

# Pregnancy may be the best time to see the world

BY HATTIE KLOTZ, OTTAWA CITIZEN



Travelling while pregnant is a great way to see the world.

**Photograph by:** Hattie Klotz, for Postmedia News

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I have an unfortunate disorder. It's called desperate-to-travel-when-pregnant. I have just returned from two weeks travelling in Vietnam and my husband is furious with me. I should mention that I passed the seven months mark on the day I returned. I did the same thing almost exactly two years ago when pregnant with my second child. I raced off to discover Brazil. The only difference is that that time I dragged my husband along too.

I can only explain this rushing about as a feeling that, with each child (now three), I lose a little more of my independence and recognize that I'll be travelling a little less in the future. In fact, I think that with a third child, interesting travel might be out of the question and out of budget for at least eight years. Really, who wants to take a young child to potentially dangerous and dirty places that are 27 hours away by plane?

So despite upsetting my obstetricians and many people in my family near and far, I have discovered that travelling when heavily pregnant is a really excellent time to travel. Even in Canada in the latter stages of pregnancy, strangers grant that sympathetic, supportive and congratulatory look. That effect

is magnified tenfold when travelling in foreign lands.

In Brazil, my husband and I set off as independent travellers. We rented a car and drove from Sao Paulo to Rio de Janeiro. We were warned not to stop, ever, not to confront anyone in the road, to just keep driving. Well, we stopped, we walked on deserted beaches, we found tiny seaside towns for fried fish lunches, we stopped to take photographs of the breathtaking scenery along the coastal road.

Without fail we were greeted with smiles and tentative questions about the baby to be born. How far along? A girl or a boy? How many children? In Vietnam I answered the same questions 40 times daily from smiling men and women, keen to have a conversation in extremely limited English and then sell me something.

Pregnancy breaks down barriers. It is universal and therefore rich or poor. Speaking a common language or none, I have something in common with many of the women I meet. They are sympathetic when I look faint from the heat and humidity or tired from the great weight bearing down upon my sore feet. They thrust bottles of icy water into my hands.

In Brazil, a notoriously dangerous country for the affluent, we did not shut ourselves away behind bars in expensive hotels, but travelled fully, criss-crossing the country, visiting the sites in Rio where one woman gave me a semiprecious stone knick-knack "for luck and happiness," she said, gesturing at my belly.

We spent a fascinating afternoon in the favelas, the ghettos of extreme poverty that ring the city. In airports we never waited in line. As soon as anyone noticed my basketball stomach they pushed me forward to the front of the line - first to board, first to be seated. "Pregnant women don't wait in Brazil," one airline employee told me.

In Vietnam, people are surprised that I should have travelled alone such a distance from my home in Canada. Once they've ascertained that I've left a husband and two children at home, they smile and nod when I say that I want to discover their country before it's too late and my hands are full and my nights are short once again. There's a certain gratitude shown towards me for making the journey at this time in my life. Perhaps I'm dreaming, but I sense that they're gentler with me than with other tourists around me.

I'm convinced that I've experienced more of a country travelling when pregnant than I might otherwise have done. Pregnancy has given me a safety blanket in several ways. It's a callous person who would attack or deliberately swindle or mislead a pregnant woman (so they haven't) and it's given me an icebreaker into situations where otherwise I might be treated like any other tourist.

Pregnancy isn't an illness. As I said to my husband during one particularly heated discussion on my odyssey, "women have children in Vietnam too, you know." If you're fit and healthy and your

obstetrician is on board, get some good health insurance and take the chance to travel. It may be your last!

*Hattie Klotz is an Ottawa writer and soon-to-be mother of three.*

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