

Get Up and Go!

By Evelyn Preston



Marrying an Australian, I envisioned worldwide travel until I realized that my husband lacked a valid passport due to his confusing dual citizenship. “I can leave,” he said, “but I might not get back in!”

We did spend months in the U.S. Virgin Islands and vacationed in Hawaii. And we often compared our two cross country driving trips 40 years apart: the reasonable prices and easy (often free) access of our original ‘60s trek with the charges and reservations later needed for National Parks, historical sites, campsites and museums. However crowded or costly, it remains priceless to explore the sweep and scope of our fabulous country via bus, train, tour or car.

Q: Have you ever stayed at an Airbnb, a VRBO (vacation rental by owner) or similar set up?

With hotel rates plus taxes climbing especially during peak travel times, I’m tuned into these alternative venues. Many years ago, I took advantage of inexpensive European “pensions” (room in private home/bath down the hall). Modern equivalents showcased online can close shave the price of a hotel IF you spend the time searching. My friend’s daughter “negotiates” terms and deposits with rental owners from Paris to New York. Become your own travel agent for rewarding discoveries and substantial discounts.

Q: Do many people still travel using hotel chain points or airline miles?

My old boss would spend a whole day behind closed door, with a muffled, “I’m busy,” if we needed him. Turns out he was figuring his frequent flyer miles, blackout dates, best routes, etc. My cousin got us a free room and amenities at a fancy hotel on Hilton points. I’ve heard it’s no longer as easy or cost-effective due to industry changes. ActiveOver50 publisher, Larry Hayes, found it nearly impossible to use overseas travel points without planning more than a year in advance.

For better options, a travel expert I know wisely points out the connection between the types of credit card you choose and the travel perks it might offer. She makes the comparison with financial planning: figure out your goals, needs, wants and priorities to narrow your search. A high-end credit card allows top level amenities with specialized bookings, airline upgrades, etc.—well worth the yearly fees. Since I don’t travel much, I prefer a no-fee, no-frills card with generous cash-back allowances.

Consider: miles, routes, frequency traveled, length of stay, time of year, cities and countries visited, lodging type, number of guests, etc. Cross-check with the corresponding “best deal” card for discounts and freebies. Credit cards from airlines and hotels to Disney (grandparents take note) and gas companies have diverse and distinct advantages. Remember that miles/points are often the most valued gift you can offer friends or family.



Q: When is it worthwhile to call a travel agent?

Over the years, the role of travel agents has evolved and narrowed. Most people now book a flight or mainstream travel on their own. There are separate cruise and tour companies for every corner of the globe and agents who specialize in specific countries or interests (fine art, famous cuisine, shopping.) To obtain visas, hire a private car or find a personal guide, travel pros enjoy cost-effective access and contacts built up over years. Although I worked well with our highly recommended Israeli guide via phone/email (ActiveOver50, summer, 2016), for planning an extended trip, special excursion or unique destination, using a knowledgeable agent can save money, time and be the catalyst for a perfect trip.

Q: Any basic money saving advice for travelers?

It’s necessary to constantly surf the net to follow changing fares and accommodations. Besides the better known Travel Advisor, Expedia, Yelp, there are probably hundreds of sites, blogs and specialized offerings like the Frugal Traveler and popular gurus. ActiveOver50 travel issues and magazines and newspaper travel sections add to the wealth of info. While DIY travel requires patience and time, many people find the challenge exhilarating and fun!

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