



## **Your Guide to Budget Travel Abroad**

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### **Topics Covered:**

- Introduction to Budget Travel
- Staying on Budget - Package vs. Independent Travel
- Choosing the Best Package Deal for Your Budget
- Saving Money on a Cruise
- European Budget Travel - Flying within Europe
- Saving Money on European Travel with Rail Passes
- Getting the Best Deal on Airfare
- The Importance of Packing Light

Sightseeing on a Budget  
Finding Inexpensive Lodging in Europe  
European Travel - Is Hostelling Right For You?  
Budget Tips for International Car Rentals  
Packing Tips for the Budget Minded Traveler  
Saving Money by Staying off the Beaten Path  
Choosing the Best Season for Travel Bargains  
Budget Adventure Travel  
Travel Cheap in Latin America  
European Travel on a Budget  
Great Ways to Save Money on Travel to Europe  
Tips for a Vacation That is More Fun and Less Expensive  
Lightweight Backpacking for the Budget Traveler  
More Travel Tips for Those on a Budget  
Enjoy Your Honeymoon with a Low Cost Mediterranean Cruise  
Save Money When Flying Internationally by Using Charter Flights  
Traveling to India on the Cheap  
Getting the Best Deal on a Cruise  
The Best Ways to Get the Cheapest Airfares  
Budget Travel in the Fall  
Why a Cruise is Such a Good Budget Vacation  
Keeping Your Food Travel Budget Low

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# **Your Guide to Budget Travel Abroad**

Just about everyone loves the excitement and sense of adventure that only travel can bring. There is nothing like traveling around the world and meeting other people to grow your understanding and appreciation of your own culture and that of others around the world. In fact, many people believe that if more people traveled outside their own country, many conflicts and misunderstandings could be avoided.

While your own budget travel adventures may not be able to bring peace to the world, they certainly can bring some fun and excitement to your life. We hope this report can help make your next vacation both great fun and a great bargain.

## **Introduction to Budget Travel**

The world of budget travel is one of the most exciting and interesting, and in today's world traveling on a budget is becoming more and more of a necessity. Keeping costs low while traveling is important, whether you are a solo traveler seeing the world for the first time or a family with a carload full of kids heading for the beach or the theme park.

When it comes to coming up with a travel budget, the first step should be to decide what is important to you and where you can cut back a bit. For instance, some travelers are comfortable spending a bit more for a better class of hotel, while others prefer to save money by using budget accommodations and spend the money they saved on sightseeing or a special meal for the family.

As with other aspects of finance, it is a good idea to create a travel budget. Determine a budget for the various aspects of your vacation, such as hotel, airfare, rental cars, sightseeing, gasoline, etc. Once you have a good idea of what each element of the vacation should cost, it is time to start shopping around for the best deals.

Once you have determined what is most important to you, it is time to start determining how to get the best deals. Often, admission deals on area attractions are the easiest to come by, since many theme parks, museums and other destinations run specials to attract out of town guests.

A good map can also be a money saver, since it will keep you from driving around in circles and wasting gas. Finding your way easily to and from the hotel and the surrounding area will make your vacation more pleasant and less costly.

No matter how you save money on your next vacation, having a budget and sticking to it will help you enjoy your vacation more, and worry less about paying for it.

### **Staying on Budget – Package vs. Independent Travel**

When traveling on a budget, one of the most often questions is whether it is best to travel independently, making your own airfare, hotel and sightseeing reservations, or choose a package tour where everything is set up for you in advance.

There is unfortunately no easy answer to this question, as it is largely dependent on the location and the specific deals that are available. For instance, travel to European destinations are often less costly to book on your own, especially when the airlines are running specials of European airfares in the off season.

On the other hand, travel to many exotic locations, like Egypt, Morocco, Kenya, South Africa, Thailand and India, are often much less costly when booked through a package company or travel agent. That is because these tour operators often have special deals with the national airlines of these companies, and with very nice resort hotels, to provide considerable discounts in exchange for a steady flow of business.

Of course, you can also find great deals on your own, and this is often a great way to go, especially if you are a solo traveler. Solo travelers often have difficulty getting those great deals on packages, since the required single supplement can often ruin the deal.

It is also important to find out exactly what is, and what is not included, in any package you are considering. Many package deals have optional excursions built in, and these extras can add considerable cost. Be sure to ask for a detailed daily itinerary to determine if you will be left on your own if you fail to take these optionals. Also ask for a detailed list of these optional excursions, including full descriptions and prices, then carefully compare the total price to what you could find on your own.

If you are traveling on your own, be sure to start shopping early, especially if you are traveling by air. The important thing to remember is that airlines allocate only so many seats for those advertised low fares, and if you fail to act quickly you may be out of luck. It is important to book the airfare, and the hotel, as early as possible to ensure the lowest possible prices.

Ultimately, the decision of whether to choose a package deal or independent travel is up to each individual traveler. It is important to carefully compare package prices with those for independent travel to the same location. It is also important to take your own personal travel style into account. Some people are more comfortable with a packaged tour, particularly to an unfamiliar location, while others relish the freedom from schedules that independent travel provides.

## **Choosing the Best Package Deal for Your Budget**

Many budget minded travelers like the safety, security and convenience that comes with booking a packaged or escorted tours. These tours can be particularly useful for those traveling to an unfamiliar or exotic location, as well as for those who want to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time.

There are tour packages to every conceivable destination, and for every possible budget. There are package tours that specialize in budget accommodations, and there are those that use only the finest hotels and the best restaurants. When looking for a suitable tour, it is important to take your own tastes and budgets into account.

There are several types of package tours available, and it is important to understand the difference, and to choose the type that best suits your interests, travel style and of course your budget as well.

### Fully escorted tours

Fully escorted tours are generally the most all inclusive. In most cases, everything is included, from airfare and lodging to sightseeing and meals. In most fully escorted tours, the entire tour is tightly structured, and a full, highly detailed, itinerary is provided.

Many people like the structured and all inclusive nature of this kind of package tour, but they are not for everyone. Many independent minded travelers do not care for the rigid structure, or the fact that there is often not time to explore a particular destination more in depth. Many of these more independent minded travelers prefer the next category, the partially escorted tour.

### Partially escorted tours

As the name implies, partially escorted tours are not as all inclusive as fully escorted ones. These tours generally take care of transportation from one destination to another and lodging once you get there. Unlike fully escorted tours, however, these partially escorted tours generally provide more free time to explore on your own.

With most partially escorted tours, meals, other than maybe a few, are not included. The tour often stops at a particular restaurant or eatery, but the meals are generally at the expense of the traveler. Many travelers prefer the greater freedom this affords, while others prefer the all inclusive nature of the fully escorted tour. It is a choice each traveler must make for him or herself.

Many partially escorted tours also include optional excursions, and these excursions are also at the traveler's expense. It is important for anyone considering such a tour to get

a list of optional excursions, including the price, and to review the itinerary for less costly alternatives that may be available.

#### Lodging and airfare tours

A package tour that includes only lodging and airfare is the least inclusive, least structured, and generally the least expensive, type of package tour available. This type of package deal generally includes the airfare to your destination, transfer to the hotel, lodging for the length of the stay, and transfer back to the airport upon departure. In some cases a rental car may be included as well.

While these types of packages can be an excellent deal for the adventurous traveler, it is important to take into account the cost of meals, sightseeing tours, etc., and to compare that cost with the cost of a more inclusive package.

It is also important to pay close attention to the location of the hotel, and its proximity to the sights you plan to see. Many tour companies keep the costs of their packages low by using out of the way or unpopular hotels, so it is important to consult a map of your destination and find your hotel before booking the trip. If you end up in a hotel that is far from the city center, you may end up spending lots of money on taxi fare or rental cars. It is often better to upgrade to a hotel that is closer to town, even if that causes the cost of the package to rise.

### **Saving Money on a Cruise**

For many people, a cruise ship can be the ultimate budget travel destination. A cruise provides a great, one price, vacation, and one of the main attractions to booking a cruise is that just about everything is included in the price. As a matter of fact, in some cases the daily cost of a cruise can be less than the daily cost of a decent hotel room. When you consider that the price of the cruise includes not only the room, but all the food and entertainment as well, it is easy to see why cruises are so popular with budget minded travelers.

Of course, there are some things that are typically not included in a cruise package, and it is important to find out what is included and what will need to be paid for as an extra. For instance, most cruises do not include alcohol, and require passengers to pay their bar tab upon departure. In addition, most shore excursions and local sightseeing is not included, so it is important to get a detailed list of such excursions, including the price.

In addition, since advertised cruise prices are based on double occupancy, cruises are often less of a deal for solo travelers, since the single supplements can add quite a bit to the price of the cruise. It is always a good idea to inquire about special single rates if you are traveling alone.

The location of the cabin is another important consideration when booking a cruise. The interior cabins on the lower parts of the ship are generally the least costly, while the higher, larger cabins with ocean views are the most expensive. If you have never taken a cruise before, it is a good idea to get advice from those who have experienced cruising. These people can provide valuable insight on the best balance of cost and comfort for your first cruise experience.

As with other kinds of travel, getting the best deal on a cruise will take some time, some planning, some perseverance and plenty of shopping around. It is a good idea to shop as early as possible, particularly for popular destinations like the Caribbean or Mexico in the high season.

Of course, it is possible to save money by traveling in the off season, and this can often be a great strategy. For instance, even though it is the middle of the winter and most people are not thinking about vacations where you are, it may be warm and inviting in many tropical cruise destinations. It is important, however to check out the local weather, and to avoid the rainy season in the destinations you are considering. Steering clear of hurricanes, tropical downpours and other weather problems can help you get the most out of your cruise.

It is not always necessary to shop early, of course. Cruise lines have been known to offer some spectacular discounts at the last minute in order to move unsold cabins or avoid leaving with a less than full passenger load. There are many last minute travel newsletters that provide details on these types of cruise deals, and these last minute travel deals are a big hit with retirees and others with the time to see the world.

### **European Budget Travel – Flying within Europe**

Many budget travelers assume that a multi-city European vacation is beyond their means, but that is often not the case. The large number of budget airlines that have sprung up in Europe in recent years have dropped the average cost of airfare between many major European cities. In some cases, the cost of coach airfare between major European hubs like London and Amsterdam is lower than a comparable first or even second class train ticket.

And of course flying between cities is far less time consuming than taking the train or driving yourself, and that means more time to explore the places you've always wanted to see, as well as more money to spend once you get there.

The key to getting the best airfares, both from the United States to destinations in Europe, and between European destinations, is to shop around and compare carefully. Most major American air carriers have partnerships with one or more European airlines,

and therefore it is often possible to shop airfares between European cities from the web sites of these airlines.

In addition, the major European only airlines all have their own web sites, and most provide for online booking and confirmation as well. This makes it easy to line up all your airfare before you leave the United States. This is an important consideration, since it is often more difficult, and more expensive, to book airline tickets or train tickets after you have arrived in Europe.

The choice of European cities you plan to visit can also have a major impact on airfare between destinations. Many of the low cost European air carriers are based in London, so it is often considerably less costly to fly from London than to fly from many other major European cities. Therefore, many budget travelers choose to make London their primary destination, and to take two and three day trips from there to the places they have always wanted to see.

While it is possible to get great deals from other European gateways, it is often more difficult than flying to and from London. Just as American airlines have their own major gateways, such as New York, Los Angeles and Atlanta, so too do budget European airlines. Planning your visit around these hub cities is often the best way to get the lowest possible airfares between European cities.

Flying within Europe is surprisingly affordable for way for many budget travelers to get around. Many first time travelers to Europe, and some seasoned travelers as well, are shocked to find just how affordable it is to fly around Europe.

### **Saving Money on European Travel with Rail Passes**

Travel to Europe is a must for many budget minded travelers, and many young college students would not dream of entering the real world without first spending a summer backpacking through Europe.

Even though the costs of traveling to and within Europe have risen in recent years, European travel can still be surprisingly affordable, for independent travelers and families alike.

One of the most popular ways to save money when traveling within Europe is to purchase a rail pass. Rail passes are quite popular among all types of travelers, and there are rail passes to suit just about every budget and travel need.

When choosing from among the many rail passes available to European travelers, it is important to tailor the pass you buy to your needs, and consider the destinations you plan to visit before leaving home.



This is because there are many different types of rail passes available. Some rail passes are good only in one country, while others are good for any country in Europe for a specific period of time. Those planning to travel only within a single country, therefore, can often save money by purchasing a single country pass.

Those who plan to spend considerable time in Europe, especially those who want to visit many different locations, may want to check into buying a rail pass for a longer length of time. These kinds of extended length rail passes are often less costly in the long run for travelers who plan to stay awhile.

There are a number of ways to buy European rail passes before leaving home, and it is generally a good idea to do so. Most travel agents can help you buy European rail passes, as well as providing advice on which type of rail pass best suits your needs. AAA also provides valuable information on European rail passes, a convenient way to buy them, and in some cases a good discount as well.

In addition, European rail passes are now available directly on the internet from a number of sources, and it may be a good idea to purchase a European rail pass directly from these sources. Just be sure you allow plenty of time for the rail pass to arrive before you leave for your vacation. When ordering rail passes directly from European sources, remember that they may take considerably longer to reach you.

Using European rail passes after you arrive is generally easy, but it is important to remember that many trains in Europe require a reservation, and simply holding a rail pass does not give you a reservation. It is important to make a reservation on the train you want as soon as possible after arriving in Europe, or ask about making one before you leave home.

It is also important to remember that many overnight trains will require an additional reservation, and extra money, for sleeping compartments. This can be an important consideration for long distance trains, so be sure to inquire about the sleeping facilities that are available when making your reservation.

Train travel is far more comfortable, and far more popular, within Europe than it is in the United States, and most European trains are quite comfortable, very fast and very safe. Train travel is the preferred method of travel for many Europeans, and the rail system in Europe is known for its efficiency and reasonable cost. Traveling throughout Europe on the train is a great way to see the sights without breaking your budget.

### **Getting the Best Deal on Airfare**

There is no doubt that airfare is one of the biggest expenses of any vacation. Airfare costs can easily represent at least half of the total cost of a vacation, and if you do not

get the best possible deal on airfare it is easy to go over budget. There are some important strategies for getting the best deal on airfares, and this article discusses some of our favorites.

One of the things I have learned over the years is that it is almost always less expensive to fly out of the larger airports than the smaller regional ones. While this is not always the case, and it is not true of every small airport, most larger airports have far more airlines competing for passengers. As we know, more competition generally equals lower prices for passengers.

Many of the larger airports are also home to the low cost carriers that have been such a phenomenon in the industry. While Southwest, Jet Blue and some of the other low cost carriers serve smaller airports, many are left out. The great thing about the incursion of these low cost carriers is that they drive down the prices of the major airlines as well. So, even if you don't like the open seating, peanuts only policy of a low cost carrier like Southwest, chances are you can still score a good deal at an airport they serve, even on one of the old line air carriers.

Of course the problem with flying out of major airports is getting there. Many people are in the same situation I am. That is, they have a small, regional airport nearby, with a couple of major airports a few hours drive away. What I do every time I need to fly is compare the cost of flying out of my close regional airport to the price I can get if I fly out of a major city. While I have been able to score some excellent deals from my regional airport, in most cases the difference in fare has been at least \$200.

I then must weigh the costs of that cheaper ticket against the convenience of local flying. Usually it makes sense to head to the large airport, particularly if I am buying more than one ticket. At a \$200 price differential, it is easy to see how much money can be saved for a family traveling together.

One great trick that too few people take advantage of is booking an airport hotel for the night before your flight. This is especially valuable for those early morning flights and saves you having to get up in the middle of the night and hit the highway. Instead, head down the night before, get a good night's sleep and take the airport's shuttle right to the airport door.

The extra added bonus of this approach is that in most cases these airport hotels allow their guests to leave their cars at the hotel for the duration of the vacation. In many cases this service is free with the hotel stay, and even in cases where there is a fee involved it is usually much lower than comparable parking at the airport. So instead of paying \$10, \$15 or even \$20 a day to park at the airport, you have a safe, well lighted place for your car during the trip, plus a comfortable place to spend the night. I honestly don't know why more people don't take advantage of this great way to save big bucks on both airfare and parking costs.

## **The Importance of Packing Light**

Many people do not realize how important packing light is to budget travel, but I can tell you from personal experience that it is very important. Trust me – if you over pack, you are much more likely to drop extra money on porters, luggage carts, taxis and all those other little costs that could be avoided if you just packed more sensibly. Even though those costs can seem insignificant, they can really add up, especially on a long, multiple city trip.

Think of it this way – while a traveler with just a backpack or small carryon will be comfortable taking the inexpensive city bus into town, the traveler loaded up with several suitcases will need to opt for a much more expensive taxi ride. It is easy to see the impact proper packing can have for the budget traveler, so we present some light packing tips borne of personal experience.

- Try to avoid checking bags whenever possible. If you can live out of your carryon, you will be much better off. Not checking a bag means no wait at the baggage carousel, and that means you can get into town and start having fun while everyone else is still waiting for their bag.
- Airlines have gotten much more strict lately with carryon limits, with most major carriers now allowing only one carryon plus a purse or other personal item. To make the most of this policy, carry a large purse and pack it with extra items, like toiletries or cosmetics, that would otherwise take up valuable luggage space.
- Wear your largest shoes and bulkiest clothing on the plane to preserve space in the suitcase. For instance, a pair of hiking boots or sneakers can take up valuable luggage space, so pack your smaller dress shoes and wear your boots or sneakers on the plane. In addition, you will appreciate having comfortable shoes as you make your way through the airport.
- Plan your outfits carefully to minimize the pieces needed. A stylish black skirt or pair of pants can easily be made into several outfits with some creative accessories and a couple of nice shirts. Pack small items like a scarf, a tie or favorite pieces of jewelry to give your outfits a new look without taking up a lot of room.
- Try packing a large oversized t-shirt in place of a bulky bathrobe. An oversized shirt can be great for wearing right out of the shower, and it can double as quick cover up after a visit to the hotel pool.
- Invest in a quality pair of stylish yet comfortable walking shoes. Shoes that are comfortable and attractive can be paired with a variety of outfits for a different look. Since shoes take up more space in the suitcase than many other items, it is best to choose versatile footwear when traveling.

- Try rolling clothes instead of folding them. Rolling clothes allows you to pack more clothes into a smaller space, and helps keep clothes wrinkle free as well.
- Stock up on small sample sized products like shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste deodorant. Many seasoned travelers keep a bag of such tiny soaps, shampoos and conditioners (gathered from hotels during previous journeys) in a bag at home for quick packing.
- Pack a large but foldable extra bag in your suitcase, and use this bag to carry the purchases and souvenirs you buy on the return trip.

## **Sightseeing on a Budget**

Seeing the local sights is why most people travel, and this is the one area you should not miss, no matter how tight your travel budget. It is possible, however, to see the local culture without busting your travel budget. This article focuses on some of our favorite tips for getting the most out of sightseeing on a budget.

### Travel like the locals do

One of the cheapest, and most overlooked, ways to see the local sights is to travel like the locals travel. This means taking the bus, the subway or the train to the most popular tourist destinations. Obviously this is not possible everywhere, as many places in the United States lack a comprehensive public transportation service. But where it is available, public transportation can be a great, and inexpensive way to get around.

It is important to note that most destinations in Europe have excellent, clean and safe public transportation, even in smaller towns and cities. Unless you absolutely must have your own wheels, it is usually quite easy to travel anywhere in Europe without the hassle and expense of renting a car.

Even in the United States, there are many places where a rental car is a liability, not an asset. That is because parking costs, fuels costs, etc. can be real budget busters. Try to research your destination on the internet, and find out which public transportation options exist. You may be surprised at how easy, and affordable, this method of travel can be.

### Take advantage of "backpacker tours"

Many destinations offer special backpacker tours for independent travelers. These tours can be great ways to see the sights, meet great new people, and have a great time, all while saving considerable sums of money.

Many of these tours allow you to purchase a ticket that is good for a specific amount of time, often a week or two. The company that operates the tour usually has a fleet of vans or buses that make a specific route, stopping at major tourist destinations. During the length of your ticket, you can generally hop on and hop off at will. This gives you the convenience of a guided tour, but allows you the freedom to spend as much or as little time as you want at each destination.

These backpacker tours can often be booked through local youth hostels, and hostels often feature flyers and information about tours that are available. This is one more reason to take advantage of these great budget accommodations.

#### Take the bus – the tour bus that its

Many large cities have a number of bus lines that operate sightseeing tours. These local bus tours often operate in a similar manner to backpacker tours, but they usually operate only in one city instead of covering a multi city route as most backpacker tours do.

The advantage of these sightseeing tours is that they allow budget minded travelers to cover a lot of ground, and see all the major sightseeing destinations in a city, in a limited amount of time. These tours can be great for backpackers who are traveling to many different cities in a short period of time, as they provide a great overview of the city and what it has to offer.

### **Finding Inexpensive Lodging in Europe**

Many first time travelers make the incorrect assumption that a European vacation is beyond their means, but this is often not the case. One of the biggest costs associated with any vacation, including travel to countries in Europe, is lodging, but it is possible to find budget accommodations that are clean, safe and centrally located.

One of the secrets to finding affordable budget accommodations when traveling to Europe is to check out the many bed and breakfast hotels that are common in Europe. The average bed and breakfast in Europe is much different than its American counterpart. Whereas many bed and breakfast's in the United States are luxurious, and expensive destinations, Europeans generally regard bed and breakfast hotels as inexpensive places to stay, and they can be much more affordable than hotels in similar locations.

Most bed and breakfast hotels in European destinations are small, family run hotels. In many cases, the family has their living quarters right on the premises, and the hotel generally provides free breakfast with the price of the room.

There are many places to look for European bed and breakfast hotels, including the Internet, destination travel guides, Internet news groups and travel review web sites. While some of the larger bed and breakfast hotels have their own web sites, many do not, and word of mouth is often the best way to find them.

There are also booking services that will book the bed and breakfast hotel for you for a small fee (usually around 10%). These booking services can be very valuable, especially if you do not speak the local language.

Even if you did not plan ahead, chances are you will still be able to find an affordable bed and breakfast hotel when you arrive. The arrivals area of most European airports has at least one booking desk to help travelers without reservations find affordable accommodations. Just be sure you have a local map handy so you don't get stuck with a hotel in the middle of nowhere.

There are some important things to keep in mind when booking a bed and breakfast or similar budget accommodations in European destinations. There are important differences in lodgings between Europe and the United States, and first time travelers to Europe are often caught unawares. Below is a list of items to consider when booking lodging for your European vacation.

- Your budget accommodations will likely be clean, but basic. In most cases the surroundings will not be fancy or luxurious, but they will be functional and clean.
- The rooms at a budget hotel or bed and breakfast will probably be small, and closet space may be limited or even non-existent.
- The least expensive rooms will have bathroom and shower facilities located down the hall, while more expensive rooms may have an in room bathroom and tub.
- A room that has only a shower will usually be less costly than one that includes a bathtub as well. If this is an important consideration, be sure to ask about the bathroom facilities when making your reservation.
- Rooms equipped with a double bed are generally less costly than those with twin beds.
- If you are driving, there is almost always an extra charge for parking. Be sure to ask about the parking charge when making your reservation.
- Be sure to buy a good map of the city you will be visiting, and make sure the hotel or bed and breakfast you choose is centrally located. It is often better to choose lodging that is within walking distance of several attractions you will be visiting, even if the room is slightly more expensive. Choosing a centrally located hotel or bed and breakfast will save you both time and money for transportation.
- When booking your lodging, be sure the price you are quoted includes all local taxes and applicable fees.

## **European Travel – Is Hostelling Right For You?**

Hostelling was once thought of as the exclusive province of college kids traveling through Europe for the first time. However, hostelling has grown to include all ages, and all types of people. When traveling on a budget, staying at a hostel can be a great experience for the traveler with a sense of adventure.

Of course, hostel travel is not for everyone, and some travelers would rather spend extra money for solo accommodations. In general, hostel traveling is best suited to solo travelers, or to groups of young people traveling together. Hostel stays are generally not recommended for families traveling with young children, and many hostels do not accept children under a certain age.

Most hostels are set up as dormitory style rooms, with a number of bunk beds arranged throughout the room. The number of bunk beds in a single room varies, with the average from four to ten bunks per room. Each traveler is assigned a specific bunk upon check-in.

Almost all hostels in the United States divide their accommodations according to gender, with the female guests in one block of rooms and the male guests in another. In multi-floor hostels, each gender is often assigned a specific floor or group of floors.

In many European locations and elsewhere around the world, however, many hostel rooms have mixed genders sharing a room. If this is a concern, be sure to ask about it. I, as a woman traveling alone, have personally never encountered a problem with these arrangements, and I have stayed in hostels throughout Europe, including Rome, London and Amsterdam. Some visitors, however, are surprised at these arrangements. The bathroom accommodations at hostels vary as well, with some rooms containing a shared bathroom and shower, while other hostels will have shower and bathroom facilities located in the hallway. If this is an important consideration, you should make sure to ask about bathroom facilities when making the reservation.

And reservations are becoming increasingly important at hostels, especially during the summer months in popular locations. Where once it was common for travelers simply to drop by the hostel and get a bed, it is now not at all unusual for hostels in popular tourist destinations to be booked solid for months.

The main appeal of staying at hostels, of course, is the price. The nightly rate for a hostel rarely rises above \$25 or \$30 per night, with most hostel accommodations costing far less. With the average hotel room hovering around \$100 to \$150 in many locations, it is easy to see why hostels are becoming so popular.

In addition, the staff at most hostels are extremely accommodating and knowledgeable about the local area. Unlike many staff members of some luxury hotels, who travel in from the suburbs and rarely see the city in which they live, hostel staff tend to live in

their city, and they have an intimate knowledge of the local attractions, including which attractions are can't miss and which ones are a waste of money.

In addition, hostels often have access to discounts and coupons for local area attractions and restaurants, and they can provide valuable information on the best, lowest priced restaurants in the area.

While staying at a hostel is not for everyone, and the local hostel will never be mistaken for a Ritz Carlton, hostels can be wonderful budget accommodations for the budget minded traveler. After all, the goal of travel is to get out and see the world, and hostel travel lets you spend your limited travel dollars doing just that.

### **Budget Tips for International Car Rentals**

While the public transportation systems in many international destinations are safe, clean, cheap and reliable, many seasoned travelers prefer having their own transportation, and in many areas it is necessary to rent a car to get from place to place. There are a number of things to remember to make renting a car internationally less costly and less of a hassle.

One of the most important things to remember involves traveling to Canada and Mexico in an American based rental car. In most cases, the insurance that comes with the rental car does not cover you once the car has left the country. If you are not sure about your coverage, always be sure to check your rental agreement. While this is important in Canada, it is vital in Mexico. While it is possible to buy special Mexican car insurance when traveling there, it is generally not recommended that casual visitors drive into Mexico. It is generally better to park in one of the border lots and take the shuttle bus to the border.

If you plan to drive abroad, either in Canada, Mexico, Europe or anywhere else outside the United States, it is a good idea to obtain an international drivers permit. While an international drivers permit is not required everywhere, it is a good idea to get one. The fee to obtain an international drivers permit is low, and the literature that comes along with it is quite valuable. An international drivers permit can be obtained through an AAA office.

It is also important to check with the company that provides your auto insurance to see if you are covered for international driving. If your normal policy does not cover you, inquire about purchasing a special policy for your trip. Also check with your credit card company to see if the rental car collision coverage they offer is good outside the country.



When arranging for a rental car, it is usually less costly to do so before you leave the United States. It can also be considerably more trouble to wait until you arrive to rent a car, and you always run the risk that the type of car you want is not available.

When renting cars in Europe, it is generally best to choose a compact or subcompact car, as many of the streets in European cities are quite narrow, and parking is often very limited. It is best to rent the smallest car you feel comfortable with.

If you plan to combine a car rental with a rail pass, there may be discounts available. Always be sure to check with your travel agent and take advantage of any discounts to which you are entitled. Some hotels and airlines also have special deals on rental cars for their customers.

If you will be dropping off your rental car in a different location than where you picked it up, which is common in European rentals, be sure to choose a rental agency that offers a low drop off fee.

When planning your trip, always keep in mind that prices for gas and diesel fuel are generally much higher than those in the United States, often as much as three times as expensive. Be sure to factor fuel costs into your travel budget. This is yet another reason to rent the smallest car you can find.

Another reason a small car is important is the frequent lack of available parking in many resort areas and near many major tourist attractions. Even if you have a car, you may want to leave it at the hotel and take public transportation to these types of destinations.

When you pick up your car, be sure that you get the terms you agreed to before you left home. If the terms are not agreeable when you get there, be prepared to cancel the deal and make alternate arrangements.

It is also important to take a company representative with you and carefully examine the car's exterior for dings and scratches. Be sure to note any preexisting damage to avoid being charged for it when the car is returned.

### **Packing Tips for the Budget Minded Traveler**

Packing properly is an important consideration for the budget traveler. Traveling on a budget means traveling light. The more unencumbered you are by junk you don't need, the more chances you will have and the less expensive your travel will be.

For instance, while the traveler with only one bag is free to hop on the inexpensive city bus and pay as little as one dollar to get into town, if that same traveler is loaded down

with three or four bulky suitcases, it is likely that an expensive taxi, and a potential fare of \$50 or more, may be the only option.

This is just one example of how packing light can help you keep your travel budget under control, but there are many more examples, all borne of experience. In addition to saving money, traveling light makes sense on so many levels. For one thing, you will enjoy your trip much more if you can just head straight out of the airport, without that long wait at the baggage claim.

Traveling light also makes getting around town, from the airport and to the hotel, much easier. Carting a lot of luggage around unnecessarily is a waste of time, money and energy, and most seasoned travelers have learned not to pack too much. Over packing, however, is a frequent mistake for the first time or inexperienced, traveler, and we are presenting the following list of tips for keeping your packing, and your budget, under control.

- As you are laying out all the things you want to take on your trip, separate them into three different piles – the essential pile, the maybe pile and the non essential pile. Then put the non essential, and half of the maybe pile, back in the closet.
- If you possibly can, try to get everything that remains into one bag that can be carried on to the airplane. If you are unsure what constitutes a carry on bag, be sure to check with the airline.
- Do not pack any items that can be purchased inexpensively once you have reached your destination. Be sure, however to pack items that may be more expensive in a tourist area. One example of this, of course, is camera film. Film is often two or three times as costly in a tourist area, so if you have extra film at home bring it along.
- Keep the amount of clothing you pack to an absolute minimum. Choose clothes that can be combined into a variety of different outfits. Keeping the clothes you pack to a minimum is especially smart if you know you will be doing a lot of shopping, and buying a lot of clothes, once you arrive at your destination. Why cart your old clothes halfway around the world if you can wear your snazzy new clothes instead?
- If your vacation is a long one, do laundry while you are away instead of bringing a suitcase full of extra clothes.
- Always pack some versatile clothes. For instance, a pair of swim trunks or shorts can double as sleeping attire. T-shirts are equally versatile and comfortable.
- Pack a collapsible bag in your suitcase. This bag can be used to carry souvenirs and other purchases on the return trip.

- Be sure that all your luggage is clearly labeled with your contact information and name. Avoid putting your street address on luggage tags, however. It is best to use a post office box or a work address.
- Always place any items you need and cannot immediately replace, such as prescription drugs, eyeglasses, and important documents, into your carryon or purse.
- Place all travel documents, maps and printed itineraries on the top of the suitcase, or in a separate zippered compartment, so they will be easy to find.
- If you have an extra pair of eyeglasses at home in a drawer, you may want to bring them along, especially if you need glasses to read signs, find your way around, etc. Pack them in a hard sided case and place them either in a purse or a separate compartment of the suitcase. Eyeglasses can be difficult, time consuming and expensive to replace while on vacation.
- And finally, consider packing an extra wallet, with one or two credit cards but no cash, into a separate compartment in your suitcase. The purpose of doing this is so you will have emergency funds in the event your regular wallet is lost or stolen. If the credit cards in the suitcase are lost or stolen, they can be cancelled immediately and you will not be liable for any fraudulent charges.

### **Saving Money by Staying off the Beaten Path**

Travel is meant to be enlightening and broadening to the mind, and there are few things that enlighten and broaden the mind as well as stepping off the beaten path and exploring those areas of the world where few tourists have ventured. Another important benefit of this "road less traveled" approach is that these un-touristy areas tend to be less expensive, often considerably so, than the same old vacation.

When it comes to finding unique travel destinations, the world is literally at your disposal. There are so many places that see little tourist traffic, and they include some of the most beautiful, and most pristine, places on earth. Not only can your off the beaten path travels help you save money, but they will allow you to meet some wonderful, fascinating and engaging people as well.

And after all, it is the people you meet while traveling, the friends you make and the things you learn that make travel such a rewarding experience. Long after the last souvenirs are put away, you will still remember the children you encountered while hiking in the Himalayas, or the farmer you met while backpacking through Cambodia. Travel should be much more than just a long list of theme parks and tourist destinations; it should be a way to learn about the world and your place in it.

You may be wondering what all this has to do with budget travel, but I assure you there is a connection. That is because these very places, the unspoiled parts of the world with the fascinating people and unique cultures, are often the most affordable. The U.S. dollar is very strong against almost all of the local currencies you will encounter off the beaten path, and that means your vacation dollars can stretch further than you ever imagined.

For instance, in many parts of Central and South America, you may be able to stay at a lovely inn or a beautiful cottage for an entire week and spend less than you would spend for a single night's lodging at one of those mega resorts in Cancun. In addition, you will see sights the vacationers in Cancun never dreamed of, from the cloud forests of Peru to the rain forests of Costa Rica to extinct volcanoes and breathtaking mountain ranges.

In addition to cheap lodging, traveling in non tourist areas also provides the opportunity to save lots of money on food while sampling some unique local dishes and different types of cuisines. Local restaurants and eateries in these far off places can be sources of great fun, and some fascinating food. Of course it helps to bring along a sense of adventure any time you travel, but that is part of the fun.

### **Choosing the Best Season for Travel Bargains**

When it comes to budget traveling, it is hard to overestimate the importance of the season of travel. Travel costs are largely dependent on the time of the year, and every travel destination has its high, low and shoulder seasons. Knowing the seasons for the destination of your choice is a great way to enjoy wonderful travel on a budget.

The high season for a particular destination varies quite a bit from location to location. For some locations, the high season can be as short as a couple of weekends throughout the year, while for other locations high season can last all summer (or all winter) long.

It is also important to know, however, when low season is low for a reason. There are certain locations you definitely do not want to visit in the off season. For instance, in August, most locations in Egypt approach the temperature of an oven, while hurricane season in Florida or the Caribbean can definitely put a crimp in your vacation. In addition, many beach towns, and some parts of Europe, just about close down in the off season. It is important, therefore to plan smart to get the best travel bargains while still enjoying your vacation.

The best choice for budget minded travelers is often the shoulder season, that magical time of year when bargains are plentiful but destinations are still very enjoyable. The period between high season and low, known as the shoulder season in the travel

industry, is the time when prices have begun to drop, but for reasons that are related to the demand for the destination, not on its underlying value or lack of value.

For many locations, the shoulder season begins in the fall, when the college students and vacationing families that kept demand high begin to go home. For instance, fall is a great time to visit many European locations. The temperatures are cooler, the crowds are gone, and the prices on lodgings and meals are lower.

In the Caribbean and Mexico, the shoulder season covers the late spring season. Prices drop at this time since most tourists from colder climates are enjoying better weather at home and no longer dreaming of escaping to a warmer climate.

Most guidebooks and travel related web sites will have information on the best time to go to each location for maximum value, so if you are unsure exactly when the high, low and shoulder seasons occur for your destination be sure to check one of these sources for further information.

Finding great deals is possible in all seasons, of course, but it is generally most difficult in the summer time, when interest in vacationing reaches its peak. The winter is an excellent season to visit many locations, but remember that it is high season for destinations like ski resorts.

The winter season can be a magical one for many locations that are on sale, however. For instance, travel to Asia is often markedly cheaper in the winter, but the sight of a snow covered Shinto temple is a remarkable sight, and one not to be missed. Many locations in Asia and Europe have winters that are less harsh than those in many parts of the United States, so a winter vacation can still be quite magical.

## **Budget Adventure Travel**

Adventure travel is one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry, but it is often difficult to find good bargains when booking adventure travel. With so many people itching to go on the adventure of a lifetime, the prices in those travel brochures can lead you to believe that adventure travel is beyond your means.

That does not have to be the case, however. The key to affordable adventure travel is to book directly from the providers of the adventure, instead of going through multiple layers of travel agents, tour operators and tour guides.

Booking a tour directly has many benefits besides monetary ones, including meeting wonderful local people and enjoying the local culture. Often the best way to enjoy a vacation on a budget is to book low cost airfare to the destination of your choice, take the local bus into town, and start asking around about the best adventure guides in

town. Local tour operators know the area, they know how to please their clientele, and best of all they are inexpensive. U.S. currency goes quite a long way in many exotic locations in Africa, Asia and elsewhere, so dealing with local tour guides is the best way to make your adventure travel dollar stretch even further.

Many inexperienced adventure travelers are unsure how they can possibly book an adventure tour on their own. For one thing, there is often a language barrier in far off locations, and you may be many thousands of miles from home in an unfamiliar location.

What these first time travelers often don't realize, however, is that finding a tour operator is often the easiest part of the journey. In many cases, the tour operators will find you as soon as you land, without you having to seek them out. And in most places, especially those frequented by American tourists, the guides will speak at least a little bit of English. Listed below are some of the best tips for booking your own budget travel adventure.

- Be sure to ask around before you leave. Get opinions from other travelers who have done the adventure you plan on.
- Refer to your guidebook for references. Guidebook writers are often quite knowledgeable about which tour operators are good and which are more questionable.
- Check on the message boards, both virtual and real. Real message boards are available at hostels and local guest houses, and they can provide excellent information on local tours and tour operators. The staff at local hostels can also provide excellent information about adventure travel. And internet message boards devoted to travel can be great sources of information, both before you leave home and after you arrive in your far off location.
- Interview your potential trip leaders carefully. Ask lots of open ended and probing questions about the equipment used, the experience level of the guides, the lodging the food, and what is and is not included. Be sure to negotiate everything in advance, since you will have little leverage once the adventure trip has begun.
- Finally, if your crew did a great job, be sure to tip them generously after the tour has come to an end. Good tour operators rely on these tips to supplement their often meager wages, and this helps to keep the best tour guides in business and the best tour operators in operation.

### **Travel Cheap in Latin America**

One of the biggest considerations when it comes to budget travel is where to vacation. Some vacation destinations are much less costly than others, so travelers on a budget need to choose their vacation spots carefully. One of the most exciting, and least

expensive, travel destinations for the budget traveler is the countries of Central and South America.

Going where your dollars go farther is one of the cardinal rules of budget travel, and U.S. dollars are highly sought after, and incredibly valuable, in a number of Latin American countries. For instance, for the same budget, you could spend a week at one of those priciest Caribbean resorts, or several months in many fascinating parts of Central and South America.

Budget travel in Latin America has many advantages far beyond the monetary savings. For instance, some of the most amazing and unforgettable sights just happen to be located in some of the world's least expensive countries. These easy to afford, hard to forget sights include the Incan wonders of Machu Picchu in Peru and the wonderful Mayan ruins scattered throughout some of the least costly parts of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. A budget Latin American vacation can include such exciting adventures as exploring an unspoiled rainforest, white water rafting down some of the world's most beautiful rivers, climbing active and extinct volcanoes, and diving off some of the world's most spectacular coral reefs.

The key to enjoying all this adventure while staying within your budget is to shun the standard tourist sights, and to take your time when traveling around. By doing this, not only will you save money, but you will make contact with real people, and make some wonderful memories. While in Cancun you may meet only other tourists, in the wilds of Peru you will meet all kinds of people, from peasant coffee farmers to experienced mountain guides and white water raft guides.

Visiting an affordable country means you will enjoy wonderful meals, stay in unique and interesting places, and meet wonderful people you will never forget, all for far less than you would spend at home.

When visiting Latin America, it is important to take your time, not simply because there is so much to see, but also because the pace of life there is slower and more relaxed. And after all, relaxation is what a vacation should be all about. And the best thing is, your vacation budget can last for many months in this most affordable of destinations.

Taking it slow will allow you to spend time with and get acquainted with some of the most fascinating people you will ever meet. Getting the perspective of the local population and learning from their varied experience, is one of the best parts of travel, no matter what your budget. Travel provides a perspective and a view of your place in the world that nothing else can, and that is what makes it so uniquely valuable and exciting.

Traveling throughout Central and South America is also a great way to boost the local economies, and help the lives of the wonderful people who live there. Spending time in a small village, living with a local family in a small guest house, may well pay that family's bills for weeks, help send their children to school, and help them enjoy a

brighter future. Instead of spending your money in a large tourist resort, try stepping off the beaten path for a couple of weeks or months.

Not only will you save significant sums of money, but you will help people who need the money. The beauty of budget travel in Latin America is that your money goes directly to the people who need it, instead of being filtered through resort owners, tour operators and hotel managers.

## **European Travel on a Budget**

When it comes to traveling across Europe, many people assume that such an adventure is beyond their modest means. However, the legions of college students and others on shoestring budgets that descend on Europe every summer undermine this assumption. If these budget travelers can make Europe affordable, there is no reason you cannot as well.

Europe is actually quite a travel bargain in many ways, and if you choose your lodging, meals and transportation carefully a vacation in Europe can actually cost much less than a week in some of the most expensive cities in the United States.

One of the primary considerations of enjoying Europe on a budget is how to get around. When it comes to getting around, there are basically three choices – the bus, the train and air travel. Renting a car is often impractical in Europe, with the different types of roads, different laws and road signs in a myriad of unfamiliar languages.

Europe's intercity bus lines offer passes, similar to rail passes, that can be purchased for various lengths of time and which provide for unlimited travel during those times. Single city to city bus tickets are often quite reasonable as well.

The main disadvantage of the bus system in Europe is that it is slow compared to rail travel and air travel. In addition, there is limited legroom on most buses, few opportunities to stand up and stretch, and some buses lack on board toilet facilities.

For many people, the extra convenience of the train more than justifies the difference in price, and train passes are still quite affordable for students and others on a budget. In addition to being faster, trains provide such amenities as toilets, and also sleeping quarters on overnight trains. Be aware, however, that there is often an extra charge for sleeping cars and other first class accommodations, even for rail pass holders.

One option that is overlooked by many budget travelers is that of city to city air travel. In Europe, however, air travel is actually quite a cost effective alternative to train and even bus travel. There are a number of excellent low cost air carriers all around Europe,



and the fares they charge are often comparable to, and in some cases even lower than, train tickets between the same cities.

No matter how you get around, you will need a clean and safe place to stay once you reach your destination. There are a number of excellent low cost lodging options in Europe, ranging from hostels to hotels to bed and breakfasts. In most cases, hostels will be the least expensive option, but for groups of two, three or more it may be just as cheap, or even cheaper, to rent a small room at a budget hotel instead.

For those who arrive at their destination without reservations, there are hotel booking services available at most major train stations and airports. These booking services can usually find you a place to stay, even if the city is very crowded. For this service, they usually charge a small fee, either a set fee or a percentage of the room charge.

### **Great Ways to Save Money on Travel to Europe**

Europe can either be one of the most expensive destinations in the world, or one of the least costly, depending on what you do, where you eat, where you stay and how you get around. Europe is a hit with budget travelers and the well heeled alike, but this article focuses on helping the former get the very most from their travel dollar.

The goal of budget travel is not merely to spend as little as possible. The true goal of the budget traveler is to get the most value out of his or her travel budget, and to focus those limited funds on the things that mean the most to them. Often this means finding cheap lodging in order to enjoy a four star dinner at the finest restaurant in Paris. For others, it could mean buying food at the local grocery and cooking your own dinner, so that you can splurge on a night at the opera or the ballet.

Listed below are some of our all time favorite tips for saving money on a vacation in Europe (or anywhere else for that matter):

- Eat where the locals eat. Eating with the local people instead of the tourists is a great way to save money and enjoy some of the finest cuisine. The restaurants favored by local residents tend to be those that provide the best meals at the lowest prices.
- For a quick and economical breakfast, pick up a roll, some fresh cold cuts and a piece of fruit from the local market. Then enjoy a delicious sandwich and a cup of coffee in the local park.
- When eating out, choose the fixed price menu and the house wine for the best value. Most restaurants offer two or three choices on their fixed price menu, and these dishes are often a great way to sample the local cuisine.

- Sleep cheap on the train. Overnight trains are a great way to both get from place to place and sleep cheaply. Be sure to bring a meal, bottle of water and snack along with you. You will save money by not visiting the dining car, and you will enjoy some great food as well.
- Take lots of pictures and enjoy the people you meet on the road. Take pictures not only of local tourist attractions but of the friends you meet along the way. If using a film camera, it is best to bring the undeveloped rolls back with you and have them developed once you get back home, since film developing in tourist locations is usually quite costly. And of course a digital camera offers a great and cost effective alternative, and you can choose to print only the best shots.
- Try emailing your postcards. Find a website that offers some great photographs of local attractions, or upload your own from your digital camera. Use these shots to send some great personalized email postcards to family and friends back home.
- Try to learn at least a little bit of the local language. If you know the language, or at least the names of the currency, it will be easier, and often cheaper, to buy the things you need.
- When making large purchases, it is always best to use a credit card. Not only will your cash last longer, but credit cards provide the best exchange rates.
- Get cash through an ATM instead of at currency exchange kiosks and hotels. Like credit cards, ATM cash transactions provide the best exchange rates, and you will avoid the sometimes costly fees charged by hotels and currency services.
- Take advantage of all the discounts you are entitled to. Many locations provide student discounts, senior discounts, etc. If you are not sure about discounts, always be sure to ask.
- Plan your vacation budget wisely. There are some excellent, and very inexpensive mementos of your trip, such as stickers, patches or postcards. For more expensive purchases, remember that the further you venture from the tourist attraction, the less expensive the souvenirs will become.
- Tour the city with the locals. A bus pass or subway token is a great way to meet the local people and see the sights. The public transportation service of most European cities is remarkably efficient, clean, safe and easy to navigate. It is not necessary to speak the local language to navigate on the subway or the bus system of most cities.

## **Tips for a Vacation That is More Fun and Less Expensive**

Just about everyone loves to travel, and travel is one of the most intriguing and fun activities one can engage in. Travel provides the remarkable ability to see the world from a whole new perspective, and I for one believe that if people traveled more outside their country there would be far less war and trouble in the world.

When asked why they do not travel, one of the most frequently cited reasons is lack of money. Lack of funds, however, does not need to be a barrier to traveling the world. Obviously if you're flat broke you may not be able to travel as you wish, but most people have at least some disposable income, and it can be surprisingly inexpensive to travel to many places.

One of the primary considerations for any budget minded traveler is where to stay. Fortunately, there are many budget friendly options when it comes to putting a roof over your head for the night. For solo travelers, hostels can provide, clean safe accommodations and the chance to meet and interact with people from all over the world. Best of all, the prices are almost impossible to beat. For instance, most hostels in major U.S. cities range from \$20 to \$30 a night, when a hotel room would set you back a cool \$150-\$200 or even more.

In Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, hostel accommodations are even cheaper, with many charging the equivalent of \$5 a night or even less. The key is to check the internet and see what is available in your destination. Many hostels even provide online booking, so you can arrive with your lodging issues already taken care of.

For couples, a budget hotel can be a great choice. There are many such hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts, located all around the world. Again, many of them are on the internet, and like hostels many can be booked online before you leave home.

Another great way to save money while still having a great vacation is to use the public transportation system. Most destinations in Europe, and many in the United States and Canada as well, have excellent, fast, reliable, and cheap public transportation systems. You can probably buy a weekly bus pass for less than what you would pay to rent a car for a single day. And public transportation also frees you from the hassles of parking the car, keeping it gassed up and learning your way around.

Another important key to traveling cheap is traveling light. Trekking around Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, or the Americas does not require a mountain of luggage. If you are unsure whether to pack it, chances are it is best left at home. It is best to take a couple of sturdy and versatile outfits, and a good pair of walking shoes, and leave the rest at home.

Getting the best airfare, along with finding the cheapest place to stay, is one of the essential cornerstones of successful budget travel. There are a number of strategies for getting the best deal on airfare, from using credit cards to rack up frequent flier miles, to using discount airlines, to traveling in the off or shoulder season. The strategy that is best for you depends on your individual needs, and on the location you choose.

Keeping the money you do have for travel safe and secure is always a concern when traveling. Most seasoned travelers have learned to use a hidden money belt to carry passports, plane tickets and the majority of their cash. Using an in room safe is also a good idea. It is generally best to use credit cards for major purchases, and keep only a small amount of cash on hand for incidental purchases. Not only do credit cards provide the best exchange rates, but you are not liable for fraudulent purchases as long as you report the card stolen in a timely fashion.

Travel does not have to be out of reach, even for the most budget minded traveler. The key is to shop wisely, focus on your priorities and get the most out of the money you do spend.

### **Lightweight Backpacking for the Budget Traveler**

When most people hear the term budget travel, they often think first of the hordes of young backpackers who traverse Europe on shoestring budgets each summer. This image is very true, and backpacking is one of the best ways to see the most sights, in the shortest amount of time and for the smallest amount of money.

Backpacking is one of the very best ways to travel light, and traveling light often allows you to travel more cheaply. Learning how to back your backpack the right way and to pack as lightly as possible, is an important skill, whether you are trekking through Europe for a month or just enjoying a weekend in the country.

The first thing is to start with a lightweight but well built backpack that is able to withstand the rigors of travel. A quality backpack should have heavy zippers, pockets and flaps that close easily and stay closed, and lots of easy accessible compartments. Buying a backpack with a lock can be important as well, particularly if your backpack will be out of sight often, such as when you are on a crowded train or staying at a hotel or hostel.

Another good alternative for many backpackers and other budget traveler is to buy a backpack that has wheels. The upside of such a design, of course, is that the backpack will be easy to wheel from place to place, and will function much like a rolling carryon suitcase, but without the bulk.

The downside of the rolling backpack, however, is that such backpacks are considerably heavier when you do have to use them as backpacks. Whether or not a backpack on wheels is right for you will depend on your style of travel and your personal preferences.

Of course what you put in your backpack is just as important as the backpack itself. It is important to pack wisely when planning for your backpack adventure. A good approach is to pack only a few quality and versatile items of clothing and combine them in new ways for variety. Packing a few accessories, such as scarves, ties and jewelry, are a great way to make the clothes you pack go further. They take up little room in the backpack, and they can provide new ways to wear the same clothes.

It is also important to pack travel size toiletry items into your backpack. Shampoos, conditioners, deodorants, toothpaste and even toothbrushes all come in small travel sizes, so be sure to gather these travel size items for your trip. These travel size items are a great way to keep the weight of your backpack to a minimum.

It is also important to buy a good pair of comfortable walking shoes, since you will be wearing them for a long time. Shoes take up a great deal of space in a suitcase or backpack, so stick with one pair of good shoes, and use the rest of your backpack for clothes and other items.

One good rule of thumb when deciding what to pack and what to leave at home is to pack those items that are not easily or cheaply purchased at your destination, and leave behind those items you can easily purchase once you arrive.

One important consideration for those who wear glasses is to pack an extra pair of eyeglasses. The importance of this tip will depend on the strength of your prescription and how important your glasses are go getting around. Most people who wear glasses have at least one extra pair. Investing in a hard sided case and packing it in your backpack could potentially save you a lot of money and trouble if you lose or break your glasses.

### **More Travel Tips for Those on a Budget**

A vacation should be a fun and exciting experience and not a source of stress. The key to making your vacation relaxing, fun and hassle free is to pay attention and learn how to travel smart.

Everyone who has traveled has at least one or two horror stories to tell. From losing a wallet or having it stolen, to spending a little bit too much at the roulette wheel, every seasoned traveler has experienced their share of vacation problems. The key is to take these travel issues in stride, and not let them ruin your long planned vacation.

One of the most important considerations when traveling is money, saving it and protecting it. Saving money, by selecting the cheapest accommodations and airfare you can find, is a great way to make even the most limited travel budget go further.

To protect your travel money, most seasoned travelers and travel experts recommend keeping valuables in a hidden wallet or travel pouch, either wrapped around your waist under your clothes or hung around your neck under your shirt.

Another great way to protect your money and reduce the chance of theft is to keep the majority of your cash in the hotel safe, taking only enough out each day to pay for small incidental purchases. Use credit cards for meals, lodging, admissions, souvenirs and other larger purchases. Credit cards provide valuable consumer protection and the best currency exchange rates as well.

Of course even the most well protected wallet can be lost or stolen, and there is one very valuable tip to keep a lost or stolen wallet from bringing your vacation to an abrupt end. Many seasoned travelers have learned to pack an extra wallet in their suitcase or backpack. This wallet will contain only a credit card or two and perhaps an ATM card. That way, if you lose your primary wallet, you still have access to ready cash with which to finish your trip.

It is also a good idea to make an itinerary, and leave it at home with family members or a trusted friend. Having family members and friends know your itinerary will help them contact you in case of an emergency at home. It is also a good idea to keep copies of your identification papers, travelers check numbers, and a photocopy of your passport, at home.

One word about the passport – I always take mine with me, even when traveling within the United States. The reason I do that is that the passport provides an additional piece of information, and that is important in the event your wallet is lost or stolen while on vacation. Since it is impossible to board a plane these days without id, having an extra form of id with you can make your life a lot easier.

It is also important to make several copies of your important travel documents, including flight reservations, hotel confirmations, rental car receipts, etc. Put each copy in a different place - one or two in different parts of the suitcase or backpack, one in your back pocket, one in your purse or carryon, etc. Also record important phone numbers in the address book of your cell phone for easy access.

It is also important to carry basic medical information, such as your blood type, allergy information and information about medications you are taking, with you while on vacation. It is also important to carry your medications in your carryon luggage or purse, and never to pack them in a checked suitcase.

## **Enjoy Your Honeymoon with a Low Cost Mediterranean Cruise**

A Mediterranean cruise is a dream honeymoon for many a couple, but many couples simply assume that such a dream is beyond their means. It is easy to see why people think this, especially since the cost of the wedding itself today is so high. Many couples feel there is simply not enough money left for a great honeymoon.

If a luxurious Mediterranean cruise is your dream, do not despair. Such a cruise may be more affordable than you think. For one thing, there are so many cruise lines and so many cruise ships vying for the lucrative honeymoon market, and that competition helps to lower prices. By shopping around, you can make your first cruise as husband and wife one you will always remember.

There are many travel related web sites that focus on travel and cruises to the Mediterranean, and they frequently offer discounted packages. It is important to search often, however, as these great deals are often snapped up quickly. It is important to be persistent to get the best deal.

After you have found the best deal on a low cost Mediterranean cruise, be sure to book it as soon as you can. There are many different packages available for Mediterranean cruises, so be sure to shop around to find the one that suits you best. There are a number of cruise lines and cruise ships that cater to honeymooners, and these ships often provide the most memorable, and most romantic, experiences.

In addition, these honeymoon themed cruise lines are often very good at providing some of the best deals to newlyweds. This is one area where you may want to consult a quality travel agent. Travel agents are often quite good at sniffing out deals on Mediterranean cruises for honeymoons, so be sure to let the travel agent know when you want to go and where you want to go.

If you can travel in the off season, or in the shoulder season, you may be able to spend a lot less on your Mediterranean cruise. The prices on these cruises often drop substantially after the high season has ended, so be sure to check for good deals in the off season.

It is important to start shopping early to book a honeymoon cruise, however. Just as the wedding takes lots of advance planning, so too with the honeymoon, particularly if your dream is a cruise to a popular destination like the Caribbean. By shopping around on the internet, however, shopping early and being persistent, you can probably score a much better deal than you ever imagined on the trip of a lifetime.

## **Save Money When Flying Internationally by Using Charter Flights**

Every international budget traveler, and many domestic budget travelers as well, will eventually be introduced to the idea of using chartered flights. Using charter flights has important advantages and some drawbacks to be aware of.

One advantage of charter flights is that they can often allow a traveler to fly to a popular destination, like Europe, in the high season for a much lower cost than comparable commercial flights. That is because commercial airlines generally greatly increase their airfares during the popular high season, due to the effects of supply and demand. During the high season, charter flights can often be much less expensive than those on traditional airlines.

Another advantage of charter flights that many people are unaware of is that it is sometimes possible to upgrade to first class for very low prices. Many travelers do not realize it, but charter planes do have first class sections. Since few people who can afford first class transatlantic flights fly on charter airlines, the first class section is often almost empty. Due to this disparity, it is often possible to upgrade to first class for very low prices.

When you check in for your charter flight, always be sure to ask if an upgrade to first class is available. These upgrades are almost always available, and the price can be as low as \$50. This is an unheard of deal for a long transatlantic flight.

These price advantages, of course, often come with some associated drawbacks. One of the most significant disadvantages of many charter flight operators is that their level of customer service can be much worse than the major commercial air carriers. From late opening ticket windows, to flight delays to luggage problem, many charter airlines have a bad reputation for customer service.

Fortunately, the internet has made the process of finding reliable charter airlines, and avoiding the bad ones, much easier. The many travel related web sites and newsgroups are great ways to learn about the various charter airlines that operate international flights, swap stories and tips with those who have been there, and of course to compare prices.

### **Traveling to India on the Cheap**

India has long been a dream destination for many people. India is a land of many contrasts, a land of many cultures, and a land of tradition. India is home to millions of people, from many different religions and many different walks of life. It has been said that India is one of the places every person should see in his or her lifetime, and India is loved by many for its history, its charm and its people.



The country of India is a small one, but it enjoys a large reputation among travelers, historians and residents alike. The country of India has given rise to some of the most influential people in history, including Mahatma Gandhi, Kalpana Chawla, and Sachin Tendulkar, among many others. Besides its history, India has many other charms for any visitor, including of course the warmth and beauty of the Indian people.

The fabulous temples, such as the Taj Mahal, have long been lures to travelers from all around the world, and the various religions and mythologies arising from India have been amazing people around the world for many centuries.

Many travelers assume that a fascinating vacation to an exotic locale like India is beyond their meager travel budget, but that is not the case. There are many ways for travelers on a budget to enjoy the beauty, charm and many wonders of India without going over their travel budget.

The airfares to India largely depend on the city from which you depart. Airfares to India from the west coast and middle of the United States are generally higher than those from gateway cities, such as New York City, Boston and Washington, D.C., that are located further to the east.

Of course, as with airfare to any destination around the world, it is important to shop around as much as possible when booking a trip to India. The prices on flights to India and other places in Asia vary quite a bit from time to time, so be sure to check often for the best price.

India is also one of the places in the world where a package deal can actually save you money. India, like Thailand, Egypt, China and other exotic locations often has some very good tour package operators that take care of everything from flights and hotel to airport transfers and sightseeing excursions.

Unlike many areas around the world, where a package tour is a luxury option only for the well heeled, many tours of India are actually quite affordable. It is important for all potential visitors to India to explore these package options.

Whether you book your own airfare to India and hotel once you get there, or get a great deal on a package tour, a trip to India is sure to be a vacation you will never forget. India offers experiences and delights that simply are not available anywhere else in the world.

### **Getting the Best Deal on a Cruise**

For many people, cruising is the ultimate budget vacation, since everything, from lodging to food to entertainment, is included in the basic price of the cruise. Cruises

serve just about every part of the world, offering a great mixture of free shipboard entertainment, relaxation and pampering, all for an often great low price.

The beauty of cruises is that they are able to cater to every taste, and serve visitors of all socioeconomic levels. There are ultra luxurious cruise ships that cater to the very wealthy, and there are also budget minded cruise ships and cruise lines that cater to providing the greatest amount of value for the least possible amount of money.

Another great thing about any type of cruise is the huge variety of onboard entertainment that is available. Cruise ship activities range from simply lounging by the pool with a drink in your hand to hitting the slots on shipboard casinos. In addition, cruise ships provide plenty of other options, including swimming, volleyball, shuffleboard, basketball, table tennis, gymnasiums, and even golf.

The fitness options for cruise passengers are many, and many cruise lines employ personal trainers and massage therapists in addition to offering all manner of workout and onboard sports options.

And the opportunities for excitement and adventure are not limited to the trip. Most cruise passengers love the off ship excursions that are offered at every port, and water sports enthusiasts will love the opportunity to water ski, jet ski and scuba dive.

Cruise ship operators pride themselves in offering a wide variety of dining options as well. The shipboard buffets available on cruise ships are renowned for good reason, and the number of buffets offers everything from burgers, French fries and hot dogs to veal cordon bleu and salad bars. And best of all, many shipboard buffets are open day and night.

Nightlife is another thing that makes cruises such a unique form of travel. The nightlife onboard a cruise ship is quite varied, offering everything from discos and bars to casinos and theatres. In addition, many cruise ships offer classes in everything from poker and bridge to ballroom dancing.

There are also myriad opportunities for enjoying a number of excursions at every port of call. For instance, guests on a Mediterranean cruise may enjoy a night at the opera or a day at a local soccer game, while visitors to Caribbean ports of call may enjoy diving and enjoying the local coral reefs.

Cruises are a favorite with travelers on a limited budget, since the cost is known up front. Unlike many other types of vacations, where the costs of lodging, meals and entertainment can quickly get out of hand, on a cruise everything is included.

There are often a great many specials on cruises available, particularly in the off season and the shoulder season. It is important to check the internet and your local travel agent frequently to get the best deal on the cruise of your dreams.

## **The Best Ways to Get the Cheapest Airfares**

Everyone who has ever planned a vacation knows that the airfare is one of the largest expenses of any vacation. The airfare can easily be more costly than the hotel, the sightseeing, the meals, or the rental car, often significantly more expensive. It is important, therefore, for anyone planning a vacation on a budget to pay careful attention to the price of the airfare.

One place to start the search for low cost airfare is with your employer. Corporate discount programs are less common than they once were, but some companies still have discount arrangements with certain airlines. If you think your employer has such an arrangement, be sure to check with your Human Resources department.

In addition, the airlines of some countries, particularly countries in Asia, offer periodic discounts to lure travelers. Be sure to ask your travel agent, or check on the internet, for such special deals.

Another great way to get discounts on airlines is to be a member of certain clubs or groups. For instance, some airlines provide discounts for senior citizens, members of the military and travel club members.

Vacation packages can be another great way to get some significant discounts on airfares and hotels. Many package tour operators buy up large numbers of airline tickets, and in exchange they receive significant discounts on each ticket they buy. They do the same thing with hotels, buying up large blocks of rooms at deeply discounted prices. This economy of scale can often provide travelers with excellent deals compared to what they could get on their own, so be sure to check the availability and value of package deals to your destination.

Of course, when booking a package deal, it is important to be sure the hotel that is included is centrally located. Some package deal operators are better than others at choosing the best and most conveniently located hotels. When choosing from among package deals, be sure to have a map of your destination city handy.

Children and students are often entitled to significant discounts on airlines, so be sure to inquire about the applicable discounts when booking tickets. Children are often entitled to discounted airfare, whether they are traveling on their own or with other family members. It is important to check with the airline for their specific policies on child and student discounts.

The internet also provides a great way to easily comparison shop for the lowest airlines. Most major and discount airlines have their own web sites and online booking services, so it is easy to compare fares and flights easily. In addition to the airlines' own web

sites, there are a number of comparison web sites that make it even easier to shop and compare.

### **Budget Travel in the Fall**

For many people, autumn is the time of year when the nights get colder, the days get shorter, the leaves change color and the year heads rapidly toward the cold winter months. The fall of the year is the time when the kids are heading back to school and anxious travelers are no longer dreaming of beach resort towns.

For the smart budget traveler, however, the autumn season offers some tremendous opportunities for lower prices, smaller crowds and an overall better vacation value. The very items cited above make fall a great time for budget minded travelers to head to some of the best known resorts and enjoy lower prices on airfares, rental cars, food and hotel rooms.

Every vacation destination has its own high and low season, but the autumn of the year has the advantage of being the off season for both summer and winter destinations. For instance, while winter is the high season for ski resort towns and other winter destinations, the mountain locations of these resorts often mean that skiing and other activities are available in late autumn, while prices for lodging, meals and rental cars are still much lower.

Likewise, resorts and travel destinations that enjoy great popularity in the summer months are still quite pleasurable, and often more so, in the fall of the year. For instance, autumn offers such benefits as cooler temperatures and fewer crowds in addition to lower prices. The same restaurant at which reservations were impossible to come by in the busy summer months may suddenly be available in the fall, and that pricey summer hotel room may be quite affordable once summer has ended.

When looking for the best possible deal on fall travel, it is important to thoroughly research your particular destination. While fall is the off season for most locations, this is not true for every destination. Be sure that there really are better values in the autumn season before booking your trip.

It is also important to check the weather, including average temperatures and average rainfall levels, for your fall travel destination. After all, lower autumn prices will do you no good if rain or uncomfortable temperatures ruin your long anticipated vacation.

If the average temperature and precipitation levels are to your liking, it is time to start searching for the perfect fall travel deals. The obvious first place to start for many people is the internet. There are a number of very good web sites and newsgroups devoted to the best in budget travel, and they are a great place to start.

It is also important to start planning early for your fall vacation. While the heat of summer is still around, be sure to start shopping for the best fall deals. Airlines often start promoting their lower fall airfares while summer is still in full swing, and it is important to act fast to get the lowest fares. The same goes for rental cars and hotel rooms, and those fall specials are often snapped up very quickly by other budget minded travelers.

### **Why a Cruise is Such a Good Budget Vacation**

When many people picture a budget vacation, they picture an intrepid traveler in a roach infested hotel room eating stale sandwiches and riding around on the city bus. However, one of the best ways to save money on a vacation is also one of the most luxurious and most exciting – the cruise ship.

Cruise ship vacations are actually one of the most affordable ways to travel almost anywhere in the world, from the glaciers of Alaska to the tropical rainforests of Central and South America.

One of the things that make cruise ships so attractive to budget travelers is the fact that the price of the cruise typically includes everything that happens onboard the ship. This includes, of course, the room, which is often less costly than a typical hotel room in many locations. In many instances, it would be impossible to book a good hotel room for less than the daily cost of the cruise.

In addition to a cheap place to stay, a cruise also offers unlimited food, including many amazing buffets that are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition, the food on cruise ships is often superior to those in all but the best land locked restaurants, and once again, the food is included in the price.

After eating all that food, you will probably feel the need to work out, and the cost of the cruise also typically includes unlimited use of the gym, the weight room and the sports locations. While many hotels tack on a surcharge for the use of the hotel gym, with a cruise it is generally included.

The cost of a cruise also includes all shipboard entertainment and classes. The entertainment options on a cruise are often one of the best parts of the experience, and many cruises offer such things as movie nights, theatres, spas, night clubs, discos, and even casinos. There are also some great classes offered by cruise lines, in everything from origami to bridge to ballroom dancing. And again, these classes and entertainment options are included in the price you pay for the cruise.

Among the only things that are not included in the typical cruise are alcoholic beverages and shore excursions. Many of the higher priced cruises even include these extras. If the shore excursions and drinks are not included, be sure to get a price list for shore excursions and drinks.

It is often possible to save money on shore excursions while on a cruise by booking the tours locally at portside instead of going with the cruise line. Just be sure, however that the book it yourself excursion will get you back to the ship on time.

For all these reasons, cruises can be among the best, and most economical, of all vacation opportunities. The ability to enjoy a week or two week vacation at one low price is one more reason to love cruising.

### **Keeping Your Food Travel Budget Low**

Food can be one of the most expensive items in a travel budget. Keeping those costs low can be one of the most important ways to keep any travel budget under control. This article focuses on some of our favorite ways to enjoy great food and low prices while on the road.

- Act, and eat, like a local. Eating where the local residents do is one of those time tested tips for getting the best food and lowest prices while on vacation. So, instead of asking the concierge for the name of a four star restaurant, try asking the hotel clerk or chambermaid where they eat. Eating where the local people do, and avoiding touristy or trendy restaurants, is a great way to sample the local food, meet local people and save some serious money.
- When embarking on a long road trip, stock a cooler with plenty of homemade sandwiches, chips, bottles of water, etc. Doing this will allow you to make better time as well as saving money, since you will not have to stop as often, or spend as much money in restaurants along the way.
- If you want to splurge on a great meal, do so at lunch instead of dinner. Many upscale restaurants offer the same food choices at lunch as they do at dinner, but lunch provides a much better value. You can enjoy the same food for much lower prices by eating a great lunch instead of dinner.
- Take advantage of the free breakfast options offered by your hotel. Many hotels provide a free continental or American breakfast, so be sure to stock up on food for the day by eating a hearty breakfast. Eating a great breakfast will give you the energy you need for a busy day of sightseeing, and help tide you over until lunch.

- Save even more money by stocking up on staples at a local grocery store. Stocking up on bottles of water, fruit and snacks is a great way to provide yourself a great, low cost late night snack while saving you lots of money.
- Try eating in the various ethnic neighborhoods in your destination. Eating in ethnic neighborhoods provides great local color, a chance to meet interesting people, and very low prices as well. In addition, most ethnic restaurants post their menus in their windows or on the door, so it is easy to ensure they have abundant food choices and great prices.

Eating cheap on vacation does not mean scarfing quality food or great experiences. It just means shopping around and making smart choices when it comes to eating out.

There is no doubt that traveling can sometimes be expensive, but it does not need to be that way. By using a combination of travel savvy, good planning, and some of the tips contained in this report, it should be quite possible to see the parts of the world you have always wanted to see without breaking your budget for the rest of the year.