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Top Tips for Travel Bargains

by Fiona Harper



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Everyone wants a bargain, particularly when it comes to holiday fun. Frugal travel writer Fiona Harper shares her tips for holiday travel on a budget.

We all want to get the most value for every dollar, euro or pound that we spend whilst traveling! Here are some top travel bargain tips for those in search of value:

1) Be flexible

It's true not everyone can be flexible but it will help your chances of snatching a bargain. 'Early bird' airfares used to be the best way of snapping up cheap airfares but the internet changed all that so that it's possible to find bargains aplenty if you book at the last minute. Not a tactic to recommend if you absolutely must be in a certain location on a certain date (like for a wedding or family reunion for example!), or if there's a major event happening (like the Grand Prix or AFL final in Melbourne).

Booking late is also fraught with anxiety for families as the more people to be accommodated, the fewer bargains there are. However for singles or couples who don't mind a bit of holiday mystery, being flexible on dates, digs or even your destination will provide maximum bargain potential.

On the other hand, booking early may offer good savings if you know well in advance where you want to travel and when, or to take advantage of favourable exchange rates.

2) One way vehicle relocations

Car and motorhome rental companies regularly require vehicles to be moved between city depots. One way rentals may cost as little as \$1 per day with a fuel package often thrown in too. You'll need to have a valid driver's license and the ability to allow approx. \$1,000 bond to be held against your credit card. Ask for an extension of the delivery date if you want to take a leisurely road trip, stopping overnight at caravan parks or motels along the way. Not limited to Australia, one way relocations are available in NZ, US & Canada. Check www.imoova.com

The downside is that routes and time frame for delivery are limited so you'll need to be flexible (see Tip No. 1). Car companies also reserve the right to cancel your scheduled relocation if a customer suddenly makes a last minute booking of the vehicle you've been allocated.

3) Stay in a cabin

Caravan parks are often overlooked as accommodation options but they're actually a pretty good source of cheap accommodation. No need to pitch a tent as most have fully self-contained cabins that will accommodate a family with the added bonus of cooking facilities, more space than a hotel room and with convenient parking at the door. Onsite cabins can be found in scenic beach or riverside locations, making them great value particularly when travelling beyond major cities.

Some like (multi award winning) Cairns Coconut Holiday Resort are more like adventure theme parks with enough distractions to make a stay almost a holiday in itself. www.coconut.com.au

4) Cheap air travel

It's a bit of a lottery bagging cheap flights but it is possible to secure bargains without taking out a second mortgage. Sign up to airline newsletters so you're alerted to their specials first. Become a frequent flyer member and start accruing points immediately, even if you've never flown X airline before. Within Australia, mid-week travel is often cheaper than travelling on Monday or Friday on popular business routes. Avoid flying during school holiday periods and long weekends as specials are rarely available during peak times.

Internationally, low cost carriers like Air Asia (Kuala Lumpur), Jetstar Asia or Scoot (Singapore) offer well priced airfares in and out of their hub cities. Travelling only with hand luggage will save on baggage fees (wear a coat with deep pockets to carry heavy items like cameras etc). Make sure in advance that checked in luggage is within airline limits to avoid nasty excess fees on check in.

Air Passes purchased in conjunction with an international ticket can be good value if you're planning on taking lots of flights within a region.

How to snag that elusive upgrade? It always pays to be polite, but none more so than at check in (where upgrades are usually determined). Or you could use accrued frequent flyer points to 'pay' for an upgrade.

5) Free Attractions

It's not necessary to splurge on expensive restaurants, glitzy entertainment or thrilling theme parks to get to know the nuts and bolts of your holiday destination. Put on your walking shoes, sling a comfortable backpack over your shoulder to carry the day's supplies and explore by foot. You'll likely come across interesting back streets, cafes and bars frequented by locals, tree-lined parks, riverside boardwalks or fresh produce markets to poke around in. Linger long enough to strike up conversation with a local and who knows what hidden secrets will be revealed about their hometown.

History and art buffs will already know that most museums and galleries are free to enjoy, but so too are many living museums in the form of historic or iconic hotels (like Raffles Hotel Singapore) and public buildings (Sydney Opera House).

6) Use local transport

Exploring a city by public transport is not only a cheap way to get around but it's also a useful tool to 'get your bearings'. Most cities will have a multi-day visitor pass allowing travel on the entire network. Do be safety aware though, keep your wits about you and keep track of your whereabouts so you can find your way back to your hotel. Carry the hotel's business card with you, which often show a location diagram to hand to taxi drivers in case you get hopelessly lost.

In some Asian cities like Bangkok it's just as easy to hail a cab or one of the ubiquitous tuk tuks for a few dollars. Melbourne has a free hop on hop off City Tram that runs all day every day.

7) Compare & Share

Comparison websites have taken much of the mystery out of airfare rules and routes. Kayak, Skyscanner, Hotel Fairy or Webjet allow travellers to punch in routes and dates to find good deals on flights and accommodation. The best also have maps that show exact hotel locations so it's easy enough to find a hotel that's on the public transport system (saving on airport cabs as well as making for easy exploration) or within walking distance of attractions.

Traveller review sites that can be easily manipulated should be utilised with caution – don't assume that all reviews are from genuine travellers.

Social media is handy for getting a prompt response from a hotel to clarify details on location, facilities, renovations or disruptions, checking out other traveller's feedback as well as learning about last minute specials not advertised elsewhere.

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