

Plan summer travel now to get the best deals!

By Sandra Gordon on March 25, 2015 06:00:00 am

Summer is a couple months away, but now is the time to start planning your vacation to get in on the best deals.

"My research has shown that booking at least two months in advance is a smart idea, especially for summer because it's a popular time for families to travel," says Cynthia J. Drake, author of "[Budget Travel for the Genius](#)."



If you wait until the last minute—or even just several weeks before you'd like to hit the road—hotels will book up and prices on flights will be high as well, she says.

Still, if there was ever a good time to travel, this summer is it. "2015 is shaping up to be the best summer in years to take an economical summer vacation," says Russell Hannon, owner of "[Break the Travel Barrier](#)."

"Gas prices are the lowest they have been in a long time and the U.S. dollar is surging against the Euro and Canadian dollar."

To make your travel dollar go as far as possible, Drake and Hannon offer these money-saving travel planning tips. Like many things in life, it's all about strategy.

Book hotels and rental cars early.

Even if your travel itinerary isn't exactly firm, go ahead and book placeholder hotels now to lock in low prices. "There are more options if you book now, and most hotels allow you to cancel your reservation up to 24 hours before your stay without penalty," Drake says.

The same goes for rental cars, if you don't go the prepaid route or book through a blind booking site, such as Priceline or Hotwire. Drake's approach: "I like to have a hotel and car reservation in reserve. Then, as I get closer to the date, I try Priceline to see if I can get a better deal.

Consider hotel alternatives.

"Hotels are as expensive as they've ever been," Hannon says. To save money, Hannon says families should consider "home swapping with another family that has the same number of children in the same age range, which will likely provide the right number of rooms, toys and space." He suggests [HomeExchange.com](#), which is the largest and best-known home swapping exchange service.

However, you have to be a member in order to use the site. If you'd like to rent a home, apartment, or condo, but don't want to use a home-swap site, consider [AirBnB](#) or [HomeAway](#).

Take advantage of travel sites and apps.

For planning airline travel, try [Hopper](#), Hannon says. The free app analyzes your flight criteria and uses historical data to tell you the least and most expensive days to purchase flights. It even predicts future prices by date.

When you're ready to book a flight, try [Hipmunk.com](#), [Skyscanner.com](#) or [Kayak.com](#). "There's no single website that will get you the best price every time, but these sites return better prices more often on average than others," Hannon says.

For hotels, try [Travelpony.com](#). It generally outperforms other websites for price. "Instead of spending money on advertising, Travelpony offers discounts when you share your booking with your social network," Hannon says.

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