The Thanksgiving drive with kids, hour by hour

Peabody blog · Games · updated 2026-10-31

A long Thanksgiving drive with kids, hour by hour: the night before, the first hour, snacks, the plate game, rest stops, the dark stretch and arriving at the door.

A long Thanksgiving drive goes best in pieces: a quiet first hour while everyone settles, a game for each stretch after that, a stop every two hours or so, talking games once it gets dark, and a calm last half hour so the children arrive ready to say hello. The back seat does better with something to hold on to, so tell them how long is left in words they understand, and hand them one game at a time. Peabody's road trip keeps the whole plan on one phone: the License Plate Game, an "Are we there yet?" countdown, travel bingo and fourteen car games, with nothing to sign up for and no location used.

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving is one of the busiest travel days of the year, so plan for the drive to take longer than the map says. Here is how a five-hour drive with kids can go, hour by hour. Stretch or squeeze it to fit yours.

The night before

- Print what you'll want on paper. The License Plate Game sheet and a page of travel bingo cards, four different cards to a page, so each child has their own. Crayons don't roll as far as pens.
- Use a checklist. The Thanksgiving drive checklist covers the car, the bags, the food you're bringing and the youngest's comfort things, and it prints blank for a pencil.
- Pack a snack bag the children can reach, and a bag for rubbish. Water in bottles with lids.
- Open the road trip pages once at home, so they work later in a tunnel or out of signal.

Hour one: settling in

Don't start a game straight away. The first half hour is for shoes off, seat belts checked, a song everyone knows and looking out of the window. Then set the Are we there yet? countdown: a grown-up taps ? or + to say about how long the drive is, and a little train chugs towards its station as you go. Whenever someone asks, the big button answers: not yet, about how long in hours and minutes, what that's like (a few songs, a few cartoons, a movie), and a game to play.

Hour two: the plate game

The License Plate Game is made for busy holiday roads, when cars come from all over. The whole car plays as one team: someone calls out a state, a child taps the part of the country and then the state, and Peabody says its nickname, its capital and one true thing about it. Nobody writes down a plate's letters and numbers, only the state. The map stays filled for the

drive home, so the way back can find the ones you missed.

The first stop

Stop before anyone asks to, about every two hours. Ten minutes of running about, a bathroom for everyone whether they need it or not, and a snack outside the car if the weather's kind. This is a good time to swap who sits where.

Hour three: bingo and a picker

Hand out the bingo cards. The Harvest drive card has orange leaves, hay bales, pumpkins on porches and geese flying in a V; the Country roads card has barns, silos and horses. When bingo runs out, use the car games picker: three taps (who's in the car, how long, light or dark) and it hands you a game with its rules in three lines. Count the Cows is a favourite on farm roads.

Hour four: when it gets dark

Late November gets dark early, so the last part of an afternoon drive is often at night. Switch to games that need no window: Twenty Questions, Would You Rather, Story Chain and Going on a Picnic. The Night drive bingo card is all lights: the moon, red tail lights, a lit-up sign. Keep the screen dim, and keep it away from the driver's eyes.

The last hour: arriving calm

The last half hour is the hardest: everyone is tired and nearly there. Try The Quiet Game, where nobody is ever out, or tell the children who they'll see and one thing to tell each person. When the train reaches the station, Peabody says "We made it" once. Shoes on before you pull up, and a minute in the car to breathe before the door opens.

Questions grown-ups ask

How do we stop the "are we there yet" questions?

You probably can't, and that's fine. What helps is an answer a child can feel: "about as long as three cartoons" means more than "an hour and ten minutes". The countdown gives that answer, and a game, every time, however often it's asked.

Does Peabody know where we're going?

No. There's no GPS and no location permission, and nobody types a town or an address. The countdown keeps only when you pressed Go and about how long you said; the plate game keeps only the states your car tapped. All of it stays on your phone.

What if one child is three and another is twelve?

Pick games the youngest can join, and give the oldest a job: reading out the bingo squares, running the plate game or being the countdown's keeper. The picker does this for you when you tap more than one age.

More for the holiday

- Thanksgiving trivia for kids, with answers we checked, for after the meal.
- Thanksgiving game night: six card and dice games for the whole table.
- Free stories for kids for the drive home, read aloud at every level.

Peabody is free through the end of 2026, with no ads, and the road trip pages need no sign-up.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/thanksgiving-road-trip-with-kids-hour-by-hour