

Homeschool Road Trip

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Imagine reading *Make Way for Ducklings* in Boston's public Garden, watching the ducks follow the swan boat. "Mama," my three-year-old says with awe, "is that Mr. Millard?"

Or picture your boys running through the field reenacting the Battle of Yorktown on the very ground that Washington and Cornwallis trod. You can almost hear the strains of "The World Turned Upside Down."

Nothing makes learning come alive like being there. Throughout our homeschooling years, we've had many opportunities to make the world our classroom. By incorporating travel into our schooling or schooling into our travel, our lives have been greatly enriched.

Building Family Memories

Our children will forever remember the things they have seen and done as we've traveled. You can read about Paul Revere, but standing at the Old North Church and reciting Longfellow's poem followed by walking through Lexington and Concord will indelibly imprint "The Shot Heard 'Round the World" in your memory. We were there eight years ago, but our fifteen-year-old remembers it better than if I had just read it to him.

Once at our support group's History Day, our then five-year-old son gave a report on Stonewall Jackson. One of the grandfathers present was positive that Caleb's parents must have written the presentation for him. Afterwards he questioned him and discovered that he knew all about Stonewall. We'd been to the Virginia Military Institute where Jackson was a professor; we'd visited Manassas where he got his nickname for being steadfast like a "stone wall;" we'd been to the Shenandoah Valley where his troops had marched so quickly they were known as "the foot cavalry;" we'd seen where he was wounded and went to be with his Lord. Caleb didn't have to memorize those facts; he would never forget them!

Melding your schooling and traveling builds family memories that will be a source of entertainment and a bond between you for the rest of your lives. We'll always remember the camping trip to Big Sur when Mom and Dad forgot the cooking pots. We heated the chili and beans in their cans that night and scrambled eggs in the cans the next morning. A family can accomplish most anything when working together toward the common goal of alleviating hunger. We remember fondly the day we got caught in a cold downpour while breaking camp in Arkansas. When we reached Hot Springs, we took off our shoes and plunged our feet into the hot spring fountain on the sidewalk.

Can We Afford It?

The cost involved in integrating family travel into your schooling is up to you. No matter what you spend, it's important to recognize the opportunities God brings.

That's how we began teaching on vacations. It seemed normal to take our field guides to the beach. When we found a live giant conch, we didn't mind that the other guests thought it was a little weird to be dissecting sea creatures on the patio or collecting buckets of different kinds of crabs to take home.

Sometimes we piggyback on my husband's trips. Once when he traveled to Boston for a two-week class, he arranged to drive rather than fly. We all went, and we stayed in his hotel room, bringing sleeping bags for the older children. We took bagels and a toaster oven for breakfast, made sandwiches for lunch, and ate out a supper. Since Hal's dinners were covered, we had a great

trip at the low cost of just one meal for the rest of us every day. Each morning, we dropped Hal off for his class and the children and I took in the sights.

When Hal was not traveling or we didn't have the funds to join a business trip, we took camping trips. One year we took a week's vacation camping through all the Civil War battlefields in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. We surveyed the war from Manassas to Appomattox, swinging through places like Fredericksburg, Antietam, Petersburg (the Crater!), Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Spotsylvania. We saw Harper's Ferry, the site of John Brown's raid, and the plantation birthplace of Booker T. Washington. We only ate out once and either ate sandwiches or cooked on the camp stove the rest of the trip. The only expenses we wouldn't have had at home were campground fees (usually about \$10 a night), some extra gas, and the tapes we bought for the driving tours. To afford camping equipment you can find things at yard sales for very little money.

Sometimes we didn't have vacation time, so we took "day vacations." We'd get up, pack a picnic lunch, and head for a museum we hadn't seen, a historical re-enactment, state park, festival, exhibition, fair, or spot on the map we hadn't seen that was less than three hours drive away and didn't cost anything or else very little. If we'd waited until we had more time or money, we would never have seen all those great things.

Be Prepared

If you are prepared, you can take advantage of every opportunity the Lord gives you. Since we drive older cars, we've always been members of AAA, and membership allows you to receive all their maps and tour books free of charge. They also publish a camp book for each region of the country, which is the easiest way to find the commercial campgrounds and the state and national parks. Your state's guide to the roadside historical markers is a great thing to stash in your glove compartment. This has kept the peace in our family; I get to find out what the marker says and Hal gets to keep driving! You should also buy a gazetteer for your state. It will show you all the back roads and pig paths that'll make your exploring fun.

Once you know where you are going, you can teach the history and geography of a place before you go. There is nothing like finally seeing a place you've read about, heard about, and dreamed about.

Last year we were invited to visit my brother in China. We saw the movie *55 Days at Peking* and our boys read *The Story About Ping* by Margorie Flack and G. A. Henty's *With the Allies to Peking*. Our oldest read *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* by Patricia Ebrey. Reading books and watching movies about your destination builds anticipation and gives your children the rich context they need to understand what they are seeing.

Grasping every opportunity to prepare is even more important when you are traveling cross-culturally or overseas. We decided to learn as much Mandarin as we could in the three months before the trip. We ordered language CDs, hired a local Chinese college student to tutor us, and discovered a Chinese as a Second Language course at a local school. We can't speak Mandarin very well, but learning what we could opened many doors and hearts to our family.

Make a Plan

Once you are ready to travel, make a plan of what you want to see each day, how you are going to get from place to place, what you need to wear, and what and where you are going to eat.

Cooking or making sandwiches may be the most cost-effective, but you need to account for the time you're missing while you return to your "base" and how much it would cost to travel there and back. Although we've eaten our share off the dollar menu at McDonald's, if you are going to eat out, I recommend you eat at local places. Books like Jane and Michael Stern's *Roadfood* (Bantam Dell, 2005) will clue you in to the hidden treasures – the dives with mouthwatering bone-sucking ribs like the Dreamland Drive-in in Tuscaloosa, Alabama; the first pizza restaurant in America, Pepe's in New Haven, Connecticut, and their wacky but wonderful white clam pizza; and the

fantastic huckleberry ice cream at Roger's Ice Cream in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The best thing about these once in a lifetime treats is that often they don't cost much more than McDonald's.

Plan your itinerary to alternate sedentary activities like riding a train or bus with active ones like walking or playing. Do things that appeal to the older children but break those up with play times and hands on museums for little ones. Girls will appreciate a break from the battlefields, perhaps with tours of historic homes. That way everyone enjoys the day.

When you get to a new place, buy a tape for a driving tour, especially at places like Gettysburg with so many sites to understand. A driving tour can give you a good overview and help you figure out where you want to spend more time. It also allows the little ones to nap while the rest of you sightsee.

When we take tours with guides, we tell our boys that each of them should think of at least one intelligent question during the presentation. If your students show interest like this, most guides will joyfully give you the deluxe tour, and you will all learn much more.

Even if you plan everything perfectly, with plenty of time to rest worked in, things will go wrong. In China, we had a little one throwing up while our guide waited for us. We gave the poor child the medicine we brought and rearranged the day to stay in the open air. Then there was the time I was able to try out my Mandarin on a Beijing taxi driver (They have a reputation for making New York cabbies look like saints.), and while apologizing for my lack of communication skills, I very carefully told him *his* Mandarin was not very good at all! These mishaps may not seem very funny at the time, but they will be treasured family stories as soon as you recover.

Many could not believe that we would dare take seven young children to China, but our experiences traveling together over the years made us feel that we couldn't pass up the opportunity. I'm so glad that we went! Matthew will never forget celebrating his tenth birthday on the Great Wall. We will always remember the raw lobster, the twenty kinds of dumplings, and the rows and rows of Terracotta Warriors.

You may never see the Great Wall of China with your children, though I hope you do. But please don't miss the things that are right around you. Make sure you take advantage of every opportunity the Lord gives you through vacations, business trips, shoestring camping trips, or just day trips. Get in the van and get going! You'll never regret it.