

Travel Tips and Checklist for Adoptive Parents

compiled by Kelly Caldwell

[\(Guatemala Coordinator, Children of the World, Inc. and adoptive mom\)](#)

TRAVEL TIPS

INTRODUCTION

I wrote this document in order to help parents prepare for travel. In general, my target audience are NEW PARENTS who have very little travel experience (especially, to Guatemala). It is appropriate for simple visits and/or the pickup trip. There is also a wonderful [Travel Etiquette Guide available on Guatadopt.com](#). That being said, these are my OWN recommendations and may differ from your own agency's.

The first thing I should warn new parents about is the **Baby-Effect**. This is the transformation than we all seem to make into parenthood. The first major milestone that you must make is putting the needs of your child in front of "Efficiency", "Cost" or "Time". You will find that a child distracts you from being as efficient as you used to be. Now the Cost of items or services are measured in hassle, stress and comfort. Time should be doubled or halved when dealing with a baby (it will take you twice as long to get them ready and your trips out should be half as much as the time it takes for you to become tired). If you are an efficiency nut (and I can certainly relate)...your methodology may have been just thrown out the window.

KISS, KISF

KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID. KEEP IT STRESS FREE. These are my ole standby phrases that I use when making travel decisions. With each choice you must make, weigh the hassles vs. the convenience vs. the cost.

KISS Example - Taking a small notebook with all your numbers as opposed to a laptop...or...opting not to take 40 *extra* diapers (if need be, they are easy to purchase around Guatemala City)

I spent quite a bit more on a carseat that fit my car better after my baby was home. Even though the first one was "manageable", it was causing backaches and hassle-time in fastening and tightening the harness. This was something I did multiple times a day, so the costly purchase made a sizable dent in my stress level for many months.

KISF Example: On the pickup trip opting for a slightly more expensive flight because it is direct! Buying a carrier for your trip that may only give you a few months use (but will be a relief to have when dealing with a baby).

You should start this transformation on your pick-up trip, otherwise, you might be putting undue stress on your baby. Remember, your baby will pick up on your mood...if you are stressed out, he/she will be stressed out.

VACCINATIONS

You will often hear visitors and parents say "I didn't get those shots and I was fine!". That may be true, but you are accessing risk when deciding on whether to get vaccinations or not. Hepatitis B is much more prevalent in poorer areas around the world. In some areas, it may affect nearly 40% of the population. Typically, you are not going to be traversing rural Guatemala, so your risk is probably not that high. However, remember that you may encounter street vendors, shoe shiners, etc. who HAVE been exposed. Talk to someone who actually contracted hepatitis. THEN, evaluate whether you want to take the risk.

I personally traveled quite a bit before my first trip to Guatemala. It was my first trip to Taiwan in 1999 during a 7.7 earthquake where I really appreciated being immunized against hepatitis and tetanus. We were incredibly lucky to have stayed in a sturdy hotel which suffered only minor damage during the quakes. Taiwan had not suffered a major quake in over 100 years and this one left over 2000 people dead and many more with serious injuries.

PASSPORT

Other than reminding you to take yours...

- Make a copy to leave with friends or relatives
- Make a copy to stash in your carry-on
- Leave a copy in your hotel when you are out and about
-

Adopted Child's Passport

Your child will be issued a Guatemalan passport. That means that your child is traveling as a Guatemalan (until you apply for a US passport). If you are considering any further international travel on this passport, you need to know the requirements for these other countries as they may differ from traveling with a US passport (for example, to gain entrance back into the US you will need the permanent resident card). Make sure that his/her ticket reflects the name on the passport and make sure that you have all necessary documentation for travel.

CLOTHING

Clothing for babies: Guatemalans tend to bundle their babies so ...

- Your baby is probably used to wearing warmer clothing than you might choose for the climate
- Your baby/child is probably NOT accustomed to air conditioning, so keep him/her away from cold drafts.

You do not want your child to overheat, however, you can lightly layer the clothing as to keep them comfortable without offending those around you.

Clothing for you: Expect 70s & 80s during the day, 60s possibly during the night. Layering works REALLY well in Guatemalan climate (a nice sweater and a couple of long sleeved blouses that you can wear over short sleeved shirts work well)! Take extra shirts, babies tend to dirty them for you. Take comfy clothing for the majority of the time in the hotel. Take something nice for your embassy appointment and something business casual for a nice dinner out. Be conservative in public.

MONEY/EXCHANGE

Take plenty of cash. Most vendors and Guatemala businesses will happily take your US Currency. Take lots of \$1 bills for tips and small purchases. For all other bills, make sure that it is the newer style "big-headed" bills. A trip to the bank a few days before is your best bet to get relatively crisp, newer bills. Typically, I recommend using your credit card wherever it is accepted and saving the cash for small purchases. However, some credit card companies have started charging a 3% or more currency conversion fee. So, it might be wise to also have Travelers checks for restaurants, tours and hotel bills.

PACKING

RULE # 1 - DON'T OVERLOAD YOUR LUGGAGE. BIG, HEAVY luggage (even if it falls under the weight limit) tends to be abused and damaged more often than smaller, lighter pieces of luggage. Consider buying two 26" suitcases as opposed to one really big suitcase. I find that they are easier to get off the conveyor belt at baggage claim and they are easier to lug around. You can buy a couple of inexpensive (but nice looking) 26" suitcases at Target that work perfectly well.

RULE # 2 - USE CONTAINERS INSIDE YOUR LUGGAGE. Try and keep items in containers of some sort (INSIDE your luggage). Pillowcases make a really simple, convenient way to organize your personal items (like panties and socks). It also minimizes the chance of your underwear being strewn all over the place because a zipper came open.

RULE # 3 - BE CONSERVATIVE WITH YOUR CARRY-ON LUGGAGE. Avoid carry-on items that would not fit under the seat in front of you unless you do NOT mind checking it at the gate. Especially, with international flights, passengers seem to push the limits when it comes to carry-on items. Often times, those that abuse the rules sneak through leaving very little overhead room for other passengers. If there is no room for your carry-on, they will want YOU to check your item. Therefore, if you can select carry-on luggage that will fit under your seat, you will likely be able to keep it with you. Some large diaper bags fit nicely under the seat and leave enough room for other personal items or fragile/valuable items. I found a nice roll-around backpack that works great. When boarding the plane, I can throw it over my shoulder...when walking through the terminal, I can roll it and when I have ALL my luggage, I throw the shoulder straps over my suitcase handle and piggy-back it.

RULE #4 - LEAVE A COMPARTMENT FOR YOUR PASSPORT HOLDER IN YOUR CARRY-ON. Do not overstuff your carry-on. Having a zippered or pocket compartment at the front of your carry-on is perfect for repeatedly pulling out your passport holder with your tickets and passports.

RULE #5 - PROTECT FRAGILE ITEMS IN CARRY-ON. Those same travelers with the big, bulky carry-on suitcases don't have an issue with smashing your carry-on while fitting theirs in the overhead space. If you have a camera or video camera, make sure to wrap it well and make sure that the carry-on is placed in a way that protects the contents. Turn it sideways if it takes less space and move it to one side.

RULE #6 - USE COMBINATION LUGGAGE LOCKS ON LUGGAGE. As I mentioned before, luggage locks also come in handy as a minimal room security technique. There are TSA combination locks that are relatively inexpensive and you do not need to walk them through the screeners. While you may not care about securing your luggage through the airport, luggage locks also help to keep zippers from coming undone!

DIAPER BAG CONTENTS < 10 MOS - If this is your pickup trip, here are a few things that I have found quite handy in the diaper bag. Regardless of what is said here, you need to discuss what the child is drinking and eating with the foster mother. You do not want to change formula or food schedule until you return to the states....and even then, I would do it ever so gradual. The baby/child is under a great deal of stress and may experience loss of appetite, constipation, diarrhea, etc. So, adding a diet change may make it difficult to determine the cause of the problem.

Formula - I have tried the measurement containers and various other methods of dealing with a baby on a plane by myself. So, this is my preferred methodology. Keep in mind that Enfamil and some other familiar brands of formula are slightly different than what we have available here in the states. In General, you may be better off buying extra canisters in Guatemala so you can gradually phase in your desired formula. For the plane, I found it much easier to load the formula in a dry bottle beforehand. If you decide to try it this way, just make sure that you take note of the resulting amount when mixed so that you know how much water to add. My favorite travel method for formula was the pre-measured packets. My least favorite was the measuring containers which seemed cumbersome to get ALL the formula in the bottle without spilling. (or preparing).

Juice - Gerber has these wonderful travel size juice containers. Take a couple of different flavors (at least 2 of each flavor).

Wipes - For babies, you might want to take an entire box of wipes on the plane with you. Those little cases seem to contain just enough for you to run out when you need them most. You may need wipes for many other things other than just dirty diapers.

Changes of clothing - pack 2 changes of clothing for your child. In your regular carry-on, pack an extra change for you as well.

Shout wipes - Shout has these mini-wipes. They work pretty well when your child decides to spit up on you.

Other items to remember: Clean spare pacifier, bottled water (1 is fine since they will provide it on the plane...just keep a bottle with you too), hand sanitizer, bib, spitup cloth, canned food (if applicable), spoon, Sassy bags or ziplocks for stinkies, changing pad, medications.

CONSIDERATIONS - Use a slim **fanny pack** instead of a purse. On the streets of Guatemala, I prefer a fanny-pack. So, I pack a basic sachel purse in my checked luggage and put some of the money, credit cards, etc. in my fanny-pack. When going through security, I stuff the fanny-pack in the front of my carry-on luggage.

SINUS SUFFERERS (a recommendation from my ENT) - Use a swab to coat the inside of your nose with Neosporin. It will keep the dry airplane air from drying your nose out (which can actually become quite painful) and it will fight off *some* bacteria too.

BABY EQUIPMENT

Strollers - You may not need a stroller for a short visit, but you will want one for your pickup trip if your child is under the age of three. Big strollers can be cumbersome and heavy going through security or folding up at the gate. Umbrella strollers are nice, but don't do as well for infants and don't lighten your load much. Consider some of the light-weight strollers or even a "Snap-N-Go" if you are bringing home an infant. While

another stroller may be a little extra money, it may save you a lot of hassle going through the airport. Make sure that you can easily fold the stroller up and lift it one handed to counter-top level.

Remember, you can check your stroller at the gate and they will return it as you exit the plane.

Infant Carrier - A must for babies under 10 months old. Even if you are visiting, you will need a *safe* place to lay the baby down besides the crib. New parents are often surprised at how much they will use the carrier EVEN when you plan on using a Mayan wrap, cozy or sling.

Again, you can check the carrier at the gate and they will return it as you exit the plane.

Mayan Wrap, Cozy, Sling, Hip Hammock - All of these are wonderful for bonding with baby. They also come in handy when you need your hands but do not want to put the baby down. The wraps and slings are also nice to shield baby on those windy or rainy days out.

Pacifiers - Pacifiers are not typically used in Guatemala and there is no need to force a child to take one if they do not seem interested. However, if your child is prone to sticking their fist in their mouth and/or fingers...you may find that a pacifier is a better option. Suckling is a natural way for a child to sooth themselves. Remember, your new family member is going through a very traumatic move...even if they outwardly seem content. While pacifier-habits may seem hard to break, they are no less difficult than thumb sucking and you have *slightly* more control over the cleanliness of the item stuck in mouth (especially, when they get to crawling).

AIRPORT TICKETING & CHECK-IN

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS - Unlike domestic flights, international flights do not vary as much with the two week advanced purchase. They will vary depending on if a special is running when you purchase your ticket. If you are using Expedia or Travelocity, try and enter in "Flexible Dates" instead of specifying a date. Sometimes, leaving a day earlier or later can save you a lot of money!

If you are flying coach and there are three seats on either isle, do not hesitate to reserve the aisle and window seat leaving the middle seat empty. The middle seats are the least desirable. If the plane is booked and the seat is reserved by another patron...they will probably be more than happy to switch to a window or aisle seat so that you can sit with your companion. Otherwise, there is a better chance the seat will remain unoccupied and you will have a little spreading out room!

LUGGAGE - On international flights, the luggage max weight is 75lbs. For domestic flights, it is 50lbs. So, if you have *unrelated* connecting flights (using two different airlines), you will probably be restricted to the 50lb limit on the in-states flight. So, there is a huge advantage in using a single carrier for the entire trip (or at least one that is partnered). Regardless of the weight restrictions, I find that it is much easier to spread items over two pieces of checked in luggage than trying to fit it in a single large suitcase. The baggage handlers seem to prefer it as well (as luggage seems less likely to be purposefully damaged). It is also much easier to lift from the baggage claim conveyors...especially, when there are many others crowded around the conveyor.

SEATS - Keep in mind that there are some seat assignments that are reserved for the gate check-in. These seats are typically unallocated so that they can accommodate special situations. If you are not happy with your seat assignment, wait and ask if there are alternatives at the gate.

TAKING YOUR CHILD HOME - If you are planning a return trip with your child, you should plan to have a little extra time between flights for processing the VISA. It is impossible to predict a short vs. long wait in Immigrations. You should give yourself at LEAST 2 hours between flights. If you are flying into Atlanta, give you may still be running to your next plane with a 2 hour layover. You will have two packets of legal paperwork in your procession. One is the Visa attached to the sealed package that you will need to present to Immigration when you return to the US. You should also have copies of paperwork that your attorney has provided for your legal records. Pack the legal paperwork away somewhere in your carry-on AWAY from the packet you will relinquish to Immigration. You will need this paperwork for the post-adoption chase no matter what type of Visa was obtained.

You will be required to pay a fee for your child even if he/she will be sitting on your lap. You can pay this fee when you check in. You will also need to produce their Guatemalan Passport and the Visa (which will be attached to the sealed package). You will get this back as they only need to see the Visa.

AIRPORT SECURITY

Your goal is to get through the security screen the FIRST time. Why? Because, going through multiple times waste your time and your carry-on luggage may be sitting unattended while you are being re-screened. The screeners may also pull you to the side to do a personal screen (a hassle if you are juggling a baby and multiple carry-ons).

Keep your **passport** and your **ticket** in your hand. They have recently been asking for them as you pass through the screener.

DON'T WEAR: boots, steel tipped shoes, high heels, belts with metal buckles, heavy jackets, hats, purses (however, small purses or fanny-packs work great if you can stuff them in a larger carry-on) etc.

SHOES:

Women - Slides or clogs that can easily be slipped off work well. Many slides (like LandsEnd) have metal in the shoe and you will need to slip them off and put them in a basket on the conveyor belt when going through security.

Men - Loafers work great because you can slide them off and place them in a basket on the conveyor belt. Many of the shoes made for men have enough metal to set off the alarm.

Regardless of the shoes, make it a habit to slip them off and put them through the machine...it takes the guesswork out of it!

PURSES AND FANNYPACKS - Men are the worst about getting through the screener because they don't tend to use purses or fanny packs. So, 5 minutes of emptying pockets of change, keys, wallets, card holders, etc. tends to be the plight of MAN. But if you have ever had a laptop or item disappear at the other end of the machine while you were unloading your pockets, you might rethink your phobia of the fanny-pack. MEN, don't carry loose change in your pockets right before getting on a plane. You will need to unload every item before walking through the screener...so don't make it a project.

THE HANDOFF - For Couples with a small child. Have Mommy hold the baby while Daddy loads everything on the conveyor. Then hand baby off to daddy and Mommy walk on through. She now has her hands free to gather the items from the conveyor belt, open up the stroller and to *watch* over their carry-ons while hubby goes through security. This works great if you have two people regardless. If you are traveling alone with baby, look for a Family and Handicap assistance line. It may be a bit slower but they are usually a little more helpful and patient.

AT THE GATE

This is the time to ask if there is **alternative seating**, if you are not happy with your assigned seats. You should also ask the gate personnel for a **gate-check** tag for your **stroller and/or your carrier**. Personally, I would gate-check these items even on the way down. Gate-checked items are typically loaded last and are returned to you at the arrival gate...In general, they seem to suffer less damage than if you check them.

WITH BABY - If you have your baby or toddler with you, make **SURE** that the gate personnel is aware that you need assistance. Sometimes, they will announce that you may board with the first *Zone*, but many times they will not say a word. It is up to you to make it a point. When the first Zone is called, go ahead and get in line with your child.

ON THE PLANE

Keep your passport holder with you. On the final leg of your trip, you will need to fill out immigration and customs paperwork. Therefore, you need to have a pen, passport and ticket handy to complete the form. Once you complete the forms, stick them back in your passport holder with your passport.

WITH BABY - One of your number one priorities is to help your child **CLEAR THEIR EARS** during takeoff and landing. A baby in pain will make you and your neighbors miserable! If your child seems stuffy, consider giving him/her Tylenol Cold 15 minutes before boarding. One of the advantages to starting your child on a pacifier is that you will have another tool to help minimize ear discomfort.

CLEARING EARS - What may seem natural to you, may be difficult for a child with less developed muscles in the ear. One solution is to can give your child formula or juice at takeoff and landing. Wait until the plane is *taking off* (no sooner and no later) to give the bottle. You want to make sure they are swallowing at **even the most minor pressure changes**. The more pressure that is on the ear, the harder it is to clear and the more painful. Therefore, the process may take more than a bottle (which is where the pacifier comes in handy). If the child dozes with a pacifier, you can wiggle the pacifier every few seconds he/she will suckle.

Landing is the same. However, you need to be alert to your own ear pressure so that you can start a bottle as you fee even the slightest altitude change. Again, they may tire of the bottle or finish it before you get on the ground. *My personal note: When I started diving, I had a tough time clearing my ears and the BEST advice I received was to pause and clear every foot....* Don't let your child go too long without clearing (drinking or sucking on the pacifier should help significantly!)

Before landing, you might want to use the bathroom on the plane. Otherwise, you may have a bit of a wait. Often enough, the bathrooms are closed before going through Immigrations.

IMMIGRATION , CUSTOMS, ETC.

ARRIVING IN GUATEMALA - You will pass through Immigrations first when you arrive in Guatemala. Take notice of the lines. On either side, you may see two immigration officials taking care of 1 line which is going to move twice as fast. At the Guatemala airport, there is usually an immigration official reserved for assisting the flight crew. However, once the flight crew has passed the agent typically starts assisting individuals in the right most line (facing immigration).

You will then go to baggage claim. There are only two conveyors that handle luggage and several flights may be grouped on these conveyors. Once you pick up your luggage, have your customs form ready to hand to the attendant. At times, there will be line(s) where CUSTOMS searches through luggage. Avoid these lines unless you are declaring something. In the center, there are usually two or more agents that look like they are the airport bouncers blocking escaping tourists. Go straight to them after picking up your luggage and hand them your declaration form (confidence is key...you know what you are doing so don't waffle). IF they feel the need, they will redirect you to the other line. Keep in mind that most passengers will automatically go to the line where they are checking baggage, so you may feel like you are stepping out of line;-)

There will be lots of onlookers during peak times of the day. Right inside the doors, you should look for your driver/shuttle who will have a hotel sign or your name (keep in mind that they may have a UNIQUE version of your name too)

LEAVING GUATEMALA WITH BABY - You will present the SEALED package to IMMIGRATION regarding the immigration of your adopted child(ren). You will be sent to a room while they review the VISA.

ROOM SECURITY

Luggage locks really come in handy when locking up your valuables in your luggage. Most hotels have a safe, but rarely do they hold much more than a change purse. Though portable luggage is not the safest container, it is better than having expensive items sitting out in plain view in your room. If you have anti-depressants or expensive prescription drugs, you might consider locking those away as well. Consider taking an extra lock for your carry-on luggage for this reason.

CHECKLIST

The following list is most likely incomplete, however I hope that it will help you remember items you may otherwise forget. If you have other suggestions, please feel free to [email them to me](#).

Necessities	Infant	Toddler/Young Children	Visit	Pickup
Baby Decongestant	Tylenol Cold	Triaminic	X	X
Fever/Pain	Baby Tylenol (Reg) Baby Motrin	Children's Tylenol Children's Motrin	X	X
Tummy Aches/Gas	Baby Mylicon Drops	Baby Mylicon Drops Children's	X	X
Diaper Rash Medicine	A&D is my favorite and Comes in a handy pump	A&D	X	X
Lotion	Aveeno Baby Lotion (one of the best)		X	X
Bottles	3 or 4	0 - Depending on age	X	X
Sippy Cups		2 or 3 If you are not sure, take bottles	X	X
Bibs	Bibsters (available at Walmart)	Bibsters (available at Walmart)	X	X
Diapers Wipes	10 per day is a safe bet A normal size box	7 per day should be fine A normal size box	X	X
Changing Pad	Huggies Disposable Changing Pads - Not only are they disposable, but they are nice and compact		X	X
Diaper Bag	A good size soft bag	Or a backpack for child's things	O	X
Cloth Diapers	Great for spit-ups	N/A	X	X
Baby Washrags	Soft ones small enough For baby	Soft ones small enough for Little faces	X	X
Cloth Gloves	Handy for handling soapy Babies	N/A	X	X
Toothbrush Toothpaste	Tiny toothbrush for toothy Babes	The theme battery powered Toothbrushes are nice. If Toddler is skittish, then don't turn It on!	X	X
Blankets	1 for wrapping baby 1 for throwing on floor for baby		X	X
Clorox Wipes	To clean surfaces		X	X
Dish Soap	For washing bottles	For washing sippy cups	X	X
Shout Wipes	These are great for those mini spitups	Good for toddlers too	X	X
Sassy Bags Or Ziplock bags	For dirty diapers - keeps the smell under control. Available at Walmart and they are very compact		X	X
Ziplocks	Handy for pacifiers, bottle parts, medicine, etc.		X	X
Nosebulb	X	N/A	X	X
Ear Thermometer	Braun makes an easy to use one		O	O
Pacifiers & Pacifier clips	Take a few different types <i>* See info on pacifiers</i>		X	X
Stroller	See *BABY EQUIPMENT	Depends on the age...	-	X
Infant Carrier	See *BABY EQUIPMENT	N/A	X	X
Bouncy Seat	See *BABY EQUIPMENT	N/A	O	O
Clothing for Tots	Err on the big side. Stretchy, cotton outfits work great. The easier to layer, the better...		X	X

Sleepers	Footed, long sleeve, cotton One-piece	If potty trained or potty training, Two piece outfits work best	X	X
Socks	X	X	X	X
Shoes	For children under 9 mos (or not walking) there is no real need for shoes	X	X	X
Undies	N/A	Only if potty trained	X	X
Girls - Leggings	Take some leggings that will work under dresses		X	X
Hats	Remember that many Guatemalan children have smaller head circumferences than here in the states.		O	O
Sunglasses		Can be fun for kids...	O	O
Jacket / Sweater	Light jacket or sweater Heavy sweater/jacket if you are returning to colder climate		X	X X
Outfits	3 per day. Remember that Guatemalans Bundle their children, so be Conservative in picking outfits.	2 per day	X	X
Toys/Entertainment				
Rattles Chew on toys	X X	N/A	O	O
Beachball	N/A	Easy to pack!	O	O
Megablocks	N/A	Easy to put in corners of luggage	O	O
Board Books	Safe for babies to handle	If an older toddler, a colorful Interesting book	O	O
Poetry Books	Good for soothing reading		O	O
Portable Walker	N/A	There are some nice portable Walkers that fold up nicely. These are great for waits at the Airport for pre-walkers	O	O
Stuffed Animal	X The softer the better. Washable is also helpful		X	X
Big plastic Mixing spoon And bowl	Good for banging	Good for pretend time	X	X
For You	Notes			
NOTEBOOK	Put all the contact numbers in here and keep it in your carry-on. Use it to take notes about your baby and items of interest....			
Breathmints	Nerves and lack of sleep reek havoc on your breath. Have some ready before meeting with attorney or going to embassy		X	X
Calculator	If you plan on doing even a little shopping, find out the exchange rate at the front desk and have your calculator handy.		X	X
Garbage Bags or Pillow cases	For dirty laundry Smaller kitchen size bags are good for clothing that has been spit up on it or *worse.		X	X
Gallon Ziplocks	For wet items (like washcloths)		X	X
Ponytail Holders or Hair clips	Babies love to pull on your hair...and to spit up on your hair. Bring something to keep your dreads out of range. There are some wonderfully colored inexpensive scrunchies		X	X

