

## CHEAP TRICKS for a GREAT TRIP

by Donna Coutts in the Herald Sun

DO YOU shop at Aldi, buy fuel on Tuesdays and haunt eBay for bargains? Well, dear canny consumer, don't blow the budget on a holiday then. Saving cash on your next trip is as easy as learning a few tricks, making time for thorough research and being flexible about destination and timing.

\*\*\*\* Beware of deals that seem too good to be true: they usually are. Read the fine print before you pay. And look for reviews from other travellers before you book.\*\*\*\*

### **High flying**

FLEXIBILITY is the key to saving on flights. Peak season is more expensive and cheap flights are rarely available on Mondays and Fridays, when business people fill planes.

- Cheap seats are easier to find on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings for domestic travel.
- Consider alternative airports: [Belfast City](#) instead of Belfast International, for example.
- Subscribe to airline email bulletins and watch for newspaper and TV ads. Early-bird deals are usually worth it. And always book as soon as you find a good deal, certainly more than 21 days before you fly.
- Booking your own flight on the internet can be cheaper than using an agent, but good agents are worth their fees. They are aware of specials and know tricks about routes and schedules likely to yield cheap deals.
- Ask about round-the-world deals, alternative routes and splitting your trip with stopovers, which can save money.
- If you book your own flight, use comparison websites such as [Webjet](#); [Moving Saving Expert](#) and [Cheap Ticket Links](#)

### **Pillow talk**

BAD accommodation is a waste of money, no matter how cheap. Thorough research is the way to find good value. And you have to do the research yourself, because what one traveller considers a bargain is a waste of money to another.

- Ask friends and agents for personal recommendations, read up-to-date guidebooks and search for traveller reviews.
- A visit to [tripadvisor.com](#) is essential. Check accommodation when you research flights, because there are often combo deals.
- Use last-minute sites such as [wotif.com](#) even if you're outside the hotel. Ask at reception for the best rate and compare that to the [wotif.com](#) price. Beware of arriving at your destination at peak time without bookings. You could pay exorbitant rates.

### **For tough times**

THINK of travel insurance as potentially saving you money. An accident or illness overseas could cost you hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is an expensive holiday in anyone's language. But don't waste money on overpriced or inappropriate cover.

- Check your credit-card policy. American Express and some platinum & gold Visa cards include travel insurance, but conditions apply. You may have to pay for all or part of your trip with that credit card to be eligible or there may be a small annual fee.
- Also check your existing health insurance policies, which you may be able to upgrade for a fee to include travel.
- Shop around to buy a specific policy. Travel agents' commissions on insurance are high, so you may be able to find something cheaper by buying direct online. Check comparison sites such as [travelinsurance.com.au](#)

### **Steer clear of gear**

- NEVER pay full price for travel gear. Wait for sales and keep an eye on eBay. If you need serious gear for extreme environments, borrow or hire what you can. New Australian site [rentoid.com](#) is excellent.
- Rethink what you really need. Aside from outdoor trips, you need only one small bag, a raincoat, a couple of changes of clothes and toiletries. Heavy luggage is a burden.

### **Money for jam**

- IF EXCHANGE rates are favourable for your destination before you go, buy cash and – if you want them – travellers' cheques from an outlet offering low commissions.
- Airport outlets usually aren't the cheapest. Monitor exchange rates as soon as you decide on your destination.
- Shop around the banks at home for a credit or ATM debit card without currency conversion or overseas ATM fees. It may be worth opening a new account that you can close as soon as you return.
- Some businesses apply a surcharge to credit card transactions, usually 1 to 5 per cent. When overseas, insist on your transactions in the local currency. If businesses offer to convert it to Australian \$\$\$, they will probably

add on a commission for themselves.

### **Move en masse**

- TAKE public transport where possible. Beware of special airport services that run parallel to regular trains and buses. Unless you're in a hurry, they are rarely good value.
- If you're hiring a car, pick it up from the airport and save on transfers.
- A good car-hire deal requires research. Compare travel agents' deals to those you can find online. Good comparison sites are [vroomvroomvroom.co.uk](http://vroomvroomvroom.co.uk); [travelsupermarket.com](http://travelsupermarket.com) and [carhire.com.au](http://carhire.com.au)
- If you need a car for a one-way trip, don't be shy about emailing a hire company before you book to ask if you can relocate a car for the company in return for a discount.

### **Every bite counts**

DON'T waste money on food or drink you don't appreciate.

- Sit down at a Parisian cafe for an expensive coffee or fizzy water and watch the world go by if that's an experience you'll talk about forever. But if you're simply thirsty, buy your drink at a supermarket.
- Refill your water bottle where safe with tap water (boiled if you prefer).
- Restaurant lunches are usually cheaper than dinner and the set menu of the day is often better value.
- Have a holiday from the food you eat at home. You can get a lot of bowls of soup or noodles in Asia for the price of a steak.

### **Museum fatigue**

BE CLEAR on why you're on holiday: to relax, soak up the street life or tick off every tourist attraction?

- The lesson? Don't feel obliged to pay expensive entry fees to attractions every day if you will get as much out of wandering the streets or lazing on the beach or the park.
- If you have your heart set on a particular attraction, find cheap tickets or multi-use passes. In the UK, consider buying National Trust, London and Britrail passes.
- Look in newspapers and tourist brochures for discount coupons. Many museums and galleries offer free or discounted entry.
- Many museums and countries have free entry on certain days of the month or on public holidays.

### **Quick, hang up**

THE fastest way to chew up your holiday money is to use hotel phones.

- Read your phone-plan details carefully before you take your mobile. Even receiving calls on your Australian mobile when you're overseas usually costs you.
- Pre-pay phone cards are the go. Buy a card when you arrive at your destination and ask the shopkeeper (try convenience stores first) for the best card to call Australia. Cards that cost a few dollars will give hours of call time.
- Buy a country-specific SIM card for your mobile **BUT** it must be "unlocked" - check with your provider that it is unlocked.
- If you are going to several countries, consider an international SIM card for your mobile, Try [www.cellularabroad.com/cellAbroadSIMcard.php](http://www.cellularabroad.com/cellAbroadSIMcard.php) They usually do not charge to receive calls.
- With any mobile, send & receive text messages - much cheaper than voice messages. Tell people not to leave voice messages for you if you do not answer (expensive for you) - ask them to send a text with the same information.
- Internet cafes are everywhere. Set up your portable email account with a provider such as Hotmail or Yahoo before you leave home.