

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black jacket over a light blue top, stands on a balcony with a red velvet railing. The balcony features intricate gold-colored metalwork. The background is a grand, classical interior with a highly decorated ceiling featuring gold leaf, red and white patterns, and classical sculptures. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the architectural details.

The Secrets of Affordable Luxury Travel

WanderingCarol.com

The Secrets of Affordable Luxury Travel

Because there's a world of luxury just waiting

Get the inside scoop from a travel journalist who's been scoping out deals for more than a decade.

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About Wandering Carol

Welcome to the ultimate eBook on The Secrets of Affordable Luxury Travel. I'm so glad you've taken this first step towards living the luxe life. Hopefully you'll find some great ideas for your next vacation and see how easy it is to add a splash of luxury to your travels.



Who am I?

I'm Wandering Carol, Carol Pehudoff, a luxury travel blogger based in Toronto. In my career as a travel columnist, freelance writer and travel blogger I've visited some of the world's best hotels, top spas and most authentic out-of-the-way places.

My goal?

To inspire and help others – *that's you!* – learn how to travel in style.

Why should you listen to me?

With more than 10 years experience, I have (she says modestly) won numerous travel awards, and my travel articles have appeared in top publications such as the *Toronto Star*, *enRoute Magazine*, *Review Magazine*, *Royal Wings*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Today I'm bringing this same level of expertise to my blog, WanderingCarol.com – a luxury travel blog without the pretention and with all the fun. So join the travel loving community over at WanderingCarol.com. I hope you enjoy the ride.

Chapter 1: The Biggest Myth about Luxury Travel

Let's not kid ourselves. Luxury travel can cost gobs of money. But. Does it mean it's out of your reach?

No! Not if you follow my tips and figure out [what luxury travel means](#) to you. So let's bust the biggest myth in luxury travel right now.

What's the big fat myth?

It's this: To be a luxury traveller you need to experience the top tier of luxury All Of The Time.



Why is this wrong?

Just think, if you only ate chocolate pastries topped with gold leaf every day - even if the chocolate was hand-harvested on a remote mountaintop on the French island of Guadeloupe and couriered in daily - you'd eventually start craving a hamburger (or at the very least some beef tartare).

Know this: a sprinkle of extravagance goes a long way into taking your trip from nice to nicely fabulous.

The secret is to choose your priorities

If ordering the foie gras at the Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Paris is going to tip your trip into the stratosphere, go for it. Just be willing to forgo the expensive souvenirs such as those cashmere sweaters in [Milan](#), or a Murano glass chandelier in [Venice](#). (Full confession, I've bought both.)

Can't give up either? If you need to dine well *and* shop, you might have to give up the (sob!) 5-star hotel.

The point is, only *you* can define what luxury travel means to you, and what you need to make your trip unforgettable. If you can't live without Michelin-starred restaurants, expensive souvenirs *and* 5-star hotels (welcome to *my* world), the following tips and tricks should help you on your way.

2: The secrets to sleeping in style

Tip #1: Travel in off-season

Travelling in shoulder season or off-season means **luxury hotels are cheaper**, the crowds not so in-your-face and even the weather can (sometimes) work to your advantage.

Example: Europe in summer can be scorching. Europe in October can be beautiful. **Europe in November can be cheap.** (You may also, like my husband and I did in the [Swiss Alps](#) during *our* November honeymoon, be able to hike in a T-shirt one day and stumble through a snowstorm the next.)

Off-season travel works for tropical destinations, too.

Travelling to the Caribbean in summer is a fabulous way to save. The weather is only slightly hotter than in February and prices for all-inclusive resorts can be a steal.



Tip #2: Rent an apartment instead of a hotel

If your heart is set on a swanky area of town, consider renting an apartment instead of staying in a hotel.

Vacation rentals can be a great deal. My husband and I have rented affordable vacation apartments in both France and Italy. Compare \$100 or \$200 a night for an apartment in a high rent area to \$600 at a hotel down the street (*Hey, Paris, I'm talking to you!*) and vacation rentals start making sense.

FYI: Just because you can't afford to stay at a luxury hotel doesn't mean you can't feel as if you are. Wander through the lobby, book a spa treatment. Some hotels such as the Italian gem, the [Rome Cavalieri](#), and a number of resorts in the Caribbean offer day passes to their pool facilities.

But I don't want an urban apartment, my idea of luxury travel is a villa

If a glamorous villa with a gorgeous pool is more your style than an urban escape, but you're only looking at expensive areas such as Tuscany or Saint-Tropez, try looking farther afield.

Getting a vacation rental in a more out-of-the-way destination such as the [Cevennes in France](#), a small town in Umbria or on an island in Croatia or Thailand can stretch your travel budget in a big way. There are many sites such as Homeaway.com that can help you find what you're looking for.

FYI: If your heart is set on the French Riviera, the city of Nice has a huge supply of affordable vacation rentals.



Tip #3: You don't need to rent the whole villa

Many luxurious vacation villas are divided into apartments, so you get all the atmosphere without paying for the entire property. Yes, you might have to share the pool, but isn't it a small price to pay?

Tip #4: Decide what is more important, that fabulous hotel or that fabulous destination

It's a sad fact. Venice is crazy expensive. The Italian spa town of Abano, a 45-minute train ride away, not so much.

When my husband and I rented an apartment in Venice and we didn't love it (sadly, it happens), we up and left for a 5-star hotel in Abano that was actually cheaper than the apartment we'd rented. (Of course in the end we paid double as we'd prepaid that apartment in Venice, so I wouldn't say we actually saved ... but live and learn.)

I'm not saying give up Venice or any other [top destination](#), but when planning a trip look at surrounding areas, too.

When is the destination more important than the hotel?

Sometimes a 5-star destination trumps a 5-star hotel. In order to afford staying in a swanky Swiss town like St. Moritz during the height of ski season, I would (reluctantly) settle for a cheaper hotel, as the entire town is high end. Though the glorious and historic Badrutt's Palace is soooooo on my list.



Tip #5: Build up your social media and use it

When I'm planning to stay in a luxury hotel, I like to tweet about it beforehand, making sure I use the right hashtag and/or Twitter handle for that hotel. Not only does it help establish a rapport between you and the property, it's fun to see what other people are saying about it and it just might put you on the path to an upgrade.

I said *might*. It never hurts to try.

FYI: To find a hotel's Twitter handle just Google the name of the hotel and the word 'Twitter.'

Tip #6: Don't check one discount booking site, check them all

Before booking a hotel I check a million sites, Tripadvisor.com, Booking.com, Priceline.com ... you name it. I also belong to a few membership-only travel websites such as TravelSetGo.com.

While the prices can be similar on booking sites, sometimes you'll luck out and find one site offering a much better deal. If you do, grab it. It's not likely to last.

Tip #7: Don't just check the hotel website, check it the *right* way

In addition to discount sites, I always check the hotel's own website. And don't just plug in your dates. Check out the hotel's special offers first, as the website won't automatically price out the best deal. (Sometimes it will give you a promo code you need to type in.)

When in doubt, call the hotel directly.

Chapter 3: Dining well: a taste of the good life

With food tourism being all the rage these days, it seems as if everyone wants add fine dining to their luxury priority check list. But watch out. Eating in 5-star restaurants can cost more than the price of your hotel room. So dine wisely and dine well.

Tip #1: Eat lunch not dinner

When I have the urge to splurge on a Michelin-starred restaurant, and I too often do, I check the restaurant's menu prices for lunch versus dinner. **The savings can be sizeable.** If you're a foodie, this is one of the best ways to be able to afford luxury travel. Plus, it's fun. You can still dress up, still have wine and have a fabulous luxury experience, you'll just pay less and get to bed earlier.



Tip #2: Add the words *prix fixe* to your food vocabulary

In Europe, the set menu, the *prix fixe*, is often much cheaper than ordering à la carte (items individually off the menu). And set menus are gaining popularity in North America, too.

These daily specials are often great deals, even at the most expensive restaurants. To double up your savings order the *prix fixe* at lunchtime. There! You've had your fabulous travel extravagance for the day.

Tip #3: You don't have to order everything

If you're not doing a prix fixe, don't get carried away. Small things add up. Order table water, not bottled. In France, the phrase *une carafe d'eau* will get you tap water rather than expensive bottled.

Skip desert, or share one. Do you really need that appetizer? I'm not saying pare your meal down to nothing, I'm saying be *aware* of what you're ordering. It's all too easy to get caught up in the exhilaration of living the luxe life and thinking the world is your oyster.

FYI: The world *is* your oyster; you just don't get to eat all the oysters all in one sitting.



Tip #4: Dine in the hotel bar

When I visited the stunning Four Seasons Hotel George V Paris last year, I took a look at the prices for the formal restaurant (astronomical) and ended up having a meal in the bar instead. It was still expensive and still delicious, but not nearly as pricey as the formal restaurant, and it came with all the aristocratic ambience I craved.

FYI: If you're travelling solo, hotel bars are much more casual and comfortable to eat in than formal restaurants, and the chance of chatting to other people much higher.

Chapter 4: Drinking well – a thirst for the good life

For years I thought luxury travel was out of my reach. Then I discovered this one simple thing: For the price of a drink, I could gain admission into the best hotels in the world. It's one of the best ways to tap into the luxury lifestyle, not to mention one of the most fun.

All I had to do was invest \$30 in a glass of bubbly and the Ritz Paris was mine. And then so was the Hôtel de Crillon, and then the Plaza Athénée ... you get the drift.

Tip #1: Watch how much you drink

A bar tab quickly adds up. You're there for the atmosphere, not the buzz, right? Stick to one (or two) and make it last. Or split a half carafe of wine between you and your travel companion.



Tip #2: Watch *what* you drink

I'm not going to lie. I love champagne. Since it ranks high in my luxury priority list, it's worth the price. If my budget is really tight, however, I'll have a glass of Prosecco, Italian sparkling wine, instead. It still feels festive and can be half the price.

FYI: In some countries wine or beer is cheaper than bottled water.

Tip #7: Avoid cover charges

Personally, I'd rather sit on an outdoor terrace and watch the world go by than cram myself into a crowded nightclub. But that's just me. I used to love going to nightclubs, and because it was a priority for me, paying a cover charge was worth it.

If you're all about clubbing, make it happen. If not, think about a stroll along an atmospheric street or stop for a drink in a ritzy hotel bar instead.

Chapter 5: Secrets to flying business class on points

Nothing says luxury travel like a business class flight to Europe. Even better, a business class flight to Asia. And the only thing that beats *that* is getting it on mileage points. I generally manage to fly business class to Europe or Asia on points at least once a year.

Know this: There is a lot of competition for international business class flights on points and only a few seats are allotted on each flight for points travel.

Here are some tips to help you travel in style:

Tip #1: Get the right credit card

While you can collect points by being a frequent flyer, you can probably collect more by shopping. Do your research and get a credit card geared towards travel points. If you're in the USA you have many more options than we do here in Canada, and there are many websites that specialize in comparing cards.

I personally use two different cards (sometimes three) both of them geared towards Aeroplan, Air Canada's mileage program, as that's the airline I use the most domestically and if I'm flying internationally it allows me to easily book on other airlines.

Tip #2: Wait for a bonus offer

Before you sign up for that credit card, wait. What are the bonus sign-up points they're offering? I was going to sign up for an American Express Aeroplan Platinum card that came with 25,000 bonus points, then held off and when they had a 50,000 point sign up special I jumped on it.

That was almost enough to fly to Europe (in economy) straight away. But of course I waited until I had enough to go business.

FYI: Cards such as the American Express Aeroplan Platinum card come with hefty annual fees. For me, the perks such as priority line-ups and business class lounge access were worth it. If you're not a frequent flier, look for a card with perks more suited to your lifestyle or opt for a cheaper card.

Tip #3: Forget cash

Once you have the right credit card, put *everything* you buy on that credit card. Those Starbucks coffees add up.

Tip #4: Book early!

Once you have enough points, plan ahead. Some airlines put the bulk of their points seats into the system almost a year in advance.

Tip #5: Check your airline's points website obsessively

You never know when more flights will be added. If someone else is flying on points but cancels or changes their flight, that seat opens up. Additional seats can come available if airlines make an adjustment to their schedule.

FYI: Don't make the mistake of looking at the regular airline website instead of the mileage points website. For example, Aeroplan.ca is not the same as AirCanada.ca, where the flights available with points won't be listed.



Tip #6: Check the website at different times of day

When I'm obsessed with booking a trip on points but the flight I want isn't available, I'll often wake up in the middle of the night and check the website. It's neurotic, I know, but you wouldn't believe how many flights I've scored at 3 a.m.

Tip #7: Be flexible

Check out different airports close to your destination. If you're flying to the northern coast of Spain, for example, you could check flights both for Barcelona and Girona.

Tip #8: If you have a flexible itinerary, look at different routings

For example, if you're visiting Germany and then Spain, but there are no flights available try visiting Spain first and then Germany.

Tip #9: Try to avoid the highest taxes and fees

Your flight on points might be free, but the taxes are not. It seems to make a huge difference which cities you fly through and which airline you take.

For example: When looking at various routes for a business class flight from Toronto to Rome (and I looked at a gazillion), the taxes and fees price ranged from \$498 to \$664 per ticket! That's a substantial difference.

It's not just about the savings, however. Luxury travellers value their time. If the fees are cheaper if you fly to Rome via Amsterdam, but the itinerary comes with a 10-hour stopover, paying the higher fees for a shorter flight time would be worth it. At least for me. **Once again it all comes down to priorities.**

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Bonus Section: Free luxury travel perks

I may love luxury travel but I love FREE luxury travel even more – so I’ve combed through the tangled mess of my brain (seriously, the inside my head looks like my hair on a bad day) to come up with some of the best free luxury travel activities and perks I’ve scouted out in Venice, New York, Switzerland and Paris.

So skim, sift and sort through in the hopes that you can find some free travel ideas for your next trip.

FYI: These are just the travel *tips* of the iceberg. There are plenty more out there. If you come across some others we should know about, [contact me](#) and when I collect enough I’ll post them so we can all enjoy the good life together.

Free luxury travel in Venice, Italy

Free private speedboat from Venice to Murano Island

When I was staying at one of my favourite hotels, the glorious Gritti Palace Venice, and asked about arranging an excursion to Murano Island, the concierge immediately called up a **deluxe private speedboat** to pick my husband and me up. No cost.

The water taxi was kitted out like a floating limo with white upholstery and polished wood. I felt so incredibly posh that I posed around the back of the boat screaming ‘Look at me! Look at me!’ in my head.



Why was the speedboat to Murano Island free?

Murano is famous for glass, and the glass-blowing factory you'll be taken to is hoping you'll buy their high quality (and expensive) chandeliers, sconces, goblets and mirrors.

Trust me, you'll be tempted. After your tour – and you don't have to buy, though you probably won't feel quite as posh skulking out empty handed – you're free to wander around the island of Murano and then take a vaporetto (waterbus) back. That's what we did and that brief ride in the water taxi to Murano was the top free luxury travel perk of our stay.

If you can't get a free speedboat through your hotel, you can sometimes still get complimentary transportation to Murano Island simply by hanging around St. Mark's Square and talking to the touts offering free Murano glass-blowing factory tours.

Free luxury travel in London, UK

London is consistently rated one of the most expensive cities in the world, so it's nice to know not everything will drain the pounds from your pocket.



Free entrance to the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery in London

If I wasn't so obsessed with Anne Boleyn I probably wouldn't go to the **National Portrait Gallery** every time I'm in London, but the gallery's Tudor room, full of moody dark portraits of the key players of the 1500s beats an episode of the Tudors on TV any day.

Given that not everyone is quite as passionate about the Tudor court as I am, I feel compelled to mention that many other public museums and galleries in London are free – such as the huge and wonderful **National Gallery** right around the corner on Trafalgar Square.

Free luxury travel in New York

New York is the city that never sleeps and neither does your credit card. There's one way, however, to have an amazing night out for free.

Free fun in New York's gallery district of Chelsea

Aren't we just so chic and sophisticated hanging out at gallery openings? Well here's something you should know. Everyone, chic or not, can – and does – attend **gallery openings in Chelsea**, New York's most happening art district, on Thursday nights.

It's fun, fabulous and free, and you'll meet a cross section of the art-world elite, men on the make, debutants and art students. It's oh so festive and yes, the drinks are free. Just please make sure to look at the art.

FYI: You can attend free art openings in plenty of other cities. Another place I recommend is the elite gallery row on **Cork Street in London's swanky Mayfair neighbourhood**. In fact, art openings can be a great way to sightsee around the world.



Free luxury travel in Switzerland

Who doesn't like Switzerland? Staggeringly beautiful mountains, well-run trains, chocolate and fondue. It also has a rep for being pricey, but don't worry, there are a couple of fun things you can do for no cost that will enhance your luxury holiday.

Free entrance to the Bern Bear Park

Maybe bears aren't the first thing you think about when you think luxury travel – but a trip to the [Bern Bear Park](#) should be high on your list. Bears are a big part of Bern's history and have been since 1191, ever since the founder of Bern named the city after the first animal he killed in a hunt. Which was a bear, obviously. Otherwise it would have been named Rabbit. Or Wild Pig. You get the point.

Right now Bern has two resident bears, Finn and Bjork, and you can see them for free at their spacious Bern Bear Park home overlooking the Aare River. It's a lovely walk there through the old town and the park offers great views of Bern, the river and the bears.



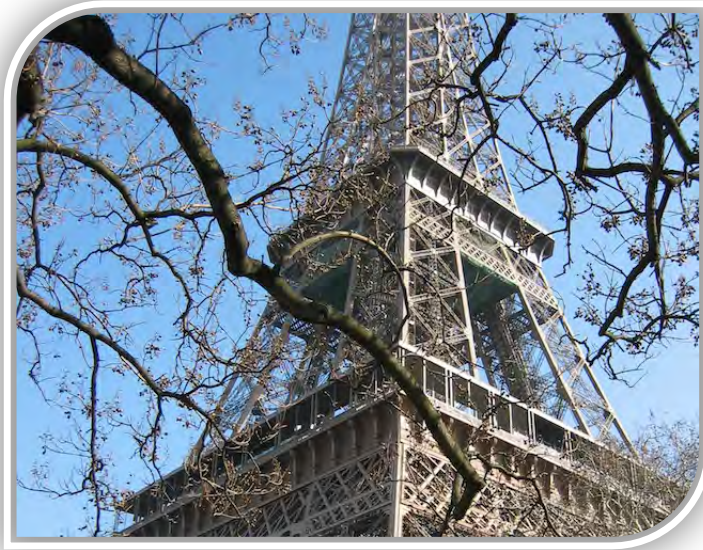
The OMEGA Museum in Biel

James Bond, anyone? When it comes to luxury, a Swiss watch is a must. If you can't afford to *buy* one, you can certainly afford to see one because entrance to the **OMEGA Museum in Biel**, Switzerland is free.

Don't miss the Seamaster, a deep diving watch that's been featured in every James Bond movie since *GoldenEye*, or the Speedmaster, the first watch worn on the moon.

Free luxury travel in Paris

Paris is perfect and it's even more perfect when it's free.



Free entrance to Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris

Whether you're a pilgrim, pauper or pampered socialite, **entrance to this 800-year old gothic cathedral is free**. But it's no cheapo destination. In fact, it's so grand that Henry VI of England decided to be crowned there in 1431, so it's sure to impress even the most jaded luxury traveler today.

Not that any of us are jaded ... the wide world of travel is just too exciting to ever bring us down.

Now you're ready to go!

So there you have it. I've shared some of my favourite tips and tricks for travelling in (affordable) luxurious style. Hopefully you've gained some inspiration from this eBook and maybe even come up with a few of your own ways to save, because a whole world of jet-setting is out there waiting for you.



Help spread the word

If you enjoyed this eBook please consider sharing. Thanks! And thanks for making it to the end. You're a dedicated traveller indeed.

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