



How to Take a Summer Vacation on a Budget



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Whether you are a hard-working Canadian on minimum wage or a Toronto trust fund baby, we have options.

With the weight of student loans and a shit job market, it's easy to feel like you don't have the money to travel. But youth is fleeting, and who wants to only be able to see the world once you're washed? To each their own, I suppose, but we're here to help. We've put together some recommendations for places young Canadians (and Americans near the border) might be able to afford on a typical tight-as-fuck millennial budget.

Some notes:

Take into consideration exchange rates: The Canadian dollar is not *that* great right now, though it is rising. Exchanging money before going out of the country is generally a good idea.

- Hostels and cheap Airbnbs are your friends. However, do check the legality of Airbnb in the country you are going to before booking.
- Buying food from a grocery store instead of eating out every day while on vacay is going to save you a fair amount.
- Walk, rent a bicycle, or take public transit whenever possible.
- If you are going to drink, buy your own booze and pre-game instead of shelling out extra cash at a bar or club.

Also of note: Keep in mind this is dependent on where you live and your access to bus, train, plane, or a vehicle. It is by no means a complete and definitive list.



Montreal: like being in Europe but still in Canada. Photo via Flickr user [Pedro Szekeky](#)

Under \$500: Scrounging Level

If you're in this bracket, an overnight or weekend-type vacation is going to be most suitable.

Camping Since most of Canada is full of nature, this is an affordable option for many. Even if you don't have your own gear, you can probably find one to borrow from a woodsy-type loved one or by posting on Facebook. Note: Camping is something (allegedly) that primarily white people enjoy.

Detroit Motor City is a good pick for those on a tight budget in Ontario wanting to get away for a long weekend. It might not be as lavish as it once was, but there's still a lot to do here: awesome music (techno AND jazz), food (coney dogs and chili cheese fries), art (like [The Heidelberg Project](#)), and endless urban decay of abandoned buildings (if you're into that sort of thing). Airbnbs are reasonable if you don't go during peak times, such as when major music festivals are going on.

Montreal Everything is (slightly) cheaper in Montreal compared to other major Canadian cities (both of them). Just be forewarned if you are coming from Toronto, you might want to stay once you take in how much you'd save on rent there. Airbnbs go for an average of about \$85 per night (note: if you want an Airbnb of the entire private home variety, that's going to run you more). If you don't want to take a bus and live in Toronto, you can get a rideshare for somewhere north of \$30. There's incredible nightlife with a 3 AM last call (and the infamous after-hours club [Stereomood](#)), a healthy art scene, real poutine everywhere, beer in convenience stores, and the [Biodome](#) (which houses four ecosystems). It's a great option if you want to feel like sort of like you're in Europe without having a passport.

Rent a Cottage on Airbnb Even if you don't have friends with rich parents who own lakeside property, you can still get away with booking a cottage on Airbnb easily for under \$200 per night. (But, if you do have a friend with a rich family home in Muskoka, do take advantage of that.) To be honest, convincing a friend who has a car to go with you is the easiest and cheapest method of pulling this off. Once you get to your temporary lakeside (or lake-adjacent) home, go hiking (it's free!) and rent a canoe or kayak for under \$40 a day.

A Wine Tour Yes, it's a bit bougie, but if you're with a group of friends, it can be fun. In BC, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec, you can easily plan a day, overnight, or two-night trip to go on a wine tour with your crew. There are wineries in Kelowna, BC; Niagara Region in Ontario; and the Finger Lakes in Upstate New York. Important: Make sure you have a designated driver (limos are a good option and not always expensive as you might think when split between a group of people).

Just Take Acid and Go to a Park

For those who can't spend more than \$20 on a trip.



Live look at what you'll be eating every day if you can manage to budget for a trip to New York. Photo via Flickr user [La Piazza Pizzeria](#)

A Road Trip to the Nearest City Regardless of where you live in Canada, you can probably hop on a bus or drive to the nearest city for under a couple hundred. If all else fails, [you could always hitchhike](#) (not that we would advise that). (Or, go to the nearest cool US city: Minneapolis and Chicago are good options for Prairie kids, though you might run into the next budget bracket.) Make it an overnight trip and buy tickets in advance to a concert in said city.

\$500-\$1,000: First Job out of University Level

Plan ahead and book early to be able to afford these trips at this bracket.

New York City If you live in Quebec or Ontario, taking a Greyhound or Megabus could save you a lot of money if you're travelling to New York City—should you have the time to sit on a bus for 10+ hours. You could get away with buying a flight if you take [Porter Airlines](#) to eerily similar-named-but-not-at-all-the-same Newark, New Jersey and take transit from there to NYC. This budget is still tight for New York and works best for a few-days-long trip. Staying in Manhattan is off the table. Maybe Brooklyn too.

You're better off crashing with a friend if you happen to know someone who's managed to survive living in NYC or you could get an Airbnb in a burrough. Get a refillable Metropass and avoid cabs, eat pizza and bagels (cheap and on nearly every street corner), and go to whisky bars in Brooklyn with drink specials.

A Music Festival Depending on where you live, you might be able to get away with paying under \$500. Multi-day festival tickets alone typically run into the hundreds though, and if you're going to be travelling to get there and partying extra hard (including overpriced drinks at the festival), you could easily find yourself in this bracket. Bring your own food (if it's allowed), stay hydrated, and if you can, camp out to save money.

Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia For East Coasters, going to beautiful Cape Breton for a few days is a popular choice. Airbnbs are about \$140 on average per night, and hotels will generally run you a bit more. Spend your evenings going on an old-fashioned pub crawl. Huge bonus: locally sourced and affordable seafood (including lobster) dinners.

Maine Though this state is so far north it basically should be considered Canada, it's a vacation destination for some Canadians (especially those on or near the east coast). Bar Harbor is beautiful coastal, woodsy location and hosts the awesome Acadia National Park, which is 47,000 acres and on an island. However, accommodations in most popular tourism spots in the New England state can be expensive: Airbnbs go for an average of about \$250 per night in Bar Harbor. Oh, and of course, there's lobster.

Toronto It's expensive af to live here, but if you're just visiting, you can get an Airbnb (average price per night is around \$100) or a hostel (there's several in the hippie-tourist-hybrid neighbourhood of Kensington Market). Last call is unfortunately 2 AM, but there is a healthy afterparty scene, especially in and around Kensington. Avoid King Street West clubs like the plague: expensive and awful. If you're into being in city parks, Trinity Bellwoods is a summer staple in Toronto; for some reason, it's a super popular location for public drinking despite it being illegal.



Montezuma, Costa Rica is a choice location for young people travelling in Central America. Photo via Flickr user [Javier Bacchetta](#)

\$1,000–\$2,000+: Trust Fund and/or Livable Wage Level

The world is your oyster, and your financial stability is the envy of your peers if you are able to read past this mark.

Mexico or Central America Round-trip flights to some locations in these countries from major Canadian cities are cheaper than flying between Toronto and Vancouver. Depending on the location, hostels can go for \$20 or under per night. Countries such as Costa Rica (where drugs are decriminalized) have quite the drug tourism economy; cocaine is super cheap and pure compared to Canada throughout Central America. Be sure to do your research on which areas are touristy and which tend to be unsafe (the latter is especially important if you're visiting an urban area, such as Mexico City). Oh, and another word of advice: Even if night flights are cheaper, opt to arrive during the day unless you are an experienced traveller.

The Caribbean If you like resorts, you can easily get away with being in the \$1,000-\$2,000 bracket for destinations in countries such as the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Jamaica. However, if you're booking via Sunwing Airlines, take the time to educate yourself about that company's troubling history (note: I took it once, and it did not end in disaster). Airbnbs or hostels are a better option if you're not looking to hang around resort types, but beware of resorts masquerading as Airbnb listings before you book. If you're going to a location that is not immediately reachable by a major airport, research public bus prices, times, and reliability ahead of your trip before deciding final plans. It's also a good idea to make sure you aren't going during rainy season. Book a snorkeling adventure (some are all-you-can-drink) for under \$100 once you arrive. Be wary of going on beaches at night—at the very least, do not bring valuables if you must go for a moonlit walk.

Backpacking Europe If you've managed to not hear about someone's techno mecca to the sinden/nightclub Berghain in Berlin, then you must not live in Toronto. When planning a multi-country escapade around Europe, booking flights through a discount airline like Wow Air can save you money, but you're still likely going to need to budget in the thousands (in Canadian) for your trip in total if you're going for a couple weeks.

Flying within Europe, using airlines like Ryanair (of recent public sex fame) is way more reasonably priced than flying within Canada, and trains are a good option depending on where you want to travel. Countries that don't use the Euro tend to be cheaper, such as those in Eastern Europe: Budapest, Hungary; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Krakow, Poland. If you want to go to Italy, consider that the Dalmatian Coast in Croatia is a similar but cheaper option. If you're thinking about Spain—and, to be fair, Ibiza is tempting to watch the Brits in action—consider that locations in Portugal (Lisbon!!!), where drugs are decriminalized in the entire country btw, is considerably more affordable.

Follow Allison Tierney on Twitter.