

Cost-cutting ideas for your vacation

From airfares to roaming fees, expert offers some helpful tips

PETER GLENN
CALGARY HERALD

If you found yourself returning home from summer vacation to a big bill, you'll want to hear what Calgary-based ultra-economical travel expert Russell Hannon has to say.

The author of *Stop Dreaming Start Traveling: The Ultimate Guide to Traveling More and Spending Less*, Hannon says your last vacation likely cost you five times more than it needed to because travel is an industry that charges on average five times the local cost of living.

Hannon explains that the average three-star hotel room that goes for \$160 a night costs five times more than the average one-bedroom apartment down the street that rents out for \$900/month. That works out to just \$30 a night.

Same goes with eating out three times a day while travelling, over the long haul that will add up to five times your at-home grocery bill.

Hannon is a travel expert with breakthetravelbarrier.com. Once feeling unable to afford to travel, Hannon applied lean principles to travel at a fraction of the going rate. He has since been featured on America Tonight, CTV, CNBC, Around the World and Travel TV.

Here are five budget travel tips:

1. One of the most common questions I get is, "When is the best time to book a flight?" The answer is it doesn't matter, if you fly with an airline such as WestJet that offers a price-drop guarantee. It's a benefit that few people take advantage of.

Once you book your flight, set up the details of your flight at airfarewatchdog.com with instructions to notify you any time the posted fare for your flight drops 10 per cent below the price you paid. If you get a price drop notification, contact WestJet Customer support that same day and forward them the email showing the lower fare.

If the agent can independently replicate the fare and it's for an identical class and itinerary, you will be entitled to a refund of the difference between what you paid and the lower price.

I offer a free guide at breakthetravelbarrier.com titled *Beat the Best Online Fare — Every Time, Every Flight*.

2. Many people sign up to e-coupons with companies like Groupon or LivingSocial.com to get discount coupons at home, but don't think about ways to leverage them while travelling.

I suggest that two weeks prior to your trip, change the hometown

in your account to the destination you'll be visiting, and you'll get emails with discount coupons that target locals.

If you're a Costco member, stop into a Costco at your destination for \$100 gift certificates for restaurants and attractions that sell for \$80.

3. To get the best possible Priceline rate for hotels, you can "out-negotiate the Priceline negotiator," a platform where you bid on how much you are willing to pay for a category of hotel room in a certain area.

The problem is Priceline requires you to enter your credit card information before you submit your bid, and if Priceline accepts your bid, it automatically charges a non-refundable booking to your credit card. To get around this, you can bid on rooms using a Visa gift card with a balance that is lower than your bid amount. If Priceline accepts your bid, you will get a pop up window that says "Priceline could not process your order," then you submit a lower bid and continue on that way until Priceline rejects it.

This way you will know the best possible Priceline rate and you can then use your credit card to get the best possible Priceline rate and not a penny more.

4. Roaming: The best roaming plans for cellphones are not those you see advertised on TV.

For Canadians visiting the U.S. and Mexico, roamability.com will mail you a SIM card for \$20 with a local phone number that's yours to keep. Before your trip, purchase a prepaid plan online then insert the SIM into your phone when you arrive. You can top up your plan by going to the website. I recommend sticking to data-only plans for just over \$15/week in the U.S., and \$25 in Mexico. For Europe, LeFrenchMobile offers a multi-lingual prepaid SIM card mailed to you before your trip. Rates are comparable to plans offered by local carriers.

5. To get around pesky luggage fees, bring a luggage jacket as your second carry-on bag. When the time comes to board the plane, the luggage jacket unfolds into a jacket that you can wear.

Here's another suggestion: Since you need to have a credit card to book travel online, the WestJet World Elite MasterCard is the best overall value Canadian travel credit card. It entitles WestJet flyers who use the card to pay for their flight to a complimentary checked bag and an annual companion pass where they can bring a guest with them for an additional \$99, anywhere in Canada and the Continental U.S.



The Alt Hotel Halifax Airport, connected to the terminal by an indoor passage, is known for its colourful, minimalist design and moderate price of \$149 per night. GROUP GERMAIN HOTELS

Avant-garde room service at Alt Hotel

ROCHELLE LASH
SPECIAL TO THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

The Alt Hotel Halifax Airport will ramp up its entertainment factor in November with avant-garde performances that blend dance and theatre.

The innovative Montreal-based dance lab La 2e Porte à Gauche will present a series of brief, intimate pas de deux performances in four guest rooms of the Alt.

The unusual formula is designed to bring together the artists and about 20 spectators in a different way. The dances, featuring Montreal performers who presented this concept at Hôtel Le Germain Montréal in 2014, will express feelings about relationships with dance movements on the beds

and in the baths, moving from one guest room to another.

The Alt brand is defined by its minimalist style, but this airport hotel has several extras:

It is connected by an indoor passage to the Stanfield International Airport.

■ It has a bar with a pool table and a complimentary guest reception on many Mondays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., so travellers can meet and mingle. Signature cocktails are \$4 for two, daily between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.

■ The 24-hour Altcetera cafeteria-convenience store stocks juices, soft drinks, sandwiches and salads, snacks and desserts. Everything is pre-packaged, ready to eat, and prepared daily by a local caterer. You can grab-and-go or settle in with your mobile device at the café tables.

■ The Halifax Alt is environmentally conscious, with energy-saving lighting, green waste and water operations and geo-thermal heating and cooling systems that recycle warm air.

■ The 24-hour fitness room is bright, colourful and equipped with cardio machines, weights and Swiss balls.

■ Alt Hotels are part of the Group Germain, the company behind the chic Le Germain boutique establishments, and many amenities even in the lower-priced Alts are deluxe. Every room at Alt Halifax has a Keurig coffee-maker, goose-down duvets, Egyptian cotton sheets, sharp bathrooms with glass showers, and Bella Pella bath products, an aromatherapy-inspired line from Montreal.

DETAILS

Alt Hotel Halifax Airport: 169 rooms at \$149, including Wi-Fi, pool, fitness room, lounge; 855-258-5775, 902-334-0136; althotels.ca; 40 Silver Dart Drive, Enfield, N.S. Packages available with long-term airport parking, adjacent to the hotel.

Rendezvous à l'Hôtel Alt: Nov. 6 & 7 at 7 p.m.; Nov. 8 at 2 p.m., \$30 for adults, with discounts for seniors and students. Tickets at Live Art Dance in Halifax, liveartdance.ca, 902-420-0003 or at Alt Hotel Halifax.



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