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## **SEE THE USA FOR \$50 A DAY**

By Karl Arnold Belser

Do you like to travel, have limited money, but lots of time, and have a reliable car? If the answer is YES, then read this article for tips on how to see the USA for an average daily expense of about \$100 per couple. This cost includes transportation, lodging, food, and admission fees.

### **TRANSPORTATION - USE YOUR CAR**

You may ask, "Is automobile transportation really economical?" The amount of savings depends on the distance to be traveled and assumes that your time costs nothing.

Consider going to Seattle from San Francisco a distance of about 1700 miles round trip. If your car gets 25 miles per gallon at \$1.50 per gallon, it will take 68 gallons and cost about \$100. This compares to a round trip airfare per person of about \$250. The driving option for two people is

about \$400 cheaper than flying, and there will be no rental car expense when you get there.

You may point out that this accounting does not include the wear and tear on the car during the trip. There will be a small marginal cost for oil changes and wear of the tires. Engine wear is really not an issue because modern engines last over 200,000 miles and most people trade cars before this mileage. These marginal costs would be about \$50 for the trip to Seattle mentioned above.

In addition, it is a good idea to have towing insurance in the rare event of a breakdown. The American Automobile Association (or AAA) and most automobile insurance companies offer towing insurance for a modest fee.

You may be concerned about getting tired when you drive long distances between points of interest. Listening to audio books mitigates the problem of driver fatigue. Check out books out of the public library on tape or CD. The book renewal can be done by phone if your trip is longer than three weeks. Further, fatigue can be lowered by frequent rest stops and by limiting the driving hours to 5 or 6 a day. And remember that because you have your own car, you can bring a cooler with drinks and snacks to refresh yourself while driving, as well as wine or beer to help you relax after a long day's drive.

**LODGING - USE HOTEL DISCOUNT COUPON BOOKS**

Get hotel discount coupons, like the ones from the nation-wide Traveler Discount Guide, the Travel Saver in Florida, the US Travel Guide, and the web site [WWW.roomsaver.com/roomsaver/](http://WWW.roomsaver.com/roomsaver/). In addition to these larger coupon books, there are regional hotel discount books. Take the best offer that you can find.

The discount books can be found at fast food restaurants, budget family restaurants, gas stations, chambers of commerce, rest stops, and welcome centers at state borders. It is a good practice to stop at the welcome center when you cross a state border to make sure you always have a list of economical places to stay.

The lodgings listed in these coupon books are name brand motels such as Best Western, Day's Inn, Knight/s Inn, Sleep Inn, Super 8, and Travel Lodge. They are usually located along the interstate highways, and the discount price is typically 70 to 80% of the normal rate.

The catch to these coupons is that you cannot make advanced reservations, but this is actually an advantage because it gives you the flexibility to change your plans day-by-day. The coupons are honored on a first come, first

serve basis, but you will have no trouble getting the room that you want if you check in between 5 and 6 PM.

You may say, "It's too good to be true," but the low rates are there because the hotel or motel owner built their hotel in the wrong place. Fortunately, you have your car and it is a small inconvenience to drive a few miles to get to the attractions that you want to see if you are saving \$20 to \$50 per night on lodging.

There may be times when coupons are not available near where you want to stay. In this case find a budget hotel and ask for an AARP or AAA discount. Also, pick hotels that are somewhat remote to where you want to go because the rates will be lower. For example, it will cost more than \$100 a night to stay in the center of Chicago but less than \$50 a night if you stay in Lansing, IL, about 20 minutes south of the city. This could be a \$200 savings if it takes you four days to see Chicago.

#### **FOOD - USE SENIOR DISCOUNTS**

If you are over the age of 55, the operative words for eating are "senior discount." Almost every family restaurant chain has a senior menu, and almost all fast food places have low cost burgers or breakfast sandwiches with a senior discount on drinks. For example, a Big 'n Tasty from

McDonalds or a Jumbo Jack from Jack-in-the-Box with a senior coffee cost about \$1.35. In general, the fast food places and family restaurants will be the most economical places to eat. Also, many motels will offer a free continental breakfast, so look for this breakfast in the hotel coupon book ads.

A picnic lunch is a convenient and enjoyable way to eat when you are visiting parks or beaches. Most grocery stores, like Safeway that are everywhere, have a deli department. Buy a couple of sandwiches, some potato salad or slaw, some cookies, and some fruit juice or soft drinks, put them in the cooler in your car, and start your day.

#### **ADMISSIONS - GET DISCOUNT COUPONS IN ADVANCE**

The last expense is the admission to attractions. The AAA tour books list the attractions that give a discount to AAA members. But the AAA has other discounts that you have to obtain in advance. For example, one can get a discount for most amusement parks. Also many museums have specific days of the week where there is no entrance fee. These days are given in the AAA tour book. All you have to do is plan ahead.

If you are interested in seeing the national parks it will probably be worthwhile to purchase a Golden Eagle pass.

Park entrance fees have become a significant expense in recent years. Also if one person in your party is disabled, such as hard of hearing, visually impaired, or otherwise handicapped so that he or she needs your help in experiencing the parks, a free, lifetime Golden Access Passport can be obtained at the park entrance that will allow everyone in your party to enter for free.

#### **WHAT TO SEE - IDENTIFY THE POINTS OF INTEREST IN ADVANCE**

The AAA is a convenient way to get travel information because it gives free maps and tour books to its members. Further, the AAA denotes the attractions that one "must" see as GEMS. A reasonable goal of a tourist in the United States is to see every AAA GEM attraction. And since you will be passing by them anyway, why not stop.

You will need to estimate the number of days that the trip will require. Suppose that you wanted to explore the area between Denver and San Francisco. You could make a large loop by several routes. For example you could go to Denver by driving first to Las Vegas in one long day, see the sights in Las Vegas the next day, go to Zion Canyon for the next two days, and take a couple of days to wend your way north through Bryce Canyon and the Utah desert rock formations to Green River. Beyond Green river you can spend

a couple of days hiking parks like Arches, Canyon Lands, or the Colorado National Monument, continue east through the Rockies to Denver in one day while visiting Vale or The Rocky Mountain National Park, and finally visit the attractions in Denver. The trip to Denver would take 10 days. You could then return by a northerly route through Salt Lake City or by a southerly route through Santa Fe. The round trip from San Francisco to Denver might take three weeks.

In conclusion it is possible for a couple to see the USA for about \$100 per day, or as they say in the travel trade \$50 per person per day, double occupancy. Look in the travel section of your Sunday paper and try to match the price. If you try these tips you will be surprised at how affordable it is to see the entire United States.

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