

HOW TO TRAVEL ON THE CHEAP

Airlines are cutting back flights and charging for everything they possibly can – including checking luggage and in some cases even sitting in an aisle seat. Pretty soon, they’re going to begin charging you for each piece of toilet paper you use, or each napkin you are required to have to put under your cup for your soda. (Not really, but that seems to be where this is heading...)

Gas is hitting the roof. To drive from home to work is becoming increasingly expensive due to the continued rise in the cost of gasoline. On the news, you see that more and more people are beginning to bike or take public transportation – both good moves if feasible!

In this down economy, our brothers, and everyone else, who used to travel regularly are taking more and more time off from hitting the roads/skies. However, when travel is necessary for business or pleasure, we hope that you will find value in the resources outlined below that are intended to assist in helping you travel more cheaply and efficiently.

AIRFARE

When booking airfare, there are a number of ways and places to look to find the best fares. If you look online, there are hundreds of sites that give you travel ideas and tips for finding good airfares. We tried to consolidate the main tips below to help you.

TIPS:

1. **Buy early** – With airlines continuing to cut down on service and ground planes, it is best to look for your fares early. If you can book four months ahead of time, you are likely to easily find a flight and seat that you want, and you lock in your fare in case it rises as your trip gets closer.
2. **Know When to Buy** – Use the web site www.farecast.com to see a history of when airlines have the cheapest fares. In my research, I did an example search from O’Hare in Chicago to San Diego for a trip I was taking about a month and a half after I wrote this story. The site advised me to buy, as it was likely that the cost would rise within the next seven days by between \$26 and \$52. There was a high level of confidence using their history tracking technology.
3. **Be Flexible** – According to Rickseaney.com, a travel blog led by travel expert Rick Seaney, the cheapest day of the week to travel is Wednesday. If you can book your trip for a Wednesday, you are likely to find cheap airfares. The next best days are Tuesdays and Saturdays. Rick also says not to travel on holidays or major events to find cheap fares.
4. **Sign up for all of the Frequent Flyer Programs** – While these days, it’s harder and harder to find non-

blackout seats when you want to use your miles, you might as well sign up for all of these free programs to get something for traveling on the airlines. If you happen to fly enough to earn a free flight, you’ll be glad you signed up originally.

WHERE TO LOOK:

1. Online sites like Orbitz, Hotwire, Expedia and Travelocity are all good for comparing prices of the major carriers. However, when you go to buy the tickets, you are better off going to the carrier’s site specifically to avoid the service charge (usually \$5) that are charged by the aforementioned travel sites.
2. Don’t forget to check out discount carriers like JetBlue and Southwest when booking. While most times they are not included in the comparisons you’ll find on Orbitz, Expedia and Travelocity, you can find some great deals on flying on these airlines, AND in the case of JetBlue, they have newer planes and some additional perks like live television that the other carriers don’t have.

HOTELS

Hotels are another part of the travel experience whose price can be cut, even slashed, to allow for cheaper travel. Check out a few sites on page 48 that can be excellent opportunities for finding cheaper hotel travel, but



TIPS FROM BROTHERS

Delta Sig asked brothers on the Delta Sigma Phi Circle for some of their tips on traveling cheaply and efficiently, and here is what we found out:

1 TRAVELING INTERNATIONALLY

- Be wary of the money changers. Never EVER change your money with someone on the street or at the border, no matter how often they tell you that you can't change your current currency in the next country. The same should also be said for ForEx stands in the airport. Go to a bank, or use an ATM card to take out local currency.

Ken April, *Penn State '89*

- Research the public transportation and stay at a hotel outside of town and close to a main train, tram or bus station. We stayed at a nice hotel in the business center of Paris, La Defense, for \$75 a night. It was 3X less expensive than in the city center and only a 10 minute direct tram ride from the major attractions

If you travel frequently, look into opening an account at a bank with no foreign transaction fees. Some banks gold plate their toilet seats off the fees they collect from these transactions. Many Credit Unions and banks will allow withdrawals and purchases for little or no charge (e.g. Capital One Bank). Also, some banks have foreign

partner banks that you can use their ATMs for no charge (e.g. Bank of America and Deutsche Bank).

John Hooker, *New Mexico State '96*

2 TRAVELING TO VEGAS

- If you are traveling to Las Vegas, some good resources are a couple of web sites called cheapovegas.com (they are also a good link for coupons and other deals) and A2ZLV.com.

I found good deals on monorail passes by buying all day passes earlier in the summer when they were on sale. They are good for up to a year after they are issued.

Ron Willer, *Central Michigan '85*

3 BOOKING HOTELS

- Through my work, I am able to use a government/military rate for hotels and other things. Some may not know they have access to this discount. I may get an initial hotel rate of \$175, but when I "click" on government/military, the rate could be cut in half or at least \$20 cheaper.

Nathan Wight, *Illinois State '97*

- Two tips to bring down the accommodation prices in the future are stay at the same chain and more importantly same hotel. They all have computers and like to see

you have visited before, and because you are coming back they will be even better with customer service.

John Dandin, *CSU East Bay '93*

4 TAKING THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

- Traveling for me has always been the free and easy way, camping. There are so many locations along the unbeaten path that may not be mainstream, but offer a more beautiful and enjoyable experience. You do need to bring along all the essentials and leave the camp as clean as when you arrived, but there is nothing better than waking up with nature and hearing the sounds of a river alongside your camp, tent or travel trailer.

I typically do not pay and seek the more primitive campgrounds. There are campgrounds with reasonable rates and they offer water and the basics such as restrooms for \$10 - \$15 per site if you use national forest or BLM campgrounds. But traveling an even less traveled road offers even less expensive camping adventures, which typically offer more wildlife and greater unspoiled splendor.

Dane Zahner, *Central Michigan '86*

be careful – by using these sites, you will not get your valuable hotel rewards points!

1. **Priceline.com** – Priceline boasts that you can save up to 50% on 4-star hotel rooms in cities across the country by “Naming Your Own Price.” In my experience, I have been able to get discounts that are even better than that – sometimes as much as 60-70% off the published prices on the hotel sites themselves. Imagine this – on my frequent business trips for the Fraternity, I have often stayed at 4-star hotels downtown in cities across the country for between \$50 and \$60 per night. Even with the taxes, service fees and parking costs added to that, I always pay less than I would at a Hampton Inn, and get four-star treatment. A few drawbacks are that you don’t know the hotel at which you are staying until you have already accepted the price, you have to pay up front so if your plans change you are out of luck, and you don’t accrue hotel rewards points since you are purchasing your room from an outside vendor. To avoid the latter, you can pay with a credit card tied to hotel rewards points, and get one point for every dollar you spend, which allows you to continue bringing in hotel points during your stays.
2. **Hotwire.com** – With its catchy, twangy commercial jingle, this site boasts “4-star hotels at 2-star prices”, a claim that is hard to fathom considering most times, you can find better prices for 4-star hotels on Priceline by naming your own price. However, one of the positive things about Hotwire is that you are able to see the general area of the hotels they are promoting for the low prices, even though they do not tell you the exact hotel on which you are bidding. If you know the city, you can likely figure out which hotel it is without them telling you,

which is a nice addition to the low prices you receive.

Driving Cheaply/Car Rental

With the gas prices out of control, are you always checking out the signs at the stations trying to find the cheapest price as you are driving and burning your gas away? How about finding good rental car deals? Where are the best places to find those, and what are some tips for the rental car experience? See below for your answers.

FINDING CHEAP GAS

1. **Gasbuddy.com** – This web site has an amazingly robust database of the lowest gas prices in your county and even city – all the way down to the exact store and location of the cheapest gas. When I went to the site, I searched in my county and then my town, and found the lowest gas price is at the store at which I usually do all of my grocery shopping – lucky me! You too can find out the nearest low gas prices by heading online to this web site.
2. **Autos.msn.com** – On this web site, you can also find the cheapest gas prices in your area. While it didn’t show all of the stores and didn’t seem as robust as Gasbuddy, it is another option when checking out where the best place is to fill ‘er up.

RENTAL CAR TIPS

1. **Take the gas option if bringing your car back empty** – At most car rental agencies, they charge you at a much lower price per gallon to fill up the car upon its return, so make sure to take the gas option, and bring back the car bone dry. The drawback is if you still have gas in the tank when you return the car, you have essentially given the company free gas since you already paid for a full tank up front.
2. **Make sure to bring your car back full of gas (if you don’t take the gas option)** – If you don’t buy a full tank up front, and decide to fill it

up yourself before returning, be sure to bring it back full or you will be charged heftily upon your return. In most cases, rental companies charge double the cost of gas at the local station if you don’t bring it back full, so be sure to do so, or you will pay the price, literally.

3. **Know your insurance policy** – Check to make sure with your car insurance company that you are covered while driving rental cars. If so, you don’t need to purchase that policy for \$13/day that the companies try to sell you.

RENTAL CAR RESOURCES:

1. **Priceline.com** – Going back to Priceline here, as you can also “Name Your Own Price” for rental cars and save a bundle – up to 30% according to their site. This works best if you are renting at an airport as opposed to it being a local rental, so keep that in mind as you think about utilizing this resource. You go in, put in your airport, put in your arrival and departure times, and place a bid. It’s that easy, and you get a response in seconds on whether your price was accepted. Again, you pay up front and don’t get your rental car points, but you save a good chunk of change.
2. **Rentalcars.com** – This site provides you a list of the cost of cars at your location for at least seven of the top rental car companies that service your destination. It provides per day and total fees, and different from Priceline, allows you to not pay until you pick up the car. This option is another good one for renting a car in your destination at a cheap rate.

We hope that the ideas and resources contained in this story will be able to help you in your quest for cheaper travel on your next trip. May you have safe (and cheap) travels ahead of you!