



Family vacation deals

▶ [Book now on Expedia](#)



Ten Ways To Save Money On Car Trips

by TFB EDITORS on AUGUST 7, 2012



By Jan Ross

I've been writing about the joys of car-tripping lately in several articles and I'm in the midst of planning another car trip to Panama City, Florida, and Amelia Island in a week. So I started thinking about how much we're saving by driving rather than flying.

The most obvious way you save by taking a car trip is, of course, that you're not paying for airfare. But there are other ways that might not be quite as obvious. Think about these the next time you start planning a car trip.

1. **Save money by planning ahead.** Carefully research the best routes using a combination of GPS *and* maps. Sometimes you can actually find a better route with old-fashioned maps than the GPS and save time and money. Book your accommodations and plan your meals and tours. Sometimes you can get discounts by booking in advance.
2. **Save money on food.** The last time I went on a car-trip with these same gals (my sister and sister-in-law), my sister was in charge of snacks. My family has a tendency to get carried away when purchasing food and a simple bag of snacks for the car can morph into a couple of tote bags and a cooler packed with drinks and goodies. Looking at all our supplies, you'd think we were heading to the Alaskan tundra for a month or so. This time was no exception. However, because we stayed in a beach house and a condo on that trip, we had kitchens with full refrigerators and we ate and snacked on that food for days. We actually managed to make it work for several meals rather than eating out. So I didn't give my sister a lecture about bringing way too much food. Instead, I just enjoyed saving money.
3. **Save money when you do eat out.** Even if your vacation home is stuffed with all those fabulous snacks that your trusty travel companion packed, you're still going to want to eat out some. Who can pass up fresh seafood at the beach or the local specialties wherever you travel? If money is tight, you can order an appetizer (crazily enough, I have seen chicken tenders with fries and other offerings as an appetizer!), share a dish with your companion if the proportions are generous, or have your big meal at lunch when many restaurants offer special prices on smaller portions of the same entrees they serve at dinner.
4. **Save even more money eating out.** Plan ahead before you reach your destination by purchasing restaurant coupons on sites like [Groupon](#) or [Restaurant.com](#), check the local newspaper for coupons or special deals when you arrive, and check with the local Convention and Visitor's Bureau for help with special deals or restaurants that have especially good prices. Don't order appetizers (unless they are your meal!) or desserts since they really add on to your bill. And if you are feeling very economical, order water instead of a soft drink. Get creative and ask for extra lemon, then use the sweetener on the table to mix up your own lemonade. (Yes, I have actually done this!)
5. **Save money by making your own drinks.** Unless you're on a cruise ship where they frown upon you bringing your own alcohol, you can tote as much liquor and mixers on your trip as you want. Open up a bottle of wine or mix up a fancy drink – even bring your own little umbrellas! – and enjoy your drinks in your hotel or rental house as you relish how much money you're saving by making your own.
6. **Save money on your car.** There are all kinds of statistics about how driving very fast uses a lot more gas, so keep your speed low and steady. Avoid stopping and starting a lot, if possible, and keep your car perfectly tuned. On your car-trip checklist should be a complete check up for your car prior to your departure date, including an oil change, if necessary, and having your tires rotated. Uneven tire wear can also use more gas than desirable, and end up costing you even more when you have to replace your tires.



7. **Save even more money on your car.** You don't want gas to be a big expense on your car trip, so get it as cheaply as possible. There are apps for your smartphone that will tell you where to find the cheapest gas. Or you can plan ahead to stop at places like Sam's Club to get the best deal. I have a Kroger card that gets me a discount on gas. I also noticed on our last trip that Kroger fill-ups were listed on highway signs – the first time I've seen that. We made a special stop to fill up there and saved an incredible \$1.40 a gallon – well worth the stop!



8. **Save money by packing what you need.** I cringed when I paid \$25 for an umbrella and two lounge chairs during our trip to Tybee Island last month because I was tired of sitting on my towel in the sand. We used the chairs and shade all day so it was worth the money. But you can avoid this expense if you take your own beach chairs, umbrella, and beach towels – unless you're staying at a resort that provides them. Also bring plenty of sun block, bug spray, or whatever else you might need for your beach time because it will probably be a lot more expensive at your destination. And don't forget chargers and batteries. We've been forced to purchase both when we forgot them.

9. **Save money by planning for possible problems with your credit cards.** Before you leave on vacation, notify your bank and your credit card companies that you will be gone so they won't wonder why in the world someone is using your credit card to pay for a massage at the beach in Mexico and put a hold on your credit. It happens! Make copies of each of your credit cards, front and back (and your passports as well), and put those copies in a safe place (obviously not in the same place where you store your credit cards in case *they* are stolen). With copies, you have your account numbers and the contact phone number just in case...
10. **Save money by taking care of your credit cards and cash.** Don't carry all your money and credit cards with you when you leave your hotel or rental house. Many hotels have an in-room safe, so use it. If they don't, stash your valuables somewhere else – somewhere not obvious to a casual thief. Be careful and smart with the money and cards you are carrying. You really shouldn't need to take much cash with you if you have credit cards – which are easier to replace than cash.