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Just Divorced? Travel Tips Every Newly Single Parent Needs to Know Before Their Next Trip

By Hallie Levine



*Post-divorce vacations can still be great. (Photo: Thinkstock)*

Traveling with kids on a family vacation can be stressful. But when you're traveling solo with them as a newly divorced parent, there are a whole host of other legal and practical details to freak out about, as I learned recently when I took my three small children (ages 7 and under) to Florida. Here, six things to keep in mind so your trip runs smoothly:

**1. Be clever about ways to afford a trip (like charging your divorce-related bills so you get miles).**

If you had asked me last September —as I was digging myself out of a financial hole post-divorce — where I'd be going with my kids on vacation, I'd have looked at you as if you'd suddenly sprouted three heads. But in February, while on the phone with my credit card company to tell them about my name change, I realized something: All that divorce debt I'd racked up over the last couple years (and finally paid off) had accumulated me a heck of a lot of

sky miles and hotel points. A few phone calls later, I'd learned I could book a five-night stay at a four-star hotel in Florida over my kids' spring break. Bonus: I even had extra points to get a room for Nana (my mother), so she could come and help me with my littles now that I was a single mom.

But even if you don't have that option, there are plenty of ways to travel inexpensively — like road trips: “One of my son's favorite trips ever was a road trip we did when he was 11 with another divorced mom who had a boy around the same age,” recalls Christina Pesoli, a Texas divorce attorney and author of [\*Break Free from the Divortex: Power Through Your Divorce and Launch Your New Life\*](#). “We drove to Houston to visit NASA and stayed with my sister. He had a blast, and it cost me virtually nothing other than gas and food.” Or consider a vacation rental (you can find them at sites like [homeaway.com](#)), which often provides twice the space at half the cost of a hotel room with budget-friendly amenities such as kitchens (so you don't have to spend money eating out) and washing machines (so you can pack less and avoid paying hefty bag-check fees).

## **2. Give your ex plenty of advance notice.**

When you got divorced, most likely a parenting plan was incorporated into the divorce decree. Before booking the trip, check it, and if there are any stipulations about travel and vacations, make sure everything is cleared with your ex before you go. Pesoli learned this the hard way when she forgot to check her divorce decree before booking a trip to Mexico with her daughter. “The decree required 21 days notice,” she says, which she didn't remember. Her ex-husband refused to give his consent, telling Pesoli he'd have the cops meet her at the airport if she tried to leave. “I had already bought airline tickets, and my daughter was looking forward to visiting her grandmother and grandfather who lived in San Miguel part of the year, so I was kind of stuck,” she recalls. Her ex finally agreed, under the condition that she go through eight years of family photos before the trip and give him every single duplicate she had before leaving. “I ended up doing it — it was either that or A) miss the trip and lose a bunch of money and disappoint my daughter and my parents, or B) go to court and spend a bunch of money on legal fees,” she says.



### **3. Know what paperwork you need to travel with.**

The night before the flight to Florida, I had a mild panic attack. I realized the kids and I now had different last names. I had visions of being apprehended at airport check-in by burley security guards for kidnapping. I decided to bring both their birth certificates and my divorce settlement agreement in the diaper bag. Though nobody asked me for them (likely because I was traveling domestically, says the TSA), it's best to bring them anyway to be safe. And you'll definitely need these if you are traveling internationally. In fact, you'll need your ex-spouse to provide a notarized consent form giving permission for you to travel with the kids during your desired dates if you're leaving the country. And make sure you get that early — at least a month before you leave, if possible. Why? **“If you ask for it that far in advance and your spouse is being difficult, you have plenty of time to take it back to court,”** explains New York City divorce attorney **Nancy Chemtob**. The good news is most judges get annoyed when an ex-spouse withholds consent for no valid reason, and will most likely allow you to go, AND make your ex pay attorney fees. If that sounds like a lot of trouble, court can at least serve as a bargaining chip.

### **4. Send your ex a detailed copy of your travel itinerary.**



*Make sure to give your ex all the trip information. (Photo: Thinkstock)*

Even though your ex can technically reach you (and even possibly your kids) by cell phone, make sure you send him an email with your flight information, the name and phone number of the hotel or hotels where you'll be staying, and information about how you're getting from place to place (for example, whether you're renting a car and driving to the resort, or taking a shuttle service). "Treat your ex-spouse exactly how you'd want to be treated, which means providing him or her with all the information you'd need to feel at ease," advises Chemtob. Most of the time, your ex will feel reassured by all the information, especially if it's your first time traveling alone with the kids and he's a little apprehensive.

If things are more tense between you two, more information wards off problems down the road. A friend of mine forgot to send her litigious ex her flight numbers when she took the kids on a recent trip to California, even though her parenting plan required her to provide it. "He knew the day [and] time we were traveling, and when we were landing — my kids even texted him right before and after the flights," she says. Despite all that, he took her to court for contempt. "He literally cried on the witness stand that he was so worried that the plane would crash and he wouldn't know his own children had died!" she recalls. As a result, she had to pay a \$500 penalty and his attorney fees.

### **5. Don't freak out if your ex acts up.**

The day before we were supposed to leave for Florida, my ex sent me emails demanding Ivry, the family dog, spend the week with him. I replied that I'd already arranged for her to stay with my babysitter and her kids, who were looking forward to five days of romping with her the local park and the beach. He was adamant, and after a few back-and-forth email clashes over the canine, I realized it wasn't really about the dog. I told him he could have her for the weekend. Turns out experts say I made the right call. "Sometimes the spouse not going on the trip feels left

out, like they're on the outside looking in," explains Gail Gross, a psychologist in Houston, Texas. I suspected that was the case with my ex, who later sent me several emails implying he wasn't going to return her to my sitter after the weekend. Although feeling somewhat panicked at the idea that my ex-husband might hold the family dog hostage, I ignored him, and once he realized he wasn't going to get a rise out of me, he dutifully dropped her off that evening.

**6. Try to include your ex in some way.**



*Include the other parent (Photo: Thinkstock)*

Speaking of your ex feeling left out, if your parenting agreement calls for your ex to speak or Skype with your kids each day, make sure you stick with it, even if you have to tweak the time due to vacation travel schedules. Email or text photos of the kids a few times, so he can see what they're doing. Gross even recommends asking your ex to write little notes to the children that you can pack in their backpacks, so they can open a new one each day. "It gives them something to look forward to and keeps them connected to the other parent," explains Gross. And at the end of the day, it keeps the peace so you can enjoy your vacation.