

» Finances and work

Of course being fabulously wealthy always helps, but compared to younger travellers, parents tend to be further along the home-ownership ladder; they can often rent their home out while away – possibly even for a net income. Many find it relatively easy to negotiate time off, having risen to positions of trust in the workplace. And some choose to work on the trip; apart from bringing in an income, the experience can add a competitive edge and help secure more interesting work on return.

Working while travelling does, of course, mean staying put here and there. But there are advantages. The family gets immersion time in a novel community, which also serves as a new base from which to travel

elsewhere. Certainly, for families with very young or numerous children, this often works out well. The Reardons, for instance, got a contract in Geneva, and from there visited 18 countries in two years. With four children, the youngest three months and the oldest nine years, this seemed like the best, perhaps the only, way to make everything work.

The Harris family managed finances differently on their trip. They travelled for a whole four years, using a combination of 'wwoofing' in Australia and living simply in rural India (for roughly £25 a week). They also managed to find bits of work in their own fields; Sam is a professional photographer and Yael is in marketing and PR.

Still on the subject of finances, families often come into a bit of money as elder relatives die – not enough to change their futures, but enough to cushion the costs of travel. The Burgnards, for instance, agreed that there was no better way to commemorate the life of their grandmother than to take to the road together.

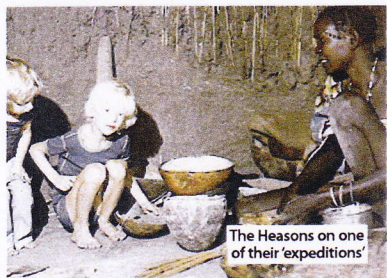
Otherwise, the standard money-saving tricks apply: travelling in

countries with a low cost of living and camping to save on accommodation. In the 70s, when air fares weren't nearly as accessible as they are now, the Heasons made several long expeditions on what they term relatively low-paid incomes. They trekked with their two sons (under eight) to the Himalayas and Africa, and then sailed on a bareback dhow in the Indian Ocean. Alan went on to point out that you don't need to fly across the world to travel – you can start just outside your front door.



"IN TERMS OF TRENDS, I'D SAY THE TWO BIGGEST ARE FAMILY ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS AND FAMILY VOLUNTEERING. THERE HAS DEFINITELY BEEN AN INCREASED INTEREST IN BOTH OF THESE."

Kristine Pentland, responsibletravel.com



The Heasons on one of their 'expeditions'

Education

Apart from cost, education tends to be the next biggest issue. For pre-school children, there's clearly no problem. Which is why many parents choose to travel precisely at this point – and of course to also take advantage of tickets and accommodation being cheap or even free. But once the children hit school age, a number of factors kick in. First, you have to get approval

from the school or local authorities. It's also a smart move to organise school places for when you return – this can be surprisingly hard. And depending on their ages, your children might have to complete a curriculum while away; the older they are, the tougher it is to satisfy the authorities that the teaching and discipline will be managed to a high enough standard.



The Burgnards are currently on a round-the-world gap year



In the Andaman's: The Harris' travelled for four years

pic © Sam Harris

One thing is for sure, though: enrolling the children in schools along the way – even for short periods – helps with getting permission to go. Apart from professional teaching, other attractions include a pack of instant friends for the children. There's also the not-to-be-scoffed-at dimension of parents getting time out each day. When Melissa Reardon was asked how she chose their school in Geneva, she laughed: "The one that would take both girls!" She went on to say that it all worked fine. The kids gained infinitely from being away and got two years of French to boot. The Harris' went further; they felt that the schooling they found in India and Australia was better than their daughter would have received at home.

The Burgnards, who happen to still be travelling on their gap year and are chipping in for this article from Chile, are facing different challenges. Their daughters are

older, of ages where education is usually considered critical; Annadeline, who is in her third year at university, has managed to get some credits in Canada along the way. She and the others are keeping up with work through distance-learning schemes. Jean-François, their father, acknowledges that it hasn't always been easy to do the course work, but refers to a quote from Cameroon which goes: "If you don't have an education, travel." His personal take on this is: "If you want to learn differently, travel." And he's a teacher!

The options for distance learning keep increasing. This has little to do with catering for travelling families; rather, it's the result of technology making it easier for schools to increase the subjects they can offer. Incidentally, Australia happens to be the pioneer for distance learning – they've had years of experience providing education for children in remote areas.