# THE FAMILY ROAD TRIP GUIDE

How to plan a US road trip with kids and a rental car:
the right car, car seats, games, snacks and four family routes.

INSIDE

- Minivan, SUV or sedan: which family car to rent
- Car seats and booster seats by age
- Road trip games, activities and snacks for kids
- Four family road trips across the US
- A printable family packing checklist

Published by SIXT, the premium car rental company.

# IN SHORT

**How do you plan a family road trip in the USA?** Keep driving days short and plan a break every two to three hours. Rent a car with room for everyone and their bags: a minivan seats up to seven, and SUVs seat five to seven.[1] Bring the right car seat for each child, since children younger than 13 should ride in the back seat.[2] Pack games, snacks and a checklist, and pick a route with kid-friendly stops, from space shuttles in Florida to the Junior Ranger programs in national parks.[3, 4]

**CONTENTS**


Introduction

1. How do you plan a family road trip?
2. Which rental car is best for a family road trip?
3. Car seats and booster seats on a road trip
4. Road trip games and activities for kids
5. Road trip snacks and meals
6. Health, comfort and pets on the road
7. Four family road trips across the US
8. Family road trip packing list
9. Frequently asked questions
10. Conclusion

Methodology and limitations

Sources

About SIXT


# INTRODUCTION

A family road trip is time together you can't get anywhere else. You set the pace, stop where the kids want to stop and see the country from the road. This guide is for parents planning a road trip in the USA with a rental car. Inside, you'll find a step-by-step plan, help choosing between a minivan, an SUV and a sedan, car seat guidance by age from official safety sources, games and snack ideas, a packing checklist and four family-friendly routes with stops kids love.

Read the guide from start to finish or jump to the chapter you need. Most chapters end with key takeaways and quick answers to the questions parents ask most. For route planning, budgets, tolls and classic drives such as Route 66, see our **USA Road Trip Planner**.

# 1. HOW DO YOU PLAN A FAMILY ROAD TRIP?

Plan a family road trip around the kids' rhythm, not the map. Shorter driving days, regular breaks and one or two highlights a day keep everyone happy.

## Plan in six steps

| Step | What to do |
|---|---|
| 1. Pick a destination | Choose a place with something for every age: a beach, a national park, a museum or a theme park. Ask the kids to vote on one stop each. |
| 2. Set the pace | Plan shorter driving days than you would without kids. With a baby, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests a break every two to three hours on a day trip.[5] |
| 3. Map the route | Mark stops for meals, playgrounds and restrooms, and a must-see highlight for each day. |
| 4. Choose the car | Count people, car seats, strollers and bags, then pick a minivan, SUV or sedan that fits everyone. See chapter 2. |
| 5. Sort the car seats | Bring your own seats or add infant, toddler or booster seats to your SIXT booking.[1] See chapter 3. |
| 6. Pack smart | Use the checklist in chapter 8 and keep snacks, wipes and entertainment within reach. |

## How far can you drive in a day with kids?

There's no fixed rule, so plan around your kids' ages and moods. With babies, the AAP recommends a break every two to three hours during the day and every four to six hours at night.[5] Older kids handle longer stretches, but a playground stop, a picnic or a short walk makes the next leg easier. Drive during nap time with little ones, and save the scenic highlights for when everyone's awake.

## Book the big things early

Book lodging early in popular seasons, and check whether parks or attractions on your route need reservations or tickets. Family rooms and suites with a kitchenette make longer stays easier, and a pool is always a hit after a long drive.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Plan shorter driving days and one or two highlights a day.
- With a baby, take a break every two to three hours during the day.
- Let each child pick a stop. It keeps them excited about the trip.

## FAQ

**How do you plan a road trip with kids?**

Pick a kid-friendly destination, plan shorter driving days with regular breaks, choose a car with room for car seats and luggage, and pack snacks and games within reach.

**How often should you stop on a road trip with a baby?**

The AAP suggests a break every two to three hours on a day trip and every four to six hours at night.

# 2. WHICH RENTAL CAR IS BEST FOR A FAMILY ROAD TRIP?

The best family car is the one that fits everyone, every car seat and every bag, with room to spare. Count seats first, then luggage and strollers.

| Car type | Seats | Best for |
|---|---|---|
| Minivan | Up to 7 | Families with young kids. Sliding doors make it easy to get kids in and out, even in tight parking spots, and flexible seats fold flat for cargo.[1] |
| Sport utility vehicle (SUV) | 5 to 7 | Active families and mixed terrain. Large trunks fit strollers and sports gear, and all-wheel drive (AWD) options help in all weather.[1] |
| Premium sedan | Up to 5 | Small families on city and highway trips. Generous trunk space fits a family of four with bags.[1] |

### Minivan or SUV: which is better for a family road trip?

Choose a **minivan** if you have young children in car seats, lots of luggage or long highway days. Sliding doors, a low floor and room to move between the rows make every stop quicker. Choose an **SUV** if you're heading to the mountains, expect snow or want AWD and higher ground clearance. Many SUVs seat up to seven, but the third row is often tighter, so check the luggage space with all seats in use.

### Rent a minivan in the USA

You can rent a minivan with SIXT at locations across the US, from Los Angeles, Orlando and Las Vegas to Denver, Nashville and New York City.[6] For a bigger group, travel in two cars or choose a seven-seat SUV.

### Make the rental work for your family

- **Add a second driver.** Sharing the wheel keeps everyone rested. A daily fee applies, with a daily cap, and some locations add additional drivers at no extra charge where local law requires it. Each driver needs to be at the counter at pickup with their own driver's license and photo ID.[7, 8]
- **Choose unlimited mileage.** Family road trips are full of detours, so choose a rate with unlimited miles.[1]

- **Add the extras you need.** Add child seats, GPS (Global Positioning System) and prepaid fuel during booking or at the counter.[1]
- **Think one-way.** Pick up in one city and drop off in another, so you don't have to drive back the same way.[9]

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- A minivan seats up to seven and makes getting young kids in and out easy.
- An SUV seats five to seven and suits mountains, snow and active trips.
- Add a second driver and choose unlimited mileage for long trips.

### FAQ

**What is the best rental car for a family of five?**

A minivan or a seven-seat SUV. Both leave room for car seats and luggage. A sedan seats five, but space gets tight with car seats and bags on a long trip.

**Can you rent a seven-seater car in the USA?**

Yes. SIXT offers minivans with up to seven seats and SUVs with five to seven seats at US locations.[1]

**Is there a fee for a second driver?**

A daily fee usually applies, with a daily cap. In some locations, additional drivers are added at no extra charge where local law requires it. Check when you book.[7, 8]

# 3. CAR SEATS AND BOOSTER SEATS ON A ROAD TRIP

The right car seat depends on your child's age, height and weight. Use the seat that fits your child now, and keep them in each stage for as long as the seat's limits allow.[10]

## Which car seat does your child need?

| Age | Recommended seat | Good to know |
|---|---|---|
| Birth to 12 months | Rear-facing car seat | Children under one year should always ride rear-facing.[10] |
| 1 to 3 years | Rear-facing car seat | Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible, until they reach the seat's top height or weight limit.[10] |
| 4 to 7 years | Forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether | Use it until your child reaches the seat's top height or weight limit, then move to a booster seat.[10] |

| Age | Recommended seat | Good to know |
|---|---|---|
| 8 to 12 years | Booster seat, then seat belt | Use a booster until the seat belt fits properly: the lap belt across the upper thighs and the shoulder belt across the shoulder and chest.[10] |

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) car seat recommendations. Always follow your car seat manufacturer's height and weight limits.

## What age can a child stop using a booster seat?

It depends on size, not just age. The AAP recommends a booster seat until the vehicle seat belt fits properly, typically when a child reaches 4 feet 9 inches and is 8 to 12 years old.[2]

## When can kids sit in the front seat?

Children younger than 13 should ride in the back seat.[2] NHTSA also recommends keeping your child in the back seat at least through age 12.[10]

## Car seat laws differ by state

Every US state has child passenger safety laws, but the rules on age, weight and height vary.[11] If your road trip crosses state lines, check the rules for each state on your route. The law where you're driving is what counts.

## How long can a baby stay in a car seat?

Babies can sleep in a properly installed car seat in the car, but car seats aren't ideal for very long stretches when no one is watching a sleeping baby. If you can, have an adult ride in the back, and take a break every two to three hours during the day.[5] Once you arrive, move your baby to a safe sleep space, because a car seat should be used only for travel.[2, 5] Never breastfeed in a moving car. Stop instead.[5]

## Rent a car seat with your SIXT rental

| Child seat | What it's for |
|---|---|
| Infant seat | Rear-facing seat for babies |
| Toddler seat | Forward-facing seat for growing kids, easy to install |
| Booster seat | Helps older children sit safely at the right height |

SIXT child seats. Add them during booking or at the counter.[1]

Toddlers who still fit a rear-facing seat should stay rear-facing, so check the seat type and limits when you book.[10]

Install each seat following its instructions and your vehicle's owner's manual. Want a second pair of eyes? Certified technicians at car seat inspection stations check seats free of charge in most cases.[10]

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Keep kids rear-facing as long as the seat allows, then forward-facing with a harness, then a booster.
- Kids usually need a booster until they reach 4 feet 9 inches, typically between ages 8 and 12.
- Children younger than 13 ride in the back seat.
- Add infant, toddler or booster seats to your SIXT booking.

## FAQ

**Can you rent a car seat with a rental car?**

Yes. With SIXT, you can add an infant seat, a toddler seat or a booster seat during booking or at the counter.[1]

**What age is a booster seat for?**

Most children move to a booster once they outgrow their forward-facing seat with a harness, and use it until the seat belt fits, typically at 4 feet 9 inches and 8 to 12 years old.[10, 2]

**Are car seat laws the same in every state?**

No. Every state has child passenger safety laws, but the age, weight and height rules vary.[11]

# 4. ROAD TRIP GAMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

The best road trip games need nothing but your eyes and your voice. Mix screen-free games with audiobooks and downtime, and the miles fly by.

### Classic road trip games

| Game | How to play | Ages |
|---|---|---|
| License Plate Game | Spot license plates from as many US states as you can. Keep a list and see who finds the most by the end of the trip. | 5+ |
| Road trip bingo | Make bingo cards before you go with things to spot: a red barn, a bridge, a cow, a gas station, a state sign. First to get a line wins. | 4+ |
| I spy | "I spy with my little eye something that is ..." Everyone guesses until someone gets it right. | 3+ |
| Alphabet game | Find each letter from A to Z on road signs and billboards, in order. | 6+ |
| 20 questions | One person thinks of a person, place or thing. The others ask yes-or-no questions to guess it. | 6+ |

| Game | How to play | Ages |
|---|---|---|
| Would you rather | Ask fun choices, such as "Would you rather live on a boat or in a treehouse?" | 4+ |
| Story chain | One person starts a story with one sentence, and everyone adds a sentence in turn. | 5+ |

## Level up the License Plate Game

Want an extra challenge? Look for custom plates, too. For our license plate study, we asked state transportation departments for their latest custom plate numbers. Kentucky's Unbridled Spirit plate tops the list, with more than two million sold (2025 data).[12]

## Activities that go the distance

- **Audiobooks and podcasts.** Download family-friendly stories before you leave, so you don't need a signal.
- **A road trip journal.** Kids draw, collect stickers and write one sentence about each day.
- **A travel map.** Print a US map and let kids mark each state and stop as you go.
- **Junior Ranger programs.** Most national parks offer Junior Ranger activities, often in a free activity booklet. Kids complete the activities, take a pledge and earn a badge.[4]
- **Quiet time.** Plan a daily rest hour for the kids with music, books or a nap, and swap drivers or stop when the driver needs a rest.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Screen-free games such as the License Plate Game, I spy and road trip bingo need no prep.
- Download audiobooks and podcasts before you go.
- Junior Ranger programs turn national park visits into a mission for kids.

## FAQ

**How do you keep kids entertained on a long car ride?**

Rotate screen-free games, audiobooks, drawing and quiet time, and plan a stop every couple of hours so kids can run around.

**What are good road trip games for kids?**

The License Plate Game, road trip bingo, I spy, the alphabet game, 20 questions and story chain all work in any car with no equipment.

# 5. ROAD TRIP SNACKS AND MEALS

Good snacks keep moods up and stops short. Pack a mix of fresh and shelf-stable food, and keep a small bag within reach of the back seat.

## Road trip snacks kids love

| Type | Ideas |
|---|---|
| Fresh | Grapes, apple slices, baby carrots, cucumber sticks, clementines, cheese cubes |
| Crunchy | Crackers, pretzels, popcorn, rice cakes, roasted chickpeas |
| Filling | Sandwiches and wraps, hummus cups, yogurt pouches, hard-boiled eggs, granola bars |
| Treats | Dried fruit, trail mix and a small surprise snack for the end of a long day |

**Snacks for little ones.** For kids under four, avoid or chop high-risk foods such as whole grapes, raw carrots, apple chunks, cheese chunks, popcorn and nuts. Cut food into pieces no larger than half an inch, have kids sit up while they eat and keep an eye on them. Hand out these snacks at stops rather than while you drive.[13]

## Tips for mess-free snacking

- **Pack portions.** Fill small reusable containers so each child has their own.
- **Use a cooler.** Keep fresh food, yogurt and drinks cold, and top it up with ice at stops.
- **Bring water for everyone.** Refillable bottles cut down on stops for drinks.
- **Choose dry over sticky.** Crackers and fruit are easier to clean up than chocolate and juice.
- **Keep a clean-up kit.** Pack wipes, paper towels and trash bags, and return the car as clean as you found it.

## Make meals part of the trip

Plan one sit-down meal a day at a local restaurant or a picnic spot with a view. Picnics in a park give kids space to run, and trying local dishes turns lunch into part of the adventure.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Mix fresh, crunchy and filling snacks, and pack them in portions.
- Bring a cooler and refillable water bottles.
- Keep wipes, paper towels and trash bags within reach.

### FAQ

**What are the best road trip snacks for kids?**

Easy, low-mess snacks such as grapes, apple slices, cheese cubes, crackers, pretzels, popcorn, granola bars and sandwiches.

**How do you keep food cold on a road trip?**

Use a cooler with ice packs, keep it out of direct sun and top it up with ice at stops.

# 6. HEALTH, COMFORT AND PETS ON THE ROAD

A few simple habits keep everyone comfortable, from car sickness tips to a safety check every time you lock the car.

## How to help with car sickness

Car sickness is most common in children between the ages of seven and 12, and children under two don't usually get it.[14] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests these steps, which you should try first:[14]

- **Look outside.** Looking at the horizon helps.
- **Limit reading and screens** while the car is moving.
- **Get fresh air and music.** Open a window and play something calm.
- **Rest well.** A lack of sleep can make car sickness worse.

Talk to your pediatrician before you give a child any medication for car sickness.[14]

## Stop. Look. Lock.

Never leave a child alone in a car, even for a minute. Opening the windows or parking in the shade does little to keep the car cool, and a child's body heats up three to five times faster than an adult's.[15] Make it a habit to check the whole car, especially the back seat, before you lock it. Put something you always need, such as your bag or phone, on the back seat as a reminder.[15]

## Stay comfortable

- **Dress in layers.** The temperature changes between the front and back seats, and between the desert and the mountains.
- **Use sun shades** on the rear side windows.
- **Bring a travel pillow and blanket** for naps.
- **Pack a first aid kit** with bandages, disinfectant and any medication your family needs.

## Bring the family pet

Pets are welcome in SIXT rental cars, as long as they're properly secured, kept under control at all times and the car comes back clean. Use a transport crate, a harness or a cargo divider, and bring a protective blanket or seat cover. A cleaning fee may apply if the car is heavily soiled.[16] Stop every couple of hours so your pet can stretch, and always take them with you when you leave the car. Looking for a dog-friendly destination? Our K9 Companion study ranks the best US cities for traveling with your dog.[17]

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- For car sickness, look at the horizon, limit screens and get fresh air.
- Never leave a child alone in the car, and check the back seat before you lock it.
- Pets are welcome in SIXT rental cars when they're secured and the car is returned clean.

## FAQ

**How do you prevent car sickness in kids?**

Have them look out at the horizon, avoid reading and screens while moving, open a window and get enough sleep. Ask your pediatrician before using medication.[14]

**Can I take my dog in a SIXT rental car?**

Yes. Pets are welcome when they're secured in a crate, with a harness or behind a cargo divider, and the car is returned clean.[16]

# 7. FOUR FAMILY ROAD TRIPS ACROSS THE US

These four road trips mix short driving days with stops kids love: rockets, forts, zoos, beaches, a giant dam and two of America's most famous national parks.

| Road trip | Highlights for kids | Good to know |
|---|---|---|
| Florida: Orlando to St. Augustine | Space Shuttle Atlantis and a seaside fort in a city founded in 1565 | About 105 miles direct from Orlando to St. Augustine, more via the space center[18] |
| Southern California: San Diego to Los Angeles | Tide pools, a world-famous zoo, a free observatory and a pier with rides | Griffith Observatory is open Tuesday to Sunday[19] |
| Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon | Hoover Dam and the South Rim of the Grand Canyon | 278 miles from Las Vegas to the South Rim[20] |
| Great Smoky Mountains | Wildlife, waterfalls and the Cades Cove loop | No entrance fee, but a parking tag is required[21] |

## Florida: from Orlando to St. Augustine

Start in Orlando and head east on State Road 528 to the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, about 60 miles away.[22] Set your GPS to "Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex", not "Kennedy Space Center", or it may send you to the wrong place.[22] Then drive north along the coast on I-95 to historic St. Augustine.

| Stop | Why kids love it |
|---|---|
| Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex | See Space Shuttle Atlantis, the only space shuttle displayed as if in flight.[3] Parking costs $15 per car.[22] |
| St. Augustine | Founded in 1565, it's the oldest continuously inhabited European-founded settlement in the continental US.[18] |
| Castillo de San Marcos National Monument | The oldest masonry fort in the continental US, with cannon firing demonstrations every Friday, Saturday and Sunday.[23] Children 15 and under enter free with an adult, and adults pay $15 for seven days. The park is cashless.[24] |

## Southern California: from San Diego to Los Angeles

Spend a few days in San Diego, then follow I-5 north to Los Angeles. This trip packs beaches, animals and science into a short drive, and it works all year.

| Stop | Why kids love it |
|---|---|
| Cabrillo National Monument, San Diego | Tide pools, the Old Point Loma Lighthouse and the story of the first European to set foot on what is now the US West Coast, in 1542.[25] Entry is $20 per private vehicle for seven days, and kids 15 and under enter free.[26] |
| San Diego Zoo | A 1-Day Pass includes a guided bus tour and the Skyfari aerial tram.[27] |
| Balboa Park, San Diego | A public park with free walking tours (suggested $5 donation) on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11 a.m.[28] |
| Griffith Observatory, Los Angeles | Free admission, telescopes and city views. Open Tuesday to Sunday. Parking near the observatory is paid.[19] |
| Santa Monica Pier | Open since 1909 and now a National Historic Landmark, with the Pacific Wheel and the West Coaster at Pacific Park.[29] |

## From Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon

Hoover Dam is 30 miles southeast of Las Vegas, on the Nevada-Arizona border.[30] From there, follow US 93 to Kingman, I-40 to Williams and AZ 64 north to the South Rim, 278 miles from Las Vegas in total.[20]

| Stop | Good to know for families |
|---|---|
| Hoover Dam | Parking in the garage on the Nevada side costs $10 per vehicle. Children three and under join the guided dam tour free, but strollers aren't allowed on it. National park passes aren't accepted here, and pets can't go on the dam or be left in the car.[31] |
| Grand Canyon South Rim | The South Rim is open all year. Entry is $35 per private vehicle for seven days, and no reservation is needed.[20, 32] Nonresidents aged 16 and over pay an extra $100 per person unless they have a park annual pass or an America the Beautiful pass. The park is cashless.[32] |
| Junior Ranger | Pick up a Junior Ranger Activity book at a visitor center. There's a special book for the South Rim, and kids earn their badge in the park.[33] |
| Rim safety | Stay on trails and walkways, keep at least six feet from the edge, never climb over railings and keep small children close.[34] |

Spring break and summer are the busiest times. Arrive at the entrance before 10 a.m. or after 2 p.m. to skip the longest lines.[32]

## Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Great Smoky Mountains was America's most visited national park in 2025, with more than 11.5 million recreation visits.[35] From I-40, take Exit 407 to TN 66 south, then US 441 through Sevierville, Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg into the park. GPS can be unreliable in the mountains, so carry a paper map too.[36]

| Topic | Good to know for families |
|---|---|
| Parking tag | There's no entrance fee, but every vehicle parked longer than 15 minutes needs a parking tag: $5 a day, $15 a week or $40 a year. The tag must show the license plate of the car it's in, so buy it online or at a visitor center as soon as you have your rental car's plate number. Most trailheads don't sell tags.[21] |
| Cades Cove | An 11-mile, one-way loop road through a valley with wildlife and historic buildings. Allow at least two to four hours.[37] |
| Vehicle-free Wednesdays | In 2026, the Cades Cove loop was open only to walkers and cyclists on Wednesdays from May 6 to September 30. Children under 16 must wear a helmet when cycling.[38] |
| Fall colors | Colors usually peak below 4,000 feet between mid-October and early November, and October is the park's busiest month.[39] |

Looking for longer drives? Our **USA Road Trip Planner** covers Route 66, the Overseas Highway to Key West, a Colorado mountain loop and more, with tips on budgets and tolls.

## Save on national park visits

- **Every Kid Outdoors.** US fourth graders, including home-school equivalents, get a free pass for the 2026 to 2027 school year, valid until August 31, 2027. At sites that charge per vehicle, it covers all children under 16 and all adults in one passenger vehicle. It doesn't cover parking, camping or special tours.[40] Print the paper pass before you go.[41]
- **America the Beautiful pass.** The annual pass costs $80 for US citizens and residents and $250 for nonresidents.[42]

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Florida mixes space, history and beaches in a short drive.
- The Grand Canyon's South Rim is open all year. Keep small children close at the rim.
- In the Smokies, buy your parking tag once you have your rental car's license plate.
- Fourth graders get a free national park pass with Every Kid Outdoors.

## FAQ

**What is the best family road trip in the USA?**

It depends on your kids' ages and interests. Florida suits space fans and beach lovers, Southern California mixes zoos and beaches, and the Grand Canyon and the Smokies are great for nature-loving families.

**Do kids pay to enter national parks?**

At many parks, children under 16 don't need an entrance pass, as at the Grand Canyon,[32] and US fourth graders can get a free Every Kid Outdoors pass for the whole family's vehicle.[40]

**Is the Grand Canyon good for kids?**

Yes. Kids can earn a Junior Ranger badge with the South Rim activity book. Stay on trails and keep at least six feet from the edge.[33, 34]

# 8. FAMILY ROAD TRIP PACKING LIST

Use this checklist as you pack. Check off the essentials for every trip, then add what your family needs for the season.

**Documents and tech**

- ☐ Driver's licenses for every driver
- ☐ Rental agreement and booking details
- ☐ Phone chargers and cables
- ☐ GPS added to your rental, plus offline maps
- ☐ Downloaded audiobooks, music and shows

**Babies and toddlers**

- ☐ Diapers and wipes
- ☐ Bottles and formula or baby food
- ☐ Sun shades for the rear windows
- ☐ Portable crib or travel bed
- ☐ Stroller

**Kids**

- ☐ Car seats or booster seats (or added to your booking)
- ☐ Favorite toy and comfort blanket
- ☐ Games, coloring books and a travel journal
- ☐ Headphones for each child
- ☐ Change of clothes within reach

**Food and drinks**

- ☐ Cooler and ice packs
- ☐ Snacks in portion containers
- ☐ Refillable water bottles
- ☐ Wipes, paper towels and trash bags

**Health and safety**

- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Any medication
- ☐ Sunscreen and hats
- ☐ Emergency and roadside assistance numbers
- ☐ Flashlight and a power bank

**Comfort**

- ☐ Travel pillows and blankets
- ☐ Layers for changing weather
- ☐ Swimwear and towels
- ☐ Rain jackets

# 9. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**How do I plan a family road trip with a rental car?**

Pick a destination with something for every age, plan shorter driving days with breaks every two to three hours, choose a car with room for everyone, sort out car seats and pack with a checklist.

**What is the best rental car for a family road trip?**

A minivan for young kids and lots of luggage, a five- to seven-seat SUV for mountains and active trips, or a premium sedan for a family of four on city and highway trips.[1]

**Is a minivan or SUV better for a road trip with kids?**

A minivan makes it easier to get kids and car seats in and out and usually has more room behind the third row. An SUV is better for snow, mountains and back roads.

**Can I rent a car seat with my rental car?**

Yes. Add an infant seat, toddler seat or booster seat to your SIXT booking or at the counter.[1]

**What age can a child stop using a booster seat?**

When the seat belt fits properly, typically at 4 feet 9 inches and between 8 and 12 years old.[2]

**When can a child sit in the front seat?**

Children younger than 13 should ride in the back seat.[2, 10]

**How long can a baby be in a car seat on a road trip?**

Take a break every two to three hours during the day and every four to six hours at night, and don't let your baby sleep in the car seat once you arrive.[5]

**What should I pack for a road trip with kids?**

Car seats, snacks, water, games, headphones, a change of clothes, wipes, a first aid kit and any medication. Use the checklist in chapter 8.

**Can I bring my dog on a family road trip in a rental car?**

Yes. Pets are welcome in SIXT rental cars when they're secured and the car is returned clean.[16]

**Can I drop off my rental car in a different city?**

Yes. One-way rentals let you pick up in one city and return in another. A one-way fee may apply on some routes, and you'll see it before you book.[9]

# 10. CONCLUSION

The best family road trips are planned around the kids: shorter driving days, the right seat for every child, snacks and games within reach and a highlight to look forward to each day. Choose a car with room for everyone, pack with the checklist in this guide and pick a route that suits your family, from rockets in Florida to the canyons of Arizona and the mountains of the Smokies.

**Ready for your family road trip? Rent the car.**

Rent your family car with SIXT, from premium sedans and SUVs to minivans, with child seats you can add to your booking.

# METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This e-book brings together family travel guidance from official sources and product information from sixt.com. We checked facts in October 2026 against official sources, including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Park Service, the US Bureau of Reclamation, official tourism boards and official attraction websites. Numbered references in the text point to the sources listed at the end of this e-book. Distances are approximate and depend on your exact route.

Prices, opening hours, reservation rules and park dates reflect official websites in October 2026 and can change. SIXT product details, including vehicle types, child seats, additional drivers, pets and one-way rentals, reflect sixt.com in October 2026, are subject to availability and may change without notice. Check your booking for the terms that apply to your rental.

**Check local rules.** Car seat laws and driving rules differ by state. This guide is general information, not medical or legal advice. Ask your pediatrician about your child's health and confirm the rules with the official authority before you travel.

Author: SIXT.

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# ABOUT SIXT

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