

How to Take a Low-Budget Camping Trip

Summary: *Camping may end costing more than you think unless you follow these tips.*

Did you know that many popular campsites fill up a year in advance? You might want to start planning for next year's summer camping trip now! Whether you want to take a low-key trip to round out this summer or early fall or you're already thinking about what you want to do for next year, there are a lot of things to think through and consider.

While you may think camping as an inexpensive way to take a trip, if you don't have a lot of experience it may end up being more expensive than you think. First of all, there's all the gear; then there's paying for campsites, entrances into parks, food, gas, etc. Sure, it's not a luxury trip to Italy, but it's not cheap either. If you're looking to be more frugal while exploring all the U.S. has to offer, here are eight tips on how to take a low-budget camping trip.

1. **Check out National Forests rather than National Parks.** National Parks tend to be more expensive than camping in a National Forest, so take a look around and see if there are any National Forests nearby parks that you want to visit to cut costs on campgrounds.
2. **Look for special passes.** If you're traveling with someone over 62, you're an active member of the military, or you happen to be traveling with a 4th grader or 4th-grade educator, you can get a [highly discounted](#) or [free pass](#) into national parks.
3. **Pack as much of your own food as you can.** You've probably learned that on any vacation, you end up spending a ton of money you didn't expect by eating out all the time. Plan ahead and pack food to make simple meals while camping. If you're going on a long trip, leave the parks and stock up again at a less expensive grocery store.
4. **Use a small propane burner for cooking.** While campfires can be a fun addition to any trip, the cost of wood for a night can really add up. Consider having campfires a couple of times for your s'mores and using a propane stove for cooking your food on nights you return a little later.
5. **Use rechargeable batteries.** Some campgrounds have electric and non-electric sites, and the ones with electricity can be considerably more expensive than the others. For the most part, you shouldn't need much electricity on a camping trip but for things like charging your phone, bring a [rechargeable battery](#) that will keep you going for a couple of days.
6. **Borrow gear from friends.** Camping gear is expensive, and if you're not a regular camper, it may not be worth the investment. Poll your friends and family and see if you can borrow things like tents, sleeping bags, lanterns, and cooking supplies.
7. **Avoid touristy towns.** Some of these towns can be fun to walk around, but if you're dining out or buying anything, go to another town. Not only will you save money and avoid crowds, but you'll also get a more local experience.
8. **Fill up on gas away from the park.** Large national parks tend to have their own gas stations inside the park, but because they're the only one there, they can increase their prices with no competition. Be sure to fill up a few miles away from entering the park and whenever you leave for a day trip.