

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THESE GADGETS ARE FAMILY-FRIENDLY

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright

GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

OK, you have kids now and you’ll never travel lightly again. But, there are ways to make the trip easier-going. Before you pack up the family for a weekend getaway or your long-awaited vacation, check out these gotta’ have, road-tested gadgets and gear guaranteed to make your trip go smoother.

SKIP HOP DIAPER BAGS

These diaper bags are so stylish that they may replace your everyday purse. We like the Duo Special Edition Diaper Bag for its classy, contemporary design. But it’s not just a pretty face. This bag works. “Everything gets lost in my other diaper bag,” says Susan Macdonald, mother of a 1-year-old son. “The Skip Hop not only looks good, but everything — from bottles to bibs — are easy to find.” The bag has nine pockets, including exterior pockets, a personal zip pocket, interior bottle pocket, and two hidden pockets. We also like that it can be wiped clean and that you can hang it on a stroller or fling it over your shoulders. 877-4-SKIPHOP, www.skiphop.com, \$70

SAND FREE MAT

Taking the kids to the beach? There’s no way you’ll keep sand off the blanket or off of you! A sand-less beach mat sounded too good to be true, but we gave it a try. Now, this one-way sift mat is a staple in our beach and camping gear. In fact, it stays in the trunk of our car, and is pulled out spring through fall at picnics, beaches, outdoor BBQs, and more. The ultra-thin weave technology, used by the military for years, allows sand and dirt particles to fall through without coming back up. Consider purchasing the sand-free tote bag (\$29.99), with enough room to stuff the mat and a few other items. cgear-sandfree.com, three sizes from \$59.99-\$99.99.

PEAPOD PLUS TRAVEL BED

Your porta’ crib is fine for taking to Grandma’s house, but inconveniently heavy and bulky to lug on planes. This portable pop-up tent, with a cushioned bottom sleeping pad, is super lightweight and compact enough to stuff into your carry-on. It pops up quickly, and once you know the drill, collapses easily, too. Kids love it, and having their own little contained space makes them feel at home and more comfortable when traveling. It’s also a great thing to take to the beach, providing shade and insect-barrier screening. 800-553-5529, www.kidco.com, \$119.99.

BUMKINS SNACK BAGS

Sometimes the smallest things can make all the difference. Take these multi-use snack bags. They’re lightweight, machine washable, dishwasher safe, and a feel-good purchase as an eco-friendly alternative to plastic bags. They come in two sizes and a variety of fun prints, and are perfect for storing snacks, small toys, wipes, crayons,

and more. We also like the Clear Travel Bags (\$12.95-\$14.95), a package of three different sized bags that are TSA compliant. 480-481-3618, www.bumkins.com, \$4.95-\$6.95.

LITTLE PASSPORTS

If you’d like to help instill a love of travel in your children and deepen their understanding of cultures around the world, consider subscribing to the ingenious Little Passports program. The welcome package includes a miniature suitcase, passport, activities and a map of the world. Each month, your children will receive a country-specific package as they follow their pen pals Sam and Sofia around the world. The packages are well-done and creatively thought out. For example, in the Japan package, we received a letter from Sam and Sofia talking about their adventures (like eating sushi, making origami, and visiting Mt. Fuji and Tsukiji, the largest fish market in the world.) The package also contained a boarding pass to Japan with a secret access code to play games in the Boarding Zone area of the Little Passports’ website, a sushi eraser, stickers and a stamp to add to the map and passport, a postcard of Himeji Castle, instructions and papers for making origami, and an activity sheet for making a kite. Little Passports is available in three subscription options, Early Explorers for ages 3 to 5, World Edition for ages 6 to 10, and USA Edition for ages 7 to 12. www.littlepassports.com, Early Explorer \$14.95 for 12 months or \$17.95 per month, World Edition and USA Edition \$11.95 for 12 months or \$13.95 per month.

MIFOLD GRAB-AND-GO BOOSTER SEAT

This compact booster seat, 10 times smaller than traditional booster seats, promises to revolutionize family road travel. While traditional booster seats are bulky and heavy, making them inconvenient to pack for plane-rental car travel, the Grab-and-Go seat folds up to just 10 inches by five inches, and can easily fit in a tote or backpack. Instead of raising a child to meet the adult-sized seatbelt, this system adjusts the seat belt to fit the child, positioning it properly across the child’s chest and hips. Designed for ages 4 to 12 and available now for online preorders, it’s perfect for carpooling, car rentals, taxis, and extra vehicles. www.mifold.com, \$49.

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The sand free mat.



The Skip Hop diaper bag.



Mifold Grab-and-Go booster seat.



The Little Passports travel kit.



The Peapod Plus travel bed.

HERE

EXPLORE QUINCY’S PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY

Take a self-guided tour in the footsteps of former presidents John and John Quincy Adams, first ladies Abigail and Louisa Catherine Adams, and famed patriot John Hancock. The Trail of the Presidents takes visitors on a historically rich journey through the city of Quincy, from the church where all four Adams lie in rest, and the Stone Library, known as America’s first presidential library with more than 16,000 books and numerous national treasures, to the presidential mansion at Peacefield, a farmhouse dating to 1731 that served as the summer home and White House for presidents John and John Quincy Adams. Visit more than a dozen other related landmarks, parks, and walking trails throughout Quincy. A free trolley connects the Adams National Historical Park headquarters (across from the Quincy Center T stop) with the mansion, library, and birthplaces. www.discoverquincy.com

ENJOY MOVIES AND MUSIC ON BOSTON HARBOR

Catch free live music and classic films during the Boston Harbor Hotel’s Summer in the City program. Dine al fresco and take in views of Boston Harbor while enjoying Pop Soul Tuesdays, Rat Pack Wednesdays, and Blues Barge Thursdays from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Don’t miss the Premier Band on July 12, the Justin Beech Band on July 13, and Bruce Marshall on Aug. 11.



The Movies by Moonlight series runs Fridays at dusk until Sept. 9, featuring such classic films as “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom” (July 22), “Back to the Future” (Aug. 5), “Some Like It Hot” (Aug. 26), and “Star Trek” (Sept. 2). All events are open to the public. 617-439-7000, www.bhh.com

THERE

ROW YOUR OWN GONDOLA IN VEGAS

Learn how to be a gondolier as you navigate the serpentine canals at The Venetian Las Vegas. The hotel has just launched Gondola University, a daily program that teaches participants about the history of Venice and its water transportation system, and how to pilot a gondola. After you row their own vessel, you’ll graduate during an official Sash and Scarf Ceremony, and then receive a gondola certificate, hat, T-shirt, and photo. Gondola University runs 8 a.m.-10 a.m. daily; maximum nine people. \$199 plus tax. You don’t have to stay at The Venetian to enroll, but if you are a guest you can then kick back in one of the hotel’s newly updated and super spacious accommodations — Guinness World Records calls The Venetian’s standard suite the Largest Standard Hotel Room in the World. Also check out the hotel’s Canyon Ranch SpaClub, one of the world’s largest day spas with a staggering 150 services, and home to an impressive 40-foot climbing wall. Room rates start at \$149. 866-659-9643, www.venetian.com

SNORKEL FOR SCALLOPS ON THE FLORIDA COAST

Learn how to catch scallops while snorkeling around the shallow grass flats of north-central Florida. Plantation on Crystal River, a resort located about 75 miles north of Tampa on the Gulf of Mexico, now offers guided and non-guided scalloping packages that coincide with the launch of this year’s scalloping season. Guided scalloping tours include necessary snorkeling gear, a mesh scalloping bag for holding your catch, and instruction from a local boat captain, who will teach you how to scoop up the 2- to 3-inch scallops found inside a fan-shaped shell. The resort’s chef will prepare your harvest for lunch or dinner. The guided package, which starts at \$615 for midweek stays, includes two nights for two guests in a garden- or water-view deluxe room, patio room, or golf villa, daily breakfast, and scallop recipes. Scalloping season runs through Sept. 24. 800-632-6262, www.plantationon-crystalriver.com



EVERYWHERE

TAKE YOUR MOVIE LIBRARY ON AN ADVENTURE

Bring your entire movie collection on your travels using the DVDWatchBox, a portable device that lets you stream movies from your laptop to your TV, phone, or tablet. The DVDWatchBox

converts movies on DVDs and Blu-ray disks to streaming video files, so you can create a movie library on your laptop and take it with you wherever you go. It also captures all disk menus, subtitles, languages, and other movie content, and even supports Dolby 5.1 and 7.1 surround sound audio for TV playback. Connect the box to any TV and a wireless network to watch movies. Free apps let you stream your favorite films to your Apple and Android devices, or download them for offline playback. \$149.99 at Best Buy. www.vidon.me

GET A CHARGE HIKING

Last year, I hiked for 10 days in the Mount Rainier wilderness with a solar battery charger bouncing around the outside of my pack, getting scratched up on rocks, and snagging on branches. It never seemed to face the sun when I wanted a charge. I needed one of Gregory’s ingenious new backpacks: The Deva (women’s) and Baltoro (men’s) packs have a Goal Zero Nomad 7 Plus solar charger built into the lid, meaning the charger is protected from taking a beating and always oriented toward the sky. Plug your devices in and charge as you walk, or refuel the included Flip 10 battery pack. The charger weighs just over 1 pound and can refuel your cellphone in about three to four hours. The durable pack comes with a rain cover, pockets galore, and a clever quick-release hydration pouch that converts to a daypack. \$329 at REI. 877-477-4292, www.gregorypacks.com

KARI BODNARCHUK