

Enjoy Your Summer, Without Throwing Your Financial Goals Off-Track

How many of you were able to save money when the world was shut down due to the pandemic? So many have shared that, because everything was closed, they learned how to enjoy life in other ways and as a result saved money! As the world opens back up and summer vacations are getting planned, make sure that you don't overextend yourself financially out of a driving desire to travel after being cooped up for 2 years!

Vacation time is crucial for so many reasons. Everyone needs a break from their everyday work to relax and rejuvenate, but also to reconnect with their families. Too often, though, I hear people justify overspending on a vacation because, "it's been a rough couple of years," or "I deserve this since I have been working so hard." They are quick to whip out that credit card and joyfully enter those numbers as the vision of them sunning on a tropical beach clouds the vision of the bill that will be waiting in the mailbox for them next month. Or they stop their contributions to their retirement accounts to have extra cash to spend on vacation, which has long-term ramifications for sure. Don't get me wrong! I want you to take the time, enjoy life NOW, but encourage you to think of ways to save and still have a well-needed getaway. Here are some things to consider as you book that next trip.

Consider Driving

While gas prices seem to be increasing with the temperature right now, driving may still be a better way to go when planning a summer trip. Looking for a beach? Have you looked a little closer to home? While not for everyone, there are some amazing beaches along midwestern lakes that are within a 4-hour drive. We love vacationing in Michigan just over the boarder in towns like New Buffalo and South Haven. Another benefit of driving is that you may be able to take your pets instead of having to pay for boarding. We travel with our two dogs all the time! You just want to do your research to make sure you are traveling safely with them.

Consider a Short-Term Rental

Have you explored renting a short-term rental instead of staying in a hotel? Companies like AirBNB and VRBO have revolutionized travel by allowing people to open spaces in their homes or in a home they own to families. There are many that are pet-friendly as well, which makes it even easier to travel with pets! Another great thing you can do by renting a home is plan vacations with friends or other families and split the cost. Most rental properties have multiple bedrooms and bathrooms to give you private space, and a shared kitchen and living area to enjoy time with your travel companions. You can even save on your food bill as well by cooking at your rental. Split up the meals and have each person cook a meal! It can be a great experience and you won't be eating out every night spending more than you can afford. My fondest memories of vacations as a kid were when we rented a houseboat on Lake Norfolk in Arkansas with three other families. Each family took their turn cooking a meal and there were multiple kids to play with to keep us busy and allow the adults to enjoy their vacation too! It definitely wasn't the most glamorous vacation, but that is the point! We didn't have to spend a lot for it to be memorable.

Consider a Staycation

While it may make many cringe after being forced to stay home for two years, still, consider a staycation! Now, to make this work you still have to put your “out-of-office” on your e-mail and make sure your colleagues know you are on vacation so you don’t have interruptions. Have you explored all your town or surrounding towns have to offer? This year for Spring Break we did ½ staycation and ½ drive to an Airbnb 3 hours away with the dogs. We explored some local museums we never get a chance to visit while at home and saved money by renting an Airbnb and took the dogs and cooked some meals at the rental. This is another great way to save some money, do a blend of a staycation and a destination vacation.

Make Sure You Know Refund Policies

No matter what you decide, make sure you know what the refund policies are for the trips you plan. The world is still not at rest and the pandemic and conflict are impacting many places. If you are traveling overseas, make sure you know what the airlines, cruise companies, etc. have as a refund policy in case things shift and your vacation is cancelled. Also consider buying trip insurance or booking travel through your credit card’s benefit site if it’s offered. If traveling internationally, you want to make sure that your credit cards don’t charge any foreign transaction fees or you could be in for a rude awakening when that bill hits your mailbox! Overall, if in doubt, work with a travel agent who can help you navigate all these things! Our local travel agent, Jennifer Call from Call the Travel Agent, helped us plan an amazing Northern European cruise for this summer that we are looking forward to for sure!

No matter what you decide for your summer vacation, make sure that you have made a..... BUDGET! I know, you can’t get away from an article by me without me using the B word. Ideally, you have saved money over the last year into a “vacation fund” and have funds to use to plan your trip. Look at some of the restaurants you are interested in trying and see what their menu prices are, calculate how many miles you will drive and what kind of gas mileage your car gets to estimate the gas prices. Plan on shopping? Set a budget to spend. This will also be freeing if you know exactly how much you have to spend and spend it!

I can remember as a kid driving to Florida to stay with our grandparents and hitting one of those roadside stands as you come into Florida. You know the ones! Huge billboards announcing them for miles in advance, building the anticipation of every child in the car. Mom and Dad would give us a small amount of money (our budget) to find a treasure. The decision was a serious one! Do you spend it on one taxidermy baby gator or several cartons of Florida orange gum balls? What I remember is enjoying the decision process because I had dedicated funds I knew I could spend. You should do the same so that you enjoy every day of vacation without worrying, because you have thought it through and know you can spend that money!

Whether you stay home or fly across the world, don’t sabotage the joy it should bring you by going into it without considering the money you will spend and having a solid vacation budget in place. I promise you, even if it is a small budget and you can’t ride an elephant across the African plains or lose yourself in Pina Colodas on a Caribbean beach, you will get so much more joy out of your precious time off if you do it without having to stress about the money! Have a safe, and joyful, trip!

Do you have a specific question? E-mail me at: anne.e.schutt@nm.com and we can include your question in an upcoming article.

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