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On a personal Note:

Happy 4th of July. Our summer is half over & we have no plans to go tripping but check out the article, cost savings trip tips. During these hot summer days I've been working on quilts. I made a promise to myself that I was going to finish all my on going projects before I start any new quilts. Some of these unfinished treasure I started in 1990's and when I pull them out of the closet my mind races back to when I picked out the fabric and what class I was taking. However, sometimes my mind fails me and for the life of me I can't remember why or when I started this quilt. Someone asked the other day how many unfinished projects I had. I was *almost* embarrassed to say around 30. I confess, I'm a fabriholic! Make it a glorious July.



History in the making...

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Drafted by Thomas Jefferson between June 11 and June 28, 1776, the Declaration of Independence is at once the nation's most cherished symbol of liberty and Jefferson's most enduring monument. Here, in exalted and unforgettable phrases, Jefferson expressed the convictions in the minds and hearts of the American people.

The political philosophy of the Declaration was not new; its ideals of individual liberty had already been expressed by John Locke and the Continental philosophers. What Jefferson did was to summarize this philosophy in "self-evident truths" and set forth a list of grievances against the King in order to justify before the world the breaking of ties between the colonies and the mother country. We invite you to [read a transcription](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html) of the complete text of the Declaration. <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html>

The American flag with fifty stars will have its fiftieth birthday on July 4, 2010

Read more at Suite101: [July 4, 2010 Marks 50th Anniversary of 50-Star U.S. Flag](http://americanhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/july-4-2010-marks-50th-anniversary-of-50-star-us-flag#ixzz0sG4C0kg9) <http://americanhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/july-4-2010-marks-50th-anniversary-of-50-star-us-flag#ixzz0sG4C0kg9>

May you be surrounded by family and friends and your day is blessed!

U.S. Foreclosure Activity Declines

Foreclosure filings, including default notices, scheduled auctions and bank repossessions, were reported on 322,920 U.S. properties in May, a 3 percent decline from the previous month and an increase of less than 1 percent from May 2009, [RealtyTrac](#) reported this morning. One in every 400 U.S. housing units received a foreclosure filing during the month.

Nevada continued to post the nation's highest foreclosure rate with one in every 179 homes receiving a foreclosure filing in May, despite a 12 percent decrease in foreclosure activity from last month and a 16 percent decrease from a year ago. Arizona had the second highest foreclosure rate in the nation with one in every 169 households receiving a foreclosure filing, followed by Florida with one in every 174 households receiving a foreclosure filing during the month.

Nine of the top 10 metro areas with the highest foreclosure rates posted declining foreclosure activity on a year-over-year basis. Las Vegas led the nation with the highest foreclosure rate, but overall foreclosure activity was down 18 percent over last year. Vallejo-Fairfield, Calif., was the only metro area in the top 10 that showed a year-over-year increase in foreclosure activity. **JUNE 2010**

With these Cost-Saving Tips for Trips, Money Concerns Won't Bend You Out of Shape



RISMEDIA, June 30, 2010--(MCT)--Americans will grab their suitcases — and their precious dollars — to head out for vacation this summer. That's good because getaways have been proved to reduce stress. The key is making sure the trip itself does not induce stress by, say, costing boatloads of money. Fortunately, there are ways to hit the road without taking a detour to the poorhouse. Let us count the ways (while you count your cash).

1. Exchange sweat equity for sweet deals. If the idea of chopping firewood near the shore of a deep blue lake revs up your inner lumberjack, consider a work weekend at Gunflint Lodge. This classic resort on the Gunflint Trail north of Grand Marais, Minn., hosts weekends each spring and fall during which guests work on Saturday mornings preparing the resort for the coming season (planting flowers, wielding an ax), but pay just \$99 for their two-night stay plus a Saturday-night dinner buffet. The amount you save depends upon the type of cabin you score; sign up early to get the best: romantic cottages with a steam shower, two-person spa, a deck and other amenities. Fall work weekends are scheduled for Nov. 5-7 and 12-14 (www.gunflint.com; 1-800-328-3325).
2. Say "au revoir" to Paris and London, and "cze" (that's "hello" in Polish) to Warsaw and Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro. So-called "second cities" in Europe are less expensive because they get fewer tourists. I call that a win-win.
3. Sleep on a sofa. Sure, it feels odd to crash on a stranger's couch (or in her guest room), but the heebie-jeebies should dissipate in the morning when said stranger (who is quickly becoming a friend) plies you with strong coffee and insider information on spots to see. The other cool part: no bill. CouchSurfing (at www.couchsurfing.org) is a nonprofit organization that links travelers with hosts in more than 230 countries. You need to join and create a bio of yourself before you can "surf" (the organization's parlance for "find a bed.")
4. Join a museum at home. You can get free admission to similar institutions across the country. Heading to Chicago with children? A membership to the Science Museum of Minnesota (\$69 for two; \$95 for a family) will get you in the door fee-free at four Windy City biggies: the Adler Planetarium, the Field Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Science and Industry and Chicago's Children's Museum. You'll also get free admission to more than 200 other museums around the country. "Friends" of the Walker Art Center waltz in to more than 300 museums elsewhere, including the Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which is as star-studded as the Sunset Strip about 3 miles north (friending the Walker costs \$100). A mere \$45 membership at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum can find you smelling the roses at more than 200 other arboretums across the land.
5. Hungry for some upscale grub? Dine at the fancy restaurant on your to-do list during lunch, when the cost can be half of what it might be at dinner. At Commander's Palace in New Orleans, for instance, the three-course Creole lunch, which culminates in a bread pudding soufflé, rings up at \$30, less than the cost of many of the restaurant's dinner entrees.
6. Embrace visitors' bureaus. Vacation hot spots have convention and visitors bureaus, and most use coupons and discounts as lures. For instance, at the website of the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau (www.orlandoinfo.com), you can print a "Magicard" good for discounts at places such as Sea World and Nickelodeon Suite Resort. The visitors bureau of Rapid City, S.D. (www.visitrapidcity.com), offers coupons for the Black Hills area. Click on the "plan your trip" tab and scroll down to "coupons."
7. Win a trip. The odds may be slim, but someone's got to be the lucky one. Most contests for free getaways are an attempt by a visitor's bureau to get you dreaming of its destination — and perhaps to nab your e-mail address for future promotions. Cases in point: Travel Oregon will soon give away three weeklong "adventurecations" (think biking, golfing and kayaking), and at the end of its short online entry form, the organization invites you to receive monthly newsletters. (Enter at www.traveloregon.com by July 18.) Visit Sweden, along with the West Sweden Tourism Board and Volvo, is offering a chance to win a one-week trip to West Sweden (complete with a Volvo loaner car). To enter, you must submit a "dream itinerary," created with the trip planner that pops up as you register. By the time you're done, you'll want to take the trip even if it isn't free. (Enter at www.carplusvacation.com by July 1.) For more free getaway contests, search online for "vacation giveaways."
8. Skip buying a guidebook. Instead, put that \$15.95 toward a dinner at a restaurant you discovered while researching your destination online. Guidebooks can illuminate the history and culture of a destination, but they are sometimes years old. Browsing the Web can offer the same insights, but also yields tips on the currently cool night clubs or restaurants. Most of the big names in travel guides have a website (www.ricksteves.com, www.fodors.com, www.frommers.com). But to tap into the latest about a destination, read travel forums written by real travelers. One of the best is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree Travel (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree). Virtual Tourist (www.virtualtourist.com) is also worth a look.
9. Rent a car using a card. Many credit cards insure you against accidents, so you can skip the often expensive supplemental collision damage coverage offered by car rental companies. Not all credit cards are created equal, though. Check to see if your card offers coverage where you're traveling and what the deductible might be. Also, be sure you understand all the rules. One reader told me that when he rented a car in Germany, he had to decline all of the car rental company's insurance options or his Visa card would not cover the rental at all.
10. Take your chances and save a bundle on a hotel. At Priceline.com, you choose your location and star rating, offer a low-ball price and plug in your credit card number. Then you pray for the best, because if your bid is accepted, the deal is done. Only then do you get the name of the hotel. Hotwire.com, another opaque site that lets you search by location and number of stars, lists deals by rates, but no specific hotel names until you pay. Both sites are known for their hotel deals, but you can also try for flights and rental cars on the sites. If you're game for the unknown, (and how far can you stray from acceptable if you request three- or four-star hotels?), it's worth the gamble.
11. Travel when others won't. At many places off-season, you'll find cheap sleeps, empty museums and open tables at the dinner hour. If you can embrace the beauty of winter in Grand Marais (not difficult, I assure you) and don't mind skipping a port of call because a hurricane is blowing in, what's not to love? Beyond off-season, there's off-limits. When the state department warns people to use caution in Jamaica and Thailand due to unrest, a certain kind of traveler packs the bags, anticipating unprecedented deals.
12. If you want to get away, but can't stomach the idea of eating out (and paying restaurant rates) for every meal, consider renting a home. These can be a real bargain, particularly if you travel and share the home with another couple or family. Vacation Rental by Owner (www.vrbo.com) is a top site. Homeaway.com is another with rentals around the world. For a cabin on the North Shore, check with Cascade Vacation Rentals (www.lakesuperiorrentals.com). Also, www.lakeplace.com offers rentals from Michigan to North Dakota.

RULES TO FLY BY:

13. Before you hit the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, log onto its website (www.mspairport.com). There you'll find coupons good for discounts at the airport, such as \$3 off a \$10 purchase at French Meadow Bakery. And who couldn't use an ice cream treat (\$1 off at Ben & Jerry's) to soothe the jangled nerves that come with the flying experience. Click on the "eat, shop, relax" button and then click on "save."
14. Buy when the time is right. According to farecompare.com, airlines begin to manage a flight's revenue three months before departure. If you buy before the three-month mark, you're probably paying too much because the airline hasn't adjusted prices downward if the flight is looking empty. Also, prices rise 14 days before departure. Farecompare also reports that airlines typically file airfare sales on late Monday evening and during the morning hours of Tuesday. Other airlines often meet those fares, so Tuesday afternoon is a great time to shop. Sales generally end late on Thursday, leaving weekends (when many busy people take time to plan a trip) with the highest airfares.
15. Fly when the time is right, too. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, typically the slowest days in the air, offer the cheapest fares. Heading out in the early morning can also reduce the price.
16. Be certain before you book. Changing your flight can cost as much as \$150 on many carriers.
17. Know the market. To grab a deal, you need to know it when you see it. There are a few ways to get a feel for pricing. Once you've decided on a destination, even if you aren't ready to book, start checking airfares. Or you can go to websites that do the research for you. Sign up for airfare pricing alerts with sites such as farecompare.com and airfarewatchdog.com. And go to Bing.com/travel, which searches the flight you want and predicts whether the prices will go up or down.
18. Pack light. Not only do airlines charge for checked bags, the costs go through the roof if those bags are overweight or oversized. For the first checked bag, Delta charges \$23 if paid in advance online, or \$25 if paid at the airport; other airlines charge similar prices. (A few exceptions: Southwest Airlines lets you check a bag for free and some airlines, including Delta, waive first-bag fees for people who carry an airline-branded credit card and pay for tickets with the card.) A second bag would cost you \$32 or \$35. Bring in a bag weighing more than 50 pounds, and you'll be charged \$90 — unless it weighs more than 70 pounds, in which case the charge jumps to \$175. A bag that measures more than 62 inches overall (add the length, width and height) will run you \$175; if it's more than 80 inches, you'll want to just stay home: the charge is \$300.
19. Bring your own meal and an empty water bottle. Unless you're flying first-class (and if you are, why are you reading this story?), you're headed to a foreign land, or you want to pay \$9 for a stale turkey sandwich, it's best to brown-bag it. Just skip the yogurt, cream cheese or any other gooey delight that would get nabbed by security. (The 3-1-1 rule applies to your dinner — all liquids must be in 3.4-ounce or smaller containers, fit into one quart-sized zip-locked bag, and each passenger is entitled to one such bag.) That Transportation Security Administration rule also means your water bottle must be empty. Just fill it in a fountain once you've been waved through.
20. Book online. Most U.S. carriers don't charge for bookings online, but do for telephone reservations and purchases at a ticket counter.
21. Sign up for fare alerts and e-deals. Many websites — including farecompare.com, kayak.com, airfarewatchdog.com, travelocity.com and orbitz.com — will send you notices when prices drop on a specific route. Airlines themselves send mid-week e-mails about last-minute bargain fares.
22. Call a travel agent. Most charge a fee, but it can be worth the minimal cost, especially when itineraries are complicated. Agents possess the know-how to track down cheap fares and good routes.
23. Know the fees. TripAdvisor.com and kayak.com both have the option to include airline fees in a search for cheap airfares. farecompare.com has a comprehensive fee chart, including those pesky ones for seat selection, reserving by phone and meals.
24. Follow the low-fare carriers. If you're flexible about where you vacation, consider choosing a location served by low-fare carriers such as Southwest and Sun Country. Where those airlines fly, prices tend to drop as other airlines compete.
25. Consider driving or taking the train. Especially, if you are traveling with a group, (sometimes known as family), you'll save money by loading up the car for a drive. Plus, you'll see the country (or at least freeways) and get to spend quality time with the gang. If an extended drive doesn't qualify as "quality time," try the train (www.amtrak.com), where you can kick back in seats as spacious as those in the first-class section of airplanes.



WEBSITES TRAVELERS SHOULD BOOKMARK

FareCompare.com lists fare sales and offers fare alerts so you know when airlines drop prices. It also has an airline fee chart. Airfarewatchdog.com highlights the lowest fares from cities across the country. You can also sign up for fare alerts here. Kayak.com scans numerous booking sites, from online travel agents to airlines, and lists the results for air, car and hotel. The site can compile an airfare search that includes fees such as those for checked bags. It also offers fare alerts. Bing.com/travel searches for flights and predicts whether the prices will go up or down. Hotels.com sells discounted rooms at more than 70,000 properties, including some hostels. Travelzoo.com, smartertravel.com and budgettravel.com are bargain sites that list vacation deals. Priceline.com and hotwire.com, so-called opaque sites, provide exceptional savings for anyone who is willing to book a room without knowing which hotel it's in. The sites apply the same no-name approach to cars and airfare.

Tax Changes coming:



G/Note: This information comes from a newsletter that my Tax accountant sent and I thought I would pass along as a heads up for the coming tax years.

A little history first: Do you remember the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act (EGTRRA)? Well, I am not surprised if you do not.

In 2001 EGTRRA was passed by Congress to slowly revive the economy over a ten year period. It had many components, but the most important ones were:

Taxes were lowered

The marriage penalty was eliminated for many taxpayers

The child tax credit was increased

Plus many more tax savings were phased-in.

After the ten year period of increasing lower taxes, the tax rates and rules are scheduled to revert back to pre-2001 conditions

So in the tax world, 2010 will be as good as it gets, and 2011 will be a tax shocker if everything goes as planned. 2010 may be your last chance to take advantage of some tax gems before they expire. This information is focused on tax provisions that are scheduled to expire at the end of 2010. Unless congress acts, it could be your last chance to take advantage of these savings.



To put it in perspective:

Now in 2010

The federal tax rates are as follows: 10%, 15%, 25%, 28%, 33%, 35%

The 10% and 15% brackets are wider in order to eliminate the marriage penalty, and the standard deduction for married filers is 2 times the single deduction.

The Child Tax Credit is \$1,000 per child

Next year 2011

The federal tax rates will be as follows: 15%, 28%, 31%, 36%, and 39.6%.

The 10% bracket will be nonexistent, the 15% bracket will be narrower, and the marriage standard deduction will become 167% of the single standard deduction. (The marriage penalty returns.)

The Child Tax Credit will be \$500 per child.

Sell stock or property at a gain and pay little or no federal tax:

Do you have a building, piece of land, block of stock, or other capital investment that has increased in value?

If you are in the 25% tax bracket or higher, the tax rate on long term capital gains will be only 15% in 2010.

If you wait until 2011 to sell, the rate is scheduled to be 18% or 20% depending on holding period.

If you are in the 15% tax bracket or lower, 2010 is your last chance to sell assets held long term at a gain and pay no federal tax. State taxes may apply.

What tax bracket are you in?

G/Notes: Of course, Congress may make new tax laws before 2011 but it's always best to be prepared in advance. Like I always say, " you need to contract your local tax advisor to discuss your financial issues."

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 SELLER THINK "GAIL"
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