



TRAVEL TIPS

What You Need To Know About Minors Traveling Alone

by Amy Ziff

(NAPSA)—During the holidays, many parents send their kids to visit family across the country.

Though there may be days when you want nothing more than to ship your devilish children off, I know they're truly your most precious cargo. So, be sure to follow protocol before sending your child along.



Ziff

Children (ages 5-14) traveling alone by air are considered "unaccompanied minors" (UMs) by most carriers. UM status requires advance paperwork and ar-

rangements resulting in special attention by airline employees, which means your children are going to be looked after.

An airline employee will meet you at check-in and escort your child to the gate. Once onboard, your child will be given extra attention from the crew. They'll be assisted with baggage, shown the lavatories and emergency exits and maybe even the cockpit if there's time. Upon arrival at the destination airport or during layovers, kids are escorted from the gate pick-up and released only when they are claimed by the named guardian. Not surprisingly, this service comes at an additional cost which generally ranges from \$40-\$75 per child for each leg of the journey.

Parents may want to pack snacks along with toys from home, which not only entertain, but provide comfort in new surroundings. Remember to leave ample time for filling out the required paperwork at the airport and try to remain there until the flight has departed.

When traveling internationally, the rules for UMs are slightly different and vary by country. Contact the U.S. consulate or embassy to verify policies at www.travel.state.gov. Document the time period in which your child will be traveling, in the language requested. If your child is traveling with only one parent, written proof of sole custody or a notarized letter of consent from the other parent will be required.

Tips to Help Your Kids When Traveling Alone:

- Remind kids to seek help only from uniformed personnel
- Prepare them with a cash stash (for emergencies only!)
- Establish scheduled times to call home (pre-arrange use of a cell phone or calling card)
- Remind your child to proceed on and off the plane only with an airline representative

Above all, prepare your kids. It's wise to talk about what they may encounter on the journey so they'll be prepared as they learn first-hand about the excitement of traveling.

• *Ms. Ziff is Travelocity's Editor-at-Large. To sign up to receive Amy's weekly tips on timely and helpful travel topics, e-mail Amanda@vollmerpr.com or visit the "Travel Tips from A to Z" Web page at www.travelocity.com/atoz.*