

Insider Tricks to Plan a Cheap Last-Minute Summer Vacation

Follow these three steps to cut the cost of your trip in half.



Did spring come and go before you had a chance to plan a summer vacation? Is looking at friends' fabulous vacation pictures making you dream of your own getaway?

Never fear. There's still plenty of time to plan a vacation that satisfies your need to get away without burdening your budget. Check out these tips to make travel planning a breeze.

Step 1: Pick Your Place

Daydreaming about possible destinations can be the best – and often lengthiest – part of vacation planning. Whether you're considering flying or driving to your destination, online tools can help you compare options to determine the most cost-effective destination.

- **Flying.** Use Google Flights to help with your planning. Just select your departure city, plug in the dates and explore where the best travel deals are. Whether mountains, beaches or a foreign city are what you're after, this tool will help you narrow down a location based on what you can afford.
- **Driving.** As you've surely heard (and noticed at the pump) gas is the cheapest it's been in years, meaning this summer is a great time to take that road trip you've been considering. Use Roadtrippers.com to find sample routes including suggested hotels, attractions, landmarks and more. The site also estimates how much money you'll spend on gas along the way.

Step 2: Look for Lodging

Depending on your personal travel style and who you are traveling with (family bonding or solo adventure?) your accommodation needs will vary. Luckily there's an online tool to help you find the best fit at the best price.

- **Home or room rental.** If you're staying somewhere for several nights, consider renting a room, home or apartment from popular services Airbnb or HomeAway. In addition to getting to experience the local scene, you'll likely have kitchen access, which can help cut travel costs (more on that later).
- **Third party sites.** With the large number of online travel sites it would be a shame to spend full price on a hotel room. Explore options and prices on Hipmunk, Expedia or Orbitz to make your dollar go further. If you waited until the last minute and are looking for hotels seven days or fewer in advance, check out HotelTonight where you can find discounted rates on hotel rooms.
- **Hostels.** Though you may associate hostels with European trips and horror movies, hostels have come a long way over the past decade – both abroad and in the U.S. If your primary desire is a warm bed, you'd be remiss not to consider these great deal options; check out HostelBookers.com and HostelWorld.com to make comparing your options a breeze.

Step 3: Skimp to Splurge

No one likes to be pinching pennies or skimping on vacation, and with some advance planning you shouldn't have to. Consider these easy ways to save while you're away from home so that you can treat yourself to a special vacation meal or souvenir without the guilt.

- **Eat in and out wisely.** However long your vacation, eating out at restaurants can really add up. To save some dough, head to a grocery store the first day of your trip to pick up sandwich supplies, snacks and whatever other perishable items your accommodations will allow. If there's a nice restaurant you're dying to try during your trip, consider treating yourself to a fancy lunch. Prices are typically far more manageable in the afternoon, and reservations will be easier to come by!
- **Public transportation.** If your travel destination has it, skip the taxis, shuttles and parking fees by taking public transportation whenever possible. In addition to saving some serious cash, you'll also experience the city like a local and get to take in the views from the passenger seat.
- **Free sites and entertainment.** Speaking of experiencing a destination like a local, be sure to do some research on free attractions, entertainment and events that the destination offers. Most city and town governments update their website with the local event calendars and activity guides. Time Out also offers great activity and event recommendations for over 50 cities worldwide.
- **Deals sites.** A few weeks before your trip sign up for deals sites like LivingSocial and Groupon in your destination city, so you can score great discounts on local restaurants, events, activities and tours.

OK, enough reading, time to get out there and travel!

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