

Top 11 Money Saving Holiday Travel Tips



As we head into November, Americans are scrambling to book a cheap holiday before 2012 comes to a close. Whether you're traveling across country to visit the parents, or rounding up the little ones en masse for a holiday reunion this season, there are many **money saving tips** for those traveling on a budget.

#1. Avoid Peak Travel Days



Peak travel days are the busiest and most expensive days to travel during the holiday season. Typically, they fall on the days just before and after major holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

For example, **Thanksgiving** flight peak travel days are the Wednesday preceding Thanksgiving Day and the Sunday after Thanksgiving. In 2011, roundtrip, non-stop fare from Los Angeles to New York on these dates was \$1,030–\$1,230 per person on Delta Airlines.

When **traveling on a budget**, working with a flexible schedule can help. Last year, travelers departing from Los Angeles to New York from the same airline on the morning of Thanksgiving Day and returning on the following Saturday (instead of Sunday) spent \$509 – \$619, helping to save about 50 percent in transportation costs. (Photo: Daz /SWAN MAN)

#2. Take Advantage of Airline “Dead Weeks”

If you don't need to make an appearance on the holiday proper and simply want to visit friends or family during the holiday season, airlines often experience “dead weeks” between Thanksgiving and Christmas. This inactivity in airport terminals is a result of fewer business trips over the holiday months.

For instance, last year a round trip ticket from LAX to NYC departing on Tuesday, December 13 and returning Sunday, December 18 only ran around \$408 with Delta Airlines. By traveling between holidays, you can enjoy Thanksgiving leftovers and drop-off gifts in time for Christmas all in one trip.

#3. Know the Cheapest Days to Fly

More **holiday travel tips** include knowing about the cheapest days to fly. According to a study conducted by Farecompare.com, the cheapest domestic departure dates fall on Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. These three days have the least flight demand, as Americans tend to fly on days surrounding the weekend.

#4. Take the Train

As airline transportation rises in popularity, traveling by train has taken a backseat. However, frugal travelers can **book a cheap holiday** trip with railway companies like Amtrak.

Traveling by train does require the luxury of a flexible schedule, since travel time is lengthier than by airplane. Despite this fact, you can benefit from saving about \$100 with train travel.



In 2011, train tickets for trips departing from Los Angeles on December 21 and arriving in New York on December 24 was an economical \$208, and a return trip was at a fair \$301, totaling \$509 round trip. In comparison, Delta Airline rates were up to \$645 for a comparable flight. (Photo: blmurch)

#5. Book Large Parties Separately

If you plan on traveling domestically with a large group, you may see incredible discounts just by shopping for tickets separately. Major airlines have about 10 price levels to choose from, depending on your seating location. However, many airline websites and comparison websites like Expedia.com and Travelocity.com conduct seating availability based on the number of people in your group and which price level has that occupancy number available.

So, even if there are two or three less expensive seats, everyone in your party will be charged at the higher rate. While booking each person's flight separately may cause a bit of an inconvenience, it's relatively mild when there's an opportunity to save hundreds in the process.

Additionally, flight attendants may be willing to relocate part of your party next to each other once you're on the plane, if availability permits.

#6. Don't Buy Tickets Too Early or Too Late

A common mistake travelers make is purchasing airline tickets too early. Often, airlines don't even begin to actively assess their rates versus demand and availability until about 3 to 4 months in advance.

Booking flights earlier than this sets you up for overspending. Another misconception is that prices lower when you book flights at the last minute. Adhere to the 3 to 4 month guideline and you'll be in for peak savings opportunities for holiday traveling.

Additionally, Mark Drusch Chief Supplier Relations Officer of CheapOair.com shares, "... to get the best deals, for those last minute travelers, a tip is to check airfare late at night, which is when airlines tend to launch major fare sales."

#7. Stay with Family or Friends

Staying with relatives is always a great option when traveling on a budget. Why spend hundreds of dollars on a hotel room with fees and bloated prices when you have a homey guest room that awaits you with family or friends?

#8. Couches are Free



Free-spirited travelers looking to gain worldly perspective, while getting a FREE roof over their heads, can turn to a rapidly growing community called [CouchSurfing](#).

Households worldwide are opening their homes to visitors traveling on a budget. This community of CouchSurfers and hosts create online profiles, submit references and reviews of each other and continue to strengthen the network each day.

While this option is ideal for the lone traveler, it provides a great opportunity to save money, meet interesting people and be immersed in diverse cultures.

Avid CouchSurfer, Kent Lam, expressed, "People you normally meet [outside of CouchSurfing] share a common interest with you already—they're just like you—but [CouchSurfing] gives you insight to the lives of complete strangers living anywhere in the world. It helps broaden and diversify the experience."

Lam stated he wasn't living frugally, yet saved an "astronomical" amount of money in boarding and transportation costs. (Photo: [Dennis](#))

#9. Negotiate Hotel Rates

Many holiday travelers overlook chances to book a cheap holiday by neglecting to contact the hotel directly and compare rates. When speaking to a hotel representative, there may be an option to save on rooms that aren't advertised on travel websites. Once you've identified exactly what type of accommodations your party needs, speaking to a person one-on-one allows more room to negotiate rates.

At the very least, travelers can get free upgrades or added services at no additional cost. For example, when I visited Las Vegas, I mentioned that I was celebrating a birthday and our room got upgraded two tiers for free. Additionally, you can negotiate for smaller things like free wi-fi connection to help take the strain off of your wallet.

#10. Compare Nearby Airport Airfares

When traveling to well-frequented cities over the holidays, find out whether there is more than one airport in the vicinity. Opting for the airport that's located farther away from a major metropolitan area can bring great savings when traveling on a budget.

Michael McColl, publisher of TravellInsider.com, encourages you to "price out your flight options from alternate airports."

"For instance, rates can be very different for flights departing from Oakland vs San Francisco, or Newark vs La Guardia vs JFK. Also true on the destination side, Gatwick vs Heathrow, etc.," says McColl, "The more options you research, the better chance of saving."

#11. Look for Package Deals

Many travel sites promote package deals to aid in traveling on a budget. By booking the flight, hotel and rental car in a single sitting, holiday travelers can save a couple hundred dollars and some time in the process.

With these holiday travel tips, a bit of schedule flexibility and a creative eye for cutting costs, you can find success when traveling on a budget.