tips and strategies

LAST-MINUTE GETAWAYS

BY COLLEEN KELLY

As host of a family travel TV show, I spend so much time exploring and sharing fun destinations with viewers that my own family's vacation planning is often left to the last minute. Fortunately, these simple strategies make it easy to hit the road on short notice.

1 Start a "Mad Dash" Fund

My grandmother used to keep a "mad money" fund for fun things she wanted to buy, so in her honor, I created a "mad dash" travel fund. My bank automatically moves $50 a month from my main account into this special account, which I reserve strictly for spur-of-the-moment trips. I also deposit into it loose change and bills we collect in a jar in the kitchen. It adds up fast!

2 Find Rooms on the Go

If you hit the road without arranging a place to stay, you can locate rooms and make a reservation right from your smartphone with apps such as HotelTonight, Booking.com, and Last Minute Travel Deals. Some let you sort by price and find exclusive deals, even at the eleventh hour.

3 Ask an Agent

Travel agents, such as those at AAA, are some of my best friends! Why? Because they're well connected to a range of travel vendors and often privy to specials that might not be apparent when I'm searching online to book a trip on my own.

4 Follow the Fares

Following specific airlines or travel websites on Twitter can be a great way to learn about cheap flights, especially if you're willing to be flexible, as companies often use Twitter to promote their last-minute discounts. You can also try the "Today's Best Fares" section of Fly.com (a Travelzoo property), which highlights the lowest round-trip rates to popular destinations.

5 Team Up With Grandparents

The AARP Travel Center, run by Expedia, includes a section on last-minute deals, including flights, hotel rooms, and packages (expedia-aarp.com). So ask an AARP member you're traveling with to check it out. If you're extra lucky, Grammy might even help with the tab!

meet the family

Colleen Kelly with daughters Shea Grace and Dunovan Kate.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Family Travel With Colleen Kelly airs on PBS stations around the country. To learn more about our partnership with her, see page 2.