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Planes, and Trains Automobiles

As millions of Americans begin to plan their summer vacations, we explore five common methods of transportation and reveal several clever tips for saving money while traveling across America.



DRIVING

The quintessential all-American family vacation, the road trip continues to stand the test of time, offering full scenery and flexibility not found elsewhere. Taking to the road offers great advantages such as being able to move at your own pace while reaching places otherwise unseen.

- During a road trip, gas is likely to be your largest expense. Below are a few tips that families can consider to save significantly on these costs and make a road trip more affordable:
- Use websites like www.Fueleconomy.gov and www.Gasbuddy.com to research fuel prices in the region and at your destination. Gasoline is your number one cost and if you're able to travel in a direction offering savings of 40 cents per gallon, it's going to add up quickly. Sometimes simply crossing a state line will cause a major spike in prices. You can also find great mobile apps for checking prices while on the road. Check out five great iPhone apps here: <http://earth2tech.com/2008/07/11/5-iphone-apps-to-help-save-gas/>
- Don't weigh the old ride down. The weight of your vehicle and its contents is directly correlated to the cost of fuel, so pack light. Rent a more fuel-efficient car for your trip. Even with the cost of rental, you'll often save in the end. Typically websites like www.Hertz.com, www.Enterprise.com, and www.Budget.com can offer great local rates from non-airport locations.

FLYING

One of the most popular forms of family travel, taking to the sky offers a number of unique benefits which are unmatched by other methods of traveling.

On a plane, there's no need to be squished together in uncomfortably close quarters for more than a few hours and you're sure to reach your destination quickly and safely. Furthermore, flying to a destination and back typically involves only two full travel days; whereas driving and other methods of transport can take up a significant portion of your holiday just for travel.

Flying does have its limitations and disadvantages, however; the first and foremost being cost. It's simply not cheap to fly a family of four or five round trip to anywhere. Nonetheless, with the right measures, this cost can be reduced significantly.

If you've got enough planning time and a bit of flexibility, it's typically not hard to find affordable airfare. It's easier than ever before with the help of websites like Momondo.com and Kayak.com. These two particular sites search multiple travel booking websites for the best fare available. Once you've found a good fare, check again for the exact same flight on the airline's own website where oftentimes further savings can be acquired. If you're having trouble finding an affordable fare to your preferred destination, consider an alternative — after all, the point is simply to be together and have fun. Check out [AOL's list of top ten family vacations](#) if you're short on ideas.

Another thing that families can do to save big on traveling by air is reducing associated costs such as airport transport and baggage fees. By simply taking carry-on baggage only and getting to the airport via bus or train, a family of four could easily save hundreds of dollars that would be better spent on fun; or, travel with [Southwest Airlines](#), which allows for one free checked bag per passenger.



TRAIN

An often-overlooked option for travel in the United States, traveling by train is a fun and worthwhile option for family vacations. If you haven't yet tried it, consider doing so as train travel combines the scenery aspect of a road trip with the convenience of letting somebody else do the work. Furthermore, fares are typically reasonable while the level of comfort on a train easily exceeds that of most any other method of travel.



The biggest disadvantages of traveling by train are associated with travel time and reliability. Quite simply, train travel takes a lot of time. Despite the fact that schedules are in place, train travel is notorious for extensive delays. For many, however, these characteristics are part of the package and if the idea of a vacation is to relax and to ease stress, throwing schedules and agendas out the window is the perfect scenario.

All things considered, train travel is a great opportunity to do something different with the family and it's all about the experience and comfort. The scenery goes by slowly and offers glimpses of places that are quite often not seen in any other mode of transportation.

Destinations for train travel are somewhat limited, though plenty of great options exist. Check out [Amtrak.com's](https://www.amtrak.com) helpful [interactive route atlas](#) for great information and trip ideas. Much like air travel, fares are highly subject to seasonal popularity and, therefore, flexibility and booking in advance can go a long way in the effort to save money.

TAKING AN RV TRIP

For longer trips and larger families, this is simply a fantastic option. The benefits of a recreational vehicle are extensive and unique. RVs allow a family to travel as one unit with everything it needs in one package. They provide savings on the cost and hassle of hotel rooms and allow everyone to bring plenty of personal belongings for maximum comfort and fun. They also give families the opportunity to sleep comfortably in the heart of many of America's greatest outdoor attractions.

There's just one major problem with taking an RV trip: they're often incredibly expensive. This applies both to the price of rental as well as the cost of fuel associated with operating an RV. Below are a few tips on maximizing savings on an RV trip:

- Book rentals well in advance or take the risk of waiting for last minute deals. Prices skyrocket in anticipation of the busy summer travel season so act accordingly.
- Consider alternative seasons for great savings. In addition to considerably lower rental rates, renting an RV in the spring and fall offers comfortable travel temperatures and typically lower gas prices.
- Take a break from expensive RV parks and hook-up fees. They're not really necessary all the time, so going a few extra nights without them can tack on a few hundred dollars of savings by the end of the trip.
- Plan your vacation in an area with lower gas prices. You can save as much as 50 cents per gallon if you fill up in the right parts of the country (Texas, Oklahoma, etc.).



BUSES AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

While many of us have taken the [Greyhound](#) at one point or another for basic travel needs, few families elect to take advantage of traveling across America by bus for vacation purposes. Bus travel by far offers the lowest fares to many destinations and when combined with the use of public transportation upon arrival, families can enjoy a great vacation for a fraction of the cost of traveling by air, train, or even family car. By taking advantage of these potentially huge savings, perhaps some families could afford to take two vacations instead of one.

Below are a few tips to maximize savings and the enjoyment of traveling by bus and public transport in America:

- Book in advance. Although bus travel is less susceptible to last-minute inflation, Greyhound and other bus companies typically offer significant savings on 21-day advance purchases.
- Research public transportation networks thoroughly in advance. If you're headed to somewhere like Chicago or New York, a bit of time spent on the [MTA](#) or [CTA](#) website could save a lot of confusion and headaches later on.
- Relax and enjoy the scenery. Much like train travel, traveling by bus takes time. Take advantage of those big windows and the personal chauffeur in the front seat. It's a big, beautiful country.

Regardless of how you choose to travel, there are always going to be ways to save money while still enjoying a great family vacation. The most important thing to remember is that the purpose is simply to have fun and create memories that flourish in the minds of everyone in the family for years to come; and best of all, doing so doesn't have to come at the expense of your entire family budget.



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