

- » Figuring out where you want to go
- » Narrowing down your to-do list
- » Living large on a small budget

Chapter 1

Wanting to Travel at Any Cost

Adventure — that's what travel means to me. Whether it's exploring the streets of Vienna, floating in the clear blue waters of Fiji, or hiking through a rainforest, it's all an adventure. Travel can be a weekend away upstate, or a multi-month journey around the world. Big budget or small, long or short, travel can make you feel alive, rejuvenate your psyche, and give you memories you'll cherish for a lifetime.

The trick, of course, is being able to afford it. Don't worry, though. I'm here to help you become an avid traveler whatever your budget.



FIND
ONLINE

Be sure to check out www.dummies.com/go/budgettravel to find any web addresses mentioned in the chapter as well as links to other fun and useful sites.

Ditching the Notion That Travel Has to Be Expensive

You don't need to be rich to travel. I mean, sure, it'd be great to hop on your private jet, get whisked away to your private island, and enjoy a feast prepared by your private chef. If you've got a line on how to do that, I'm all ears. But I'm not waiting around to hit that lottery. I've traveled for months at a time on a limited budget. How limited? Less than many people spend on rent, even to gorgeous locations like the one in Figure 1-1.



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FIGURE 1-1: It's possible to travel on a budget just about everywhere!

The fact is, the way most people travel is significantly more expensive than it needs to be. I've heard people who were convinced that a trip to Europe can't cost less than \$4,000 plus airfare. I've heard people dismiss entire countries because they think it will cost too much. Most upsetting, I've heard from far too many people who think that *all* travel is "too expensive," despite having an income higher than mine.

This is one of the few times in this book I'm going to be judgmental: Most people are wrong about travel. It doesn't have to be expensive. It can be affordable enough that most people, with a little planning and savings, can travel anywhere. While I don't have just one secret that allows this (that would be a pretty short

book!), there are a variety of simple adjustments and “best practices” in this book that can greatly reduce the cost of every aspect of your adventure.

My goal is to show you not only how you can afford your next trip, but also how to use the skills you’ll learn to have one after that, and one after that, and fully embrace the goal of adventure. Because no matter where you want to go, the way to get there is budget travel (hey — that’s the title of the book!).

Deciding Where to Go

By far the best way to be able to afford travel is picking your destination carefully. This, above all other tips and tricks, will save you the most money. Or to put it another way, your money goes a lot farther in some places than in others. Don’t get me wrong, if you’ve got your heart set on seeing the lights of Paris or the sun setting over Serengeti, there are ways to make that affordable, too.

If you just want to get *out there*, to go somewhere you can’t read the signs and no one knows your name, you can find a variety of options similar to the popular places where you can enjoy a comparable experience at a fraction of the cost.

For example, Tokyo is one of the most expensive cities in the world. If you’re looking for the hustle and bustle of a huge city, along with some amazing varieties of food, Taipei is significantly more affordable. London is another hugely expensive city, but if you’re looking for history and atmosphere, Lisbon has that Old World feel and is easier on the budget.

Not every place has a less-expensive option. If you have your heart set on Paris, France, then Paris, Texas, is not going to work. The Luxor in Las Vegas is not the same as Luxor, Egypt. It’s a big world out there, though, and there are adventures to be had all over. If your budget is limited now, you can get out there, explore, and make some memories right away without having to save up for three years for just one short trip.

With any luck, you’ll have more money in the future to venture into more expensive places. Or even better, you’ll discover from

this book and your initial budget travels how to become such a clever and frugal traveler that you can spend days and weeks in even these expensive places, with a budget that seems impossibly low right now.



TIP

For now, if you're not set on a location, several flight booking sites (more on these in Chapter 4) can show you what the cheapest flights are from your closest airport. The best deals might be a less-visited and less-expensive location.

If you're not sure where to go, the following sections should help you narrow down the best destination for your next adventure.

What kind of experience are you looking for?

Some types of travel are more affordable than others. If it's your dream to spend weeks on safari in southern Africa, that's going to be difficult to do on the cheap. If you want to try every restaurant and café along the river Seine, you're going to need deep pockets.

What is it about the location that appeals to you? If there's some personal reason, that's great. But if it's just "I want to see X," it's worth asking yourself what it is about that specific location that's drawing you there. If it's to see something unique about that location, the Eiffel Tower or Iguazu Falls, go for it. If it's just to be on a beach, to climb a mountain, or explore an unfamiliar city, there are lots of inexpensive and still incredible options.

Of course, you don't have to have a reason. I'm absolutely not trying to talk you out of seeing what you want to see. I've certainly done plenty of "touristy" trips myself (see Figure 1-2 for just one example), and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Even if it's just "I want to take a picture on the Great Wall of China," don't let anyone talk you out of it. I've certainly gone on trips for worse reasons. I once took a series of trains from northern England to Spain because I thought it'd be funny and make a good story. It was, it did, and I won't do it again.



REMEMBER

If your budget is extremely limited, though, and you just need to get out and see the world, figuring out what you want from travel is the first step in figuring out what locations can satisfy that desire, and more importantly, which of those are affordable.



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FIGURE 1-2: The picturesque village of Hallstatt, Austria is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and gets thousands of visitors a day. It's gorgeous, but so are many other less-visited towns in the area.

Ideas for first-time travelers

It's a big world out there. That's exciting, but also daunting. If you're new to travel, the whole idea can be intimidating. It's awesome if you have an endless list of places you want to see and things you want to do, but don't feel the need to tackle all of it at once. The idea of budget travel is not to be cheap but choosy so that you can make travel sustainable on your budget. Rather than breaking the bank for a singular "trip of a lifetime," the goal is to take as many trips as often as possible throughout your lifetime, creating countless memories over many years.

Hopefully, you can narrow down your dream travel list to what you want to see the most. Don't let anyone make you feel guilty about what's on this short list. If you want to take a selfie in front of the Leaning Tower of Pisa or eat sushi at a fish market in Japan, you do you. It's all an adventure and as long as you treat the locals with respect and you have fun, who cares what your former roommate's brother's partner's jealous cousin has to say about it.



REMEMBER

Throughout this book I give you tips that should help you wherever you want to go, but I want to give you this piece of advice now, before you get your heart set on any one place: start slow. If this is your first trip of hopefully many, stick to one place, and ideally, a place that's not overly challenging to visit.

I'm not here to yuck anyone's yums, but for novice travelers I generally recommend places that are well-known tourist destinations. This partially goes against my advice of going where the tourists aren't, but there's a line to be walked for sure between affordability and accessibility. Perhaps the cheapest destination isn't as easy to navigate as a slightly more expensive option. On the other hand, the easiest destination could be the most expensive for getting around, while one a bit cheaper could prove nearly as easy.

What do I mean by "easy"? Tourist-friendly destinations will have the infrastructure to help you out if something goes wrong, many people will speak English, and it will be fairly simple to get around. Cities might be entirely walkable or have an extensive metro system. Grocery stores and inexpensive eateries will be plentiful. Stores will take your credit cards, or it will be easy to find a cash machine.

Later, when you've got a few trips under your belt, feel free to go somewhere you'll never hear English, no one takes credit cards, and the hotels are a room in some guy's garage. Some of the best adventures in my life have been to places where I've vibrantly stuck out like every inch of the bald, bespectacled weirdo that I am. It's great! It's just not something even I could have handled at the start of my extended travels.

Of course, I realize many live life according to the credo that says being out of your comfort zone is the only way to live. At least, that's what all the posters, candle holders, bathmats, and pillow cushions at IKEA tell me. I don't disagree, but there's being out of your comfort zone, and there's being out of your comfort zone. If you're new to travel, maybe bushwacking through a swamp five hours from the nearest town isn't the best way to start.

So find your own way and your own adventure, but as someone that's done this for a while, there's no shame in starting small. In fact, starting small is an amazing gateway into something epic.



TIP

If you're not set on a specific destination, there's no harm starting with places where you speak the language. There's endless fun being in places where you don't, but for a first overseas adventure, it's okay to start with at least one thing you're familiar with.

Don't try to do everything at once



WARNING

By far the biggest, and often expensive, mistake new or infrequent travelers make is trying to cram in everything, everywhere, all at once. If you've been saving for months and only have two weeks to travel, it's understandable you want to see everything possible. But this is a recipe for disaster. I discuss more about planning in Chapter 2, but it's crucial to start pushing back on your own intentions before you've set anything in stone. Narrowing your focus to one place or area will not only save you money but will also make your trip better overall. Wanting to see every capital in Europe during a two-week vacation is not a tenable plan. One or *maybe* two is a far better start.

I made this mistake for many years, and it never ended well. I'd be disappointed I didn't see certain things, I'd be rushed seeing the things I did see, and through it all, nothing but stress.

Here are a few things to keep in mind now:

- » You'll always see less than you want to.
- » The more you try to do, the more expensive the entire trip.
- » Quality time with a few things is almost always better than mediocre time with many things.
- » Flexibility is the best gift your planning self can give your traveling self.



TIP

There's nothing wrong with a to-do list. They're great! Just don't expect to do it all. Prioritize and plan, with the intention of changing as you go.

Focusing on Less So You Can Enjoy More

When you're looking at a series of dates in the future, it can be easy to think you have more time than you actually do. Everything always takes longer than you expected. Take a step back. What city have you visited the most? Could you explore it all in a day or two? There's no reason to think you could do the same while on vacation. If your itinerary involves something like "We'll spend an hour here, and then an hour here . . ." stop. You're almost certainly trying to do too much.

Dialing back the number of things you want to do will not only save you money and stress, but it will also let you be in the moment and enjoy the things you're actually doing. In the above example, what if you get to the first location and want to spend more than an hour there? What happens then?

I'm not saying pick only one thing to do each day, though that can be fun, too. I'm saying don't plan on seeing five cities in ten days or four museums in an afternoon. You'll always be on the go. Doesn't that sound like work? Generally, I try to spend at least three days in any location and limit my daily to-do list to just a few things. Sometimes three days isn't enough and a few things is too much, but it's a safe place to start.

Keep transit to a minimum. Planes, trains, and automobiles are fun, but unless your intention is to enjoy the transit itself as part of your adventure (and for what it's worth, I do), then the time spent in transit could be better spent enjoying yourself in that place you just left.



TIP

Multi-city travel agendas are perilous. I'm not saying don't do it, but you should be cautious. Far too much could go wrong, and it's possible you'll be seeing the inside of a vehicle more than the place you're visiting.

Planning less is one of the greatest challenges for any lover of travel. Whether it's wanting to get the most out of a hard-earned dollar or not wanting to waste precious vacation time, everything in your being is going to want to plan as much as possible. Here's why you should resist that urge.

The challenge of planning to do less

This is all crazy, right? Who am I to tell you your five-day, 14-city adventure isn't going to be legendary. Well, I've traveled a lot, all over the world (60 countries and counting), and in all my years of travel, every time I've tried to do a lot, it has gone poorly, and every time I've tried to do less, it has been amazing.

I get it, though. There's immense pressure for an expensive trip to be perfect. I call this "The Curse of 'Once in a Lifetime.'" I hate the phrase "once in a lifetime" because it's often absolute nonsense and a toxic way to think about travel. Going to Europe for two weeks? Not once in a lifetime. Seeing a zebra in South Africa? Nope. Hiking Angel's Landing at Zion National Park to watch

the sunset? Okay, that one is definitely once in a lifetime for me because there is no way I'm doing that hike again.

What I'm saying is it's vital to push back against the idea that your next trip is the only trip you'll ever take. If you don't see something this trip, you can go again. The whole idea of budget travel, in my mind, is to make travel inexpensive enough that you can do it over and over again. Not, "I went to Europe once for two weeks," but instead, "I went to Europe last year, and I'm going again this summer." Not, "I saw a zebra in South Africa," but instead, "I saw a zebra in South Africa, and I'm going to Zimbabwe next spring."

If you embrace the mindset that there will be a next time, it can greatly reduce the stress in needing to see everything possible in one go. Sure, it would be great to do everything on your list during one trip, but if it's at the cost of always feeling rushed and not enjoying any of it, what's the point?

And if you do miss something then — oh no — you'll have to go back. How terrible. Better start looking at flights now.

How to narrow your focus (one city, not five)

Make a to-do list. Apps like Keep on Android and Notes on iOS let you create a list and have access to it from any internet-connected device. Make a huge list! Go nuts! But as you do, figure out what's most important. You're never going to see it all. You'll probably only see a fraction of it and that's absolutely fine. What is it you *really* want to see or do? What are the core memories you want to create on this specific trip. As you add something new to the list, slot it in above things you currently find less interesting. Soon enough you'll have a list that's in a rough order of things you want to do from most interesting to least.

Now that you have this semi-ordered list, pick the things you absolutely have to do. Maybe this final curated list is just a few things. If it's just one thing, that's even easier! Try to keep this "must-do" list as short as possible. It will make your trip far more manageable and less expensive. If you're able to do everything on your core list, you'll still have the rest of the list for ideas. With any luck, you'll find other cool things to do once you get there.

If you're having trouble moving things down your priority list, check out online reviews. Take these with a big ol' grain of salt, though. People love complaining, especially online. Even US National Parks get bad reviews sometimes, and these are some of the most beautiful places on Earth. That said, the text of the reviews might give you an idea what it's like, which can be helpful. Maybe some spot is actually always crowded with tourists, or cheap souvenir shops, or something else that isn't readily apparent from photos and write-ups.

For instance, I went to an incredibly famous castle in Scotland and found out after I got inside that it was barely older than my house. The whole thing was built from a nearly bare rock in the early twentieth century. Sure, it looks great in pictures, but knowing it's barely older than my parents sure took the shine off it.



TIP

There's also nothing wrong with keeping things on your to-do list for a potential future visit. Enjoy your first visit at a reasonable pace, and then you'll know what you want to do and how to get there for your next visit.

Travel days eat into your adventure

For example, let's assume that like most Americans, you have two weeks of vacation. You want to see as much as you can on a trip to Europe. You want to spend a few days in Paris, a few days in Amsterdam, a few days in Berlin, and a few days in London. It's going to be great.

Except, it's not. That's going to be brutal. Anyone who has been to Europe is going to think the above itinerary is crazy, and yet I've met people who have tried. Best case, each transit between cities mentioned above is a day. Some less, some more. So for your 14-day trip, that's one day on each end flying and at least four days to each city. Throw in one where you're jetlagged and miserable, and suddenly your 14-day trip is actually seven. So you have roughly one and a half days in each huge city to see everything you want to see.

It's a difficult decision, but you should try to minimize travel days on any trip, although I discuss some exceptions Chapter 4. For the most part, however, unless the transit is itself part of your trip (night trains, ferries, and so on), try to avoid it.



WARNING

It's easy to make the mistake of not leaving enough total time for a specific journey. That one-hour flight isn't really one hour. It's probably closer to six hours door-to-door when you include getting to and from the airport, security, and so on. Don't expect to do much on transit days other than transit, even if it seems like a short trip.

Budget Travel that Doesn't Feel Like Budget Travel

In all my years of traveling on a budget, I almost never felt like I was traveling on a budget. I've stayed at beachfront resorts in Fiji for \$30 a night (as shown in Figure 1-1). I've explored Japan from Wakkanai to Nagasaki eating the most amazing food for less than \$50 a day. I've stayed for weeks in the most expensive cities in the world, and I've done it again and again year after year.

So when I say "budget travel" I'm not talking about the quality of the adventure. I'm talking about getting the most adventure you can for your specific budget. That doesn't always mean spending the least amount possible. It's about spending the least amount to get the most enjoyment.

That's what you'll discover through the rest of this book. How to save money and selectively spend money to get the best travel possible on whatever budget you have, from the mountains (like those in Figure 1-3) to the ocean and everywhere in between. Not just for your next trip but to also make travel financially sustainable so you can enjoy regular adventures for years to come.



TIP

It's okay to selectively spend more to get a specific experience you want. You'll find ways throughout this book to save money on the less important things, so you can spend more on the cool stuff.



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FIGURE 1-3: Time to find some adventure!