

June 2025

Summer Travel with Children with Special Needs: Your Realistic, Joy-Focused Guide

Let's be honest traveling with kids is an adventure all its own. Throw in medications, sensory needs, mobility gear, or a tightly managed routine, and it can start to feel like prepping for a moon landing. But here's the good news: you can do this, and there's joy to be found along the way.

At Project Alive, we know that summer travel with a child who has special needs, especially in the Hunter syndrome community, takes creativity, planning, and a whole lot of grace (for you and them). So, we're breaking it all down with real-life travel tips, self-care reminders, and hacks that make things just a bit smoother.

Be sure to check the links throughout for easy access to resources discussed in the article.



Logistical Advice: The Planning Phase

Start early, stay flexible, and keep these things in mind:

1. Call ahead. Whether it's a hotel, Airbnb, airline, or amusement park—don't be afraid to call and ask detailed questions. Is there a fridge for meds? Can you request early boarding? Do they allow strollers or wheelchairs in lines? The more you know, the smoother it'll go.
2. Build in buffer time. Avoid back-to-back activities. Plan for downtime each day so your child (and you!) have time to rest, regulate, and recharge.
3. Pack a "comfort kit." Include noise-canceling headphones, preferred snacks, familiar toys, blankets, or sensory tools that can help with transitions and overstimulation.
4. Medical essentials checklist. Bring extra meds, emergency/medical alert info, feeding supplies, and a hard copy of your child's care plan. Pro tip: Keep it all in one easily accessible bag.

Safety First (Always)

- Use ID bands or shoe tags with your contact info in case of wandering or emergencies.
- Take a "day one" photo of your child so you have their current appearance and clothing on hand if needed.
- Know where the nearest urgent care or children's hospital is—especially in remote or unfamiliar areas.
- Use a buddy system if you're traveling with multiple children or with extended family.



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Travel Hacks from Veteran Parents



You don't need to reinvent the wheel these hacks are tried and true:

- Ziploc bags for everything: Snacks, chargers, extra clothes, meds, wipes—everything has its own bag. It keeps things clean and makes airport security a breeze.
- Door alarms for hotel rooms: Affordable peace of mind if your child is a wanderer.
- Portable blackout curtains: Help maintain sleep routines even when you're not at home.
- Download maps, tickets, and documents: Don't count on Wi-Fi or cell service when you need it most.
- Use clear labels: Label medical equipment, strollers, and sensory gear with name and contact info—just in case something gets left behind.

Don't Forget Your Self-Care

Let's say it louder for the parents in the back: you matter, too.

- Give yourself permission to do less. You don't have to "maximize" the trip. If the highlight is a calm morning walk with your child, that's enough.
- Accept help. Trade off shifts with a partner or family member. Take breaks when you can.
- Celebrate small wins. Got through airport security meltdown-free? That's a win. Laughed together in the hotel room? Another win. Focus on the moments that matter most.

Must-Have Entertainment & Activities

Long car rides and flight delays are no joke, so bring the fun:

- Busy bags: Fill gallon bags with fidget toys, coloring supplies, or themed puzzles tailored to your child's interests.
- Preloaded tablet: Add favorite shows, calming music, and offline games (bonus if they don't require Wi-Fi).
- Audiobooks or sound stories: Great for sensory-sensitive kids who prefer listening over screens.
- Scavenger hunts: Create a visual list of things to spot—stop signs, cows, red cars, airplanes—to keep kids engaged in their environment.
- Sensory bottles: A simple DIY option to calm nerves or pass the time with sparkles and movement.



Travel doesn't have to be Pinterest-perfect. It's okay to pivot, to cancel a plan, or to take the scenic route (literally and figuratively). The magic isn't just in the destination; it's in the cuddles in the hotel bed, the shared snack at the rest stop, and the way your child lights up at something new.

You've got this. You're not alone. And if you're traveling this summer, we'd love to see your family in action!

📸 Send us your summer travel photos at resources@projectalive.org

Let us know if you'd like us to feature your adventure in our newsletter or on social media!