly and have comfortable cosy rooms.

Also, make sure that you share all the details with your parents so that they too have enough time to prepare themselves for the kind of holiday they are going to have. Trust me, after 60 parents take their time to soak in details and get ready mentally. But once they are ready, nobody can stop them from having the fun.



2- Select a non-touristy place/location to get the best out of your vacation.

Now this could get difficult to plan sometimes, but there are many famous destinations which have a part which remains untouched by tourists. We don't like places which are always beaming with people all around. Vacation should have a motive, and if your aim is not to explore the whole place which is anyhow not possible with kids and elderly then make relaxation and rejuvenation your main priority.

3- Plan for relaxing trips without much of traveling as that is exhausting for both kids & elderly.

We all know how tiring it gets if we have to explore various locations and places during the trip. Plan the itinerary such that you include only 2-3 nearby locations which can be easily visited and everybody gets enough time to rest and relax. Usually, during our earlier trips, we would get ready around 9 am and leave the hotel to explore nearby places and would come back only around late evening.

Don't ever plan such itineraries when you have kids and their grandparents along. This will only leave them exhausted and irritated. Gift them a relaxing holiday.

4- If possible, book a resort which has connecting rooms so that you can be together all the time.

You'll thank me later for this tip. If you can find such resorts which have villas with 2 rooms or connecting rooms, nothing could be better than this. If somehow you are unable to get connecting rooms in a resort, without any doubt book an Airbnb villa with 2 bedrooms. Nothing can beat this. It will feel just like home!

5- Lastly, plan activities which are easy to do and can be enjoyed together

You can't tell your parents & toddler to try paragliding or river rafting. However, everyone can enjoy boat rides in place of river rafting and peaceful small walks in place of long trekking. Don't shy away from asking your parents about their wish list. I'm sure they will share their own ideas of how they wish to enjoy the holiday.

One last point, deep inside we feel happy to have an extra pair of hands to take care of kids on a holiday but don't take that for granted. Let them enjoy & make memories with their kids and grandkids. You can't miss clicking those happy faces and laughter!



SECTION A - ANDAMAN ISLANDS

Alright now, let's take you on a trip to Andaman Islands and show you some of the offbeat locations which can be traveled with a toddler.

Andaman Trip Itinerary (9N/10D)

We planned this trip in Jan 2018 for Nemit's 2nd birthday and it turned out to be one of our most memorable trips. It was a 10-day leisure cum adventure trip and the best part was Nemit's Nani & Dadi were also traveling with us. We tried to cover some of the amazing places from South, Middle, and North Andaman. And it took us around 30 days to plan it perfectly.



Day 1 – Delhi to Port Blair

We had an early morning flight from Delhi to Port Blair. Since we had a toddler and his grandmothers along, we kept the first half of the day at leisure. And for the second half we decided to explore a nearby **‘Corbyn cove beach’**.

Stay at Kevin Homestay (www.kevinsandaman.com)

Place visited- Corbyn Cove Beach

Day 2 – Port Blair to Havelock Island (Swaraj Dweep)

Next day, we had planned to go to Havelock Island which is the most visited island in the Andamans. Since our ferry was around 2 pm we decided to visit **Munda Pahar Beach at Chidiya Tapu** in the morning which was about 40 mins from Port Blair.

It's an eco-friendly beach facility & a nice place to visit with kids. There are many eco-huts & wooden swings along the beachside. One can easily spend 3-4 hrs here, locals recommend watching the sunset from this beach.

Stay at Havelock Holiday Beach Resort (www.hhbr.in)

Place visited- Munda Pahar Beach at Chidiya Tapu

Day 3 – Visit to Radhanagar Beach

Next day, we visited Radhanagar beach which is the most famous & beautiful beach in Havelock Island. And, **it is also known as one of the best beaches in Asia.**

Stay at Havelock Holiday Beach Resort

Place visited- Radhanagar Beach

Day 4 – Trek to Elephant Beach

It was our last day in Havelock Island and we decided to try some adventure. We trekked to the Elephant beach which was one of the most exciting experiences we have ever had. **We also did the sea walk.**

Stay at Havelock Holiday Beach Resort

Place visited- Elephant Beach

Day 5 – Havelock Island to Port Blair

After spending 3 wonderful days in the South Andaman, it was time to **explore the middle and North Andaman** which are the least visited parts of the Andaman Archipelago. And I would recommend planning a visit to North Andaman as a separate itinerary and not to club it with South Andaman.

We spent the half day in transit from Havelock to Port Blair and rest of the day in exploring the market at Port Blair, shopping some necessary items.

Stay at Ixzire Resort (www.ixzire.com)

If you happen to plan a vacation for 5-6 days, then you can simply keep 2 days for Port Blair & rest of the days for Havelock Island. You can also visit another famous island '**Neil Island**' (Shaheed Dweep) for which ferry is available from Havelock as well as Port Blair. **We skipped Neil Island since we had to visit North Andaman.**

If you are traveling for the first time with a baby or a toddler, I'll recommend visiting the South Andaman. If you have older kids and you like adventure, you should definitely plan for Middle & North Andaman. And if you are adventure lovers like us, go ahead and take your toddler for the most exciting expedition to North Andaman. The most exotic beaches will welcome you!

Day 6 – Port Blair to Diglipur

Diglipur is the largest town of the North Andaman Island. You can witness the laid-back village life; people are very friendly and the food is simple yet tasty. It takes around **8-9 hrs to reach Diglipur by road**. However, with kids it may take up to 12-14 hrs. So, go well prepared!

There are many places of interest for adventure lovers such as **Saddle peak** (highest peak of Andaman & Nicobar Islands), **Ross & Smith**

Islands (also known as the twin islands), **Mud volcano**, **Alfred caves**, **Lamiya bay**, **Kalipur beach** (famous for turtle nesting), etc.

Stay at Pristine Beach Resort (www.andamanpristineresorts.com)

Place visited- Amkunj Beach

Day 7 – Ross & Smith Island

Next day it was Nemit's birthday and we had planned to visit [Ross & Smith Islands](#). These are one of the most pristine and secluded Islands of Andaman and are connected to each other with a thin strip of the white sandbar

Day 8 – Diglipur to Rangat

We wanted to visit Baratang caves so we had to halt overnight at Rangat (in Middle Andaman).

Stay at Priya International

Place visited- Dhani Nallah Nature Walkway & Beach

Day 9 – Rangat to Port Blair via Baratang

We visited the caves and then left for Port Blair. One can also do the full day tour to Baratang caves from Port Blair if they are not traveling to the North Andaman.

Stay at Ripple Resort (www.rippleresort.com)

Place visited- Limestone Caves at Baratang Island

Day 10 – Port Blair to Delhi

This was our last day in Andaman and we had booked an afternoon flight to Delhi.

Best Beach in Havelock Island

Havelock Island is famous for its pristine white sand beaches. The most beautiful beach on Havelock Island has also been ranked as Asia's one of the best beaches by Time Magazine. And it is the Radhanagar beach, undoubtedly the perfect one to visit with a toddler.



In case you want to visit the other beaches in Havelock Island, you can check out *Vijyanagar Beach, Kalapathar Beach, Elephant Beach & Govind Nagar Beach*.

How to Reach Havelock Island?

There is only one way to reach Havelock Island and that is **BY WATER!** One needs to take a ferry from Port Blair to reach this most visited island in the Andaman archipelago.

There are 2 kinds of ferry services available – **Government ferry & Private ferry**.

All private ferries operate under Makruzz & Green Ocean cruise. These are air-conditioned, have comfortable cushioned seats & even have a small cafe on board. We have traveled through Makruzz.

One can book a premium, deluxe or a royal class on Makruzz depending on their budget & requirement. Though, I would suggest booking a premium class as it is cost-effective and offers the best view of the sea since it is on the lower deck.

We reached an hour early and had to wait before boarding the ferry which was absolutely boring, also it was quite hot during the day. It's better to stay in the cab while only one person gets the tickets. Keep your child hydrated.

You can check more about [Makruzz here](#) & [Green Ocean here](#)!

A Visit to Radhanagar Beach

We reached Havelock Island in the evening. Since we were too tired to do anything else, we decided to call it a day. Next day we chose to visit the famous Radhanagar beach. Our day was quite exciting from the time we started from our resort until we came back in the evening. Since we were on a budget trip, we traveled like locals & took a bus instead of a cab to reach the beach. I would not recommend taking a bus if you are traveling with a baby (less than a year old).

We hopped on a bus which took around 30 mins from our resort to reach Radhanagar beach. The journey was one of its kind, we were dancing to the rhythm of the bus with each turn. The driver was in a race with time, it was fun but scary too.

It was Nemit's first bus ride and he was quite thrilled throughout the journey. While my husband and I were trying to keep our balance & not to fall on each other, our mothers were having a blast remembering their childhood days.



It was an experience we will never forget. For the next 2 days, Nemit tried stopping each and every bus that he saw on the road, ‘Bhaiya, roko...roko’ is what he shouted to every passing bus.

Nemit used to take 2 naps in a day when he was 2 years old. So, when we reached the beach, it was already time for his first nap. While he was sleeping, we decided to have some ‘we’ time & left him with his grandmothers in an eco-hut on the beachside. We spent a good time swimming in the shallow water & jumping on the waves. After an hour, when Nemit woke up, it was time to pull the grannies into the water. It was such a delight to watch them enjoy & have fun.

If you want to gift something to your parents, take them on a vacation with you and let them be kids once again.



Time went by so fast that we totally forgot about the lunchtime. We wanted to stay in the water for some more time. But we could not ignore the hunger pangs after doing all the acrobats. There is only one restaurant near the beach by the name 'The Mohwa '. We were lucky to get some authentic local vegetarian food at the restaurant even though it was time for them to close.

By the time we finished our meal, it was already 4 pm and also the time for the last bus to depart. We had to rush to the parking lot to catch that last bus. Nemit decided to take his 2nd nap on our way back in the bus while we gossiped about how none of us were able to keep our

balance in the waves. And, how the life guard was giving us stern looks perhaps for behaving like small kids.

If you plan a vacation to the Andaman Islands, I would like to suggest you book a hotel near Radhanagar beach and stay for at least 3 days in Havelock Island. I'm sure now you know why Radhanagar beach is the best beach to visit with kids. In case, you are still in doubt check out some more reasons below.

10 Reasons Radhanagar Beach is the Best Beach in Havelock Island to Visit with Kids

When one thinks of a beach holiday with kids, they want the beach to be **clean, less crowded, safe, and the water to be calm & shallow**. And, you get all this at the Radhanagar Beach.

- 1- It is *one of the most beautiful beaches* in the Andaman with *soft white sand & pristine blue waters*.
- 2- It is the *most famous beach in Havelock Island* yet less crowded and has an almost *2km long shoreline*.
- 3- There are *no shacks & shops* on the beach which makes it quite a *peaceful place to relax*.
- 4- The waters are calm and waves are smooth. Making it an *ideal beach for kids* to enjoy swimming or playing in the water.
- 5- There are *lifeguards* seated for the safety of tourists.
- 6- There are no water sports/activities available making it a perfect site for *swimming & relaxing*.
- 7- It is yet *not commercialized*. But offers all the basic facilities like lockers, changing rooms and shower area at very nominal charges.
- 8- There is *one restaurant located inside the park area* alongside the beach which offers lunch option on the buffet.
- 9- There are *eco-friendly huts, swings for kids, and benches* to sit under the tall mohwa trees.
- 10- The *eateries & shops are located outside the main gate* of the beach area in case you want to buy something for the kids.

Trek to Elephant Beach

While Radhanagar beach is an ideal place to relax & rewind, Elephant beach is a perfect place to enjoy water sports and adventure activities.

So, while coming back from Radhanagar beach, we asked the bus conductor to suggest some fun activities we can enjoy as a family. It's always better to check with the locals, they can be your best guides, you know! And he suggested a Trek to the Elephant Beach. He told us about the trekking path which goes through the beautiful jungle and leads directly to the beach. **And, we decided to try that out the next day.**

Trek that went wrong!

The next morning, we were so excited about the adventure. We reached the exact location from where the trek begins. There were a couple of forest guards seated at the entrance where they were noting down details of people taking that trek.

We checked with them about the trail and asked them if it is safe to go with a 2-year-old child and 2 senior citizens. They said it's a plain trail through the forest and if we can walk for 30 mins then we are good to go. Just then a local villager approached us & asked if we want to take a guide. Thinking it to be an easy trek we refused to take him along.

During the trek, something went wrong perhaps we should have hired that guide.

After completing all the formalities, we started our trek. We anticipated that this trek could take around an hour since we walk slow. We had walked only 15 mins when we were joined by 2 foreigner ladies who were also grannies & were traveling alone. For the next 15 mins, we all walked together and chatted along the way. It was getting hotter; I remember it was not noon still we could feel the sun directly on our head. Even though it was hot & humid, we were enjoying the trek.

However, we totally forgot that it was time for Nemit's first nap & he started getting cranky. As soon as Sumit picked him up, he dozed off.



We were doing fine until we saw a big mud puddle in front of us.

There was no way to go around it, we had to walk through it. And when we walked into that puddle, we realized that this was going to get challenging. It was not mud, it seemed like clay, very slippery and the puddle was deep. We couldn't keep our balance and had to hold on to the little branches hanging from the trees. Now, this was totally unexpected. ***And, we were not prepared for it.***

Also, this was not the kind of adventure we were looking for!

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But to our own surprise, we got so thrilled after crossing that puddle. We were giving hi-fives to each other as if we accomplished some kind of a mission. We took a short break there and Nemit decided to wake up all crying and cranky. On top of that he only wanted to be with me & it was literally not possible for me to carry him & walk through that jungle.



We had no idea what was ahead of us. And, just after a turn we saw the whole path was covered with even bigger puddles. My mom told us that it had rained last night which might have resulted in these puddles. But forest guards didn't mention this at all.

Millions of thoughts were crossing my mind. Maybe we were on the wrong path since we hadn't seen anyone in the last 15 mins. Maybe we should have hired that guide. Our phones were not working so there was no way to call anyone for help. Also, the 2 foreigner ladies who were walking with us, they were nowhere to be seen. None of us saw them going ahead. ***All this was freaking me out!***

We crossed another puddle and saw elephant poop on that path. Well, that just added to my anxiety. What if we get face to face with a wild elephant after all it is called Elephant beach so might be a connection. Clearly, I was losing my mind.



We decided to take control of that situation, luckily, we had our elders to offer their wisdom. We tried to calm down and look for a solution. Thankfully, Nemit had also settled by then sensing the tension in the environment. In that particular moment when none of us were speaking a word and we could hear our heartbeats; ***I felt a moment of Nirvana.***

And after some time, we all exclaimed together, let's do this!

Although it took us another one and a half hour to come out of that trail, the feeling was idyllic. I was never so happy to see a beach in my life. We were covered with mud from head to toe. Yes, because at some

places we had to crawl on our knees & bums to pass through the puddle.

I can never forget that trek. That 3-hr long trek taught me so much about life, balance, fear, love, will to survive, togetherness, moreover, accepting the situation when it is not as per our plan. This is what travel teaches us and that's why I want my son to travel and explore such places from this very early age. That experience didn't stop us from trying adventured in fact it prepared us for future expeditions.

Finally, we saw the white sand beach with the most beautiful turquoise water in the distance. We ran to the shore and cleaned ourselves and thanked our stars. ***We were happy we didn't find any wild elephants!***

Water Sport Activities at Elephant Beach



After relaxing a bit, we checked what all we could do on Elephant beach. We were shocked to know that they were almost closing. Yes, the beach closes around 3.30 pm. They clear off the beach by 4 pm as it gets high tides in the evening. And, it's not safe!

We realized why we couldn't find anyone on that trail. The officials at the beach told us that the best time to reach is early morning. There were many activities to do, snorkeling, banana boat ride, jet ski, and sea walk. We chose to go for sea walk since we had never tried this before.



So, while our mothers decided to relax on the beach, we booked a sea walk session for us. It was a surreal experience to walk on the sea bed, circling around a big coral rock, and feeding the colorful fishes with our hands. What did I like most about that experience? Making poses underwater and getting clicked. No doubt!

If you plan to trek to the elephant beach, do consider hiring a guide. And, be flexible, keep your calm and have a Plan B ready. You can also take a boat to reach the beach.

Visiting the Limestone Caves at Baratang

After spending three wonderful days at Havelock Island, we came back to Port Blair and prepared for our further journey. Next day we had to leave for Diglipur which lies in the extreme North Andaman. The road to Diglipur passes through Baratang Island in the Middle Andaman which is famous for the limestone caves.



If I'll only talk about the caves at Baratang, that would sound quite boring to you. Because here the journey to the destination is more exciting than the destination itself. The Baratang excursion to reach the limestone caves is what makes the whole experience enriching for kids as well as adults.

This journey starts from Port Blair passing through the thick jungles in a convoy of vehicles and crossing the strait on a vehicle ferry to finally taking the speed boat which sails through the mangrove creeks & drops you near the limestone caves from where one needs to walk through the fields to finally reach the caves.

Baratang Island connects the South Andaman to the Middle Andaman. And it's known for its natural wonders and the thick tropical & mangrove forests.

Sadly, there is very little information available online especially for tourists traveling with young children & senior citizens. Hence, I consider it my responsibility to share as much useful information as I could in my book based on our personal experience and some research.



How to Reach the Caves?

First, you need to decide whether you want to do a full day tour or stay overnight at Baratang. Or, if you want to go further to the North Andaman. Since we had planned to explore Diglipur in North Andaman,

we decided to visit the caves on our way back. There are 4 options to reach the caves which you may check [here](#).

We did a mistake by covering South, Middle & North Andaman in 10 days. It got too hectic by the end of the trip. It would have been better if we'd planned 2 separate trips. One for South Andaman and another for Middle & North Andaman.

Things you must know before visiting the Caves

- ✓ All tours start from Port Blair.
- ✓ All the vehicles need to stop at Jirkatang check post to get a permit to enter the Jarwah reserve forest. (You don't need to worry about the permit, your driver/tour agent will arrange that for you).

[Port Blair to Jirkatang check post – 42 Km](#)

- ✓ If you plan to travel by a private cab, you can book a hotel near to Jirkatang check post. We had booked Ixzire Resort which is 30 mins from Port Blair. By booking this hotel we saved some time in the morning & we also left half of our luggage there.

[Ixzire Resort to Jirkatang check post – 20 Km](#)

- ✓ The Jarwah reserve forest starts from Jirkatang check post & stretches up to 49km & ends at the Middle Strait Jetty.
- ✓ All the vehicles leave in convoy from Jirkatang check post. Each convoy has a bus in the front with 1-2 armed policemen inside. This experience of passing through the dense forest was quite exhilarating.
- ✓ There are 4 convoys throughout the day (6 am, 9 am, 12 pm, 2.30 pm).

- ✓ If you miss the convoy, you can't enter the Jarwah reserve forest. So, take note of these times & plan your visit accordingly. No person or vehicle is allowed to stop once inside the reserve. Carry sufficient food and water with you.
- ✓ Jarwah are the tribal people of Baratang Island who are completely cut off from the outer world.
- ✓ Taking pictures or interacting with Jarwah tribe is not allowed & is a punishable offense. Though interacting with tribal people was not allowed, we were hoping to catch a glimpse & we did. But we made sure not to take their pics or startle them with our actions. They are humans just like us living in a different habitat.
- ✓ Once you reach the Middle Strait Jetty, you need to wait for the vehicle ferry to cross a strait & reach the Baratang Island



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- ✓ Once you are on the other side of the Jetty, you need to take a speed boat from there that will take you through the mangrove creek to Nayadera jetty. This is truly a mesmerizing journey of 45 mins through the dense tropical forest.
- ✓ After getting down at the Nayadera jetty, you need to walk for 300 meters on a wooden bridge.
- ✓ Once you cross the bridge, you need to walk further 300 meters through the fields and a small village to finally reach the limestone caves.

The cave is not very big and the entrance is quite compact. But once you are inside you feel the adrenaline rush looking at all the mesmerizing limestone formations. Although the whole journey seems tiresome, the memories you take away from this journey makes the whole experience worthwhile.



And, when you come out after exploring the cave, do try the refreshing lemon water villagers sell just outside the cave.

If you are traveling with kids or elderly (60+ age), please keep their requirements in mind. Don't push them to try their limits & keep ample time in hand. Always have a Plan B ready in case the actual plan goes down. In short, be flexible!

You'll be surprised to know that our 2-year-old had the most fun time during the whole expedition. The jungle, river, ships, ocean, ferry, speed boat, trekking, caves, it was all quite thrilling for him.



Diglipur – The Hidden Gem in North Andaman

As I mentioned earlier, Diglipur is the largest & the farthest town in North Andaman. Although, it is not the main tourist attraction you can witness a beautiful island village life here, which makes it truly special. Also, you'll find some most exotic & untouched beaches near Diglipur.

Diglipur seemed to me like a dream. People were just lazing around, there was no stress on their faces, they were happy doing their own thing. And their simple rice & sambhar with pickle & paapad is the most delicious meal I've ever had in my life. The whole experience at Diglipur was just magical. And, I wanted to stay there forever.

Not many people know about Diglipur including the locals at Port Blair. None of the travel operators will add this in your trip itinerary unless you mention it specifically. Only a few tourists travel this far in the North & they are mostly the explorers and the nature lovers. Yes, we can call Diglipur a nature lover's paradise. And I'd love to say we are a family of nature lovers!

How to Reach Diglipur?

Let me clear one thing, don't expect too much, you won't find any luxury in any part of Middle or North Andaman. But you can experience the best of nature, pristine beaches and explore the most beautiful untouched locations there.

The distance from Port Blair to Diglipur is 300 Km and it may take up to 14 hrs if traveling with kids. The road condition in many parts is not that good which will further slow you down. You'll need to cross Jarwah Reserve Forest and 2/3 water streams on vehicle ferries if starting from Port Blair.

We started early morning around 5 am from our resort (Ixziye Resort) and reached Jirkatang check post by 5.45 am. After all the formalities to get the permit to pass through the Jarwah Reserve Forest, we started in a convoy at around 6.30 am. We reached the Middle strait jetty after an exciting road journey of 90 mins. Next, we took a vehicle ferry to reach Baratang jetty at Baratang Island. From there, we started our onward journey towards Rangat.

We reached Rangat around 1 pm and stopped at *Priya International Hotel* for lunch. We stayed at this same hotel while returning back from Diglipur.

After lunch, we directly visited Amkunj Beach which is a famous beach in Rangat with eco-friendly facilities like eco huts, log sofas & wooden swings. It was a beautiful location and Nemit had a blast running around & playing in the sand. After spending some 30 mins & exploring around the beach, we started our onward journey.



There is another beautiful beach located 13 km from Amkunj beach towards Diglipur i.e. Dhaninallah Beach. It is famous for the longest Mangrove Nature Walkway, 713 meters long, in India. The boardwalk

and the beach facilities are completely eco-friendly. There are many halts on the long boardwalk and these are named after the commonly found birds in the Andaman Islands. We explored Dhaninallah while returning back from Diglipur. I wish we had more time to spend in Middle & North Andaman, I had never seen such beautiful beaches anywhere in India. Our next stop was Diglipur market where we ordered a cake for our son since it was Nemit's birthday on the next day.

Where to Stay in Diglipur?

There are only a few accommodation options in Diglipur mainly in nearby Kalipur village. And you need to book your stay well in advance. We had stayed at Pristine Beach Resort which is undoubtedly the best resort in Diglipur. Other in the town are Turtle Resort (it is government property) & Saddle Peak View Resort.

Places to Visit in Diglipur?

- 1- Ross & Smith Island – Twin Island
- 2- Kalipur Beach – Turtle Nesting Ground
- 3- Saddle Peak – Highest Peak in Andaman & Nicobar Islands
- 4- Alfred Caves – Limestone Caves in Diglipur
- 5- Mud Volcano at Shyam Nagar

That's the hidden gem of North Andaman. The journey was a bit tiring for Nemit and his Nani & Dadi since it was quite hot even in the month of January. But the whole experience was out of this world and I can't truly express it in words. One should have to visit Diglipur to witness the charm of this rustic village and its nearby places.

A Day at Ross & Smith Islands, Diglipur

The next day was Nemit's birthday and to celebrate his special day we chose the exotic Ross & Smith Islands. These are one of the most pristine and secluded Islands of Andaman. And are connected to each other with a thin strip of the white sandbar. You can literally walk from one island to another. Just imagine the feeling of walking on the white sand from one island to the other.



The best thing about this trip was not just Nemit's birthday but also the company of both his grandmothers. Also, we had 10 days to cover most of the parts of this beautiful Indian Island. That too without burning a hole in our pockets.

How to reach?

One has to take a speedboat from the Aerial Bay Jetty in Diglipur to reach the Twin Islands. The boat ride to Ross and Smith costs around INR 3000/- per boat for a capacity of 5-6 persons and it takes around 20 minutes to reach the destination.

There are few beautiful huts near the Ticket counter at Aerial Bay Jetty. We spent some time there while arranging for the permits and the boat before taking on the further journey. Make all arrangements beforehand as there are no shops at the Ross and Smith Island. We had to carry the eatables as well as drinking water with us. When we visited, there were no arrangements for water sports as well, so if you wish to do snorkeling, carry your gear along.

What to do?

After the boat drops at the Island, take a walk on the white sand trail to reach the Smith Island. To cross the sandbar and reach the Ross Island, one has to take a separate permission from the officials at the Smith Island.

Once you reach the Smith Island, you'll be surprised to see how beautifully it has been maintained, there are wooden huts everywhere, loungers to bask under the sun, beautiful swings and even the bathing & changing huts too. You'll be mesmerized by the beauty of this island, spend time taking long walks on the beach, swim in the clear waters, do snorkeling or just bask in the sun. Each moment spent here felt like a moment of the lifetime.



There are 2 things which Nemit likes a lot and these are water and sand. And that's why we were so sure to take this trip for Nemit. We left him free to explore the beach on his own, only keeping an eye on him from the distance. He was so excited to see sand and water all around him.

We could have never planned his birthday better than this. He had his parents all to him, without any gadgets around, giving him complete attention and their time. His grandmothers were there to shower their love and blessings on him. And he had the whole paradise island for himself to enjoy his day.



We reached the Island at around 11 am and were asked to head back around 3 pm. We were told that we can't stay there once the high tide starts. During high tides, the sandbar connecting both the islands get submerged in water separating the two from each other.

After spending some time walking along the beach and taking lots of pictures, we decided to go get drenched in ocean water. We noticed that swimming was allowed only on the other side of the sandbar and it was getting some waves too. While the other side had calm waters without any waves but swimming was not allowed. We all had a great

time playing in the water with Nemit. Once the waves started getting bigger and harsh, we came out took a bath and changed into dry clothes. And, then it was time to just relax & get tanned.

We didn't realize how fast time was running there and soon our boat driver came looking for us. It was time to head back to our resort in Diglipur.

Where to Stay?

We stayed at the Pristine Beach Resort, in Diglipur. The distance from the Resort to the Aerial bay jetty is about 8 Km and takes around 20 mins to reach there. Kalipur beach is nearby and at a walking distance of 10 mins. The resort has options for rooms and villas. Since we were on a budget trip, we settled for 2 Deluxe rooms, which were quite cosy and comfortable.

Villas have 2 connected rooms, spacious, luxurious and with all the amenities. If we had to spend our time in the resort, we would have chosen the villas.

Traveling is a therapy for the mind, body, and soul. And it works same with everyone & benefits every age group!

I have a post on my blog where I have shared '[80 Things to Do in Andaman Island with Family](#)'.

SECTION B – KASHMIR

Let us now take you to the Paradise on Earth.

An Ultimate Kashmir Travel Guide

Jammu & Kashmir is a state in northern India surrounded by the great Himalayan ranges. J&K consists of 3 major regions – Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh. We visited Kashmir with our toddler and his grandmothers to celebrate Sumit's birthday in October 2018. The Kashmir valley is famous for its beautiful landscape, snow-capped mountains & pristine lakes & rivers. Not to forget the warm and friendly people of Kashmir.

As we hear in the news, the situation in Kashmir is mostly tensed & not considered favorable for tourism. Also, families may not consider it as a preferred travel destination. But there is another side of Kashmir which is far from terror and I feel lucky that we could travel to this beautiful destination and witness the unspoiled beauty through our own eyes. I wish the situation in Kashmir gets normal soon and it becomes the most preferred travel destination for tourists and families in the near future.

I fell in love with Kashmir at a very young age. I have heard many stories of its heavenly beauty from my parents & have seen it in their black & white honeymoon pictures.

It was my childhood dream to travel to this beautiful destination. And my dream came true last year when we planned a special family trip to Kashmir. Initially, we were confused whether we should plan this trip or not. But once we stepped out of the airport, we knew our stay in Kashmir was going to be very memorable. And, we would be taking back countless memories with us.

Here's a famous quote by Mughal Emperor Jehangir when he first visited Kashmir "Gar Firdaus bar-rue zaminast, hamiasto, hamin asto, haminast."
Meaning 'if there is heaven on Earth, it is here, it is here, it is here'. And, it still holds true.



Let me help answer some of the questions which we had while planning our trip.

When to Visit Kashmir?

The first thing we wanted to check was the best time to visit Kashmir. We were looking for the month of October which is considered the onset of winter season & also the offseason in Kashmir. Sumit called a few tour operators in Kashmir and checked with them about the weather conditions. He even checked with the hotels to be sure about the weather since we were traveling with a toddler and senior citizens.

Kashmir is one destination in India which you can visit at any time of the year. It depends on what you are looking for in your travel and also what temperatures you can tolerate.

Summer – April to June (Max tourist footfall)

Monsoon – July to September

Winters – October to March (Max Snowfall in Dec-Jan-Feb)

Summer months get the maximum crowd in the valley. However, people who love snow, flock in the winter months. We visited in October and found it to be the perfect time to enjoy the true beauty of Kashmir, it was neither too cold nor too hot.

How to Reach Kashmir?

Since we had only 5 days in hand, we chose the fastest way to reach Srinagar. The airport is very well connected to all the major cities in India. The flight takes only 1 hour 30 min from Delhi to Srinagar. And the fare ranges from INR 3000 to INR 5000 depending on the airline. You can reach Kashmir by any of these means –

By Air- Srinagar International Airport

By Road- Delhi to Srinagar (809 Km via NH 44)

By Train- Jammu Tawi Railway Station in Jammu

Places to Visit in Kashmir?

Now that you have decided when & how you want to travel to Kashmir, it's time to decide which places you want to include in your itinerary. We visited the 4 main destinations -

- 1- Srinagar
- 2- Pahalgam
- 3- Gulmarg
- 4- Sonmarg

Other than these people also prefer visiting Leh & Ladakh, Jammu and Patnitop.

Quick Kashmir Itinerary (5N/6D)

This is the itinerary that we followed for our trip.

Day 1- Delhi to Srinagar to Pahalgam

We took an early morning flight & Nemit decided to take a quick nap.

Places we visited in Pahalgam

- ✓ Apple garden
- ✓ Lidder Amusement Park
- ✓ Lidder river near the hotel

Overnight stay at Kolahoi Green Resort (www.kolahoigreen.com)

Day 2- Pahalgam Day Tour

Places we visited in Pahalgam

- ✓ Betab valley
- ✓ Chandanwari
- ✓ Aru valley

Overnight stay at Kolahoi Green Resort (www.kolahoigreen.com)

Day 3- Pahalgam to Gulmarg

- ✓ Gondola ride

Overnight stay at Kolahoi Green Heights (www.kolahoigreen.com)

Day 4- Gulmarg to Srinagar

Places we visited in Srinagar

- ✓ Dal Lake
- ✓ Char Chinar (movie shooting – Notebook)

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- ✓ Chashme Shahi Park

Overnight Stay at Hotel New Park (www.hotelnewpark.in)

Day 5- Srinagar to Sonmarg (Day Trip)

Places we visited in Sonmarg

- ✓ Baltal Valley
- ✓ Fishing Point
- ✓ The Last Village
- ✓ Thajiwas Glacier

Overnight Stay at Hotel New Park (www.hotelnewpark.in)

Is it Safe to Visit Kashmir?

We all know the situation in Kashmir. We keep hearing the news of violence, stone pelting, and ceasefire violation in J&K. Srinagar is the main city that witnesses the violent protests by the frustrated youth. But let me tell you, Kashmir is the warmest place on Earth & the care and hospitality by the Kashmiris is truly heart touching.

For Kashmiris, tourism is the main source of their income. And, they can never go against tourists or hurt them. In fact, they go out of their way to save tourists from any foul situation. During our stay, we felt that warmth, love, and care in their hospitality.

You may read this article for more info – [Is it Safe to Travel to Kashmir?](#)

Lidder River & Lidder Amusement Park, Pahalgam

As I mentioned in the beginning of the book, it's important to make the holiday kid-friendly if you are traveling with young kids. We try to include some fun activities which we can do with Nemit on our trips. While we were planning our trip to Kashmir, we saw this Lidder amusement park on the map & without any second thoughts, we included it in our itinerary.

We had booked Kolahoi Green Resort which is located en route to Pahalgam from Srinagar. And the Pahalgam market is just 7 km from the resort. This resort is strategically located in the most peaceful location offering a splendid view of the mountains. And, the best part is the Lidder river flows just across the road making it a perfect resort to stay with family. On our Day 1 in Pahalgam, we had half a day at leisure, so first, we took Nemit to the amusement park & later returned to the riverside to spend some fun family time.

Lidder Amusement Park

We reached the amusement park at 3 pm. The area around the park was spookily quiet, there were only a few people around but we could not spot any tourists amongst them. I guess it was because of the offseason, but that did freak me out for a moment.

This park is situated right on the banks of Lidder river & is not as big as the ones we have in our metro cities. But it is definitely a perfect one for children to have some thrilling time amidst nature. This visit to the amusement park was a surprise for Nemit & he got quite excited to enjoy the rides. Although, most of the rides catered to kids above 5 years, that didn't bring down Nemit's excitement level.



There's a huge garden in the centre of the park where families can sit and have a picnic while kids enjoy the rides. We were as happy as Nemit since this was the first amusement park where there were no long queues and the views were spectacular.

Timings – 10 am to 6 pm

Entry Fee – INR 100/adult & INR 50/child

Leisure Time at Lidder River

After spending 2 hrs at the park, we decided to cancel our plan to go to the riverside because it was getting cold with each passing hour. The air became chill & crisp within a few minutes after the sunset. We just

wanted to go back to our resort, jump right into our beds & have some hot kahwa. But who are we to make plans in the paradise?

We were on our way back when we saw the Lidder river flowing just by our side. And, the gushing sparkling water was tempting enough to make us stop. The spot where we stopped was a little far from our resort but we still decided to check it out. The beauty of Kashmir is so mesmerizing, that the hills, meadows, river, air, natural sounds, they all pull you towards them. And, you feel enthralled with their charm.



It was too cold due to the strong winds and we had to rush back to our cab within 15 mins. But that fun experience made us crave for more. Next day, we woke up early morning, there was a nip in the air but we could also see the Sun throwing up its rays on the top of the mountain. We got dressed and headed right to the river just across our resort.

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We made poses and clicked selfies. Nemit enjoyed throwing stones in the river. He even made some friends there. We sat there for more than 2 hours & made countless memories. It was such an unforgettable experience. If you plan a trip to Pahalgam, keep a day at leisure and spend that time by the Lidder river and at the Lidder amusement park. Your kids will love it.



And, you'll take back memories for a lifetime with you.

A Day in Pahalgam, Kashmir

After coming back from the river, we had scrumptious breakfast and later went to explore the charming beauty of Pahalgam.

In Kashmir, the local taxi mafia prevails, which means you can't drive around in your cab. One has to book a separate taxi of that particular region to reach specific tourist places. We had pre-booked our cab for the period of our stay in Kashmir. And, we were not informed about the taxi union while booking. Luckily, no one stopped our vehicle or questioned us on day 1 but we didn't want any bad experience during our trip so we hired separate cabs for Pahalgam & Sonmarg day tours. And let me tell you the taxis in Kashmir are expensive. So, plan your budget accordingly.

Tip – If you are pre-booking a cab, ask the booking agent to provide you separate local taxis for each location – Pahalgam, Gulmarg & Sonmarg.

1- Visit Betab Valley, Pahalgam

After a 15-min scenic drive from Pahalgam with Lidder river flowing by our side we reached Betab Valley. If you have watched the famous Bollywood movie 'BETAAB' starring Sunny Deol & Amrita Singh then it won't take much time to relate to the name of this valley. And, this will also make you excited to look for exact shooting locations which you could recall from the movie.

My mother & husband were quite excited to explore this place. While my mother in law and I were just happy to be at such a calm and peaceful location. Nemit was happy to see all the green open space which was perfect for him to run around.

The weather in Kashmir is quite unpredictable, it can go from sunny to cloudy to windy within no time. And, when it gets windy, it gets super chilly too. Only a Maggi & chai can save you. Luckily, it was Nemit's nap time, so he slept peacefully for an hour while we had a Maggi picnic at Betab Valley.

2- Trek to Chandanwari Glacier

Chandanwari is a beautiful place just 20 mins from Betab Valley. It is also the starting point of Amarnath Yatra. When we reached Chandanwari, it was already 2.30 pm and the temperature had started going down. Our driver dropped us near a small market from where we had to trek to the glacier point. It was a different experience, Nemit was enjoying the most. He just wanted to keep going even though the terrain was quite rough and we had to literally run behind him to save him from any falls.



There was a completely mesmerizing feel to that place. I don't know if it was the October month or just the time of the day but the place was extremely quiet. The only sound we could hear was our own echo in the valley or the gushing sound of the river water. The moment I took a step towards the glacier I fell in love with this place.

I wanted to dance and sing and just stay there forever. It is not possible to write down the exact feeling in words, but I was completely awestruck by the beauty of Chandanwari.



Just when we were returning to our cab, it started snowing. It was very slow and we could hardly feel it but that added to our ecstatic mood. We decided to stay for some more time and again ordered a round of Maggi & chai for us. And, cookies & chocolate milk for the little one.

3- Drive to Aru Valley

Our next stop was Aru Valley which was an hour's drive from Chandanwari. Since it was already 4 pm when we started, we knew we won't be able to spend much time at Aru Valley. Just after 10 mins drive, it started raining heavily. And, the whole drive turned into the most delightful long drive in the hills.

We put on the music and started our own karaoke in the car. While our driver was getting worried, we were in full mood to go out and enjoy the rain. And, as soon as we reached Aru valley, the weather took another turn, and now we could see the rain and the hail together. Even that could not stop us from going out. For Sumit and me, it was the perfect moment to go out and enjoy the beauty of nature. And, we did that exactly. In that extreme weather, we walked a few meters to the valley and clicked pictures. That's crazy we!



Nemit was missing all the action since his grandmothers didn't let him go with us. Poor baby! But on our way back when it stopped raining and the sky changed colors, we stopped once again. It was a small viewpoint from where one can have the complete view of the Lidder valley.

If you can make to Aru Valley before 4 pm and the weather is pleasant, it's a beautiful place to spend some leisure time with family.

We couldn't spend much time there but we were happy we visited. Also, it was Sumit's birthday and we couldn't have enjoyed this special day any better. We reached our resort and did a small celebration. Since, it was our last day in Pahalgam we packed our bags for our next destination and called it a night.



Gulmarg Gondola

After spending 2 exciting days in Pahalgam, it was time for some thrill in Gulmarg. We were already quite nervous about our trip because of the tensed situation in J&K. However, we wanted our trip to be a memorable & exciting one so we tried including some adventure in it. Most of you must be aware of Gulmarg being a popular ski destination in India during winters. Many tourists, travelers, and adventurers visit Gulmarg in the months of Dec-Jan-Feb to enjoy the snow.

However, if you are planning a vacation with young kids, I would suggest not visiting in the extreme winter months especially, if it's their first experience at a high altitude as the temperature dips as low as -14 degrees Celsius in peak winters. We found October to be perfect for traveling with young children when the average temperature was around 5 to 15 degrees Celsius.

Gulmarg Gondola Joyride

Gulmarg Gondola is one of the world's longest & highest operating cable cars which operate in 2 phases. There's one more phase that is chairlift which majorly operates in winter months.

3 Stages of Gondola ride

Gulmarg to Kongdoori (9 mins)

Kongdoori to Apharwat Peak (12 mins)

***Chairlift – Kongdoori to Mary shoulder (children
below 10 years of age are not allowed)***

Although I have experienced ropeway rides at many other places in India and abroad, the Gulmarg Gondola ride was quite an exhilarating experience. It's thrilling and spine-chilling when you are thousands of feet above the ground & all you see around you are the snow-covered mountain peaks & tips of the pine trees.



Well, I remember freaking out when the cable car started swinging due to strong winds after crossing phase 1. At that moment, I was having flashes from movie 'Frozen' (no, not the Disney Frozen). The movie where 3 friends get stranded on the chair lift when the ski patrol mistakenly left them behind.

I was getting all the horrible thoughts in my mind. I looked at my mom, surprisingly she looked calm, I'm sure she was in the meditative state. When I turned to look at my mother-in-law, she seemed as terrified as I

was. And, I immediately turned to my husband, to get reassurance that everything is fine & he managed to reciprocate with a smile.

Next, I wanted to see the reaction on Nemit's face in that situation. I was avoiding eye contact since I was fearing that he would want to jump into my lap the moment I look at him.

But to my utter surprise, he was the only one who was enjoying the whole experience. He was happily looking outside when he turned around & said, 'Wow, look Mumma-papa, that's snow. I want to play in snow.' And, that immediately brought a big smile on everyone's face. And, our fears just vanished into thin air.

That's childhood, fearless & carefree.



All you need to know before taking the Gondola Ride!

When to visit

Gulmarg Gondola is operational all year round. They may shut down periodically for maintenance. It is better to call on the helpline numbers before visiting Gulmarg and check with them if they are operational or not.

Email – info@gulmarggondola.com
Ph- +919650226555, 91-197-2435837

We visited in October 2018 and there was not much snow even at phase 2 or the snow was too thin & slippery. Also, there were no snow activities during that time. But the views were breath taking. Since, there were only a few tourists there, we got to enjoy the panoramic beauty of the mountain ranges.

Timings of Gondola

Gondola timings are from 9 am to 5 pm (depending on weather conditions) and the ticket is valid only for 3 hours from the time of boarding. At any time, if the weather gets bad, they immediately evacuate the place for the safety of tourists.

Ticket Booking

You can book tickets through the ticket counter or online e-ticketing sites www.jksccc.com or www.gulmarggondola.com.

It is always better to book tickets after checking with them the current weather conditions. I would suggest booking online once you reach Gulmarg. Ticket counters usually have long queues which are a total waste of time. Also, when you book online you get to select a time slot (of an hour) from 9 am to 3 pm & the ticket is valid for 3 hours.

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For phase 1 & 2, children below 3 years are free. And for phase 3, children below 10 years are not allowed.

I would recommend booking a two-way ticket from Gulmarg to Apharwat. Go directly to phase 2, spend some time there playing in the snow and then come back to phase 1. Please take care of small children and senior citizens as they may face some breathing problem for the first few minutes.

As per our experience, Nemit was all good and excited and didn't face any issues which we were fearing. However, my mother-in-law did get breathing difficulty at Phase 2 & she couldn't enjoy much. My mother was initially good but after some time she also felt a bit tired, due to less oxygen at high altitude. Sumit and I didn't feel any issues as such. There's a seating area at both the levels in case someone wants to rest & relax and catch a breath.

What to Wear/Pack

At Apharwat, the temperature keeps on changing depending on the weather condition. So, even on a good sunny day, it is advisable to pack a pair of woolen gloves, a woolen cap to cover the head, ears & neck (or even face) and an extra jacket/wind-cheater. It is always good to **put on layers** rather than covering up in 1 bulky woolen.

For kids, keep a pair of spare outfits in case they need a change after getting wet playing in the snow. And, wear comfortable shoes, snow boots or hiking boots are good. You can also rent boots after reaching phase 2.

Do you need a Tourist Guide?

Yes!!!

I would strongly suggest booking a guide if you have kids or elderly with you. They can help you walk through the snow, can carry your bags and narrate to you some amazing tales of the hills.

SECTION C – MEGHALAYA

Have you ever seen a toddler enjoying adventure travel? It came as a surprise to us. Come on, let us take you to an adventurous trip to the North East India.

Meghalaya Trip

We traveled to the Andaman Islands in January and then went on 2 mini vacations in February and May. But the second half of the year was the game changer, we took 6 back to back trips both long and short, leisure and adventure. Each one of our trips made us more confident to explore & experiment with our travels. We had never imagined that Nemit's terrible twos can turn out to be so much fun. We are so proud of our boy; he was the only driving force when we felt lost.

After coming back from Kashmir, we felt the urge to travel more. And we again packed our bags to explore the offbeat locations in Meghalaya. This time we traveled without our mothers; they needed some rest. But Nemit was in full charged up mode which was a good sign for us. It was our most special trip during Diwali holidays with our toddler.

We trekked to the mesmerizing waterfalls, explored the hidden caves, did camping by the riverside and much more.

Meghalaya is one of the most sought-after travel destinations for nature and adventure lovers in India. The name **Meghalaya means 'the abode of clouds'** and it is also one of the most beautiful States in the North-Eastern part of India.

To cover all the major places of interest in Meghalaya, one must reach Shillong first. There are no direct flights to Shillong that we know of. The nearest airport is in Guwahati, Assam and one needs to take a cab from there to reach Shillong. It takes around 3-4 hrs to cover the distance, roads are quite smooth and the views are amazing.

We traveled in the first week of November, the weather was pleasant and the only drawback of traveling around this time of the year was 'no

rainfall' and almost 'dried waterfalls'. If you want to witness the rain and the gushing waterfalls, the best time would be to visit just after the monsoon. But then it would become a little difficult to walk around and trek to the falls as it would be slippery and not safe for kids as well. So, plan accordingly!

By this time Nemit had already traveled a lot & we had started calling him a pro traveler. We included a lot of adventure activities in our itinerary but kept it flexible. If this is your first trip with your toddler & you are doubtful if you could manage adventure travel or not, I suggest you take it easy and plan as per your child's likings and strengths.

This was a 7N/8D trip which also included 1 N at Kaziranga National Park.

Itinerary of Meghalaya Trip

Day 1 – Delhi to Guwahati to Kaziranga

Delhi to Guwahati by flight – 2.5 hrs (early morning flight)
Guwahati to Kaziranga by road – 5 hrs (with 1 pit stop for lunch)

We visited Kaziranga Orchid and Bio-diversity Park to attend their night cultural program.

Overnight stay at Bonfire Kaziranga Resort (www.bonfirekaziranga.com)

Day 2 – Kaziranga to Shillong

Next day, we went for a morning jeep safari (7.30 am – 10 am)
Checked out from our hotel and left for Shillong around 12 noon.

Kaziranga to Shillong by road – 6 hrs (with 2 pit stops)
Overnight stay at Pine Hill Homestay, Shillong.

Day 3 – Day Trip to Mawsynram

Shillong to Mawsynram – 2 hrs

Mawsynram is the wettest place in the world. We visited Mawjymbuin cave, Khreng Khreng waterfall, and Mawphlang Sacred Grove.

Overnight stay at Pine Hill Homestay, Shillong.

Day 4 – Shillong to Cherrapunjee

Shillong to Cherrapunjee – 1.5 hrs

It took us around 5 hrs to reach our resort in Cherrapunjee as we covered the major places of interest en route. We visited Mawkdok Dympep Valley, trekked down to Wah Kaba falls, explored the newly discovered Arwah cave and witnessed the mesmerizing beauty of Nohkalikai falls.

Overnight stay at Pala Resort. (www.palaresort.co.in)

Day 5 – Cherrapunjee

We visited Seven Sister falls and Maswmai cave. In the evening, spent some fun time with Nemit at a children's park near Maswmai cave.

Overnight stay at Pala Resort.

Day 6 – Cherrapunjee to Dawki (Camping)

Cherrapunjee to Dawki – 2.5 hrs

Dawki to Shnongpdeng camping area - 7 Kms

We enjoyed boating in the surreal waters of Umngnot river & experienced our first camp life near the river surrounded by lush green forest.

Overnight stay at camp by [Shatsngi Homestay & Adventure](#)

Day 7 – Dawki to Mawlynnong to Shillong

Dawki to Mawlynnong – 1.5 hrs

We spent the morning playing in the crystal-clear water of Umngnot river. After breakfast, we left for Mawlynnong village which is also the cleanest village in Asia. We also trekked to the living root bridge at Mawlynnong.

After lunch, we came back to Shillong and visited the popular Police Bazaar in the evening.

Mawlynnong to Shillong – 2.5 hrs

Overnight stay at Pine Hill Homestay, Shillong.

Day 8 – Shillong to Guwahati to Delhi

This was the last day of our Meghalaya trip. We checked out from our hotel after breakfast and left for Guwahati. En route we visited Elephant falls and spent some fun time at Umiam Lake. This lake also features a beautiful garden (Lum Nehru Park) near its shores with a children's play area at one corner, perfect to have a family picnic. We left around 2 pm and had lunch at Jiva Restaurant on the way to Guwahati.

Umiam lake to Guwahati – 3 hrs (including 1 hr spent at Jiva)

We had booked an evening flight to Delhi.

5 Natural Wonders of Meghalaya

Meghalaya is the wettest state in India.

Do you know 70% of this state is covered with forests which are considered to be among the richest botanical habitats of Asia?

Apart from its rich biodiversity, Meghalaya is also famous for the longest and deepest natural caves in the subcontinent and some of the most breath-taking waterfalls. If you wish to explore the caves with your kids, make sure you plan the trip in the dry months. But to experience the true beauty of the majestic falls, visit during the monsoon.

Here's a list of 5 natural wonders of Meghalaya which we visited with our toddler.

1- The Caves in Meghalaya

There are around 900 caves in Meghalaya which have been partially or fully explored by the experts.

Krem Liat Prah is the longest cave in India and is listed among the longest caves in the world.

Most of the caves can only be explored by the experienced cavers with proper skills and gears. But there are a few other caves which can be easily explored by anyone without requiring any special skills except the skill of balancing. Even the kids can visit these caves.

1- Mawjymbuin Cave, Mawsynram

Mawjymbuin cave is a small cave 60 km from Shillong in the town of Mawsynram.

2- Mawsmmai Cave, Cherrapunjee

Mawsmmai cave is the most popular cave in Cherrapunjee for tourists who want to feel the thrill. It is well lit and easily accessible which

makes it the favorite choice of tourists especially families. It is a long cave but only a small portion is open for the visitors.

3- **Arwah Cave, Cherrapunjee**

Arwah cave is the more recent discovery and was opened for tourists in 2014. If you want to experience the real thrill of exploring the unknown then this is a must visit. This was not part of our itinerary, in fact, we had no idea that such a cave existed, thanks to our driver who told us about this new cave.



2- Waterfalls in Meghalaya

Now, coming to the waterfalls which are abundant and truly magnificent in Meghalaya. Each waterfall has some kind of interesting tale associated to it, ask your local guide or driver to narrate these to

you. Also, you'll need really good stamina or at least ample time at hand to trek to some of the most spectacular waterfalls.

1- Elephant Falls in Shillong

Elephant falls are quite popular among the tourists visiting Shillong. This fall is a 3-step waterfall and each of the steps is easily accessible by walking down the stairs. And, no! there are no elephants neither they resemble an elephant now.

1- Khreng Khreng Falls in Mawsynram

Not so majestic but definitely the best located falls in Mawsynram. Although we had big expectations from this fall it didn't disappoint us. You will be thrilled to see the view from the falls. Also, don't forget to explore the nearby areas.



2- Wah Kaba Falls in Cherrapunjee

Visiting Wakhaba falls was one of our most memorable experience. We walked down around 700 steps to reach the top of the falls which was calm enough to walk across from one side to the other.

At some dangerous points, you may need to pick up your toddler and walk, it may sound tiring but the stunning views of the valley you get to see all along the way make it all worthwhile. Trust me, you'll not regret visiting these falls!

3- Seven Sister Falls

One of the popular falls are these 7 streams which fall in parallel from over the hill and looks quite enchanting when in full glory. These are very close to the Mawsmmai caves hence also known by the name Mawsmmai Falls.

4- Nohkalikai Falls

Another famous waterfall in Meghalaya is the majestic yet mesmerizing Nohkalikai fall which is also one of the highest waterfalls in India. There's a horrible tale related to this waterfall which is also known as the legend of Nohkalikai. You won't have to walk much to see its beauty since this can only be enjoyed from far.

5- Mawkdok Dympep viewpoint in Cherrapunjee

This is the first viewpoint en route to Cherrapunjee from Shillong. When we were walking down the stairs to reach the falls, some of the visitors coming back discouraged us from going down with a small child. We got confused and had to return back halfway. Later, we realized we did a mistake listening to people. We should have at least tried. But the views were stunning even from that point and worth clicking.

3- Living Root Bridge, Mawlynnong

The living root bridges are not completely natural but they are a wonder, no doubt. Cherrapunjee and many other parts of Meghalaya are famous for these root bridges which are formed by the local

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villagers by inter-connecting & directing the ariel roots of some trees over the rivers which then keep growing and form a complex structure. Once the structure looks strong enough, it is then used as a natural bridge to cross the streams by foot.

The most famous double-decker root bridge is in Nongriat village, Cherrapunjee.



One needs to trek down the hill and cross 2 streams using a hanging steel wire bridge. Approx. steps down the hill are 3000, so you'll need a lot of stamina to do this trek. We visited a smaller root bridge in Riwai near Mawlynnong village.

4- Umiam Lake, Shillong

Umiam lake is situated on the way to Shillong from Guwahati and is a perfect picnic spot for families. I highly recommend visiting the Umiam viewpoint and spend some leisure time with family.

There's a small kid's play area inside the park. Older kids and adults can enjoy water sports at the lake. Make sure you carry your food and water as there are no eateries inside the picnic area.



5- Umngnot River, Dawki

Dawki village is on the border of India and Bangladesh. It is famously known for the Dawki bridge over Umngnot river and also for boating in crystal clear water of the Umngnot river.



The water is surprisingly clear and you can see till the bottom of the river. You can enjoy the best of nature's wonders while camping by the riverside in Dawki. These are the 5 best natural wonders in Meghalaya which you should definitely add to your itinerary. I'm sure your kids will love the whole experience of exploring the best of nature in Meghalaya.

A Day Trip to Mawsynram

It was our first day in Shillong and we had planned to visit the wettest place on Earth, Mawsynram. It is a small village about 60 km from Shillong & it took us around 2 hrs to reach there. The Mawsynram-Shillong Rd is quite good and well maintained but gets narrow with little bumps here and there after about an hour's drive. The only thing consistent was the most beautiful scenery throughout the journey. The first hour was a little boring for Nemit and he decided to take a nap.

We visited 3 places in Mawsynram and each one was as spectacular as the other. **Our day was a mix of fun, fear, thrill and adrenaline rush.**

1- Mawjymbuin Cave



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Our first stop was the Mawjymbuin cave in Mawsynram. The area around the cave was completely deserted, we couldn't find any human or animal in that area except for the lady with a baby at the ticket counter.



We paid for the tickets and asked our driver to come with us in case we would need a hand with Nemit inside the caves. **We had no idea how long, dark and deep was the cave.** The lady at the counter could only speak in Khasi (their native language) & was not able to understand Hindi or English. We were on our own mercy.

My heart was beating really fast and the whole scene was giving me goose bumps. I was getting weird thoughts in my mind, all kind of what ifs. With all these thoughts still hovering on my mind, we walked down the steps towards the cave. After going down a few steps, we could see the entrance of the cave and it looked huge. The clouds of terror started dispersing and I could finally feel the serenity of the place.



Mawjymbuin is a small cave just 50 m wide and 4 m high. It is actually a sacred shrine for Hindus due to the huge formation of stalagmite in the form of Shiv Lingam. But during our visit, we couldn't spot even one person there.



On the left side from the entrance, there was a small opening and a passage to the other side of the cave. I'm not sure if that was accessible since all we could see inside was darkness and hear the sound of a flowing stream. Maybe if we had a torch with us, we could have tried to explore more.

But for that day, we were happy to explore that small portion of the cave. There was nothing much for Nemit to enjoy but surprisingly he was quite happy to be there and was showing a keen interest in the Shiv Lingam & other stalagmite formations. We left the cave after 30 mins to move on to our next destination.

2- Khreng Khreng Waterfall & Viewpoint



We were quite excited to visit the waterfall and were hoping to see a huge one completely ignoring the fact that we visited during a dry month. It showed just 5 km ahead of Mawjymbuin cave on the map. After 15 mins drive, the map showed we had already crossed the location. We were confused since there was only one road and we hadn't seen any waterfall along the way.

We got down of the car and walked backwards in the direction of the exact location. And saw a few small streams of water falling down off the hill. We checked the small signboard which confirmed that this was the famous Khreng Khreng falls. I don't blame the falls here, we visited in November which was supposed to be the dry month in Mawsynram with only occasional rain showers. Hence, the dry waterfall.

But we didn't lose hope, it was our unplanned day and we were happy to go with the flow. Since there was not even a single vehicle passing through that road, we found an excellent spot to sit and started clicking pictures.



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Surprisingly, we spent an hour there, all thanks to Nemit who was totally having a blast. For us, the waterfall was not as per we had expected but for him, it was still the most beautiful sight.

We were now feeling the hunger pangs so we decided to walk a little further and look for some eatery. But what we saw was a small trail which was going up the hill. We saw a few school kids nearby and upon inquiring we came to know that the trail leads to a viewpoint on the top of the hill.



We, being the adventure lovers, saw an opportunity to explore another offbeat location. Without giving it a second thought, we took the trail and were now trekking with our toddler. Although we could not reach to the top since we lost our trail, this was one of the best experiences we had that day.



We were literally missing humans that day. At least when there are people around, you can follow them or ask for directions. We came down and decided to go back to Shillong.

3- Mawphlang Sacred Grove, Mawsynram



We were almost out of the Mawsynram village when we saw a board to Mawphlang Sacred Grove and thought of checking it out. It was at a 10 min drive from there and situated at a very exquisite location. At first, it looked like a big picnic spot but when we read about it, we came to know about its significance.

*Mawphlang Sacred Forest is one of the most sacred forests of the East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya. And this forest is guarded by one strict rule – **‘NOTHING is allowed to be taken out of this Sacred Grove.** Not even a leaf, stone or a dead log’. Failing to comply may lead to death. You may read more about it [here](#).*

It was getting cold hence we decided to head back to Shillong. Our driver mentioned that this region gets covered with dense clouds by evening (not sure if it's true). Though we still stopped at a few places to soak in the beauty of Mawsynram one last time.

Some Tips for Parents visiting Mawsynram

- ✓ Mawsynram is completely safe to travel with kids just go prepared for rains.
- ✓ Wear comfortable shoes, it gets quite slippery during rains.
- ✓ Pack some extra woollens & don't forget to carry your raincoat.
- ✓ Do keep a hiking torch with you.
- ✓ Carry lots of snacks & water.
- ✓ Do pack a lunch, we couldn't find anything decent to eat.

A Quick Guide to Visiting Wah Kaba Falls

On our Day 2, we had planned to go to Cherrapunjee and spend 2 nights there. Since most of the waterfalls & viewpoints fall en route we covered the best ones that day. Our first stop was Mawkdok Dympep Valley viewpoint which we had to leave midway and return back. Next, we stopped at one of the most charming waterfalls in Cherrapunjee, Wahkaba waterfall.



If you remember I had mentioned about [6 breath taking waterfalls](#) in Shillong, Mawsynram, and Cherrapunjee in the beginning of this section. Although we visited Meghalaya in November, the beauty of these falls was unmatched and truly magical.

Sometimes, it is not only the destination but also the journey which leaves an everlasting impact on the soul. One such journey was to the Wah Kaba waterfalls in Cherrapunjee. Again, we were not sure what

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to expect as it was not part of our itinerary. But at the ticket counter, we came to know that it was a 30 min trek downhill to reach the actual falls.

The idea of trekking on a beautiful day was enough to fill us up with excitement. It was a beautiful winter morning; the sun was shining bright but we could still feel a nip in the air. After buying tickets to the falls, we packed a small bag with some essential items. We kept a water bottle, an extra pair of clothes & diaper for Nemit, a box of snacks, a small pack of wipes, and a few tissue papers. We had no idea how tiring the trek may get or how much time we might spend there so we went prepared.



As soon as we entered the gate, we saw a flight of stairs without any boundaries or side rails going down the hill. That sight was spine chilling, we held Nemit's hand tightly to avoid any mishap. After walking down a

few steps, the path got narrowed and we were now walking by the hillside and could see the whole valley on the other side. Within a few minutes, the whole valley got covered with clouds blurring our vision. However, we kept moving, taking in all the beauty around. We couldn't take many pictures while going down since it was dangerous. We had to stay vigilant and alert all the time with Nemit.

The Wahkaba Viewpoint

After walking down for 15 mins, we reached the first viewpoint. It was built on the edge of the cliff and we could see till the bottom of the valley which was quite deep. It looked scary at first. A few steps ahead we saw a small waterfall which was almost dry. We were little disappointed to see that ordinary fall thinking it to be the main Wahkaba fall. We sat there for some time, clicked pictures & then prepared to move back.



Just then we heard some voices coming from the opposite side. We turned and moved a little ahead & saw another path leading further down the hill & some boys who were taking selfies. Curiously, we asked the boys about the path & came to know that we need to hike down further to reach the main falls. Excitedly, we thanked them and continued our hike. Just after 15-20 mins, we reached the main falls. Although the Wah Kaba falls were almost dry, that **location was breathtakingly gorgeous.**

Wahkaba Waterfalls

We spent more than an hour at the falls. We sat down on the big rock and soaked in the magical beauty of the place.



Nemit enjoyed playing in water which was flowing through the cracks in the rock. We clicked pictures from every angle possible. There was only one more couple at the falls, it seemed like our own private waterfall.

The most striking part of the falls was the edge of the cliff where one can stand and have a look at the foot of the valley. Not to worry, it is guarded by a railing but definitely not safe for kids. Keep your kids far from the cliff and don't let them go out of sight even for a second. After spending some amazing time there, we prepared to move back. Although, it took us almost double the time to trek back to the top, we were in full spirit & overjoyed at creating such beautiful memories to cherish for a lifetime.



Few Things to Keep in mind while visiting Wahkaba Falls

- ✓ Walk slow, one step at a time and take rest in between.
- ✓ Wear comfortable shoes, avoid wearing sandals or heels.
- ✓ Stay hydrated.
- ✓ Keep the child in the centre and towards the hillside.
- ✓ Try to reach early to avoid the crowd.
- ✓ Do carry something to eat.
- ✓ Even if the temperature seems warm, carry a jacket.
- ✓ Don't litter and take the empty packets & water bottles back with you.
- ✓ The path may become slippery during rains, avoid going with small kids.
- ✓ Trek back may seem tiring due to the steep climb. Keep ample time in hand. And, don't rush.

Exploring Offbeat Arwah Cave with our Toddler

After our trek we got too tired and instructed our driver to take us to our resort. We were done for the day. On our way he mentioned about some caves which not many people know of and are a delight for adventure lovers. Upon hearing adventure again, we forgot all our tiredness & asked him to take us there. Nemit decided to take a nap to get charged up again for another expedition.

There are many caves in Meghalaya and one can take caving expeditions as per their expertise. **If you are a first timer and not an adventure lover**, Mawjymbuin cave will be a perfect one for you to visit. **If you like thrill but are afraid of exploring the deep dark unknown spaces** then try visiting Mawsmmai cave in Cherrapunjee. This one is the most famous cave among the tourists. But, **if you like exploring offbeat locations and you thrive on thrill** then you should definitely try exploring the Arwah Lumshynna cave.



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Exploring the Arwah caves in Meghalaya was one of our most exciting & terrifying experiences of all.

- 1- We had no idea that such a cave existed in Meghalaya until we reached there.
- 2- We had no idea if we could manage the cave expedition with our toddler, still, we took up the challenge.
- 3- Also, we didn't know how deep and long was the cave. We went a step ahead and said 'No' to hire a guide (again a mistake).
- 4- We were not well prepared & equipped for cave exploration. Yet, we managed to touch the darkest passages inside the cave.
- 5- Although the cave was surprisingly long, creepy, quiet, & suffocating, we felt the sense of joy & satisfaction.

Our Journey to the Caves



While Nemit was sleeping peacefully we requested our driver to share more details about the caves. He mentioned that these caves are the longest accessible caves for visitors which further added to our excitement. After a 30-min drive, he took a sudden left turn and we were now off road moving at a speed of a tortoise to avoid jerking and shaking. Nemit woke up & enjoyed the bumpy ride.

The road didn't seem to end and we were now almost regretting our decision. But just then we saw a big parking area in front of us. Finally, we reached but couldn't see the cave. Upon enquiring from the people, we came to know that we need to walk some 800 meters ahead to reach the cave. We were already so tired that the idea of walking any further put us off.

Exploring Arwah Lumshynna Cave



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After walking a few steps, we saw the ticket counter from where the walkway leads to the cave. Once I stepped on that path, I just skipped a heartbeat, the view in front of my eyes was extremely beautiful.

It seemed we had entered a fairy-tale setting; the pathway was narrow with hills on one side and tall trees & deep valley on the other. The only sounds we could hear were of birds and insects. It was the most beautiful sight which we were least expecting that time. And, all our weariness just faded away.



We enjoyed each minute walking on that bridge towards the cave. Soon, we saw the cave entrance where we were approached by a local guide. We were certainly not in our senses and refused to hire him. We went inside the small entrance and walked down the stairs. The cave looked huge from there. There was another flight of stairs which seemed rickety but we managed to descend safely.

What we saw ahead was a huge passage, poorly lit, small water streams flowing out of nowhere, water dripping from the ceiling and only sound we could hear was of the flowing water, other than that there was an eerie silence. That was the moment when we realized we were going to have the best experience of our life. We moved further enthusiastically carefully making our way in the semi-lit cave observing the limestone formations. There were fossil carvings on the rocks above, we were totally having a thrilling time. Nemit was as excited as we were but not at all scared.



We moved further and realized it was getting darker with each step. Since we were not carrying the torch, **we used our mobile phone torch to find our way ahead.** And then the passage started getting narrower. Soon we reached a point where it was pitch dark and even our phone lights refused to help us see clearly. The only sound we could hear was

our own heartbeat, I can't even explain the adrenaline rush I could feel in that moment. Also, it was quite humid and suffocating inside.

After an hour's ordeal, we decided to head back and took a deep breath when we saw the natural light once again.

12 Things to Keep in Mind before Visiting Arwah Cave

- 1- Do hire a guide.
- 2- Carry a good torchlight.
- 3- Don't carry a big backpack or handbag. A backpack might get stuck in narrow passages and you'll need free hands to keep your balance so no handbag.
- 4- Carry enough water bottles, it gets quite hot & humid inside.
- 5- If there are more than 10-20 people inside the cave, wait and keep a distance. It's a one-way cave you'll not like getting suffocated in that small area.
- 6- Wear comfortable shoes preferably with rubber sole or floaters or crocs sandal which gives a good grip, it is very slippery inside at some places. Keep an extra pair of footwear in the car in case your shoes get wet.
- 7- Be very careful with kids, don't leave their hand in dark or slippery area.
- 8- Don't step into the water stream.
- 9- Be alert and don't panic.
- 10- If at any point you feel uncomfortable, return back.
- 11- You can take your toddler (age 2+) with you, strictly a 'no' for babies and infants.
- 12- Otherwise, the cave looked safe, just watch your step and mind your head.

Riverside Camping with Kids at Dawki, Meghalaya

Our next day in Cherrapunjee was not that eventful, it was Diwali so we decided to keep it low. We only visited the Mawsmi cave and went to a nearby park where Nemit played with some local kids. We spent the rest of the day exploring our resort.

Next day it was time to bid adieu to Cherrapunjee and move to Dawki. It is the last village of Meghalaya situated at the India-Bangladesh border & it's famous for boating in crystal clear water of Umngnot river. We wanted to do boating in clear waters and tick it off our bucket list. We were not sure whether to stay overnight at Dawki or move to Mawlynnong village which was our next stop. Hence, we didn't book accommodation for that night & kept our plan flexible. And, I'm happy we kept it like that since we got to experience our first camp life with our toddler.



Sometimes, unplanned trips turn out to be the best! And, Meghalaya was one such trip out of many.

It was our 6th day in Meghalaya and it took us 2 hr 30 min to reach Dawki from Cherrapunjee. The road was not so good and after a point, there were a lot of trucks continuously coming from the opposite side. Dawki was relatively warm since it is near the plains. But it got really hot around noon. At that time, we were actually not very happy with our decision to visit Dawki.

When we finally saw the big Dawki river and the India-Bangladesh border on our right, we felt somewhat good. But the road was jam-packed with all the vehicles parked on that small lane. The sight was not very impressive. We were approached by many boatmen who wanted us to book a boat ride with them. We said no to them since we had other plans!



While on the way, our driver had promised to take us to a much better and quieter place which was 9 km ahead of Dawki. I must say the driver was quite proactive and definitely very smart. In such a short span of time, he understood our preferences very well. If you remember he even told us about the offbeat Arwah cave in Cherrapunjee. And, this time, he recommended camping to us.

Dawki to Shnongpdeng Camping Area

We were quite panicked when we saw the rush at Dawki & were totally turned off by that sight. Not many people know about this another place which is truly a hidden gem. And, a treat for nature and adventure lovers. So, when you reach Dawki, just ask your driver to take you to Shnongpdeng. It took us another 15-20 mins to reach there.

We were very much impressed by the place. It was a perfect location amidst lush green forest, beautiful river, greenery, and peace all around. Now the task was to find a decent place to stay. Our driver had already suggested camping to us but we still wanted to check another option just in case. You always want to be well prepared when you have kids with you. Luckily, we found a nice room overlooking Umngnot river obviously overpriced but we were happy to have some option. Next, we wanted to check the Shnongpdeng camping area. The same person who showed us the room, accompanied us to show his camps.

Now, to reach the camping area, we had to cross a narrow suspension footbridge built over the river. And, that was the only way to reach the other side. It looked a little scary at first & once on the bridge I just froze, couldn't even feel my legs, it was nerve-wracking. I looked up and saw the man was about to reach the other end. Sumit & Nemit were almost in the middle when the bridge started shaking badly. I looked at Sumit and missed a beat to saw the terrified look on his face.

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I had to do it & after much struggle, I reached till the middle and took Nemit's hand. Now, we all 3 were walking together, Nemit in between

us. Woah! that was one spine chilling experience. And, we had to do that not once or twice but every time we had to cross that river.

Camping at Shatsngi Homestay and Adventure



When we reached the camping area, we knew we had to stay at the camp only. Once again, we made a trip to the other side, packed our backpacks with essentials for 1 night & left our suitcases in the cab.

Yay, we were finally camping with our toddler. We chose a big family tent for us and talked to the manager for activities that we could do.

We booked a camp from – [Shatsngi Homestay and Adventure](#).

He suggested going for a boat ride which was already in our to-do list. We decided to have lunch and then go for boating.



The sun was setting and the temperature was going down. Everything was so perfect. There were only a few boats in that part of the river at Shnongpdeng, the whole setting was quite charming. And, we loved the boating experience.

It became cold and dark around 6 pm. We changed into warm clothes and sat outside our tent. It was so serene and beautiful. We were shocked to know that there were no charging points in that camping area and there was only 1 lightbulb. Soon our phone batteries died and we realized we were in a true nature camp setting. We just surrendered ourselves to nature that evening.

It was then time for dinner and bonfire. It always amazes me to see the most delectable food served in such rustic settings. The food was super yum.



It got quite cold at night and bonfire did a great job at keeping us warm. We were having a gala time, later our driver and camp manager with his wife also joined us. We talked & laughed, they shared their stories, we shared ours and with that, we called it a night.

It was a perfect camping experience!

The next day, we woke up fresh and happy. Then went to the river bank for some fun family time. The water was cold but it couldn't deter Nemit from getting wet.

Ok, one thing I want to mention, that day there was only 1 more couple staying at that camp. So, we were a little worried for our safety. That night, we left everything to the almighty.



And, we realized faith still works, there are still good people. We were quite vulnerable that night & anything could have happened considering we were a family. Our phones were not working and we were totally alone in that part of the camp. However, as per our experience, we found all the places we visited in Meghalaya to be quite safe and traveler friendly. I would still suggest going well prepared, keep a torch and power bank with you.

SECTION D- HOW TO PREPARE FOR A TRIP WITH KIDS

I am pretty sure you mommies & daddies are so motivated now to take up traveling with your toddlers. You see it was not that difficult. Let me help me a little more to prepare well for your family trip.

- [HOW TO CHOOSE A KID-FRIENDLY HOTEL?](#)
- [HOTEL RECOMMENDATIONS](#)
- [WHY AIRBNB?](#)
- [PACKING TIPS](#)
- [AVOID THESE PACKING MISTAKES](#)
- [TRAVEL ESSENTIALS](#)
- [POOL TIME ESSENTIALS](#)
- [OUTFIT IDEAS](#)
- [FOOD TIPS](#)
- [WHAT MAKES TRAVELING EXTRAORDINARY?](#)
- [A TO Z OF FAMILY TRAVEL](#)

5 Tips to choose the best kid-friendly Hotel

The travel planning does not stop at finalizing the travel destination. In fact, it is just the beginning. The next big step is to plan a perfect [child-friendly holiday](#) which includes planning an itinerary, booking the right hotel, and finalizing & booking the mode of transport. Once you are done with this step, next you need to prepare for the trip which includes packing your bags wisely so that it doesn't become a burden later on. You wouldn't like to pull super heavy and large trolley bags when you have a baby or a toddler traveling with you. That just can't happen. Here are some of our tips to make your task simpler.



Any vacation is incomplete without booking a nice place to stay. And, selecting the right hotel becomes the most crucial part if you are traveling with kids. You need to plan things keeping the comfort & requirement of your kids in mind. Most parents don't consider this aspect and later find themselves struggling with difficult situations.

Sometimes, kids take their own time to adjust to a new place. It then becomes important to provide them with a comfortable and fun environment.

5 Tips to select a perfect kid-friendly hotel

You must be thinking that a kid-friendly hotel would be too expensive to afford. Well, actually no! It depends on what all the facilities or amenities you are looking for. There are hotels which have their own little kid-friendly water park right by the pool. Or, there are hotels which have huge kids play areas both indoor as well as outdoor. And, they do charge a bomb. But I feel this is not what kids look for especially babies & toddlers, they don't even know such things exist until we tell me.

As per our experience, there are many other things that make a hotel kid-friendly. Check these out below-

1- Location

While selecting a hotel/resort, check out its location on the map and its proximity to places you want to visit. We usually look for a hotel which is centrally located or is at least nearby to the main attractions. This will help in reducing your travel time.

Never book a hotel in the main market area or too far into the streets where the four-wheelers can't enter (especially on hill stations). If you are on a beach holiday, then definitely look for a beach resort.

2- Open Space

Usually, resorts are big and there's ample open space on the premises, which make these a perfect choice for families. However, there are many hotels which have their own lawn area or they also have a kid's play area. Even if there are no specific activities for kids, an open space is all that can keep them happy.

3- Rooms



Selecting a right room for your family is very essential. First of all, the bed size matters if your kid prefers to sleep with you. Or else, you can ask for an extra bed or a baby cot/crib (check with them if they provide that or not). Rooms should be spacious enough for the child to move around and play. Also, rooms should have basic amenities, like a kettle and a refrigerator.

While booking rooms, tell your preference to the reservation staff. Even if you are booking online, call the hotel and ask for room details & availability. We usually book rooms on the ground floor which are garden facing.

When we travel with our mothers, we look for connecting rooms or villas with 2 bedrooms or 2 side rooms in a hotel, again you need to convey your room preferences to the staff beforehand. And don't forget to take that confirmation on mail.

4- Facilities

Most important, a kid-friendly hotel should have a separate kids pool. Also, do check if they provide pool essentials like swimming floats for kids. If the pool is not required then definitely look for some outdoor space or indoor kids' activity area.



Next important thing to check with the hotel are the food option for kids. Do they take special requests or not, in case you want something to be prepared for your child? What is the opening & closing time of the kitchen? Do they have high/booster chairs for babies?

We had even stayed at Airbnb villas during a couple of our vacations & found these to be a perfect choice for families traveling with kids. The best part of booking a BnB is that you get the whole place for yourself, some Bnbs have a kitchenette, living room and some even provide private pool facility.

Another facility I want to mention here is the babysitting service provided by the hotel. It's a great option to look out for if you

are planning a date or want to have some ‘couple time’ together. You can leave your child under the care of the hotel’s staff at the childcare for an hour or two.

5- Reviews

Last but not the least, checking hotel reviews on trusted websites like TripAdvisor is a must. I guess we all do that. But don’t rely on old reviews, look for recent ones, not more than a year old.



Kid-friendly Hotel Recommendations

Here are some kid-friendly hotel recommendations from our travels in India.

1- Mayfair Hideaway Spa Resort, South Goa

Website – <http://www.mayfairhotels.com/mayfair-goa/>

2- Abad Turtle Beach Resort, Alleppey, Kerala

Website – <https://www.abadhotels.com/mararibeach>

3- Aranyaka Resort, Munnar, Kerala

Website – <http://www.aranyakaresorts.com/travellers-skit.php>

4- Riverarch Greenfields Resort, Jaipur

Website – <http://riverarch.in/>

5- Hotel Chevron Mountain Villa, Kausani

You can read my post on Kausani and hotel review here.

Website – <https://www.chevronhotels.in/mountain-villa-kausani/>

6- RKN Beach Resort, Pondicherry

Website – <https://www.rknresorts.com/>

7- Orange County Cottages, Mukteshwar

Website – Booked through Airbnb

8- Kolahoi Green Resort, Pahalgam, Kashmir

Website – <http://www.kolahoigreen.com/>

9- Pristine Beach Resort, Diglipur

Website – <http://www.andamanpristineresorts.com/>

10- Ixzire Resort, Port Blair

Website – <http://ixzire.com/>

11- Havelock Holiday Beach Resort, Havelock

Website – <http://hhbr.in/>

12- Pine Hill Homestay, Shillong

Website – Booked through Airbnb

13- Pala Resort, Cherrapunjee

Website – <https://www.palaresort.co.in/>

14- The Grand Leoney Resort, North Goa

Website – <http://thegrandleoneyresort.com/>

15- Shatsngi Homestay and Adventure, Camping at Dawki, Meghalaya

Website – [Facebook Page](#)

16- Solang Valley Resorts, Manali

Website – <https://www.solangvalleyresorts.com/>

We have traveled to many places and have stayed at various hotels, resorts, camps, and Airbnb. Every place has something unique to offer, but the best ones are those which made us feel at home when we were far away from home. The above list of 16 stay options are our best stay experiences in India with family.

Why Book an Airbnb when Traveling with Kids?

I'm sure you would like to know what is so special about Airbnb. Here are 5 reasons why we think that families should book an Airbnb rather than a hotel for their stay.

Airbnb is a worldwide online platform where travelers connect with the property owners for booking a Bed & Breakfast. It was founded to allow people to rent out their free home space or the whole apartment to travelers at a cheaper rate than a hotel. One can simply list their property with Airbnb and become a host. And, start hosting travelers from around the world. It is becoming one of the most popular stay options among all kind of travelers.



1- Airbnb is cheaper and better than a hotel

Yes, you read it right. Staying at an Airbnb is cheaper than staying at a hotel. It also depends on what type of accommodation you are looking for. Even if you book a luxury villa with a private pool, it will cost you less than booking a luxury suite at a 5-star hotel.

I really find it a great option if you are on a budget trip or you are on a long vacation. We booked a 2-bedroom villa in Krabi, Thailand for 4 nights and it was the cheapest yet best option we could find. And, it was beautiful.

2- You, not just get a room but also a living room and outdoor sitting area and much more

So, the best thing about an Airbnb is that you get a home to stay. And, you have the liberty to choose what kind of a home you want to book. It can be a villa, cottage, apartment, bungalow or just a private room.



We booked Orange County Cottages at Mukteshwar which had 2 bedrooms, living room, kitchen, outdoor sitting area, and a small garden. And, that too at almost half the price of a hotel room. We even got our personal cook who was also the caretaker of the property.

You can never get such spacious accommodation and that homely feel at a hotel or resort. When you are on a vacation with your children, you want them to be free, comfortable and happy.

3- You can cook your own meals if you stay at an Airbnb

As I mentioned above, many of the Airbnb homes have a kitchen for the guests. This is one of my personal favorite of the reasons why I would recommend Airbnb to families. So, when you are traveling with children especially baby or a toddler you worry a lot about their food.



I remember during our Goa trip; it was a huge task to arrange food for Nemit (then 7-month-old). I wanted get a small space in the resort's kitchen to prepare no salt no sugar healthy meals for my baby. But at an Airbnb, you won't face any such issue.

Would you believe if I tell you that we didn't spend even a single penny on food during our 4 days stay at Family Lux Villas, Krabi? We carried our own groceries and cooked our own meals.

4- You feel like staying at home away from home

We have never felt so comfortable during our stays on a vacation ever. During both our Airbnb stays we never felt that we are away from home. I really like the filter option on Airbnb where you can select what all facilities and amenities you want for your stay. And you get the options best matching your requirements.



If the property is small, there will usually be only the hosts or a caretaker who will look after your stay. While at a bigger property, you can expect the hosts as well as some staff at the property.

5- The hosts of the property go out of their way to make your stay memorable

Now that most of the properties are small and are meant only for a few people, you get personal treatment from the hosts/caretaker. When we were in Mukteshwar, our host was not there but he made sure to keep in touch with us over message and call. While in Krabi, our hosts were so humble and down to earth that we never felt like an outsider there.

You need to stay at an Airbnb to actually experience the beauty of a homestay far away from home!

5 Simple Packing Hacks for Traveling with Kids

Here are some of my travel packing hacks that I have learned from my worst packing mistakes over the years. And, these hacks have helped me save my sanity on our trips with our toddler. We usually start our packing with making a packing list, which then leads to a to-do list and a purchase list, and finally to a checklist.



TIP 1

Before making a packing list, ask these questions to yourself-

- Is it a weekend trip or a long trip?
 - For how many days you'll be traveling?
 - How many hotels you'll be staying at?
 - Temperature and weather conditions at the destination?
 - How much baggage weight the flight allows to carry?
-
- ✓ For a weekend trip, we only pack 1 medium size trolley bag and carry 1 backpack.
 - ✓ For a week-long trip, we usually pack 2 medium size trolley bags and 2 backpacks.

TIP 2

Now while keeping the above pointers in mind, start making a master packing list. You may add more items to the below list as per your requirement.

Main categories –

- ✓ Clothes
- ✓ Footwear
- ✓ Snacks
- ✓ Toys
- ✓ First Aid kit/Medicine box
- ✓ Toiletries/Make up kit
- ✓ Electronics
- ✓ Essential documents
- ✓ Extras

TIP 3

Next step is very crucial but generally, we avoid doing that since it seems time consuming. But trust me making subcategories of the above-listed items will really help you in packing efficiently. We tend to think that we can recall all the items by just looking at the main categories but most of the times due to the rush we forget things. Whether you have a really good memory power or you are another version of Ghajini (Bollywood movie), take 15 minutes out of your busy schedule and write down the subcategories. Trust me, having this list will make your task 10x simpler on the final day.

Sub-categories-

1- Clothes

- ✓ T-shirts/shirts/dresses
- ✓ Shorts
- ✓ Pants
- ✓ Innerwear/diapers
- ✓ Socks/caps/gloves (for winter vacation)
- ✓ Swimwear (for summer vacation)

2- Footwear

- ✓ Flipflops
- ✓ Shoes
- ✓ Sandals

3- Snacks

- ✓ Dry snacks
- ✓ Juice packets
- ✓ Sandwiches

4- In-flight/In-car/In-train entertainment

- ✓ Books
- ✓ Activity sheets
- ✓ Favorite Toy
- ✓ Doodle pad

5- Medicine Box (travel sized kit)

- ✓ Basic medicines
- ✓ Prescribed medicines along with the prescription

- ✓ Thermometer
- ✓ ORS & Eno sachets

6- Toiletries/make up kit (travel sized kit)

- ✓ Soap/shower gel
- ✓ Shampoo/conditioner
- ✓ Toothbrush/toothpaste
- ✓ Laundry soap/liquid
- ✓ Moisturizer/Sunscreen
- ✓ Swimming pool essentials
- ✓ Makeup essentials

7- Electronics

- ✓ Mobile phone
- ✓ Charger/power bank
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Earphone/Headphones

8- Essential documents

- ✓ Passport (if traveling Internationally) & Visa (if applicable)
- ✓ ID cards or driving license if you plan to hire a bike/car & self-drive
- ✓ Photocopies of flight booking, hotel booking, etc.

9- Extras

- ✓ Diapers
- ✓ Hand sanitizer
- ✓ Wipes
- ✓ Tissue papers
- ✓ Candies/chocolates for difficult times

TIP 4

Once the list is ready, you'll get an idea of what all things you need to arrange and what all you have to purchase. At this stage, you can prepare your purchase list or a simple to-do list and stick it at a place where it is clearly visible. And start collecting items at a single place.

TIP 5

Once you have arranged all the things as per the above list, the next big step is to put all the main items in the trolley bag. We usually pack our big bags 2-3 days prior to our trip or even early if it's possible. And, pack our backpacks a day before the trip since all the last-minute things go in the backpack.

Keep ticking off the items which you have added to the bags. And, now you'll be left with your checklist i.e. the things which are yet to be placed in the bags. These are the important things that we collect at the last moment from every corner of the house. But with the checklist in hand, it won't take more than a minute to do that.

6 Worst packing mistakes to avoid

Now that you have applied the packing hacks and are almost done with your packing, you realize something is not right. We all tend to do certain packing mistakes which are otherwise avoidable. So, here are the 6 packing mistakes you need to avoid for when you are packing for a trip with kids.

1- Carrying a handbag instead of a backpack

I have seen many parents carrying a heavy handbag at the airport and running behind the kids. Please think wisely when you are traveling with a baby or a toddler. You'll need your hands to be free to attend to your kids rather than handling a big handbag. If you want to maintain the style quotient then select a stylish bag which can be used in multiple ways, a handbag, sling bag or a backpack.

2- Don't overpack clothes & footwear

During our first couple of trips when Nemit was a baby, we did the mistake of packing a lot of clothes with matching footwear, socks, and caps. No need to do that. Pack stuff which goes with everything and can be mix n matched.

- ✓ Just pack one outfit per day and 2 extra outfits for the whole trip.
- ✓ If you are traveling to a summer destination, carry lightweight outfits. You can easily wash them if need be.
- ✓ If you are traveling to a colder place, pack dark color clothes. Carry no more than 2 jackets.
- ✓ If possible, pack only 1 pair of shoes and 1 pair of flipflops. Avoid carrying heavy shoes.
- ✓ If you plan to do some shopping, you can always cut down 1 or 2 outfits per person while packing.

3- Don't pack all the toys or books

- ✓ Never do this mistake. You'll not like to see your child playing with toys or gadgets rather than enjoying nature and scenery on a holiday.
- ✓ Let your child get bored, a bored mind will look for options to keep itself engaged.
- ✓ Just carry 1 favorite toy, 1 storybook, and a few activity sheets to keep them busy while on a flight or waiting at the airport.

4- Don't pack perishable food items

- ✓ Don't keep juice packets in your trolley bag when taking a flight. They may puff due to air pressure and leak inside the bag.
- ✓ Avoid packing too many perishable food items. Instead, keep a lot of dry snacks for munching during your trip. Or pack some sandwiches for immediate hunger pangs.

5- Not checking the essential documents

- ✓ Check your passport and other essential documents for any damage before booking your trip. This is one of our biggest learning. My mom's passport got damaged unknowingly, the last page lamination came off which we were informed by the check-in staff at the airport. She had to cancel her flight and skip the trip.
- ✓ Always keep digital or hard copies of your marriage certificate and your child's birth certificates.

6- Not keeping enough photographs

- ✓ You'll need passport size photographs for the visa.
- ✓ Even if you are traveling nationally, it's always wise to keep a few pp size photographs of all traveling members.

Travel Essentials to Carry

I want to mention some travel accessories which we found to be really helpful during our trips especially when Nemit was a baby. So, here goes my list of Top Travel Essentials that will make your travel with kids a lot more hassle free-

1- Kid's Trolley Bag

Take a separate trolley bag to pack your kid's stuff, from clothes to toys, everything which belongs to the kid goes into this bag. It makes packing and arranging things a little bit easier and also saves a lot of time finding and re-arranging things when it's time to return back home.



This is one travel essential which can become kids favorite travel gear anytime. Toddlers love it when they know something belong only to

them and they are given responsibility to handle it. Nemit loved pushing and gliding his trolley bag everywhere we traveled.

2- Baby Carrier



If your baby is clingy and prefers to be carried most of the times, then babywearing is the best option for you. We carried Nemit till he was 13 months old. It comes really handy at the airport and at places that require a lot of waiting.

3- Stroller

Nemit mostly preferred to sit in a stroller rather being carried in a sling. I think he felt much comfortable sitting in the stroller as he could freely

move his body and can also have a nice view of the surroundings. The best thing which I like about strollers is that you can also carry your other accessories and bags easily & be hands free.



Another reason why I like stroller is the ease it provides when you have to walk with your toddler to the plane entrance where you hand over the stroller to the aircraft staff and can collect it back while getting off the plane right at the exit. It just makes the whole process looks so easy and comfortable.

4- Diaper Bag

Alright, this is the most common travel accessory and anyone with a baby will know its importance. So, if you are traveling with a baby or a toddler, carrying a diaper bag stuffed with all the baby essentials is a must.

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Now, here I want to suggest opting for a backpack rather than a handbag or a sling bag, simply because it's easier to carry a backpack while traveling with kids. But if you are comfortable in carrying a normal diaper handbag or sling bag, then that is also fine. The choice is yours.

5 Pool Time Essentials to pack in travel bag for kids

A most common mistake parents do is not packing swimming pool essentials in their travel bag. While booking your hotel, make sure to ask them about the pool accessories they provide for kids. However, it's always better to have your own stuff. The pool essentials won't even take much space in your travel bag.

1- Inflatable float with sitting support



This is a must if you have a baby or young toddler who cannot stand on their own but old enough to sit. You can just put your little one in the float and be worry free and almost hands free. They will be much safer sitting inside the float rather than in your arms.

2- Swim diapers/ Diaper covers

Swimming diapers are a must at least for babies and also for toddlers who are not yet potty trained. You can choose from a variety of swimming diapers available as per your child's requirement.

3- Swim suit

It's always better to make your child wear a good quality swim suit/bathing suit. For babies, consider buying a 2-piece swim wear as that's easy to change in case of diaper checks. If you can get full length swim wear made up of good quality material it's a plus as that can help minimize the amount of UV rays that penetrate your child's skin.



4- Inflatable Ring Floats

For older toddlers, who are ready to explore the swimming pool, consider buying an age appropriate ring float for them. That will keep them safe and also provide the necessary support in the pool.

5- Others

Apart from the above-mentioned must haves, don't forget to keep separate towel for kids, hooded ones are the best. To avoid sun burns, tanning, irritated skin, keep a good sunscreen for kids. Also pack a baby wash & moisturiser for after pool bath routine.

Outfit Ideas for Toddler Boys on a Beach Vacation

Not many people talk about fashion for boys simply because there are not many options that boys can experiment with. When it comes to a beach holiday, most people think that only shorts & t-shirts are the most comfortable & stylish options for toddlers. Well, not exactly. I have divided tops and bottoms into 5 categories each which can be mixed and matched to create stylish looks for a beach day.



TOPS

- 1- Shirts
- 2- T-shirts
- 3- Sleeveless Tees
- 4- Sets
- 5- Dungarees

BOTTOMS

- 1- Denim Shorts
- 2- Printed Cotton Shorts
- 3- Bermuda Shorts
- 4- Capri Pants
- 5- Full-Length Pants

You can check out these [11 Cool Beach Looks](#) that we created for Nemit using above mentioned outfits.



How to manage Food for Babies & Toddlers?

The most difficult thing to manage while traveling with babies & toddlers is their food. We have learned quite a lot from our mistakes so here I am sharing some of our best food tips for babies & toddlers.



1- Travel Food Tips - babies (1 to 6 months old)

It is usually said that the mother & the baby should stay at home & take rest for the first 45 days after delivery. Since the new born babies are

prone to infections as their immune systems are not fully developed. And, mothers need time to recover & regain energy.

But this is also the time when mothers feel the most restless & just want to run away from all the hectic & sleepless schedule. If you happen to plan a vacation when your baby is in the age group 1 to 6 months old, you actually don't have to think much if you are exclusively breastfeeding.

In case, you are using bottle feeds (either pumped milk or formula milk), I would suggest you to either skip traveling for the first 6 months. Or, not to travel far & long. Simply because there will be a lot to pack. But, if you can manage that, then go ahead & have fun!

Tips for traveling with bottle fed babies

- ✓ Carry a sterilizer
- ✓ Pack at least 3 bottles (or more) depending on how much time you'll be spending outdoors
- ✓ Don't forget to carry the powder dispenser (if the baby is on formula feed)
- ✓ Also, a flask to carry hot water while on the move

Nemit's 1st official long road trip was when he was 2 months old. We literally had to pack the whole house in our bags even though he was exclusively breastfed. So, plan wisely! Try staycation instead of a vacation.

2- Travel Food Tips - infants (6 to 12 months old)

Once your baby starts semi-solids, it's a good time to take them out on a vacation. However, you'll still have to pack a lot since their food needs a lot of preparation. Now, again if you are breastfeeding, your load of packing will lessen down. But there's no easy way if your baby takes the bottle feed.

The good part is you can plan a weekend getaways or a small vacation if you have just introduced solids & following the 3-day rule. So, you can just carry on with the breast/bottle/formula feed & give mashed bananas or any other fruit in between feeds. Nemit's 2nd long trip was Goa when he was 7 months old & that was also his first flight experience.

Tips for traveling with infants

- ✓ Do pack the above-mentioned things if your baby takes the bottle feed
- ✓ Carrying a sterilizer is still a must
- ✓ Also, keep a small bowl, spoon & a masher (all sterilizable)
- ✓ Give fruits which can be peeled off (banana, mango, chikoo, papaya, etc)
- ✓ You can also carry baby food such as cerelac (homemade cerelac is a great option)
- ✓ For 8 months+ babies, you can carry snacks as well, very helpful to keep them occupied (carry teething snacks)

Don't experiment with outside food for your baby, give only freshly cut fruits & homemade snacks.

I WOULD SUGGEST NOT TO GIVE ANY PACKAGED FOOD TO BABIES AT LEAST FOR A YEAR. ALSO, AVOID SUGAR & SALT.

3- Travel Food Tips - young toddlers (1 to 2 years old)

A year-old baby starts eating almost everything. Most parents even start giving them the same food that the family eats. We did the same & that helped a lot.

Tips for traveling with young toddlers

- ✓ No need to carry the sterilizer anymore, make sure you clean the bottles & bowls with hot water immediately after feeding & again clean with boiling water before the next feed.
- ✓ Let your toddler eat whatever food is available, do check for excess salt/sugar/chilly. Also, make sure that your baby is not allergic to any food item.
- ✓ If they don't like the food, ask for bread, plain rice, baked beans, baked potatoes, French fries (these are easily available)
- ✓ Carry a lot of snacks with you (preferably homemade & healthy)
- ✓ Fruits are always a savior

4- Travel Food Tips - senior toddlers (2 to 3 years old)

As per our experience, 2 to 3 years old toddler stage is the best when it comes to traveling & exploring new places. These little humans are just amazing if we can just ignore their tantrums. They love everything & enjoy every new experience. In my opinion, the toddler stage is the best to plan long vacations, road trips & adventure trips. They will enjoy every bit of it & you can be totally stress-free.

Also, you don't need to carry any specific food items except some of their favorite snacks.

What makes Traveling with Kids Extraordinary?

What is that unique factor which if added to travels can make the whole experience truly extraordinary.

I want to answer this question with this quote by Amelia E. Barr

“The great difference between voyages rests not with the ships, but with the people, you meet on them.”

What makes any travel experience extraordinary is not just the journey, destination, scenery, fun times, or adventure but also the ‘PEOPLE’ we meet along that journey.



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The impression they leave on our memories is something that gives a completely new meaning to our experience. The kind of people you meet can turn your travel experience from ordinary to extraordinary.

I have mostly seen girls and boys traveling solo or in groups engaging and interacting with the locals & other travelers. It's a great way to connect with interesting people and make friends. But I have rarely seen families making such connections. Obviously, due to safety concerns & trust issues with strangers.

But you can always speak to your driver who is also your guide for the time of your stay. We spend maximum time with our driver when traveling by road.



And, we always encourage Nemit to interact with him. But, make sure you are not disturbing him while he's driving. He can be your storyteller, narrating all the local interesting tales of that place.

What about the waiters who serve you at a restaurant? You loved their service, why not leave them a good word. Let your child say 'Thank you'. They will love this gesture. Oh, and don't forget the chef. If you really liked their signature dish, call the chef and appreciate his work.

Ever thought of talking to the hotel staff or if you are staying at a private property then the owner, manager or the caretaker of the property. Talk to them and tell them how much you liked their special attention. They can recommend you some really cool local places to check out.

You worry about your family's safety and stay away from interacting much with the locals. But your kid can definitely talk & mingle with the local kids. They are not a threat. Let them make new friends.



What if all these people you meet on your vacation do not treat you well? Or your experience is not very good. There's a chance that it may spoil your whole vacation mood.

Whereas, when you meet such loving and caring people, it makes your whole experience enriching. And, that is why I feel for any travel, the people we meet along our journey are the X factor that makes the whole experience extraordinary. We never leave an opportunity to say thanks to such people who add so much value to our vacation.

A to Z of Family Travel

Traveling with kids is one of those things that you learn to enjoy once you step into it just like parenting!

Mommies and daddies, there is nothing that can stop you from traveling and exploring new places with your kids. You just have to prepare well and take that plunge. I feel if I could convince even one family to keep their fears aside and plan their first vacation with their child, my job is done. But this is just the beginning. And soon we will see more and more families taking up traveling with their babies & toddlers.

The world is waiting for you!

26 Best Tips for Traveling with Babies and Toddlers

I'm listing down 26 of our best travel tips which we have learned during the last 3 years of traveling with Nemit. Some of these we learned from our own mistakes. And, others from our own hit and trial.

- 1- Prepare yourself. Ask yourself if you are ready for it or need more time. If every time the answer comes a 'yes', then don't think much & take the plunge.
- 2- Prepare your child. If your toddler has a routine for most of the things, half of your work is already done. Talk about the places they will visit & activities they can enjoy.
- 3- Travel as a Family. I have shared this tip earlier also and I'll say this again. Remember when you are on a family vacation, your focus should be on your family only.
- 4- Divide your tasks. To avoid any difficult situations, divide your baby duties so that it doesn't feel like a burden to anyone. Don't set unrealistic expectations & clear the expectations before taking the trip.

- 5- Packing. I can safely say that packing is an acquired skill you learn over the time. Don't overpack otherwise most of your time will go in finding stuff from the bags. Use packing cubes if you have a small baby, these cubes will be really helpful in keeping the small clothes organized in one place.
- 6- Where to go. You should do thorough research of the place where you are going to. In addition, plan your itinerary very carefully, keep a day free in your plan.
- 7- Booking a Flight. If you are afraid of taking a long flight with your child, prepare in advance. Book a flight time which corresponds to your child's nap time. Or, you can take overnight flights.
- 8- Keep them engaged. Pack enough activities to keep your toddler engaged and also keep a lot of snacks for munching.
- 9- Booking a Hotel. Before booking a place to stay do check the latest reviews on Google as well as travel websites like TripAdvisor. Also, remember to book only a kid-friendly hotel.
- 10- Booking an Airbnb. If you want to travel on a budget but still want a comfortable place to stay, consider Airbnb.
- 11- Keep a Balance. It's important to keep a balance between leisure time and activity time. Toddlers don't like lazing around for long, keep their interests in mind.
- 12- Be Flexible. When you are traveling with kids, you can't be on a tight schedule. Be flexible and open to last minute changes.
- 13- Entertainment for kids. Look out for fun entertainment options for your toddlers. Check if there's an amusement park or a play area.

- 14- Meet the locals. An excellent way for kids to learn about people and their culture. And, also to make new friends.
- 15- Travel Bag. Keep a backpack instead of a handbag for a day out. Always carry the wipes, snack box, an extra outfit, and your child's favorite toy in the bag.
- 16- Travel Essentials. Make note of travel essentials you need to carry. When Nemit was a baby, a baby carrier was an essential item for us. And, when he graduated to the toddler stage, we always carried his stroller along.
- 17- Check the weather. Always check the weather for your travel dates & prepare accordingly.
- 18- Medicines & Prescription. Before going on a vacation, get a general check-up done for your child. And, get a prescription for travel medicines.
- 19- Keep a torch. It's an essential, find a small & light one to carry in your backpack.
- 20- Carry a power bank. If you are traveling to an offbeat location, the power bank is a must.
- 21- Keep your cool. It is very easy to get frustrated when you are in a new place & your child comes up with weird demands or start showing tantrums. Losing temper may not help anyone, try to take control of the situation with a cool mind.
- 22- Booking a cab. Most of the times we book a single cab for our travels. But there were incidents when we didn't like the behavior of the driver. We have learnt from our mistake & now we always confirm the driver after spending a day with him or else we ask for another one.

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- 23- Check your documents. We had a very bad experience when my mom had to go back from the airport when the officials found her passport to be damaged, which she was not aware of. It's always better to check all the documents before taking the trip.
- 24- Carry enough cash. Even though there are ATMs everywhere, it is still a sensible idea to carry enough cash. And, don't keep all the cash in one place.
- 25- Carry a nice camera. We forgot to carry our camera on one of our trips & we realized what a big mistake it was. We were at such an amazing destination & we had to rely on our phones for all the pics.
- 26- Enjoy your time. Most importantly, don't forget to enjoy each and every moment with your kids. Make the most of this time and you'll go back as a better person. Take my word!



For more travel pictures and stories from Neha, you can follow hashtag [#TravelingWithNemit](#) on Instagram!