

How to Save Money When You Travel

OLLI UNT Solo Travelers SIG

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Prepared by Carolyn Hodge, Co-Lead for Keller Meetings

Searching for Great Deals

Join rewards/loyalty programs (hotel, airline, credit card) - earn free flights, accumulate points for flight, hotel, or other use

Look for credit cards with sign-up/welcome bonuses, zero international fees for transactions, 2x to 4x points on travel purchases, complimentary travel insurance, or even refunding ATM fees

Consider branded credit cards with hotels or airlines

Book lodging as early as possible, look for places offering deals, weekday pricing vs weekend pricing

Special Event Savings

Cruises – off season, end of summer sales, “Viking Book More, Save More”; AA “Sail and Save”

Flights – rebates on using loyalty points (AA has a promotion for 5% rebates on miles used between now and completed trip Dec 19)

Attractions and Activities

Look for free events – beaches, parks, museums (many have entry fees, some don't; some have discounted tickets at certain times or have free nights), art galleries, seasonal festivals, etc

Free walking tours will give you a feel for the area and help learn about local culture; ask local tour guides about affordable restaurants, things to do – they're local, so they'll have their fingers on the pulse of cost saving activities

Consider avoiding high tourist seasons – spring break, Mardi Gras, Salem in October, etc

Likewise consider avoiding tourist areas -- booking hotels, VRBO, AirBnB outside the main drag (however, you can also crunch the numbers to see which is more costly – hotel in central area or transportation into and out of your desired activity areas)

City Attraction/Tourism Cards/Passes (GoCity or CityPASS)

Some offer free entry to a city's top attractions, discounts at restaurants and shops, skip-the-line options at busy attractions, free public transportation, and even guidebooks

Better than buying individual tickets for your activities, sightseeing, etc

Pre-Book Activities/Excursions

Pre-booking activities and attractions saves time and eliminates the stress of last-minute decisions. Itineraries can be planned in advance, ensuring travelers make the most of their time in each destination

Pre-booking often comes with early-bird discounts and exclusive access to limited-time offers.

Pre-booking helps avoid the disappointment of missing out on popular activities and attractions, especially during peak travel seasons.

Pre-booking allows traveler to customize itineraries to suit their preferences, whether adventure activities, cultural experiences (including museums, wine tastings,), theme park visits, or food tours

Pre-booking activities and attractions allows greater convenience – no standing in long lines (possible priority access) or making last-minute decisions about what to do next.

Conversely, leaving some time in itineraries to explore and relax on your own can lead to some fascinating experiences.

Be flexible and adapt – if something doesn't go according to plan, another opportunity may come up to be enjoyed instead. Stepping outside of your comfort zone may lead to some of the best experiences. Sometimes the unexpected can lead to the most memorable experiences.

Avoid Overspending

- Prioritizing needs over wants – limit impulse buying

- Track your expenses (all of them) – software vs personal monitoring

- Reduce alcohol/soda consumption – save on drinks, particularly with meals

- Save on car rental, fuel, reduce carbon footprint – walk, use public transportation (buses, metro, trains), consider ride share rather than taxis, or rent bicycles (Rome2rio and RideGuru are good sites to study transportation – including overnight train or bus travel between destinations to avoid another hotel cost)

- Create a travel budget – stick with it; stay committed (know when to save and when to splurge – if you save significant amount in one area, you have extra to spend in another)

- Avoid buying trinkets just to have a memento (take lots of pictures); buy something of substance, like candies, gourmet food, or fine wine (if they don't break the budget)

- Avoid exchanging currency before you travel or even after; use ATMs, they give better rates

Eating Out vs Grocery Shopping

- Eat at expensive restaurants at lunch rather than dinner

- Take advantage of complimentary hotel breakfasts (grab a piece of fruit or cereal bar before you head out) and/or happy hour snacks

- If hotel doesn't have breakfast (and choosing one that does helps with the budget), consider going to a bakery for a pastry and coffee

- Get a room with a kitchen (or at least a microwave and fridge) – head out to farmers' markets or grocery stores (if no kitchen, improvise – almost all have fridges); even if you don't cook, you can bring leftovers back

- Consider an AirBnb or VRBO – fully equipped

- Pack provisions when possible or again, head to a market (have a picnic in a park)

Other Thrifty Options

- Look for cheaper lots if you drive your car to airport (or try to get friend or relative to take you – but reward them in some way)

- Book hotels outside main tourist areas – research the areas you plan to visit to find least expensive options

- Be flexible – look for flights during the week, which are cheaper than on weekends, in fact, Tuesday and Wednesday are the cheapest days for air travel; check flights into or out of nearby cities rather than directly into your destination

- Research your area of interest to determine whether panhandlers or tourist traps (taking a picture with a faux celebrity or superhero) – if you know the area is prone to either, specifically panhandlers, be sure to secure wallets and purses

- Get off the beaten track – avoid the touristy places, like restaurants catering to tourists; go slower as you visit the area (no need to rush from here to there); dine locally; meet the people

- Carry snacks and water with you on your daily activities – have a collapsible, refillable water bottle or another type

- If you're on a hiking trip, consider camping out some nights

- Be sure to pack all your essentials, so you don't have to buy them while traveling (especially easily forgotten items like sunscreen and hats – purchasing them later adds to your costs)

Depending on your trip and the length – pack light; try to get everything in your carryon, or, and this is another reason to stay in a VRBO or AirBnB, make sure it has a washer and dryer; also bring travel laundry soap and rinse out clothing in the bathroom sink

Make a list – include EVERYTHING you will need/want with you

Bottom Line/Summary

There are many ways to save money while traveling, but it all comes down to the traveler's personal style and wants vs needs.

Some travelers prefer to having their vacations planned out; others prefer to get boots on the ground before discovering what they want to do and see

Saving money in one area may lead to having extra to spend in another.

There are many resources to help travelers plan their fabulous trips, but it may entail some individual research.

Resources

The Points Guy – www.thepointsguy.com

Nomadic Matt – www.nomadicmatt.com

Travels with Elle – www.travelswithelle.com

Sure Tavel – www.suretravel.co.zad

Addendum – Sources provided by members at the KSAC meeting on 10/10/24

OAT – Overseas Adventure Travel – <https://www.oattravel.com>

Road Scholar – <https://www.roadscholar.org>

Cruise Critic – <https://www.cruisecritic.com>

Cruise Compare – <https://www.cruisecompare.co.uk>

Travel with Alan – <https://www.travelwithalan.com>

Vacations to Go – <https://www.vacationstogo.com> (travel agency in Houston)

Trip Advisor – <https://www.tripadvisor.com/forums> (reviews)

There are many sites that have all kinds of information from cost comparisons to reviews to solo traveler specific to ways to save money, enjoy your adventures, find the right vacation, etc. The joy is in finding what works for the individual traveler. Happy Solo Traveling.

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