

How to keep kids happy on a long road trip

By Joshua Glenn and Elizabeth Foy Larsen, Slate

More of us will be traveling this summer, and travelers are increasingly seeking vacations with “substance.” For families, this can mean trading mouse ears for yoga mats, taking history tours, and spotting northern pintails in state and national parks.

There’s another advantage to such vacations with substance, of course: They can be money-savers. With airfares climbing, some airlines charging fees for families to sit together, and gas prices going down, more and more of us will be embarking on these soul-enriching outings in our cars. Unfortunately, for kids, there’s almost nothing meaningful about being strapped into the back of the family van while Missouri and Kansas whiz past. Not only are road trips boring, but they also require kids to sit still for hours on end, half-stoned on the same movies that are used to pacify them at home.

That’s a shame when you consider that most of us remember our pre-kid road trips so fondly. Part of the appeal of piling into a car with a group of buddies was that you’d inevitably get to know your fellow travelers in new, often surprising ways. From the minute you pulled into traffic, everyone tacitly agreed that for the course of the trip, the everyday rules of life would not apply. You’d eat differently, sleep differently, and have different kinds of conversations and experiences. In this liminal state, grown-ups often start to act more like kids: A bag of Twizzlers transforms into a perfectly acceptable breakfast, and acting out scenes from *Life of Brian* suddenly becomes a completely rational way to get through a two-hour stretch of freeway.

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