New Zealand – the ultimate family holiday destination!

10 enjoyable days with a toddler in a foreign land

By Kym Chambers

To all those parents with perpetual motion machines – aka toddlers – don’t put off your family holidays any longer, New Zealand is the ultimate family friendly destination and there is something for everyone.

We had promised family in New Zealand that we would take our daughter to visit them, but quite honestly the prospect of travelling with our adventurous little monkey had us quaking with fear. Turns out we shouldn’t have been so worried.

Flying Qantas – A great experience!

The flight was my first concern, as my daughter doesn’t sit still, how would we ever manage two Qantas flights of at least 3 hours duration each. But we did, all thanks to a very accommodating Qantas. We received, as requested, a bassinet on the national leg and a spare seat between us on the international leg. This meant that our daughter could wriggle around and also sleep – phew! The Qantas staff were also more than helpful. I would recommend Qantas for travelling with a toddler, maybe just don’t expect the spare seat if you are flying in peak season.

What to take on-board

You are allowed to take baby food on-board international flights and it doesn’t need to be under 100g. We were just told to make sure that our purchased packets were clearly marked baby food. We also needed milk for her bottle, which we purchased at cafes on the way to our gates. They usually fill the bottle up for a couple of dollars.

Don’t take too many things to play with. I overdid it and my bag was bulging, only to have my daughter find endless amusement with the airline water cup, seatbelts, entertainment system and seat tray.

Safe & Secure

I was a little anxious about my daughter running off in the airport, should we be tied up at check in and immigration. I did take a tiny, weeny stroller, but even that we couldn’t take up to the plane, so I
was very glad to have a lion back-pack with harness. My daughter loved it, as it meant she didn’t have to be held all the time and she had a degree of independence to explore.

**Getting about with a toddler**

To get anywhere in New Zealand we of course needed a car seat. We hired our car through Budget and were very happy with the quality of the car seat provided. Taxis can be an issue though, and in Wellington one company told us we could have our daughter on our lap only to be told by another that this was highly illegal. Try Corporate Cabs in Wellington for great taxis with car seats and I would recommend doing some internet research if you are going to other cities for the companies that provide seats.

In terms of driving with a toddler, New Zealand is great! Lots of cows and sheep to look at out the window, not to mention amazing scenery, but the best thing is the towns are relatively close together and they all have fabulous and clean amenities. Our first experience of this was Levin, approximately 2 hours north of Wellington, where by chance we found this amazing adventure playground complete with activities for kids of all ages. Our daughter had a ball running around in the enclosed baby and toddler section and driving the wooden train. It was also great to see teenagers having fun on the equipment designed especially for them – the flying fox was very popular. Also at the playground was a café, community centre and clean toilets and change facilities.

There are so many cute cafes and roadside picnic areas that you can stop at and all seem to cater to the young ones. We quite often stopped at a café for coffee and our daughter would wander off to find a toy box and the staff always delighted in bringing her a fluffy - baby cinos are called fluffies in New Zealand!

**Toddler friendly activities**

In New Zealand we chose activities that allowed our daughter to walk and run around, to save her being stuck in a stroller (which she doesn’t do anyway) and or in a backpack carrier. We did a couple of good long walks, but chose ones with decent pathways and when it came to touristy things we seemed to luck out with places that were designed for toddlers to roam freely.
Highlights included:

- **Lilliput Farm – Fun & Animal Park**
  
  10 minutes out of Taupo in Oruanui, Lilliput is a wondrous place with 25 different species of animals and birds to hand feed. Every single corner reveals an exciting animal, fun game or fantasy [http://www.lilliput-farm-park.co.nz/](http://www.lilliput-farm-park.co.nz/)

- **Tongariro National Trout Centre**
  
  Situated beside the famous Tongariro river, you can see and feed wild Trout in their natural environment. The Genesis Energy Fresh Water Aquarium is well worth it and there is a kids activities corner.
  

- **Major Jones Swinging Bridge, Turangi**
  
  A family favourite, we always make the walk along the Tongariro River to have a bounce on the swinging bridge. You might even catch a glimpse of a fly fisherman hard at work.

- **Tokaanu Thermal Baths**
  
  10 minutes from Turangi, Tokaanu Thermal Baths is a relaxing treat! There are 12 private hot pools, a larger and cooler public pool and kids pool. Make sure you take the time to do the
free thermal bushwalk through the natural thermal area and the see steaming hot mineral pools, and spluttering mud pots.

- **Coffee ‘n’ Cruise, Kaiteriteri**
  What an amazing piece of coastline. 60 minutes from Nelson, Kaiteriteri is one of a few white sand beaches in New Zealand. There are a number of cruises on offer to take you up and down the coastline, which I found to be costly and long in duration. We luckily found the Coffee ‘n’ Cruise, which turned out to be a perfect 1.5 hour round trip to Split Apple Rock, complete with a cuppa and biscuit (or two) for only $25 – it was perfect! Contact Dave on 0800 000 901 (NZ) or keep an eye out in the carpark along the beach for a poster.

**Taking in the Sounds**

Interislander Ferries are a great way to travel with kids! Our daughter was entertained for the entire 3 hour ferry ride, playing in the toddler friendly kids area with all the other kids on-board. Not even the other boats, birds, majestic scenery or Rush Munroe icecream could steer her away from this area.

The only downside is that using the ferry to get from A-B (in our case Wellington to Nelson) can take up most of the day. So if you are stuck for time, see if you can get a good deal on Sounds Air as they can take you direct to your destination.

**Take your kids today!!**

While our trip to New Zealand was very much oriented to visiting family, and we didn’t do heaps of travelling around or visit heaps of tourist attractions, I got a great feel for travelling in New Zealand and am confident to recommend it as a destination for anyone looking for a family friendly holiday - there is so much to see and do and something for everyone and the kiwis do tourism VERY well!!
Our Trip

6 nights in Turangi with family

Flew into Wellington and overnight in Waikanae before heading to Turangi.

Overnight in Wellington at the Mercure on way to Nelson.

Overnight in Wellington with family before flying home.

2 nights in Nelson with family

Return ferry Wellington to Picton

NORTH ISLAND

SOUTH ISLAND

STEWART ISLAND