

Your MONTHLY MONEY

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6 Tips for Saving Money on Summer Vacation Travel

Check out these money-saving tips before you hit the road or skies this summer.

A new poll of 2,500 Americans shows 8 in 10 are pumping the breaks on their summer travel this year. Why? Inflation, according to the survey from personal finance site Bankrate.

“This year, as prices and interest rates continue to push higher, we’re seeing more signals that vacationers are adapting their plans,” says Ted Rossman, Bankrate spokesman. “Many are still going somewhere, but they’re being more thoughtful about how they’re spending.”

If you’ve nixed summer travel plans or shortened planned vacations because travel is expensive, don’t be too quick to resign yourself to another year of “staycations.” Instead, try these six money-saving tips to stretch vacation funds.

1. Book cheaper accommodations

Most people would love to kick back in a beachfront hotel with an ocean view. But most people also can’t afford the high cost of oceanfront vacation rentals and hotels. To save hundreds of dollars, why not book a hotel blocks away or even a few minutes’ drive from the beach?

Wherever you want to travel, don’t be so much of a hotel snob that you overlook modest accommodations. Just be sure to check out reviews from former guests to make sure the hotel is safe, clean and in a convenient location.

2. Take advantage of free stuff

To save money on summer travel, research free events, museums, local parks, monuments and other free or nominal-fee attractions before you go.

While you’re at it, don’t forget to check out free music and other festivals taking place on the dates you’ll be your destination. That way, you can still have a great time without spending a fortune on entertainment and sightseeing.

3. Mind your gas mileage

With national gas prices averaging around \$3.40 a gallon, the gas pump can suck up a lot of money you'd otherwise save or spend on fun things like going out to eat and sightseeing during vacation.

You can improve your car's gas mileage by anywhere from 0.6% to 3% on your summer road trip simply by keeping tires inflated to the proper PSI, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Other ways to save on gas include making sure your engine is tuned and using the manufacturer's recommended grade of motor oil.

If your road trip involves multiple states, look up gas prices for each state at GasBuddy. You may be able to save on gas by just waiting to fill up until after you cross the state line.

4. Cash in credit card rewards

Have you racked up a lot of cash back, airline miles or other rewards on credit cards? Total them up and redeem what you can towards airfare, hotels, gift cards or other ways to pay for vacation travel.

5. Comparison shop

Were the prices for lodging and airfare the reason you put off or canceled your summer vacation? Maybe look again, this time comparing prices of a number of hotels. Maybe one has a special rate they didn't have last time you looked.

Go online to hotel sites and compare prices. Do the same with airfare, checking fares for several airlines.

6. Be flexible with dates

If possible, have some wiggle room on vacation travel dates. For example, if the airfare is higher on Saturday, check what the fare would be on a different day the same week. Hotels usually cost more on weekend nights, so you probably save significantly by staying on weeknights.

But the way to really save on vacation is to delay summer travel until the fall. That's when hotel and car rental rates drop, potentially saving big money on your trip.