

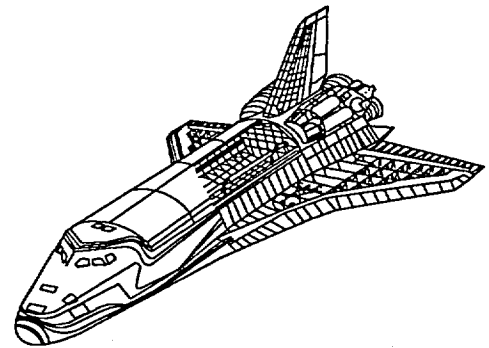
THE JUNIOR JETSET: TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN Part I

by Peter Pigott, Attache, Vienna

"One of the most difficult aspects of Foreign Service life is travelling with children," commented a colleague who should know, "but it is inescapable. One consoles oneself with the thought that someday they will be old enough to fly on their own and so can you."

While babies are soothed by movement and sleep solidly for the duration of the flight, toddlers and pre-teens do not enjoy travel for its own sake. Unlike a car or a train they have no scenery to watch and cannot explore by visiting the restaurant car or a gas station. Worse still, unlike in the family stationwagon, the child's behaviour (and your own) is on public view. Sitting next to someone else's squirming, whining child while the aircraft drones interminably across the Pacific is no one's idea of a relaxing trip.

Airlines do provide facilities for child travellers such as carrycots that fit into bulkhead walls, toys, disposable diapers and special meals. All say that with advance warning they will reserve the most suitable seats for you and your child, carry the foods appropriate to its age and alert their trained staff. However, most warn that although they allow babies under two to travel at a fraction of the full cost - on condition that the child does not occupy a seat - an active baby should have its own seat on a long flight. This is not the time to be stingy with the travel budget and it is very good advice. All the major airports provide convenient, well maintained nurseries, sometimes with trained staff. Some transit lounges now have glass enclosed "Activity Centres" where the tiny tots can slide into oceans of coloured ping pong balls and generally let off steam between connecting flights.



C h i l d psychologists write that until they reach school age, children prefer home, familiarity and routine; they have little understanding of time zones and do not appreciate the wonder of enjoying a well-prepared steak at 35,000 feet. Unless amused, they will relentlessly badger their parents and fellow passengers with as many demands as possible - only to fall soundly asleep as soon as the aircraft lands and have to be carried through the Immigration queues like leaden weights.

The experts on travelling with children are those who are, or have been, posted overseas. Here, in their own words, are a few anecdotes and suggestions of how they have coped - and survived.

Beth Gilker: one daughter.

When my daughter was a baby, on take-off and landings I used a soother or bottle, (they can't chew gum). She sucked on it to keep her ears from hurting. I bring my own food. The airline can't be relied on to have proper baby food. Bulkhead seats are best - you cannot sit near an exit

