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## HEALTH & WELLNESS

# How I cured my picky eater – in China

By **Heather Greenwood Davis** Special to the Star

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You know those kids who sit down at a table and immediately begin to list all the things wrong with their meal? There's "sauce" on the plate, the rice is "touching" the meat and the vegetables are too soft/too hard/vegetables.

It's the same kid who often manages to wear his or her well-intentioned parents down to meal after meal of hot dogs and kraft dinner (never touching of course).

I know that kid.

I have that kid.

Or at least I did 100 days ago.

Ethan Michael Davis, 9, is my first born and for years he has been the one I described in conversations with other moms as my "picky eater."

No more. Traveling has changed him.

We left on our yearlong trip around the world at the end of June and one of our biggest questions was what Ethan would eat.

We wondered. His grandparents wondered. And he wondered....constantly.

"What will I eat?" he asked when we explained that we wouldn't be packing any snacks along for the trip.

"Whatever they've got," was always the answer.

It seems to have sunk in.

I watched my picky eater mow through plate after plate of food in South America.

Impressive, but when our options were mostly very good steak, very good pizza and salad it was easy to shrug it off.

In China, he blew our minds.

Fried noodles mixed with vegetables and in a sauce? He ate it.

Steamed dumplings with surprise fillings? Ate that too.

And dozens of dishes that I could not fully list all of the ingredients of if asked.

He did it consistently, constantly and without any of our prodding.

The question is: Why now?

**I think we found the answers.**

1. Travel is one of those unique experiences when much of what kids are being exposed to is different. Adding food to that list didn't phase him. He wasn't sitting at the same table in the same chair with the same menu. A trip to a foreign destination was the perfect time to experiment with food.
2. We stuck to our guns. We told him for months before we left home that the food would be different and that on this "amazingly fun" trip around the world he'd need to commit to at least trying it as we go. We said it constantly. For months. And it stuck. It became his mantra ("I just have to try it.") and we'd hear him repeating it to himself before he bit into something new.
3. We gave him room to not like it. I was a picky-eating kid and still am, to a lesser extent, today. I understand that broccoli has less appeal than chocolate. If he took a couple of bites and didn't like it, we praised him for giving it a try. Without the pressure to like it, he seemed more willing to give it a go.
4. We stopped second-guessing him. We've lived with the kid for nine years. We know what he likes, right? Wrong. I realized that we'd grown so accustomed to choosing his foods and making mealtime easier that we weren't giving him room to make new choices. The first time we presented him with a menu in the Galapagos Islands he ordered octopus. The next? Lobster. He's an expensive eater but he's way more adventurous than we gave him credit for.
5. We encouraged him to keep going without making a big deal about it. Gentle suggestions ("Love that you're eating that shrimp, buddy! Want to try seafood sauce?") were met with much more consideration when he realized we didn't care either way. And once he'd tried one category of food we found he was much more receptive to others ("You know what's just like lobster? Crab!").

I don't know if we're completely out of the picky-eater woods with him yet.

Eventually we'll have to return home and it remains to be seen whether his old habits will return. But for now I'm enjoying watching him develop a love for foods of all varieties, even if I'm still too picky to sample off his plate.

Heather Greenwood Davis is a freelance writer. Her family is currently exploring the planet on a year-long trip around the world. Follow along at [www.globetrottingmama.com](http://www.globetrottingmama.com).

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