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I Only Travel With One of My Kids at a Time — Here's Why

BY **JUDY KOUTSKY** | DECEMBER 15, 2019

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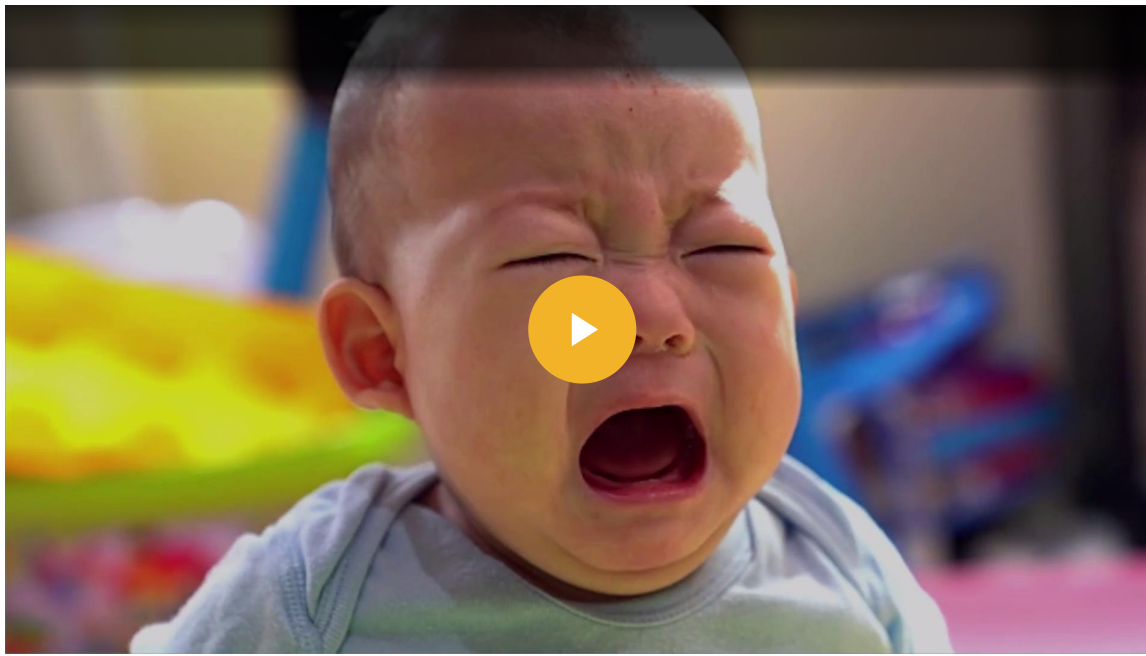
I have two high-energy, [very competitive boys](#). They are two years apart and while there are moments when they get along, well, *brotherly*, more often than not, they are competing, which inevitably leads to fighting – about, well, everything. Who got the bigger plate of pancakes, who got the best choice in desserts, who had the better seat on the plane, who got more pool time...and on and on. Of course, I'm not alone – when I travel I see this among other families. The non-stop bickering and fighting is a constant with siblings.

But here's the thing, while I can somehow manage (or ignore) the fighting at home, it just seems wrong on a trip. Traveling is meant to be relaxing, a time to recharge and refuel. And yet the bickering leaves me drained and exhausted. So I started something a bit unconventional: I started traveling with just one child at time.

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People often find this very strange. You left one child at home? On vacation? What kind of parent does that? But it turns out that in our family, it works beautifully. Not only do I get [special time with the child](#) I'm traveling with, but my husband gets to spend special time with the child that is left home (they can do a camping weekend, or go see a sports game, or simply do movie and pizza with dad). Each child feels special spending time with one parent and I feel more calm focusing on just one.

And the experts agree that this is a good thing. "There is nothing worth more than the time you invest one-on-one with your child," says Dr. Lisa Long, a licensed clinical psychologist based in Charlotte, North Carolina. "This time is a direct message to your child that they matter to you."



One of my favorite ways to travel with just one child is by exploring a destination aboard an [Uncruise](#), a small ship (less than 100 people) with a great number of things to do. Dining and activities are all communal, so my son and I get to interact with other cruisers and really get to know them. That way, I get special one-on-one time with my son during down time (playing backgammon or sipping hot chocolate while taking in the sunset), but we are in a small group (no more than 10) for excursions such as kayaking, hiking, or horseback riding. It's such a successful recipe for us, that we've explored [Costa Rica](#), Mexico, and [Alaska](#) aboard Uncruise.

Sometimes there are other kids – but even if there's not, that's okay. Being away from his brother and having the sole spotlight brings out the best in whichever son I'm traveling with. Other adults often comment on how calm and nice that child is (which makes my son even more willing to break out of his shell to try new things and start conversations with others).

On a recent trip to Belize with my younger son, we stayed at [The Lodge at Chaa Creek](#), an eco-lodge deep in the jungle. We went on night safaris looking for tarantulas, saw toucans and macaws while canoeing down the river, and went exploring caves where we were up to our waists in water. Since I was only traveling with one of my children, it made it easy to plan an itinerary as there was no fighting over who wanted to do what. Plus, spending time with just one child meant meals were a time to really explore what was going on in that kid's life. At home, things are so crazy busy, that it's hard to really talk without a sibling always interrupting or being present. "Kids need to feel that they matter as an individual to their parents," says Long. "When a parent gives a child attention independent of the rest of the family, the child will develop a greater sense of self-esteem and importance."

Another good thing about traveling one-on-one is that the child sees me, his mom, in a new light. Whether it's horseback riding in the snow at [Paws Up](#) resort in Montana; white-water rafting in [Snowmass](#), Colorado; or hiking along the coast in [Terranea Resort](#) in Los Angeles, the kids see their mom as an active – hopefully, fun – adult. "As parents invest this time with their child, the child also is able to gain a better sense of who their parent is," says Long. "This is a great way to help build a child's confidence and foster a closeness in the parental bond."

I've been traveling one-on-one with my boys since they were in preschool and now, at eight and ten, we've gone on dozens of special mother-son trips. "Sharing new experiences is a great way to show your child that they are valued," says Long. It's a winning experience for all involved.

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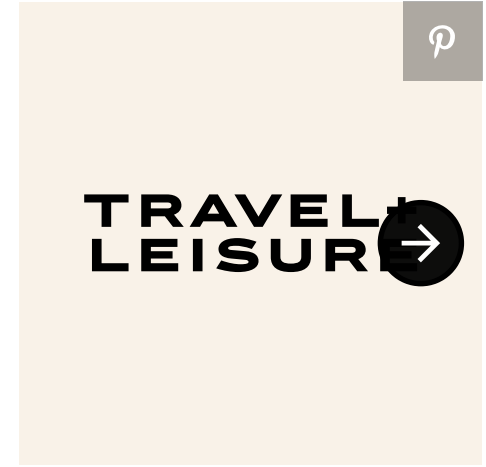
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