

Traveling by Group Coupon

Group coupons are the latest trend in cheap travel. Third-party brokering companies like Groupon and Living Social Deals negotiate a group rate that anyone can tap into. Think of it like shopping for cereal or pasta; if the store can sell it in bulk, the price per unit decreases. By guaranteeing a minimum number of customers, such companies can save you up to 50% (sometimes more) on food, hotels, excursions, and other trip-related expenses.

Make the Most of It

Most group coupon sites offer daily deals tailored to a specific geographic area. Just sign up for email or text notifications for areas you're interested in traveling to, and then peruse potential deals at your leisure as you plan your vacation.

Another way to take advantage of these sites is by inviting friends to buy deals, which often earns you free credits or vouchers. For example, Groupon.com will give you \$10 in "Groupon Bucks" for every friend you invite. LivingSocial.com will give you a free voucher for your purchase if you get three more people to buy the same deal.

Stacie Davis, a dedicated Groupon user, says, "I'm always trying to invite people to use Groupon. The deals are good for them, and I get Groupon Bucks. Everybody wins."

Save More with Travel Deals

Apart from local deals, group coupon sites also offer specific travel content, like Groupon's Getaways or LivingSocial's Escapes. You can't predict the featured deals, but if you can find one that suits your pre-planned vacation, you can easily save hundreds of dollars. Katy and Cory Cunningham, a newly married couple that can travel only on a tight budget, often look for travel deals. Finding a great coupon is "not something that we're counting on; it's a bonus," they say.

You can also let the deals themselves guide your traveling. If you decide to travel this way, be flexible; deal destinations can be as far-ranging as Hawaii, Ireland, Tanzania, China, Paris, or the Caribbean.

Take the Plunge

Newbies to group couponing might feel unsure of the process and worry about the trustworthiness of the service. Simon Goodall, vice president and general manager of travel for Groupon, assures hesitant Groupon Getaway users that each destination is carefully researched and the price negotiated to bring them the best deal. He also mentions that, if all else fails, return and exchange policies are flexible, with most group coupon sites (like Groupon) offering refunds if booking doesn't work out.

Don't worry that your deals are ripping merchants off. In reality, group coupons benefit merchants too: they are a marketing tool that helps travelers like you enjoy great services at amazingly low prices. As Davis succinctly states, "Everybody wins."

—Kelsey Berteaux

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