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Lori Swiderman

Luxe Travel for Less

Secrets to high-end trips that don't break the bank

BY KATHRYN STREETER

DO YOU HAVE five-star taste without the bank account to match? In a pricey travel year, travelers are adopting savvy strategies to enjoy high-end experiences with less financial regret.

Travel adviser Lori Swiderman, president of Travel By La Buena Vida, says even a standard itinerary allows for touch-

es of luxury — a few nights in a beautiful hotel, a special experience, or thoughtful upgrades can make all the difference. Jonathan Alder, luxury travel adviser and founder of Jonathan's Travels, suggests luxe travel can be found by pursuing quality over quantity. "It's better to take a shorter trip that will create unforgettable

memories than to stretch a longer trip and compromise the experience."

Together, their strategies unpack how to make luxury feel reachable without stressful price tags.

SEE THE BIG PICTURE

When demand is down, score luxe options with low-stress price points. Truth be told, the classic shoulder season is still Swiderman's favorite luxury hack. "Early June and late August are absolute sweet spots in places like Cape Cod (in Massachusetts), Park City (Utah), or Jackson Hole (Wyoming), with beautiful weather, fewer crowds and noticeably better rates," she says. Rethinking your travel dates rewards you with more space, upgrades and attentive service. "It's how we do summer chic without the peak season chaos or the peak season price tag."

Bonus: Alder says that shoulder season can also promise better weather. "Off-season doesn't mean it's a bad time to travel. It simply may not align with school holidays, which tend to dictate peak seasons rather than when a destination is truly at its best."

Prices will soar the minute a place becomes popular, Alder says. He suggests looking for undiscovered destinations or under-the-radar districts for fewer crowds and lower prices such as St. Pete Beach instead of Tampa in Florida, or Orlando's culinary-rich areas — like Colonialtown — instead of only its theme parks.



Kodiak, Alaska



Kachemak Bay State Park, Alaska

LOYALTY PROGRAMS, PERKS

It's critical to choose an agent who has meaningful access, Alder says. If the agent is part of a consortium like Signature Travel Network, clients gain access to preferred rates, promotions and valuable perks. Make sure to book flights early, too, to avoid paying top dollar, he says. "I always recommend booking early, generally six to nine months in advance. The best fares are released around nine months before travel and end about six months out, so booking within that window will give you the best chance at the lowest prices."

Use transferable credit card points or

airline miles for flights, and save your cash to book a better hotel or an elevated experience, Swinderman says. To maximize your options, avoid restrictive non-refundable fares that limit changes and upgrade opportunities.

Lastly, a pro tip from Alder: Buy a business-class fare far in advance, and upgrade to first on an international flight for the greatest financial value — sometimes for surprisingly few miles.

BOUTIQUE GEMS, NEW OFFERS

Elevated VIP-style vacays with truffles and bubbly are attainable with some tips and tricks. "The best intro offers and

added-value perks like breakfast, resort credits or surprise upgrades often come from knowing when a property is soft opening, promoting midweek stays or quietly releasing seasonal packages," Swinderman says. Got your eye on the Hermosa Inn in Arizona, or Teton Mountain Lodge & Spa in Wyoming? Join their mailing list, and follow their social media accounts — after all, it's about knowing how to unlock the value most travelers never see, she says. At check-in, you can also try asking the front desk if any complimentary upgrades are available.

"I often steer clients toward cruising because it offers incredible value, especially when booking through a travel adviser, which can provide access to exclusive amenities through their consortia," Alder says. Small luxury ships are often less expensive than land-based travel, he continues. Spring — before school lets out — is the ideal window for an immersive, accessible Alaska cruise experience.

In the end, luxury looks different for everyone, Swinderman says. It's about how a trip feels, not the price tag. "Luxury isn't a number; it's a feeling you create for yourself," she says.