

travel lite . BY SREEREMA BANOO

# 9 WAYS to stretch your ringgit abroad

Even with the weak ringgit, there are ways to save when holidaying overseas.

**T**he advent of low-cost carriers and hot competition between airlines has resulted in cheaper airfares, which is good news for the traveller. If before, low-cost air travel was only possible around Southeast Asia, today it's available for trips to Australia, China and soon, the UK. Full-service airlines, meanwhile, have also stepped up their promotions, offering "all inclusive fares" to a host of destinations. While air travel may be relatively inexpensive these days, the total cost of a holiday isn't necessarily cheap: The cost of accommodation, transport, tours and sightseeing can burn quite a large hole in your pocket. But don't let the higher cost of living or an unfavourable exchange rate dampen your holiday mood; here are some tips on how to stretch the ringgit when holidaying overseas.

If you want to catch the annual wildebeest migration in South Africa, you'd have to make bookings eight months in advance



### 1} Plan in advance

It may be oft-repeated advice but if you're after the best deals, then plan ahead. How far ahead depends on where and where you're headed: For example, a safari to East Africa during the height of the annual wildebeest and zebra migration — dubbed "The Greatest Show on Earth" — may require planning and booking some eight months in advance.

### 2} Buy train tickets ahead of time

Travelling by train can sometimes be more expensive than air travel, especially in Europe. If you're doing a fair bit of travelling, it makes sense to get a rail pass (examples are the Eurail Pass ([www.eurail.com](http://www.eurail.com)) or Japan Rail Pass ([www.japanrailpass.net](http://www.japanrailpass.net)). Multiple-day rail passes are much cheaper than single-journey tickets. If you buy the rail passes ahead of time — remember that they can only be purchased before your trip — you can also take advantage of the promotions available. For example, the early-bird promotion for the Eurail Global Pass offers free travel days (buy 15 days' travel and get six additional days). Some rail passes also offer additional benefits; in certain European countries, Eurail Pass holders can book hotels at a discounted rate.

### 3} Take an overnight train

One way to reduce hotel or accommodation costs is to book a few overnight train passages; this works well if you're touring Europe. For example, you could take the overnight train from Rome, Italy, and wake up the next morning in Nice, France. The Rome to Munich, Germany, train is also popular. It departs at 9.30pm and arrives at 8.30am. Do bear in mind, however, that the cost of overnight quarters is not included in some rail passes.



### 4} Get a city pass

If you're spending some time in a particular city, a city pass could allow you entry to the popular tourist attractions. The London Pass ([www.londonpass.com](http://www.londonpass.com)), for example, gives you entry to more than 55 attractions, such as the Tower of London and Windsor Castle. The New York CityPass, meanwhile, is a pocket-sized booklet containing actual admission tickets to six of the city's best attractions (including the Empire State Building Observatory, American Museum of Natural History, Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cloisters). Valid for nine days, the price of the pass is half of what you'd pay for individual tickets in total. So if you're planning to visit all these attractions anyway, then it makes sense to opt for the city pass, which is also available for Atlanta, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco ([www.citypass.com](http://www.citypass.com)).

### 5} Get a travel card

If you're staying in a city for more than a day and plan to use public transport, it makes sense to get a travel card. If you're taking the London Underground, get a Travelcard for one, three or seven consecutive days, and for various combinations of travel zones. If you are making single journeys, then opt for the Oyster card, which can store up to £90 of credit. It automatically calculates the cheapest fare for all the journeys you make in a single day ([www.tfl.gov.uk/tube](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tube)).



## 6} Rent a cheap car

If possible, avoid renting a car, as rates and fuel prices can be high. But if you're on a road trip or if you want to tour the countryside or outskirts at a leisurely pace, then rent a cheap car. Check out [www.car-hire-centre.co.uk](http://www.car-hire-centre.co.uk) or [www.rentalcargroup.com](http://www.rentalcargroup.com), which compare deals offered by car rental companies. There are also add-ons — such as adding a driver, airport- or train station-pickup, insurance and navigational support — that you might need.



## 7} Bike around

Instead of a car, consider renting a motorbike. In Bali, for example, renting a bike or *bebek* is an easy and fast way to move around the island, especially if you're headed to areas with heavy traffic such as Kuta, Legian or Seminyak. In Bali, rental for a small car costs Rp300,000 (RM95) a day while it's Rp20,000 to Rp25,000 for a bike. What's more, you save on fuel as well. However, negotiating manic traffic can be a hair-raising experience.

If bicycles are more your thing, consider renting one the next time you're in Paris; the city has 20,000 bicycles available for short-term rentals from 1,450 stations under its public bicycle rental programme or Velib ([www.velib.paris.fr](http://www.velib.paris.fr)). To use the bikes, you need to take out a subscription, which allows you an unlimited number of rentals. Subscriptions can be purchased by the day, week or year, at €1, €5, or €29, respectively. With a subscription, bike rental is free for the first half hour of every individual trip; an unlimited number of such free trips can be made per day. A trip that lasts longer than 30 minutes incurs a charge of €1 to €4 for each subsequent 30-minute period (for example, an hour's trip costs €1, a 1½-hour trip costs €3). Other cities that offer similar schemes are Barcelona, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Berlin and Vienna.

## 9} Look for freebies

Look for free concerts, museum admissions and other activities; you'd be amazed at what's available. In Paris, entrance to the Louvre is free every first Sunday of the month and on July 14. Admission is also free for visitors under the age of 26 every Friday (6pm to 9.45pm). If you're headed to New York City during the summer, look for free concerts: On Friday mornings in May to August last year, Good Morning America hosted free live performances in Bryant Park, featuring stellar acts like Josh Groban, Usher and Maroon 5. ■



## 8} Plan your sightseeing

Do some research on the top attractions, the admission rates and the time it takes to see them. In Athens, Greece, the Parthenon is a must-see as are several other historical monuments in the area. Start with the Parthenon because the admission ticket covers entrance fees to the other attractions and can only be purchased at the Parthenon's entrance. If you start at any of the other monuments, you'll need to get individual tickets and end up paying more.

In Beijing, it is quite common to find different admission rates — one is known as the “entrance” ticket and the other a “through” ticket. The entrance ticket allows a single entry but may not include entry to all the scenic spots within that place. For example, at the Summer Palace, you pay RMB60 (RM30.80) (during the peak season) for a through ticket, which allows access to all the main attractions such as the Garden of Virtue and Harmony, Wenchang Gallery, Suzhou Street and Tower of Buddhist Incense. The entrance ticket costs less at RMB40, but excludes admission to some of the scenic spots. Should you decide later that you want to see these sights, you'd have to pay an additional RMB5 or RMB10. If time is limited — the Summer Palace is a vast area to cover — the entrance ticket may suffice. The Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven also adopt a similar ticketing system.

*Note: Please be sure to confirm all rates and details directly with the companies mentioned before planning your trip.*