

- Vacationing on a budget▶
- Saving money on gas▶
- Cutting grocery expenses▶

Summer Travel on a Budget

It's almost that time of year- summer vacation. So what are your plans? Have you given it much thought yet? Whether you are looking for something frugal and local or if you are planning a nice get-away, we've come up with a few tips to help make your summer vacation a memorable one without breaking the bank.

- Choose a vacation spot that's within driving distance to where you live. Compared to flying to your destination, this can be a substantial savings.
- If you have a large family, you may want to consider booking a vacation rental or a hotel room equipped with a refrigerator and a microwave to fix some quick meals or a snack.
- When planning your get-away, see what deals the hotels and restaurants have for children. A lot of places offer free kids meals if they are under a certain age.
- If you are flying, know your airline's pricing for your luggage. Can you take a carry-on on the plane with you as well and if so, how large can it be? You don't want to be in for any surprises when you are about to board the plane.
- Discounts, discounts and more discounts. Are you an AAA or AARP member? You can almost always get a discount on attractions, hotel rooms, car rentals, and restaurants. Get a sample of some of the discounts at <http://advantages.aarp> and your local AAA website for discounts near you.
- Look for some free events that are going on during your stay. There may be local parks that offer free concerts and other activities.

If you are too late to plan a nice get-away this year, start planning now for next year. Use our "Goal Tracker" from our website www.onlinebudgetadvisor.com to start saving for next year's vacation now. We'll even send you reminders, so you stay on track and you can check your progress throughout year.

Tips

If you are planning on driving to your vacation destination, here are a few tips to help you conserve gas on your trip:

- Curtail aggressive driving. Speeding, rapid acceleration, and rapid braking all waste gas. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, keeping your cool will curb mileage by as much as 33% at highway speeds and your city mileage by 5%.
- Slow down! Speeding wastes gas and your money. Each mile per hour you drive over 60 mph is like paying an extra 10 cents per gallon.
- Cruising down the highway? Use cruise control to maintain a steady speed and help cut down on fuel consumption.
- Inflate tires to the proper setting. Not only will this increase fuel economy, but it will also make tires safer and extend their life.



Q: What impact do unpaid collection accounts have on my credit score?

A: The damage to your credit score occurs when the account goes into collections. However, ignoring unpaid collection accounts also keeps good credit actions from improving your credit score.

Unpaid collection accounts negate the positive information.

So, how should you handle unpaid collection accounts? Pay them off. You first need to check your credit report. Go to www.annualcreditreport.com and obtain a free copy of your credit report. Your credit report will list the current payments you are making to creditors, like your mortgage, car loan or utility bills and it will also list accounts that have been charged off and sold to collection agencies.

Once the debt is paid in full, you should receive a letter or a receipt from the collection agency. Always retain the documentation that you paid the account in full.

Typically, collection accounts remain on your credit report for seven years. However, in some instances, the agency will remove the account once the debt is paid if you request they do so.

Cleaning up unpaid collection accounts on your credit report will then allow positive information to start to outweigh the negative.

Understanding the information presented on your credit report can be difficult. If you need assistance with understanding your credit report and information on how to improve it, consider an Advantage Credit Counseling Service, Inc. credit report review session. Call 1-888-511-2227 for more details and to schedule an appointment.

Cutting Back on Grocery Costs

When we're tackling our monthly expenses and looking for ways to save extra money, one of the first places to start is with your grocery costs. Most of us can probably think of ways to save some extra money at the grocery store. You might be thinking: how much of an impact will saving extra money at the grocery store have on my monthly budget. Saving an extra \$20 per week amounts to over \$1,000 a year.

First, you need to give up store loyalty and shop where you can find the best price on the items you need. Most of us tend to shop at the chain grocery store closest to our home or work. However if we shop the sale ads and consider discount grocery stores, we will be able to see a reduction in our grocery bill. Discount grocery stores typically have better prices on produce as they only sell what's in season. You can also find generic versions of name brand products that cost substantially less.

If shopping at a discount store isn't for you, then you need to evaluate how you're shopping at the chain store. Are you buying only name brand items? Switch to the store brand and see what kind of impact that has on your grocery costs. Only buy name brand products if you have a coupon and even then confirm you'll be spending less than if you buy the store brand.

Do your own prep work. Buying items that are pre-washed, pre-cut and pre-prepared typically cost more than items that you have to do the prep work yourself. For example, typically a bag of pre-washed lettuce costs about \$3.00 when you can a head of lettuce for under a \$1.00 and typically get more lettuce.

Plan your meals ahead. Take some time during the week or on the weekend to think about your family's schedule for the next week and figure out your meal plan. Typically, breakfast and lunches are easy to plan ahead for. Dinner can be more challenging. Pick out several recipes you want to make for dinner and

buy the ingredients to make them. Planning dinners ahead will help keep you from stopping at the store after work or during the day trying to figure out what's for dinner and it will help keep you from ordering take out or fast food at the last minute because you're unsure what to cook. Extra trips to the grocery store during the week can typically cost about \$40 a pop. Shop once a week and keep your grocery costs down.

Plan a night for leftovers or take the leftovers to lunch. This will keep you from wasting anything you've already cooked.

Consider making meals in advance. Take some time on the weekend or a free evening and make some of your meals for the week ahead of time. This makes your week much less stressful and also keeps you on track with your planned meals. Maybe you can't make the entire meal ahead of time, but look at the recipe and see what you can prepare. You might be able to cut the veggies or bake the chicken. While you're cooking ahead see if the recipe and your supplies lends itself to making an extra casserole to freeze for particularly busy weeks or weekends.

Now that spring is finally here, start thinking about planting a garden. If you use a lot of produce in your house, just think how much you could save by eliminating produce from your grocery list. Plant enough vegetables that maybe you could can some for the winter months. Think about the produce you buy now and build your garden with those plants.

Examine your grocery costs over the past three months. If you haven't been tracking your expenses, check bank statements for your trips to the store. Figure out exactly how much you have been spending and set a goal for how much you want to reduce that by. Stick to it and keep that number in your mind as you shop.

Resources

www.annualcreditreport.com

www.ftc.gov

www.advantageccs.org

www.onlinebudgetadvisor.com

The Advantage Challenge

Advantage CCS challenges you to...cut back on your grocery costs. Examine your grocery shopping habits. Where can you cut back? Evaluate your meal planning and dig out your cookbooks or your favorite recipe websites. Make your store list and stick to it. Browse through the sale ads and try to plan your meals based on what's on sale. You'll see some savings on your grocery costs. Let us know how you do. Share results with hmurray@advantageccs.org.

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