

Books, movies that inspire kids to travel



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Indiana Jones has inspired kids to travel to Egypt, India, Turkey, Italy and Germany. (Handout)

Looking back, I blame Madeline.

When author Ludwig Bemelmans' spirited minx Madeline raised a rumpus in that "old house in Paris that was covered with vines ..." I just knew I had to visit Paris. I had been severely bitten by the travel bug and I was only eight years old. I've never recovered.

Inspiring your kids to travel -- encouraging them to explore the world -- can be done not only with books like Bemelmans' but also with movies, blogs, travel guides made for kids, or even just maps on the wall and a pack of thumbtacks. Here are a few suggestions for planting the travel bug early:

TRAVEL GUIDES

It's a growing trend among publishers of guidebooks: Produce a travel guide exclusively for kids -- one with fewer words, more illustrations and travel advice from 10-year-olds rather than their boring parents.

Among his BookPage.com picks for what he calls "the budding traveller," Robert Reid, U.S. editor for Lonely Planet, recommends an LP series called Not For Parents. With four new editions launched last month -- Not For Parents Australia, China, USA and Great Britain -- the guides include cartoon-based overviews of cities as seen through the eyes a child. Aimed at the eight-to-12 crowd, the fun-to-read books are also full of odd traditions, cool facts, spooky stuff and funny stories.

The Not for Parents series covers broader themes as well. The Not For Parents Extreme Planet tours the globe, revealing the highest, the deepest, the wildest, and the smelliest things on Earth. Not For Parents How To Be A World Explorer offers out-there tips on how to find food and water in the wild, how to avoid deadly diseases, and the always-useful tips on how to fight back against man-eating beasts.

Also kid-friendly: The kidsGo! guidebooks produced by Kids Go Travel Guides. The series is filled with fun things to do in places like London, Sydney and Bali, again written in kid-friendly language for ages eight-12. The best aspect of the series may be its website, which features posts from kids who are travelling now.

And finally, new on the endless subject of Disney: Birnbaum's Walt Disney World for Kids 2012. Children rate all of the Disney theme parks with reliable measurements such as Cool, Really Cool and The Coolest!

TRAVEL FILMS

In her post, Top 5 Favourite Movies to Inspire Kids to Travel, The Learning Channel blogger Britt Reints makes the case movies are a powerful motivator. While the author admits her travel bug was planted early by the Corleone family in The Godfather, in this blog she makes more family friendly suggestions.

Reints' list includes Rio set in Rio de Janeiro; Indiana Jones films set in Egypt, India, Turkey, Italy and Germany; The Karate Kid set in China; Home Alone 2 Lost in New York; and Up, whose hot-air balloon floats over the jungles of South America. A travel case can also be made for myriad other super-popular films for kids: Ratatouille, The Water Horse, The Sound of Music, Harry Potter, and my favourite, Secondhand Lions with Michael Caine, Robert Duvall and Haley Joel Osment. I'm confident there are many, many more.

As a kid, what movie made you want to travel?

The Godfather

Indiana Jones

The Karate Kid

Home Alone 2

Ratatouille

The Sound of Music

Harry Potter

TRAVEL FICTION

Like I said, in my house, Madeline rules. We've got Madeline and the Gypsies, Madeline's Rescue, Madeline and the Cats of Rome, and just plain old Madeline. The illustrations alone make us feel as though we've stepped onto the old streets of Europe.

But there's so much more travel fiction to inspire kids. The website travelforkids.com has a carefully culled selection in its Books For Everywhere section.

"Our staff pick might be the story of a boy who dreams of words and becomes the poet Pablo Neruda," the site says, "or a Chinese tale of the journey of the magical monkey king (or the) adventures of a young boy on a round-the-world sailing voyage."

The site's latest recommendations include *If You Lived Here* -- stories and illustrations of homes around the world by Giles Laroche -- and *What We Wear* -- photos of children in different dress by authors Maya Ajmera, Elise Hofer Derstine and Cynthia Pon.

Of course, there's also Herge's Tintin series on the world adventures of a boy reporter, his dog Snowy, and his boisterous pal Captain Haddock. Bonus: It's also a Steven Spielberg movie.

For books with a Canadian edge, there is the Kids Can Press series titled *Good Times Travel Agency*. Written by Vancouver author Linda Baily, these books feature time travel via a portal inside the Binkerton family's magical travel agency. Ancient Egypt, China, Greece and the Vikings are all explored.

MAPS

The simplest tool to inspire kids to travel may be an old fashioned map, globe or atlas. Place a globe in the living room and wait for the kids to spin it. Or mount a world map on a bedroom wall and store a box of thumbtacks nearby. Encourage your kids to stick a pin on a spot that makes them curious, or that they may have seen on TV or heard about in the news. For my kids, it's working.

Now, as Madeline's Bemelmans would say: "And that's all there is -- there isn't any more."

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