

## *Financially Speaking*

With Trisha Arndt, CFP®

### Millionaire Travel on a Budget - Planning Your Trip

The signs of the end of summer are upon us. Stores around Verona are running back-to-school specials and kids are transitioning from swim team to football practice. Farm and Fleet even has an aisle of Christmas decorations on display (yikes!). Yes, vacation time is over.

The end of the traditional summer vacation season can be a great time to scoop up deals on travel to a variety of vacation destinations. But, those “deals” aren’t always all that they seem so you need to plan carefully to get the most for your travel dollar.

Those that know me well would tell you that I was born to be a professional traveler. Yes, I love my true vocation but if money was no object I would spend my life planning and enjoying trips to every corner of the world. For myself and others I’ve happily planned everything from a whirlwind trip to Vegas to an extravagant Parisian honeymoon. Along the way I’ve picked up some tips that I think are worth sharing.

Historically almost all travel plans were put together with the help of a Travel Agent but the advent of the internet has allowed many of us to bypass the travel agent and do the research and booking for ourselves. For those who aren’t comfortable doing it themselves or just plain don’t enjoy combing travel sites for hours it can still pay to work with an experienced travel agent. They can help match you to a vacation that fits your interests and sometimes even have access to deals that you may find hard to find on your own.

For the rest of us that find the planning half of the fun, here are a few starters.

#### Do Your Research

One of the biggest travel mistakes is booking without first making sure that the location is one you will enjoy. Don’t just rely on statements from others about how “great” a place is. Check it out for yourself to make sure that it really fits your personality.

Almost all major tourist destinations now have websites devoted to providing travel information and all-around travel sites provide general information as well. I personally can’t get enough of [tripadvisor.com](http://tripadvisor.com) as it gives you lots of good information along with candid traveler reviews and photos that haven’t been doctored for publication.

#### Shop Around

Once you have a destination set shop around a variety of places before booking. I like to use a major travel site like [orbitz.com](http://orbitz.com) as a starting point and then probe deeper. Often times I’ve gotten better deals by seeing which airlines service a location and then going direct to the airline’s site to book, especially by using the airline owned travel site ([aavacations.com](http://aavacations.com) is the American Airlines owned site for instance). It is common to get

a better deal by booking a package (air and hotel together as an example) but that is not always the case so check it both ways before booking.

### Be Flexible

I know you've probably heard it before but traveling to prime locations during off peak times can both save you money and allow you to see the sites without the crowds. But even beyond that having some flexibility on your exact dates and times can save you a bundle. Many travel sites like [Orbitz.com](http://Orbitz.com) and [Expedia.com](http://Expedia.com) have calendar based tools that will allow you to search for a weekend trip in February as an example and will tell what is the least expensive weekend or specific day to go.

### Know When to Book

Generally speaking the window for discounted airline tickets opens about 45 to 60 days out but if you are looking at a "hot" destination and want to guarantee a seat on a specific flight you might want to book sooner. Once you get within 14 days you are generally looking at extremes – either quite pricey tickets on flights with average availability or potentially really good deals if an airline is trying to fill an under booked flight (which results in "last minute deals" a great way to travel if you can pick up and go on short notice).

### Become a Frequent Flyer

Absolutely sign up for the free airline frequent flyer programs and take advantage of all of the free ways you can earn miles (hotels stays, car rentals, even dining at certain restaurants can earn you miles). And, if you plan to do significant traveling, research whether a credit card that earns miles may make sense. Personally I have used nothing but an airline specific card for the last ten years and it has saved me literally tens of thousands in airline ticket prices - well worth the \$50 a year fee. For instance, my husband and I used miles to fly business class to Australia – tickets that would have run us \$9800 each if I had bought them for cash.

### Watch Deals

True travel enthusiasts like myself spend our little spare time reading travel magazines and zipping around travel sites dreaming of the next big trip. For those who don't have the interest in scanning for deals themselves there are some good free alert services out there that can do it for you. One of my favorites is [ShermansTravel.com](http://ShermansTravel.com). You can sign up for free and get regular updates on the best travel deals out there.

Stay tuned for my column next month with tips for how to get the most bang for your buck once you've arrived at your destination.

*Trisha Arndt, CFP<sup>®</sup>, is president of Wealth Strategies of Wisconsin Ltd, 535 Half Mile Road, Ste 5B, Verona, 848-2400. Securities and Investment Advisory Services offered through Commonwealth Financial Network, member FINRA/SIPC, a registered investment adviser. Wealth Strategies of Wisconsin Ltd and Commonwealth Financial Network are separate and unrelated entities.*