

20 Tips for Frugal, Fun, and Successful Travel

by Casey D. Allen, Geographer, PhD

1. Plan to go and follow-through. If you plan to go, you will. First-time planning is best done in stages and baby steps.
2. Make sacrifices. Travel is a matter of priorities, and if you want it bad enough, you will make it happen – even if it means foregoing a major purchase (do you *really* need the \$4000 70” curved 4K UHD TV, or could you get by with the \$1000 50” UHD TV from Walmart? If your budget for a TV was \$4000, and you got by with the 50”, that would leave you with enough money for two round-trip tickets to lots of places around the world!)
 - This tip also extends to *while* you’re traveling. Although the Penthouse at the Waldorf might be what you’re used to back home, the two star *Hotel Acueducto* may be the only thing in your price range (or available). Travel is a cultural experience, and that involves unfamiliar things, even if it is the *Hotel Acueducto*.
3. Be flexible! Step outside your comfort zone. Be daring and adventurous, but careful and not paranoid. And use common sense (like, if the alley is dark, avoid it...)
4. Spend time reflecting quietly (perhaps solo) during your travels. Just make sure you use common sense (see previous tip).
5. Figure a budget for your trip, and stick to it. If you can only visit one place this time around, then visit that place and see as much as you can. Just be happy you are traveling! If you enjoy traveling, you *will* keep doing it! The travel itself is what’s important.
6. Travel to the place (or places) where airfare is cheapest. For example, if you’ve always wanted to see France, but airfare is much cheaper to Amsterdam during the time you want to (or can) go, then go to the Netherlands! There is plenty to see in and around the Netherlands (you can even make France and/or Germany a side-trip from there). If *travel* is your goal, focus on that instead of a specific location perhaps (see previous tip).
7. Watch the Internet for travel specials, and especially cheap airfare. Set-up a “farewatcher” at a couple of the travel websites (like kayak.com or even your preferred airline) and pay special attention to open-jaw flights (flying into one city and out of another), as they can save you money by saving precious travel time in the long run.
8. Travel with more than one person. A group of 4 people, while *sometimes* fun, will *always* cut-down the overall cost (especially if you can share a quad room or apartment and split the cost of a rental car).
9. Learn about the place(s) to which you are traveling. Why do you want to visit Italy? For the art? Wine? Architecture? Nude beaches? Whatever the reason for your desire to visit, learn about *that*...and whatever else you can! It will make the trip much more memorable.
10. Learn basic survival phrases if traveling to a foreign-speaking country: yes, no, hello, please, thank you, “where is...” and “I would like” are useful and easy to learn in any language.
11. Speak to others who have been to the place(s) you’re going, and get their opinions. But remember, opinions are like armpits: we all have them, and at one time or another, they stink. Get the information, and then make your own judgments based on the evidence.
12. Eat like a local, drive like a local, and live like a local while you’re there. Who knows what you will learn?
13. Travel during the off season. You get a different *sense of place* when it’s off season, and see things others never would.
14. Avoid (or spend less time in) tourist havens when it’s high season. Paris is pretty in the summer, even with the seemingly-millions of tourists and higher temperatures...but so are the French Alps, *Loire Valley*, and Brittany Coast, with their milder temperatures, fewer people, and beautiful vistas...
15. Leverage credit cards for travel perks and use points and/or miles to help off-set the costs.
16. Never be afraid to ask a question (but always begin it in the native language).

17. Be open-minded and strive for understanding. Just because something is different to you, does not mean that it's wrong (or right). If you don't understand something, ask. Learn that there are more ways than only your way. Be challenged by others' beliefs and be respectful of them.
18. If something isn't to your liking, then change your liking (this is a Rick Steves quote, and it's helped me and countless others have a richer travel experience).
19. Take at least one day to relax for each week you travel. For example, if you have a two-week trip planned, work in *at least* two days to just *be*. Relax in the hotel room, stay at a park. Just slow down and relax. You might be surprised at what you see!
20. Leave something for next time. You *will* return.

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