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The Inside Scoop on Discount Travel

Save Money Through Apartment Swapping

Whenever one travels, the two most expensive elements are airfare and accommodation. It is for this reason that many people are not able to travel nearly as often as they would like. Some people, however, who have no more income than the average person, seem to constantly be taking trips. How do they do it? The secret is learning the art of discount travel - there exist many different techniques to make your trip much more affordable. A good one is the concept of apartment swapping.

Apartment swapping usually works through classified ad sites like craigslist.org, and work as follows: someone offers their apartment for a short amount of time - usually a week or two - to someone in the city they desire to travel to. If it works out, someone in the desired destination city is interested in coming to the city where the ad originates from, and the two people arrange to exchange apartments for a small time.

The beauty of the apartment swap in terms of discount travel is that it reduces your vacation costs almost exclusively to airfare. Especially when the swap involves expensive cities like New York, the swap can end up saving you the bulk of the costs associated with your trip. The other great thing about apartment swapping is that it often occurs at precisely the time in the year where accommodations are the most expensive.

If you look on a site like craigslist.org - which has a specific section devoted to apartment swapping - you'll see that the majority of apartment swaps occur for short periods over the holiday season. A typical ad will be someone that wants to spend New Year's in a different city, for example. And if it happens that you want to spend New Year's in the source city, you can save yourself a fortune and employ one of the best discount traveling techniques.

If you're interested in an apartment swap, go to craigslist.org and look through the ads located in your home city. Conversely, if you're looking to swap apartments, place your ad in the section devoted to the destination city. In other words, ads are of the "does anyone in here want my apartment in x for these dates?"

Of course, nothing comes without a price, and if you're considering apartment swapping for discount travel there are a few points you should keep in mind. The most obvious one is trust: you are letting a stranger stay in your apartment, with all your things. Even if you're not concerned about theft, try and get to know as much as you can about the potential swapper - you want to avoid someone who's going to have raucous parties that annoy your neighbors, or break your things. At the same time, the swapper is also placing a lot of trust in you - you're staying in his apartment with his things, after all - and so often this trust can be sort of balanced out.

If you're willing to trust people, and accept a reasonable amount of risk, apartment swapping can make a visit to another city extremely cheap, and is one of the best discount travel techniques out there.

Rent an Apartment Rather than Paying for a Hotel

For many people, traveling is one of the most enjoyable and culturally enlightening activities they can do. There are few experiences more memorable than seeing a different part of the world, and witnessing how different people interact and live. One of the problems, though, is that travel is one of the more expensive hobbies that one can have and, unless you happen to be quite wealthy, traveling on a regular basis isn't an option for most people. Even less of an option is a prolonged stay in any one place; that is unless you happen to have brushed up on some discount travel ideas that allow you to stretch your dollars much further than you would ever dream possible.

For instance, if you plan on staying in a city for more than a few weeks, you should consider renting an apartment. This is a great way to make your stay more affordable, as apartment rentals will almost always be less expensive than even the cheapest of hotels. Unlike North America, where it is often difficult to rent or sublet an apartment for less than a few months, in many parts of the world short term apartment rentals are the norm, the result of a burgeoning travel industry.

There are usually two varieties of apartments that you'll find: apartments that are owned expressly for the purposes of short term rental and run as a business service to travelers, and those that are being rented out by locals who will be out of town and are looking to make a bit of money. The latter is likely to be cheaper and perhaps more authentic: you'll be renting an apartment from someone who actually lives there, so you'll experience the feeling of truly living in a place. Apartments that are rented constantly to travelers will probably be more expensive. They may have more features than an apartment rented from a local, but less character: these apartments function almost like a long term hotel room.

Either choice, however, is much preferable to a hotel for a long term stay. In you have an apartment other discount travel solutions will spring from it: you can cook meals at home, for example. An apartment will also allow you to feel a little more culturally integrated - you're more likely to meet locals, to eat where they eat, to drink where they drink, etc... All of which will save you a lot of money.

For a longer stay, an apartment rental will always be the most cost effective choice. Just beware that if you are renting from an individual you have to be a little more careful - don't pay too much money up front and that sort of thing. Of course, savings is your ultimate goal when renting an apartment for a short term stay, but if you have to pay a little more for one with a fully equipped kitchen it is well worth it. Whatever your choice,

remember that your apartment rental is not only a discount travel solution, but a great way to gain a better understanding of the place you're staying in.

Eat Locally to Save Big Time

When you're looking for discount travel solutions, one of the great tools at your disposal is to adjust your eating habits. Besides the cost of getting to your destination and accommodation, food is going to be one of the biggest expenses on your trip. If you eat out at restaurants a lot, or dine mostly in your hotel, you'll likely be surprised out how quickly food eats into your travel budget.

So a smart idea in terms of discount travel is to get in the habit of eating local food, and buying fresh food at markets as opposed to constantly dining out. For example, if you're out for a day trip, stop by a supermarket and buy some healthy fresh food that you can eat on the go, so you don't have to stop at a restaurant for lunch. In many countries you'll notice a much bigger discrepancy between the prices of fresh food and the prices of meals in restaurants than exists here in North America, so taking advantage of this can save you a lot of money.

Of course, it's not expected that you spend your entire trip eating fruit and bread while sitting on a bus - part of an enjoyable traveling experience is in dining out. When you do dine out, however, eat in the places where locals eat - you see that it's radically cheaper. Depending where you are, a significant premium will be placed on North American-style food. If you're willing to put aside a desire for the food that reminds you of home, your trip will be much cheaper over the long term.

Besides being advantageous in terms of discount travel, eating at local restaurants will provide you with a broader cultural experience. You'll get to try new things you'd never be able to try at home. Plus, there's a good chance that a foreign country's interpretation of American food will be poor, so you'll probably be getting better food as well when you eat locally.

In general, avoid restaurants in touristy areas, or ones that serve things that are a radical departure from local cuisine. Remember, especially when traveling in a second world country, that the locals have much less money, relatively, than you do, so any place that they choose to dine in you're likely to find extremely affordable.

So put your desire for a burger and fries to rest - there will be plenty of that when you get home - and experience some local culinary delights. By doing this you will not only discover some new things, you'll be saving money that can be spent on more interesting things during your trip.

Be Flexible - A Key to Discount Travel

Almost everyone would love to be able to see more of the world, and traveling is one of the most culturally broadening activities we can undergo. Most people, however, can't travel nearly as much as they like, due to the costs involved. To this day, regular travel remains something that is fairly exclusive to the well-off. It needn't be this way, however: there are discount travel techniques that anyone can employ that can make traveling both more affordable and in many cases more enjoyable.

One of the most fundamental concepts to discount travel is flexibility. The more rigid you are in what you want to do and when you want to do it, the more you are going to pay. Simply being flexible about the dates you are willing to travel can save you a bundle in airfare costs. Even better is if you can be open to traveling in many different places. If you decide, for example, that you're willing to go anywhere in South America, as opposed to a particular place in South America, you'll be able to take advantage of cheap fares and save a fortune.

Almost anyone who is a master of the art of discount travel will be extremely flexible and more interested in the idea of travel itself, as opposed to a particular vacation at a particular time. And in most cases, when you meet people who don't seem to make much money but travel all the time, this is the attitude they have.

The concept of flexibility shouldn't end when you arrive at your destination, however. The true discount traveler arrives with an extremely open itinerary that allows him or her to take advantage of many different opportunities. The true discount traveler understands that any new experience will be more or less equally worthwhile than any other, so if they're looking at two similar outings to different places, they'll take the cheaper one knowing that it will probably be just as interesting as the more expensive choice.

A discount traveler knows that every rigid spot in an itinerary will end up costing him or her. If you decide that you absolutely must go to a particular place at a particular time, you leave yourself at the mercy of travel agents and tour guides, and put yourself in a position where you have to pay whatever it costs.

This idea of being open should also extend into your eating habits and entertainment choices. In many countries certain foods will be radically cheaper than others, so why not try them? Drink works the same way: if you're traveling in Mexico, say, tequila will be ridiculously cheap - so even if it's not your preferred choice, if you're willing to drink tequila when you drink, you're going to save a bundle.

By being flexible like this you will not only save yourself a lot of money, but likely have a more culturally immersive traveling experience - one that will stay with you a lot longer than a highly organized "tour."

Finding Low Airfares

Unless you are planning a short domestic trip, the cost of airfare is usually a deciding factor in an overseas trip. Most people with moderate incomes simply can't afford to fly regularly, as much as they would like to. There are, however, some people out there who are flying all the time on regular incomes. The secret to achieving this is a willingness to be flexible and shop around with airfares, as well as employing some tried and true discount travel techniques.

The key to getting a cheap flight is to shop around, and the internet makes this easy for almost anyone to do. There are a plethora of websites that will conduct searches around the world for cheap airfares. Although the internet is a valuable tool in discovering cheap airfares, it's important that you don't rely on it entirely. Many sites claim they are searching "all flights" for the cheapest possible fare, but you really don't have any way of knowing what they do and don't have access to. Oftentimes the cheapest flights can come from the airlines themselves, and you'd be well advised to check their sites as well in your search.

No matter how much research you do online, you should always visit some travel agents. Keep in mind that these people make their livings selling airfares, and will often have access to deals that aren't available to you online. Think of it this way: if you really could always get the cheapest flight online, travel agents would be out of business. The fact that they are not suggests that good deals are to be found the old fashioned way: by visiting the office of a travel agent.

When looking for discount travel, you should also explore non-traditional methods of finding flights. Websites like priceline.com offer reverse auction systems, that is: you place a bid of what you're willing to pay on a given route on a given date, and if it turns out that an airline is willing to release a seat for that price, your credit card is billed and a ticket is issued.

Another good avenue to explore is "bucket shops" - companies who buy bulk tickets from airlines at a heavy discount. They don't have the choice that a travel agent has, of course, but if you're flexible you can often get a good deal. A typical bucket shop system will work as follows: you give them a week-long window during which you'd like to fly and some destination choices, and then if something comes up at the last minute you can have it at a heavy discount.

Another rarely explored discount travel technique is to look into bucket shops and travel agents located in ethnic neighborhoods. Often, foreign airlines sell discounted tickets to these shops, which in turn serve an ethnic community regularly traveling to their home country. These shops have access to tickets from airlines that often aren't available at your regular travel agent, and can offer a significant savings.

The important thing to remember in terms of discount travel is to explore as many avenues as you can. The more flexible you are willing to be, the cheaper your fare is likely to be - but even if you're stuck with rigid dates, a comprehensive search will often result in airfares that are significantly lower than those commonly advertised.

Take an Indirect Route for Travel Savings

As most of us are no doubt familiar, there is a huge fluctuation in the prices of airline tickets. Depending on anything from season, how well traveled the route is, and other reasons that seem more mysterious, flight prices change constantly and radically. One of the most important things to consider if you're interested in discount travel is the difference in cost between domestic and international flights, and to use this to your advantage when you want to travel internationally.

In the USA, a typical return flight from New York City to Montreal, Canada, for example costs about \$300 for a trip that is just over 1 hour. For roughly the same price, one can fly domestically across the country from New York to Los Angeles - a much longer trip. With very few exceptions, flights are cheaper domestically - they are subject to less taxes and regulations for the airlines, and they are often on more traveled routes so the airlines can afford a discount.

So to take advantage of this - to truly get some discount travel - you should look into splitting your long international flight into 2 flights. Although it's more indirect, and a slight inconvenience, you can save a lot of money this way. For example, if you happen to live in the northern United States and want to go to Latin or South America, you will probably find that it's a lot cheaper to first get a domestic flight to a southern hub like Miami or Dallas and then taking a second flight further south.

Even if you live in a big northern city, chances are the direct flight is going to be more. Taking two flights doesn't have to be as inconvenient as you may think. Oftentimes, no overnight stay is required and, if your destination is a common one, you may only have short delay.

When looking for discount travel solutions online, you're going to have to use a bit of creative thinking. Most discount flight searching sights are not set-up to search multiple flight routes to your destination. Rather, they are designed to show you the cheapest direct flight between the two points you want to go. So whenever you're comparing prices of a direct flight, it's always a good idea to take a look at an indirect path as well - oftentimes you will be surprised at the savings involved.

It is harder to easily compare different 2-flight routes, and the combinations involved can quickly make things complicated. The two general rules to keep in mind when looking for savings are that you more or less want to fly as close to your destination as possible domestically, and that you want to fly between major hubs. The cheapest of all domestic flights will always be between major hubs (as our New York to LA example shows) so if you plan your trip with that in mind it's likely you will experience significant savings.

Discount travel is as much a science as an art, and those that are good at it are able to come up with creative solutions - a great starting point for becoming an experienced discount traveler is to learn about airline hubs and patterns, and to explore taking to separate flights as opposed to one long one when traveling internationally.

Using Charter Flights for Discount Travel

Almost anyone will probably agree that in a perfect world they'd be able to travel more. It is one of the most natural human desires to want to see different parts of the world and experience new things. And anyone who has traveled will probably agree that you don't really appreciate or think about your home too much until you have the perspective of seeing how people live in other parts of the world.

The problem of course, is that travel has always been expensive. Although airfares have gotten cheaper over the years, they are still expensive enough that most people don't fly regularly, and this is likely to remain the case. That is if you plan on sticking with standard commercial airlines. However, there is a cheaper alternative.

Charter flights are cheaper because they work on a different system than a standard airline flight. A standard airline will have a set route between two cities: an airline will fly a certain amount a times a week between two cities, and this remains constant regardless of the amount of passengers. In other words normal airline routes function like bus routes, and sometimes there may only be a few people on the plane. It is this need to average out costs - to be able to afford all those times when the plane is a third full - that leads to high airfares.

A charter company can offer cheaper fares by working in a different fashion: they will charter an entire plane from an airline for a particular date and time, and thus receive a heavy discount on the cost. They can then pass some of this discount on to you by offering a lower per seat price for the flight. Most charter companies operate along very common routes during peak times - for example, sunny vacation spots during the winter.

Charter flights are much more reliable than other more radical ways of obtaining discount airfare, and fares will generally get cheaper as the departure date approaches. There is a certain amount of risk, however: a charter company can decide to cancel a flight if they haven't sold enough tickets. Unlike a regular airline, which constantly has planes going to multiple destinations, the charter company may not be able to immediately put you on another plane. So instead of waiting a few hours it's likely that if your charter flight is cancelled you'll either be receiving a refund, or waiting at least a day or two for another charter - which of course can ruin any vacation.

That being said, there are many large and reliable charter companies, and charter flights -- while not offering discounts as big as can be found through other discount travel methods - remain a reliable alternative to regular airfare. And if you're flexible and willing to buy a ticket on short notice, you can find many excellent airfares from charter companies, making charter flights one of the more popular discount traveling methods.

Using Courier Flying for Discount Travel

Airfare is one of the most cost prohibitive elements of long distance travel. Many people find themselves in situations where they know someone they could stay with in another city - so accommodations would be free - but there's simply no way of being able to get there affordably. In terms of discount travel, there are some solutions to expensive airfares that are worth looking into if you are flexible and interested on a short visit rather than a long trip.

One of the cheapest ways you can fly is called courier flying. How this works is: courier companies exist that specialize in delivering relatively small packages quickly - things like important business documents etc... and what these companies want is your baggage allotment on a flight. So they will offer extremely discounted fares in order to get your baggage allotment.

If you sign up for a courier flight, your job will be to show up at the airport with carry on luggage only, meet someone with a package who will check it onto the plane in your space (you won't normally have to handle the package), and take the flight. In most cases you are required to take a return flight as well in a relatively short time (usually a few days, and rarely more than a month), which is why courier travel is more suitable to quick cross-country visits than long term travel.

Here are some samples of the approximate discounts on return fares, obtained through a simple internet search: New York to Paris, \$250; Los Angeles to Sydney, \$400. In some cases, if you are on their call list, the courier may become desperate with a last minute flight and offer it for free.

Now, with such extreme discounts, there must be a catch, right? Of course: courier flying would be simply too good to be true it didn't come with an extreme lack of flexibility. Courier flying works by placing yourself on a list to be contacted by the companies. You're not likely to receive much notice, and until you board the plane, your fate is entirely in the hands of the courier company: if there is a change or a problem with the package, for example, you're out of luck.

More so than other types of discount travel, courier flying is dependant on you being able to establish a repoire with the company. If you have been flexible and completed flights for a company in the past, you may be able to establish a relationship where they call you first to offer a flight, in which case you'll have some more options.

Regardless, to engage in courier flying you have to be very flexible, and although it is one of the most extreme forms of discount travel available, it remains fairly restrictive. If you're interested your best bet is to try one or two courier flights and hope that you can establish a good relationship with the company.

Learning How to Bargain

The reality of traveling is that it is quite expensive relative to most people's incomes. Unless you're fairly well-off, you won't be able to travel regularly throughout your life until you master some discount travel techniques.

The art of discount travel is more than simply one quick trick, it is an overall approach that you can, and should, apply to every element of your trip. For example, you should explore charter flights and last minute deals, etc. to get the cheapest possible airfare. Once you arrive in a foreign country, you should meet some locals and establish where the cheap places to eat and stay are. Discount travel involves a lot of small things that when applied together result in big savings, and allow even those on moderate budgets to travel regularly and enjoyably.

An important concept to get used to if you want your money to last while you are traveling in a foreign country is that of bargaining. In most foreign countries, and especially those of the second world, bargaining plays a big part in everyday life, and you will find yourself continually overspending if you don't participate in it.

Most North Americans are terrible at bargaining, which is not at all their fault: bargaining simply does not play much of a role in our everyday transactions, and except for large purchases like buying a car, and maybe to a lesser extent a house, most of us aren't used to it - we certainly aren't used to haggling over small items.

The first thing to understand - and a great discount travel technique - is that in the second world, everything is negotiable, and usually very heavily negotiable. If you start to bargaining, you'll soon see that the type of bargaining that goes on in other parts of the world is very different from the North American style: people often start with figures that are double or more their desired amount.

The first step in bargaining is to not be in any kind of rush to get in a taxi, or in a hotel room, or to purchase your item. Take the time to ask around, and if you can, find some locals who will (hopefully) give you an idea of a good price. The second thing to keep in mind is you have to be willing to walk away, or at least good at pretending that you're willing to walk away. Oftentimes you'll find that by simply showing a lack of interest and willingness to avoid the transaction the price will be lowered, without any need for specific bargaining on your part.

Once you get the hang of bargaining you'll find it rather easy, and in some cases fun. The main thing to keep in mind when you're in a foreign land is that your status as a North American will usually label you as rich to locals, even if it doesn't seem that way to you. If you don't want to get charged double - or more - for every single thing you do while traveling you'll have to get used to the idea of bargaining - a key component in an overall strategy towards discount travel.

The Idea of Staying Put – When Traveling

Due to the high costs involved, most people don't travel nearly as much as they would like too. Unless you are well off, chances are that traveling is something you only do a handful of times in your life, and there is therefore a tendency to try and get as much out of the experience as possible. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this idea, but a slight shift in your priorities can save you a lot of money...

Because most people travel rarely, they naturally want to see as much as they possibly can in a foreign country. What happens when you do this though, is that you end up traveling quite a lot when you are in the country - traveling when you are traveling, as it were - which makes your trip much more expensive. No matter where you are, bus tickets, train fares and car rentals are always going to be relatively expensive. One of the best things you can do to lower your trips cost's is to stay put for awhile, and explore areas around your location more closely.

If you're willing to stay put, many discount travel opportunities will become available. For one, you can rent an apartment in a city for a short term, which will cost less than even the cheapest of hotels. Also, by getting to know a place you'll learn where the bargains can be found: where the cheap places to eat are, where the cheap entertainment is. Not only that, but you will have the opportunity to immerse yourself more deeply in the culture - you'll be able to get a sense of what it is like to live in this place.

Although it's natural to want to see lots of things, many people come up with traveling itineraries that put them constantly on buses and trains and never staying in the same place for more than a few days. They get off a bus, spend a long, tiring day doing touristy things, and then sleep in a cheap hotel only to get on another train the next morning. While you'll no doubt get to see lots of things if you choose to travel like this, it certainly won't be cheap.

When planning your itinerary think of the difference between seeing things and experiencing things. You will no doubt see lots of sights if you choose to constantly tour around, but are you going to really get a sense of the country? If you choose instead to rent an apartment and stay put for awhile, you'll find out what many discount travelers already know: that immersing yourself in a culture can not only be a more valuable experience, but it will end up costing you much less. You'll get to explore areas around your base more closely, and let your curiosity guide you: a local may turn you onto an interesting spot you never would have considered when planning your itinerary back home.

In this way staying put is not only a great way to make your trip more enjoyable, but one of the best discount travel strategies there is.

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