

# PLAN A GREAT SUMMER ESCAPE FOR UNDER A GRAND!



## Pinch Your Travel Pennies Like a Pro

By Kate Burgess

**F**or many people, the idea of traveling with limited funds can be daunting. They'd rather stay close to home than find themselves in a strange piazza late at night with too few lira in their pockets. But taking a trip is a refreshing escape from work, so I've never let a lack of dough keep me languishing at home during the summer months. I'm here to tell you that, with the right planning and research, your great escape can be executed with minimal strain on your pocketbook. Some of my recent vacations have cost me less than \$1,000, including airfare.

As contradictory as it might sound, the trick is to stay loose, flexible and ready for anything—and, at the same time, be organized and plan ahead. Planning can save you money, but often you can save even more money by being willing to hop on—

or off—a flight at the drop of a hat. During college, I never had extra money available for trips, but my boyfriend got bumped twice on a flight from South Carolina to Delaware and, in exchange for his inconvenience, received two tickets to travel anywhere in the continental United States. We chose California, since it was about as far as we could get from the East Coast. The trip was great and well worth his sitting in the airport for a few hours.

Now that I've graduated and work for a nonprofit, I don't have much more money at my disposal than I did in my college days. Nevertheless, in the three years since graduation, I've managed to visit England, France, Italy and Switzerland without having to go into debt or harvest my eggs for cash. A recent "Swiss Miss" vacation cost me \$1,000; I toured Italy for \$800, staying with friends and at hostels; and I splurged on a trip to London for \$1,500, including airfare.

I've been able to afford these trips thanks to careful planning and the good fortune of having friends and relatives who



Still Leaning: The Tower of Pisa.

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conveniently live abroad and are willing to put up with me for a few days or a week. But there are other affordable lodging options—university housing, home exchanges, hostels, farm stays and even convent guest rooms—for those who have an adventurous spirit and no relatives abroad. Start your planning at [www.reids-guides.com](http://www.reids-guides.com) and click on the Lodging links to explore all the possibilities.

Below, are more of my favorite budget-crunching travel tips. Try them the next time you want to satisfy your wanderlust.

### 12 Ways to Get Away Without Going Broke

**1 GO SOMEWHERE CHEAP.** Sure, this sounds obvious, but if you don't have a lot of money to spend, one way to make it go a long way is to travel somewhere where the dollar is strong. Ryan Bollom, a 24-year-old architecture student, traveled all across India last year, and although the plane fare was outrageous, he found a nice hotel room for \$6 an evening and meals ran him something like 20 cents.

India's probably off the map for many Americans who get a measly 10 days of vacation per year, but other places, such as Costa Rica, Eastern Europe, or some of the less popular Caribbean islands are far enough off the beaten tourist track that you can find plenty of great deals. If you're traveling from a home base somewhere in the U.K. or Europe, check out some of the countries on the African continent—Ghana, Kenya or South Africa, for instance. Visit [www.virtualtourist.com](http://www.virtualtourist.com), a site with entries posted by real travelers, for more suggestions



Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi.

on off-the-beaten-track places to go and ways to save money getting there.

**2 TRAVEL AT AN "UNDESIRABLE" TIME OF YEAR.**

Costa Rica's rainy season runs from May to November, which meshes perfectly with kids' school breaks. Hotel accommodations are significantly cheaper during this time period, as are flights. Once you get there, you'll find that the rain doesn't start until late afternoon and ends by evening, giving you plenty of time for touring and beach lounging. Rest up when the skies open up (or visit the rainforest) and then venture out again for some evening entertainment after dark.

Another off-season option to consider is heading to Europe over the winter. While this might sound like a drag, plane tickets can be purchased much cheaper then, and if you're looking to visit historical monuments or museums, lines will be shorter, too.

**3 PAY IN ADVANCE.** You'll save money by shopping for good deals three to four months in advance on travel-bargain Web sites (the usual suspects: [www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com), [www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com) and [www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com)) and, if you charge your tickets, you'll end up paying off most of the hefty bill before you take flight. There's nothing worse than paying for a vacation months after the memories have faded. Better yet, start a vacation savings account so that you can pay upfront in cash, earn interest while you're saving, and avoid interest charges.

**4 CHARGE IT.** As long as you're good at paying off your credit-card bills in full on time, use your (major) credit card instead of relying on travelers' checks or withdrawing cash from an ATM

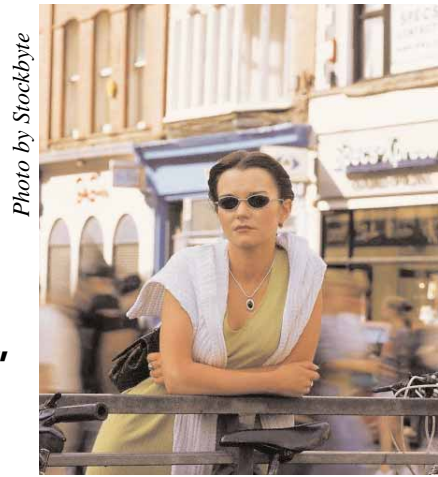


Photo by Stockbyte

when traveling abroad. You'll get a better exchange rate. But before you do, check your credit card's fee schedule. Some cards are replacing their foreign currency conversion fee with a transaction fee on all purchases made in another country, even when they're priced in dollars. Others are increasing their conversion fees, and the card-issuing bank often adds a surcharge on top of that. For big purchases, using a card is still the best option, say most experts. But you might want to look into applying for a Euro-denominated card from a foreign bank to use while abroad.

**5 STICK TO A BUDGET.** Before you plan your destination, it's a great idea to sit down and go over your budgetary restrictions. Try breaking your travel costs into categories—transportation, food, accommodations, and incidentals—set a limit on each category, and stick to the plan.

**6 LOOK FOR LAST-MINUTE DEALS.** The important point to remember here is not to limit your search to one place. If your job makes it hard for you to plan vacations in advance, sign up for last-minute deal alerts from an airline that flies out of an airport nearby. But don't stop there: Check the last-minute-deal pages on the major travel sites, [www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com), [www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com) and [www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com). Then surf on over to [www.shermans-travel.com](http://www.shermans-travel.com) and sign up for the weekly newsletter put out by its editors, who scour the Web for best deals. One of the "Hot Weekly Deals" listed when I checked was a \$299 round trip to Paris, Nice or Rome. Also, try registering at [www.lastminute-travel.com](http://www.lastminute-travel.com), named "Best of the Web" by *Travel & Leisure* and *Forbes* mag-



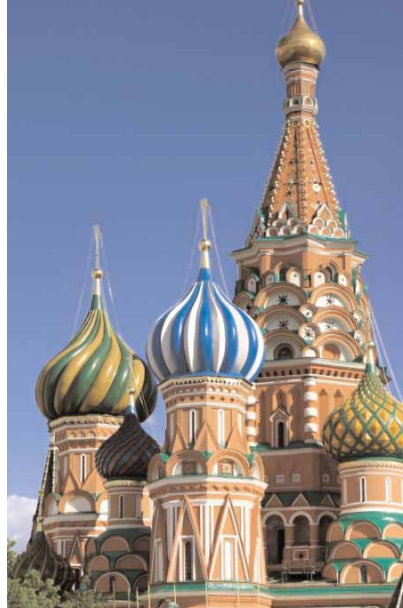
Classic: The Eiffel Tower.

azines. A recent search there found New York hotel rooms listed from \$46. Okay, so they had only a one-star rating—but how much time are you going to spend in your room, anyway?

**7 GET BUMPED.** If you're on your way home and you're not in a hurry, check to see if your return flight is overbooked and offer to give up your seat to someone else. You can usually get a free ticket for travel anywhere within the continental United States in exchange. The best chance of getting bumped is to travel on a Sunday afternoon.

**8 BID AWAY.** Web sites such as [www.hotwire.com](http://www.hotwire.com) and [www.priceline.com](http://www.priceline.com) allow you to bid on a certain category of hotel (as in number of stars) or a flight to select destinations. Using them can help you stick to your budget. The only problem with this is that you don't know until you've won the auction which hotel or airline you're bidding on, and you may end up flying on Uzbekistan Airways or the like. This strategy may not be for the nervous traveler. But if you're up for anything, check [www.bidontravel.com](http://www.bidontravel.com) for more tips on how to win at the bidding game.

**9 CHAUFFEUR YOURSELF.** If you don't mind driving, renting a car can be far less expensive than purchasing tickets on trains and tour buses after you reach your destination. Renting a car will allow you to see more of the countryside, but it works best if you have a partner to help you navigate the unfamiliar routes and to share the driving and the cost of gas. Check [www.rentalcars.com](http://www.rentalcars.com) for its regularly updated list of deals from the major rental-



St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow.

## MORE GOOD DEALS . . .

**\$** Beginning June 13, Italian carrier Eurofly will offer non-stop flights from New York to Naples (from \$649), Bologna (from \$649) and Palermo (from \$749). Visit [www.Euroflyvacations.com](http://www.Euroflyvacations.com) for more information or to book a flight.

**\$** College students and faculty get special consideration at [www.studentuniverse.com](http://www.studentuniverse.com). By negotiating with the major airlines on their behalf, Student Universe provides students and teachers with "exclusive, significantly discounted fares" and other travel deals. Be prepared to verify student/faculty status before ordering your tickets. In some cases, particularly stateside, you might do better flying discount airlines, such as [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com) or [www.southwest.com](http://www.southwest.com). But the packages at Student Universe can't be beat. Spotted recently: "Pub crawl with musicians in Dublin from \$12."

car companies, and be sure to check the rental-car company sites as well for last-minute deals or specials.

American Airlines ([www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)) now allows you to use your frequent-flyer miles to cover the cost of rental cars through its Aadvantage program, and many rental companies allow you to earn frequent-flyer miles with each rental, but beware the extra fee that may be tacked on when you sign up for such a program. When comparing prices, make sure to calculate all the taxes and fees.

**10 DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF TO JUST ONE COUNTRY.** If

you're in Europe and want to hop from country to country (you might as well!), look for budget airlines such as EasyJet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) or Ryanair ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)). They offer ridiculously cheap flights in and around Europe. Flights can cost as little as 99 pence, plus taxes. However, you have to plan well, warns frequent business traveler Dave Alspector. "If you miss check-in, which is 40 minutes before your flight leaves, you have to purchase another ticket or pay a \$40 surcharge."

There are some disadvantages to be aware of: Ryanair, for example, mainly operates out of the secondary airports of major

cities to keep costs down, so you might spend a while getting to and from airports. But, as my mother so aptly puts it, "Honey, it's cheaper to take EasyJet from Geneva to Barcelona than it is to walk." A strong point.

**11 LOOK FOR MOVEABLE BEDS.** Another great way to get around in Europe is to take sleeper trains; this way you combine the cost of a hotel room with the cost of travel.



The Metro: Riding the rails in Paris.

**12 TAKE TO THE HIGH SEAS.** Cruise packages offer great value.

As with the sleeper train, the combination of transportation and hotel accommodation here

equals big savings. Royal Caribbean ([www.royalcaribbean.com](http://www.royalcaribbean.com)) has a four-night cruise of the Bahamas and Key West for under \$500, per person, double occupancy. Cruises include breakfast and dinner, but not gratuities, nor, sadly, alcohol. And, no, you can't sneak it aboard with you. I tried and failed. To find a variety of good deals and advice, visit [www.cruisedeals.com](http://www.cruisedeals.com), where you can read customer reviews, as well as reserve berths.

Bon voyage! ☐

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