

Vacation Planning on a Budget

When money is tight, stress levels tend to be highest. But who has the money or time for a vacation when times are tough?! With some advance planning, flexibility, and creativity, it is possible to include a vacation in your budget and stay on budget. In this article, you will learn tips for finding travel deals and planning a vacation that won't break the bank.

General Planning Tips

Think local. Most of us never really explore the natural wonders of our own backyard. Within a few hundred miles (driving distance) of most towns there are national parks, monuments, lighthouses, museums, lakes, beaches, rivers, and other attractions. Avoid the tourist traps and overpriced amusement parks and get off the beaten path.

Find a home for rent instead of hotel or resort. Vacation homes can be much less costly for a week and offer much more room for your family. In addition, they offer the added benefit of a kitchen where you can avoid eating out for at least breakfast and either lunch or dinner depending on your itinerary. Having a full sized refrigerator and pantry from which to prepare snacks and picnic lunches can also save a bundle. If the house is big enough, you can also travel with friends and split the cost of the house (and groceries).

Consider off season destinations. While summer may be high season for many resort areas, there are just as many beautiful areas for which summer is technically off season. As strange as it may seem, in many Caribbean islands and South Florida, summer is much less expensive than winter. Likewise many mountain and ski resorts - which are beautiful in the summer and can offer hiking, mountain biking and cooler temperatures.

Plan ahead and/or be willing to consider absolutely last minute deals. Many cruises offer some of their lowest prices a day or so before the departure date in order to fill rooms. Obviously this only works if you live near a cruise terminal since last minute air fare is only occasionally cheapest at the last minute.

Always pack snacks. Whether you're flying, driving, or sightseeing, your own snacks from "home" will be less expensive and probably healthier than those purchased in the airport or other venue where you are a captive audience. While you can't bring bottled water in to the airport, it is still cheaper most of the time to buy it in the terminal than on the plane.

Shop for online deals

Making travel reservations on line really is the most efficient and cost effective method. However, you have to know when to wait and when to pounce on a deal that isn't going to get any better. If you have plenty of time to plan (if you know approximately when you are going to take your vacation several months in advance), you can take your time researching fares and seasonal rate changes. However, the days of only having 2 - 3 reputable sites to check is over. There are many excellent bargain hunting sites to consider.

[Orbitz](#), [Travelocity](#) and [Expedia](#) are still good options, but travel search engines such as [Kayak](#) and [Mobissimo](#) also warrant a look. You can also compare trends in ticket prices at [FareCompare.com](#) and [Airfarewatchdog.com](#). You can find last-minute deals at sites like [Hotwire.com](#).

Airlines generally reload their computers at midnight, so shortly after that is a good time to shop for seats that might have been reserved but not paid for. It's also a good idea to make your reservations through an airline's Web site to avoid booking fees of \$5-\$25. Check that your ticket price includes taxes and fees, which can bump up a ticket price by \$100 or more.

If your schedule is loose, and you are not traveling with children, you can try to get "bumped" to earn a free flight or other comps. For instance, book yourself during a peak time or on the last flight of the day

Hotel Deals

There are also savvy traveler tips to help you find the best deals on places to stay. For example, skip the hotel's toll-free reservations line and negotiate directly with the hotel. And don't settle for the first rate you're offered. Ask about corporate, military or other special rates and let the hotel know if the price you've been quoted is still too high. All they can do is say "no".

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Select a hotel just outside a major city. Rates tend to be cheaper, but you're close enough to get into the city when you want to. Also consider the timing of your stay and adapt accordingly. Resorts are busiest on weekends, but downtown hotels aren't - so enjoy the city life on the weekends and the resorts on the weekdays.

Don't forget about charges related to driving. Ask whether parking is free because at \$10 a day the cost adds up fast. Also keep in mind that a really convenient hotel that is a bit more expensive could also get rid of even needing a car - especially in a city with safe and efficient rapid transit.

Try staying at a bed-and-breakfast inn, especially at international destinations, where they can be cheaper than hotels. Or consider a hostel. Just keep in mind that hostels vary widely in quality, so read those reviews.

For more information

<http://www.budgettravel.com/> Great budget travel ideas for families, singles, seniors and everyone in between.