



Money & Your Annual Vacation

While it seems like the winter has gone on forever – and spring has yet to be sprung, the reality is that in several weeks the kids will be out of school. Therefore in many households, priorities and planning is likely turning to vacation, along with all the gusto, trepidation, excitement and concern, which accompany our yearly trek into whatever constitutes vacation.

This annual pilgrimage is however just another consumer choice. As such, it requires that you spend some time planning if you are to achieve maximum financial value.

I can't help my fundamental nature; I'm a budget freak and on that basis, therefore believe the first step in any vacation-planning-jaunt is to set some financial limits. It's a simple question really, how much will you spend and where will the cash come from? Once you've established that benchmark, the other reflections and discussions will flow easily and you'll find yourself much less stressed by the whole process.

You need to do some practical research via the Internet on your vacation destination. By practical I mean how will you occupy yourself and the other members of your party once you're there. If you're a golfer, for example and the closest course is four hours away, the you not only need to consider the time factor, there's also the cost of getting to and from in terms of gasoline consumption. By the way, the Internet is also a great money saving research tool. It's likely the best place to find a list of free attractions, like museums and galleries in most places world-wide. So use it; that's why it's there.

Obtain written information about your destination. Contact the Tourist Department for free guide books or at the very least download information from the Internet. Have a daily calendar of general plans. I'm not advocating that you pencil in things like "the Museum of Civilization" from 9:07 am to 10:17 am, planning that obsessively could see you coming back home alone. Rather, I'm advocating broad daily plans, like Monday it's galleries, Tuesday, parks, Wednesday is a lie around day and so forth. Planning this way also allows you to ideally control your food and transportation costs, and lets face it, after airfares and hotels, these are huge consumers of vacation dollars. Guidebooks also often contain discount tickets or free admission vouchers; you simply can't go wrong if you use one.

If you're a shopper, make sure you look critically at everything in your luggage, particularly on the outbound leg of your journey. Many airlines are now charging for what they see as excessive baggage so it's entirely possible that your airline tickets will cost more if you've got to pay extra to transport all your new "acquisitions" back home at the end of your vacation. As well; don't bother to carry toiletries from home, buy this stuff in travel-sized volumes when you arrive at your destination. You can leave the unused portion in your hotel room when you're done. It's also perfectly fine to leave worn or old clothes at your destination in favour of carrying the new stuff home with you. Don't forget to include all your purchases on your Custom's Declaration Form when coming back home.

Manage you money effectively and be careful with it. Wear a money belt and keep it concealed if possible. Visa or any other charge card of your choosing is perfectly fine. Just make sure that you'll be able to clear the balance in full within 60 days of arriving home. In many vacation locations it's perfectly acceptable, it's expected in fact, to haggle and bargain over price. So be sure you dicker and always ask what the price is if you pay cash. You may find yourself somewhat surprised at just how much prices can drop and how flexible vendors can be. I purchase an exquisite Mexican blanket in the summer of 2006 for \$8.00. The original asking price was \$60.00; yes \$60.00.

When it comes to where you'll lay your head on vacation, only you can say what works best for you. There are lots of options; hotels, motels, camping, hostels and house exchanges just to name a few. And course

you may be the kind of vacationer who chooses to bunk with family or friends. Whatever the choice, it's best to research the options yourself and then to tell your agent what to book.

In my view, foods costs on vacation can be controlled efficiently by "purchasing" only two meals each day; breakfast and dinner. You can "snack" lunch by picking up the kinds of food that can be enjoyed on the run and which are portable. Yes, you can always purchase only one meal a day too, snacking the others, but remember, you are on vacation and it's important things feel that way. Be careful, cautious in fact. of buffets while you're away; these are one of the easiest ways to return from vacation "thicker" than when you left.

And finally, a serious consideration for many vacationers who travel outside Canada is a nasty little piece of work, called the Exchange Rate. You need to be very conscious of this, any very early in your vacation familiarize yourself with what posted and listed prices are going to actually be to you. Ultimately you'll pay for your little bit of luxury from you're net income. Your net takes the form of the good old and dependable Looney, which these days is in fact quite dependable; particularly if you're planning a vacation to any destination where the U.S. dollar is king.

Remember most of all to relax, enjoy, and to create lost of great family memories Oh – by the way – cover up too!

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