

LGBTQ family travel tips to keep you safe and sane

(Courtesy, Jon Bailey, The Points Guy)

Traveling as an LGBTQ family takes some organization and planning other families may not have to do. That doesn't stop us though, and it shouldn't stop you.

6 documents LGBTQ families should carry

You've got passports for your whole family and that's all you need, right? That's not necessarily the case for LGBTQ parents. You may need to carry additional documents.

It wasn't that long ago that my husband and I had to prove to several airline employees that our oldest girl was actually our daughter. Returning to the U.S. from a foreign country, we had to establish that we were her legal guardians. They actually accused us of child smuggling. It was scary, and even though we had all of our travel documents, they still detained us while they clarified our status.

Events like that happen rarely and are more relevant with younger children who can't speak for themselves, but these situations are still ones to prepare for. Here's a checklist of what you may need to carry to feel safe and secure through airport and hotel check-ins, security screenings and passport control.

Your child's birth certificate

If you or your partner are not a parent listed on your child's birth certificate, make sure you have a notarized letter from the parent whose name is listed that authorizes you to travel with the child.

Official adoption paperwork

We only stopped carrying adoption papers for our daughters when they were 10 or 11 years old. It wasn't until then that we felt comfortable that they could answer questions for themselves. Add your child's official adoption paperwork from the state in which you live to your carry-on bag.

Custody documents for minors

Carrying custody documents for minors is even more important if your children do not have the same last name as you.

Notarized 'permission to travel' letter

If you and the child you are traveling with don't share the same last name, it is smart to have a letter from your partner that stipulates that you have permission to travel with your child.

Copy of health insurance cards

In addition to the health insurance cards you have in your wallet, carry a paper copy of them as well. Or take a picture to get a digital copy. Ideally, it will have both your name and your child's name on it.

Emergency contact information

Carry a list that includes phone numbers for your family's pediatrician, dentist and any other medical professionals.

This list underscores the one thing LGBTQ families should never leave home without, whether your destination is Peoria or Peru: a bag full of your important documents. Carrying these in a sealed plastic bag can help you feel more secure when traveling with your kids.

Travel tips for LGBTQ families

In addition to the documents outlined above, some extra preparations may be helpful for LGBTQ families to travel securely and happily.

Choose your destination wisely

There are more than 70 countries that consider consensual same-sex relations a crime. In some of them, these “crimes” may carry a severe punishment. So why go there? Why would you take your kids there? We decided not to travel to specific places because we didn’t want our daughters in a country where the government says we’re going to burn in hell. You can check out the U.S. Department of State’s website for safety tips for LGBTQ travelers. Also use the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association, as it is a comprehensive travel-planning resource.

Be ready for dumb questions

Unfortunately, people all over the world can occasionally be ignorant. Cringe-worthy questions ensue. We’ve been asked, “Where’s the mommy?” when checking in to a hotel or a flight. It gets uncomfortable but instead of reacting angrily, I try to use it as a teaching moment to help the person better understand my family. Most times the person apologizes when corrected, embarrassed by their faux pas.

Patronize companies that support the LGBTQ community

Anyone who travels wants to feel welcome. For LGBTQ families there is the added anxiety of not knowing how they will be received. Take away some of that anxiety by using travel brands that train employees on inclusion and make a concerted effort to be queer-friendly. Hilton, Kimpton and Fairmont are some of our favorite hotel brands for this very reason. Most of the U.S.-based airlines also have inclusivity training and programs dedicated specifically to LGBTQ customers and families.

Be prepared for the paperwork headaches

Before you can plan your next fabulous overseas adventure, you have to obtain passports for your family. And for LGBTQ families, that is not always straightforward. You will need an original birth certificate to obtain a passport from the U.S. Department of State. Get the birth certificate by submitting a request to the Bureau of Vital Statistics. The request must be submitted in the state of your child’s birth, which is not necessarily the state you live in now. Single parents may get pushback from the agency because of the lack of a custody agreement. Look for the newest forms that stipulate “Father/Mother/Parent” to help alleviate this issue.

When you apply for a child’s passport, you must do so in person with the child and both parents present.

Be a rainbow ambassador

Although it can be difficult to travel as an LGBTQ family, it is beyond worth it. I honestly believe that every time LGBTQ families travel, we’re showing the world that we are just the same as any other family. For a lot of people who haven’t seen families like mine, we are changing their perspective. And traveling somewhere awesome at the same time.