

Plan Your Summer Vacation on a Budget

Summer vacation time is just around the corner. Planning ahead can keep your vacation from blowing your entire budget for the summer. Here are a few planning and budgeting tips that will keep your vacation relaxing and reduce the stress on your wallet at the same time!

Time it right

Picking the right time for your family vacation is difficult. There are several schedules to juggle, after all! When you're selecting the best dates, keeping pricing in mind will save you money. Hotel rates fluctuate with supply and demand, so it really pays to go against the flow. In many popular summer resort destinations, prices peak between July 4 and mid-August. Consequently, vacationing in June or late-August can translate into significant savings. Tourist attraction admission prices fluctuate in much the same way. If you're flying to your destination, keep in mind that it's typically less expensive to fly on Wednesdays than on Fridays.

Watch for freebies and coupons

Whether you're selecting a hotel/resort or setting up your itinerary, be on the lookout for cost-saving bonuses, such as free continental breakfasts and cheap transportation to attractions or tourist destinations. Before you leave, look for coupons for activities and events near your destination. Planning your vacation around the savings - rather than trying to find ways to save on events or activities you've already committed to - will make keeping the budget in check easier.

Pack your own meals

Packing your own meals is one of the most effective ways to save money on a vacation. Eating out for every meal will cost hundreds of dollars each week. If you plan to stay at a hotel or resort that provides cooking space, simply plan to go grocery shopping on the day of your arrival; just have a meal plan prepared so you don't over-shop! If you want to avoid grocery shopping in a new location, you can pre-make freezable meals such as casseroles, soups and lasagna to bring along.

If you don't have access to a kitchen where you are staying, you can get creative and still save on food. For example, if you are going to the beach or the park for the day, instead of buying lunch, pack a picnic in a cooler. Head to a grocery store or deli before you reach your destination and pick up the basics for sandwiches, plus some fruit and other snacks.

Vacation locally

Finally, you can get the most bang for your vacation buck by avoiding travel altogether. If you plan sightseeing trips and activities that are within a few hours' drive of your home, your hotel costs disappear and you definitely save on gas. Careful planning can result in a week-long "staycation" that's more relaxing than a trip across the country!



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