

TRAVELING MADE EASY

Budget

T R A V E L

Geoffrey Morrison

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Budget Travel

by **Geoffrey Morrison**

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Budget Travel For Dummies®

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Introduction

Picture yourself relaxing on a tropical beach with white sand and azure waters. Picture yourself exploring the cobblestone alleyways of an ancient city. Picture yourself on horseback among a herd of zebras. If you could go anywhere in the world right now, where would it be? What's stopping you?

If you're like most people, the answer is money. The good news is, travel doesn't have to be outrageously expensive. *Budget Travel For Dummies* shows you how to keep costs low and still have an adventure you'll remember forever.

You can discover not only how to make your next trip more affordable but also how to make all travel so easy and inexpensive you're able to head out and explore again and again and again. You can find out not only how to budget money for a trip but also how to budget the true rarest of resources: time.

There's a whole world of adventure out there. Let's go explore.

About This Book

This book is the culmination of ten years of extensive and extended travels in addition to ten-plus years before that making many, many travel mistakes. I've written about travel for *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, and numerous other publications, all while traveling through 60 countries, 50 states, and during months of continuous adventure. There are numerous personal anecdotes throughout these pages, and I've included advice from other travelers I've met on the road.

Topics covered in this book include

- » Getting the most bang for your traveling buck
- » How to pack for any trip and save on luggage
- » Budget-friendly lodging and dining all over the world
- » How to get the best price on airfare
- » Common travel blunders to avoid
- » And more!

I've organized the book to flow from initial planning, to booking flights and accommodations, to packing, then on to things you'll need to keep in mind while you're traveling. Feel free to bounce around, though!

Foolish Assumptions

The foolish assumptions are actually by me about you! While writing this book I've had an idea in my head about who you are, with the hope that I can pre-answer any questions you have and write about things you want to know. Broadly speaking, I had two types of people in mind for this book. First, someone who's new to travel. Second, someone who has traveled but wants to travel a lot more. In both cases, of course, they're on a tight budget. More specifically, you're

- » Someone who wants to travel, perhaps for the first time, and you can't figure out how to afford it.
- » Someone who has the time to travel more, but not the money.

A few more general assumptions:

- » Most of my advice can apply to solo travelers as well as couples and families. I've made specific callouts when that's not the case.
- » My advice throughout is for adults of "all ages." There's no upper or lower limit on travel, budget or otherwise.
- » My advice isn't gender specific. I am a man, but I've had lengthy conversations with women (friends and fellow travelers) and have made sure to include their advice throughout this book.

Perhaps most importantly, I don't believe in gatekeeping travel. If you're 80 and want to see elephants in the wild, 20 and want to stand on the battlefield of Thermopylae, or 50 and want a selfie atop the Eiffel Tower, do it. It's all an adventure, and you should follow your heart. My goal is to help you afford it — not just that next trip, but the one after, and the one after that, and the one after that . . .

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, I use a handful of icons to point out various types of information. Here's what they are and what they mean:



REMEMBER

This is an important point that's key to budget travel or travel in general.



TIP

I've traveled a lot and I've found a lot of ways to make it easier. These tips should help you too, though they're often more situational.



WARNING

Basically the negative version of a "Tip," something that might cause an issue or is worth avoiding if possible.



FIND
ONLINE

This icon points out helpful online resources as well as items you can find on the resources page at www.dummies.com/go/budgettravelfd.

Beyond the Book

I've put together an online resources page to help you get the best prices on flights, find the right accommodations, and more. Here's what you can find:

- » Direct links to the best booking websites
- » Links to trusted (by me) gear review sites
- » Visa, passport, and other important travel info

Just go to www.dummies.com/go/budgettravelfd. Be sure to bookmark the site so you can easily find it later.

Where to Go from Here

Everywhere! No, seriously. The world is a lot smaller than it seems. Go wherever seems interesting to you, assuming it's in your budget and welcoming of visitors.

Where you should go *in this book* is an easier question. You can certainly read it chapter to chapter, cover to cover, if you want. There's certainly lots of info throughout (I hope!) and even if it's a section you're not sure you need, there might be some nuggets in there that you weren't expecting.

Alternately, you can bounce around. If you just want to know about booking cheap flights, finding the best place to stay, or what to pack, you can dive into those chapters directly. There's no Budget Travel Extended Universe you'll need to research to get the most out of each section. If there is something I explain better elsewhere in the book, I make a note of it.

If you're new to travel, I would say starting with Chapters 1 to 3 is a good idea. They'll give you a framework about what travel in general and budget travel specifically can be. They include a lot of "best practices" that will help throughout your adventures.

If you're a more advanced traveler and just want to know some key ways to save money, Chapters 4 and 5 are two important chapters to help keep your costs down.

Lastly, if you're really advanced and want to know about how to travel for weeks, months, or longer, start with Chapters 11 and 12.

Thanks for reading. I hope your next adventure is epic!

- » 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/budgettravelfd 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.