

feature



A beautiful traditional house in Lombok on top of a hill overlooking the sea

TRAVELING ON YOUR OWN, ON A BUDGET

IN FEBRUARY 2011, TWO FRIENDS SAVED P100,000 EACH TO TRAVEL ACROSS INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA, DARING TO TRAVEL FOR AS LONG AS THEIR FUNDS WOULD LAST. THE TRIP WOULD TAKE THEM TO NINE COUNTRIES IN A SPAN OF SIX MONTHS. FIND OUT HOW THEY DID IT AND START PLANNING YOUR OWN BIG TRIP!

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY LOIS YASAY

1 KEEP TRACK OF YOUR SPENDING

We always had a small notebook handy to list down our daily expenses. This included transportation costs, food, hostel stays and even small things like getting a pedicure or our hair done. It helped to know where our money went so we could figure out where to cut back on our spending.

2 SAVE ON FLIGHTS

Plan ahead and keep yourself updated on promo fares. Sign up for airline newsletters, subscribe to their Facebook page and follow them on Twitter to get the best deals. Our

cheapest flights on the trip were booked more than six months in advance during a seat sale. We were able to get flights from Kuala Lumpur to Bali, Bali to Kuala Lumpur and Kuala Lumpur to Manila for only P1500!

3 TRAVEL BY LAND

Imagine yourself getting on a motorbike and riding through breathtaking landscapes. Or biking around the majestic temples of Angkor Wat. How about trying delicacies and talking to locals and fellow travelers aboard trains? Sure, these may not always be the most comfortable options, but taking land



The little red book keeping track of spending wherever we went!

transportation is one of the best ways to experience a country.

4 SKIP HOTELS

Instead of always staying at hotels, try alternatives like hostels and family-run homestays. Not only are you supporting the local economy, you also don't have to spend a fortune, especially if you're staying for more than a few nights in a place. You won't be spending a lot of time in the room anyway. Another option is to rent apartments or condo units if you're traveling with a group. Try roomorama.com for short-term vacation rentals. You still get privacy for less.



A great way to get some exercise and see the sights in the picturesque town of Hoi An, Vietnam



Getting drenched by my 45L Thai North Face Terra backpack



Taking the train is a great way to experience and document travelers' local eating



Sign at a family-run place in Muong Ngai, Laos: All-You-Can-Eat Buffet for only LAOS 5,000 (about US\$2)



A bowl is a selection of different Indian food served in small pots called katoris. The katoris are filled with various meats, vegetables and other dishes. The number of katoris offered can vary from three to six and will normally be accompanied by rice, Indian breads and chutney.

Another way we were able to save on accommodations was to couchsurf for a few nights in Thailand. couchsurfing.org is an online travelers' community where you can stay at a local's place for free. You can pay it forward by hosting a traveler in your own country. It's a great venue for cultural exchange and we've met so many wonderful people all over the world through this community.

5 TRY LOCAL FOOD

Food is going to take up a lot of your budget. So how can you eat well without ending up broke? Dine where the locals dine. Look around—usually, if a place is packed, the food is good and cheap. Ask fellow travelers you meet for their recommendations. Be open to trying new food. It's a major part of the travel experience. We've had crunchy bugs in Laos, eaten curry with our bare hands in India, and tasted raw shellfish with spices and peanuts in Vietnam. They were all so delicious! We can attest that Filipinos do have an iron stomach. Thankfully, we never got sick during the entire six months we were traveling.

6 USE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

You don't need a taxi when you arrive at the airport. Consider the subway or buses because it's sometimes more convenient and definitely much cheaper. If you are in a major city and will be staying for a few days, research on multi-trip discounts. Many Metros and railroads have passes such as three-day unlimited travel passes which might be worth the cost if you're going to explore. If your destination isn't that far away, consider asking the locals for directions and just walk. Not only do you get some exercise, it's also a great chance for you to see the city and take pictures.

7 TRAVEL AT NIGHT

Consider traveling at night to save time and money on accommodation and fare. Night trains and red-eye flights are usually the cheapest option to get from one place to another. I remember going on a three-day non-stop overland journey from Jodhpur to Goa in India. We only took trains and buses on the way and didn't sleep in any hotels. We

TIPS ON FINING

- It's usually cheaper to travel midweek. Travel deals are entirely based on availability, and since most people travel over the weekend, you will find the cheapest airfare deals if you travel on a weekday. Be on the lookout for flights departing and returning on a Tuesday or Wednesday.
- If you find a nonstop flight too expensive, try adding a stopover to save money. Direct flights (those with one stop) are also cheaper than nonstop flights, particularly when you fly long haul. A lot of our flights in Asia had Kuala Lumpur as a stopover. We learned to orient ourselves around the airport, find things to do and be productive during these layovers.