

My Travels on a Budget

Getting from A to B

In December 2015, five months after graduating, I left for a year-long world trip with barely enough money in my bank account to get me through the first month, let alone a whole year. After trying in vain to find a job in my hometown in the months leading up to my trip, I realised that I'd be leaving for Asia a little less 'comfortable' than I anticipated. When the plane left the tarmac in Heathrow, I was thinking to myself that it probably wouldn't be long till I ran out of money and would be flying back to England. I was wrong - I had an amazing trip and didn't return until the following year. I, of course, learnt a lot about travelling on a budget along the way, and in this series, I will share with you all these travel secrets, starting with one of the biggest expenses - transportation.



SkyScanner

Plane tickets are an (almost) unavoidable expense when planning a world trip. What's more, they're usually pricey and probably one of my biggest expenses during my whole trip. SkyScanner was my saviour. It was (and still is) by far the best website I used for comparing flights and one of its benefits is that you can look at flights available in a whole month rather than only a specific day and compare multiple airports in each country you're flying from or to. For travellers who are flexible about dates and destinations but are not flexible when it comes to price, SkyScanner is the answer. An added bonus of this website is that you can enter your

closest airport and see all the cheapest destinations for that week. Using this trick got me very cheap tickets to spend a weekend in Brussels, somewhere I would never think of flying to if it hadn't been for SkyScanner.

That doesn't mean that SkyScanner doesn't have its flaws which I learnt about the hard way. During my time in Australia, I booked a flight to New Zealand, using SkyScanner to find the cheapest flight. After making the booking, I was expecting the usual confirmation email but nothing came. I waited and I waited but nothing ever came. After doing some research about the airline we booked with, we found a lot of people had booked with them only to never hear from them again. Based in Greece, the only way to get through to the company apparently was to go there in person to speak to someone. What I learnt - always do a little bit of research on the airline you're booking with before you confirm the booking! I never did receive my ticket and unfortunately had to buy another ticket. Fortunately, New Zealand was amazing which made up for it.

Take the Bus!

Trains - they're expensive and they're complicated. I've lost count of how many train stations I've been totally overwhelmed in, or trains I've boarded with the wrong ticket. The trick for saving money on trains is normally to do a lot of research into the cheapest train companies and pre-booking online which can be easier said than done. Buses on the other hand are almost always a much simpler and cheaper alternative. When you have a bit (or a lot!) of time to get somewhere, what's better than a bus? And an added bonus is the incredible perspective you get from a bus window - on my travels I've seen all sorts from my seat: elephants, mountains, monkeys and waterfalls. Another tip - if possible, get a seat with no one behind you so you can recline guilt free. Night buses will save you the price of a night in accommodation, which is another way to save a bit of cash.

Blablacar

Blablacar and other car sharing apps are unsung heroes of travel. Once you've set up an account, you can scroll through a list of drivers who are making the same journey as you on the dates you specify. Once you've reserved a seat and received a response from the driver, you arrange a pick up and a drop off. It's a very comfortable and affordable way to travel and it's also a great way to meet people as the journey can involve a lot of chatting with the driver and the other Blablacar passengers. It's a win-win scenario - the driver gets to share the cost of travelling and have company on a long journey. And the passengers get a lift from A to B faster than with a bus.

As a woman travelling alone, I was somewhat apprehensive about getting into a stranger's car. For that reason, there were a few precautions I took - I gave the driver's details to a friend and I researched the driver (reviews, social media etc.). On one journey from Vienna to Salzburg, I booked a driver and then started to get a little anxious about travelling *Blog post continues...*