THE PROOF SERIES

A PLAYFUL GUIDE TO GREAT VACATIONS

Vacation Proof

Dream it, budget it, book it, pack it, and enjoy every single day — in plain language, with big type and a few laughs.



John Marshall

PROUDLY CANADIAN



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FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER

By John Marshall

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START WITH YOU

What Kind of Trip Are You?

Every great vacation starts with one honest question: what do you actually enjoy? Answer that first, and the destination almost picks itself.

Picture the feeling › Name your pace › List your loves › Match a trip

1. Picture the feeling — Close your eyes and picture the moment you will remember most. A quiet sunrise? A lively market? A grandchild's laugh at the beach? That feeling is your compass.

2. Name your pace — Some travellers love a full schedule; others want one good outing and a long afternoon nap. There is no wrong pace, only the wrong pace for you.

3. List your loves — Write down five things you genuinely enjoy: gardens, history, ocean views, good food, live music. This short list will rule out half the brochures instantly.

4. Match a trip — Now look for trips that serve your list, not someone else's. If you love gardens and hate crowds, a botanical tour beats a theme park every time.

TALE

REAL STORY

Margaret, 71, booked a hiking holiday because the brochure photos were gorgeous.

She hates hiking. She spent the week happily reading in the lodge garden and calls it her best trip ever — because the garden, not the hike, was hers.

! Travel agents are free to consult for ideas; they earn commission from suppliers, so asking costs you nothing.

Take care: Do not book anything in the dreaming stage. Dreaming is free; bookings are not.



PICK YOUR FLAVOUR

City, Beach, Country, or Cruise?

Destinations come in flavours, like ice cream. Knowing your flavour narrows a world of choice down to a happy few.

City buzz › Beach calm › Country charm › Cruise ease

1. City buzz — Cities offer museums, restaurants, and people-watching in easy walking distance. Best for curious minds who like options. Watch out for lots of walking and stairs.

2. Beach calm — Beaches offer rest with a soundtrack of waves. Best for recharging. Pick resorts with shade, calm water, and medical facilities nearby if that matters to you.

3. Country charm — Small towns and countryside bring quiet, scenery, and friendly locals. Best for slow days. You will likely need a car or an organized tour.

4. Cruise ease — Cruises unpack once and visit several places, with meals and entertainment included. Best for easy variety. Compare what is truly included before you fall for the headline price.

TALE

E STORY

Doug, 68, insisted he was a beach person until a rainy week in a deck chair convinced him otherwise.
He now calls himself a proud museum person and has never been happier — or drier.

!

Many cruise lines and tour companies publish accessibility notes for each port; ask before booking if stairs or tender boats are a concern.

Take care: A flavour that suits your friend may not suit you. Borrow ideas, not itineraries.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

When to Go Matters as Much as Where

The same destination in July and in October can feel like two different planets — different prices, crowds, and weather.

Check the seasons › Dodge the crowds › Mind the weather › Price the difference

1. Check the seasons — Look up the destination's seasons before anything else. Remember the southern hemisphere flips ours: their winter is our summer.

2. Dodge the crowds — Shoulder season — the weeks just before or after peak — often gives the best mix: decent weather, thinner crowds, kinder prices.

3. Mind the weather — Hurricane season in the Caribbean, monsoon season in Asia, and mid-winter in northern Europe can all spoil plans. A quick search saves a soggy week.

4. Price the difference — Compare the same hotel or flight in peak versus shoulder season. The savings can be hundreds of dollars — sometimes enough to fund the whole trip's meals.

TALE

E STORY

The Hendersons always travelled in August because that is when they always had.

One September trip to the same coast cost them 40 percent less, the beach was emptier, and they now call August the amateur month.

!

In Canada, booking a winter sun trip in early fall often beats waiting for last-minute deals that may never appear.

Take care: Do not trust a brochure photo's weather. Photos are always taken on the nicest day of the year.

GOLDILOCKS TRIPS

How Long Is Just Right?

Too short and you spend the trip travelling. Too long and the magic fades into laundry. Here is how to find your just-right.

Count travel days › Add settling days › Plan real days › Leave a buffer

1. Count travel days — The journey there and back eats at least two days, more for long flights with connections. Subtract these first; they are not vacation days.

2. Add settling days — Give yourself a day at each end to arrive, unpack, and find your bearings. Rushing on day one is how suitcases get left in taxis.

3. Plan real days — For a first visit, five to seven true exploring days suits most cities; beach or countryside trips can happily stretch to ten or fourteen.

4. Leave a buffer — Add one spare day with nothing planned. It absorbs delays, bad weather, or simply a day when you would rather sit with a coffee and watch the world.

TALE

E STORY

Ruth, 74, planned a three-day dash to see her sister in Vancouver.
After two travel days she had exactly one afternoon together. She now calls anything under five days a commute with snacks.

!

Longer stays often unlock weekly rates at rentals and hotels, making day eight cheaper than day three.

Take care: If you take medication on a schedule, longer trips need a longer supply — plan refills before you go.

COMPANY MATTERS

Solo, Duo, or the Whole Gang?

Who you travel with shapes the trip more than where you go. Choose your companions as carefully as your destination.

Solo freedom › Partner rhythm › Friend groups › Family mix

1. Solo freedom — Travelling alone means total freedom: your pace, your choices. Many tour companies now waive the single supplement, and group tours welcome solo guests warmly.

2. Partner rhythm — With a spouse or partner, agree on the daily rhythm in advance: early riser versus slow starter can make or break a week. Compromise is a travel skill.

3. Friend groups — Friends make everything funnier, but plan money matters openly: shared meals, split bills, and who gets the good bedroom are best settled before departure.

4. Family mix — Multi-generation trips are wonderful and complex. Build in separate downtime, and let the grandchildren's energy set one day's pace — and yours set the next.

TALE

STORY

Two old friends, 69 and 72, nearly ended a forty-year friendship over a restaurant bill in Lisbon.
They now travel with a shared kitty jar and agree it was the best fifty dollars of diplomacy they ever spent.

! Solo travellers can join day tours at a destination for instant company without committing to a full group trip.

Take care: Never let a companion keep all the documents — each adult carries their own passport and insurance card.

DREAMS MEET MATH

The One Big Question Test

Before prices and brochures, ask one question: what do you want to bring home? The answer keeps every later decision honest.

Ask the question › Write the answer › Test each idea › Keep the winner

1. Ask the question — Say it out loud: what do I want to bring home from this trip? A story, a rest, a skill, a reconnection? Vague dreams produce vague trips.

2. Write the answer — Write it in one sentence on paper. “I want to come home rested and with photos of the ocean.” Now you have a measuring stick.

3. Test each idea — Hold each destination idea against your sentence. A busy sightseeing marathon fails the rested test. A quiet coastal town passes it.

4. Keep the winner — When two ideas both sound lovely, pick the one that serves your sentence best. The other one will still be there next year.

TALE

STORY

Frank, 77, wanted to bring home one good story to tell at the legion.

He chose a train journey through the Rockies over a beach week. He has now told that story four hundred times and shows no signs of stopping.

!

Couples can each write a sentence and look for the overlap — the shared words are your true destination.

Take care: Beware the trip you book to impress others. The neighbours will not be on the plane with you.

WISDOM OF CROWDS

Ask Friends, But Ask Smart

Friends give the best travel advice — and the most misleading. The trick is knowing which questions to ask.

Find recent travellers › Ask for specifics › Ask what flopped › Compare notes

1. Find recent travellers — Advice from five years ago may be ancient history: hotels change, prices change, neighbourhoods change. Favour friends who went recently.

2. Ask for specifics — "We loved it" helps nobody. Ask: where did you stay, what did it cost, how did you get around, what would you skip? Specifics you can use.

3. Ask what flopped — The best question is "what disappointed you?" People remember the letdowns vividly, and one honest answer can save you a wasted day.

4. Compare notes — If three friends independently name the same guesthouse or the same warning, believe them. Patterns beat opinions.

TALE

E STORY

Elaine asked her bridge club about a Greek island and got four glowing reviews.

The fifth friend quietly added, "Bring good walking shoes; the hill to our hotel nearly finished me." That one sentence saved Elaine's knees and her holiday.

!

Seniors' travel clubs and community centres often host talks by members fresh back from trips — free advice with slides.

Take care: A friend's dream hotel might be your nightmare if you travel at different paces or budgets. Adjust for the difference.

THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

Make the Shortlist

From a world of possibilities, narrow to three finalists. Three is enough to feel free and few enough to research properly.

Gather contenders › Score them simply › Research the three › Crown the winner

1. Gather contenders — List every destination that survived your big-question test. Five to eight names is fine. This is the last time the list is allowed to be long.

2. Score them simply — Give each a score out of ten for cost, ease, weather in your travel month, and excitement. No spreadsheets needed — a scrap of paper works.

3. Research the three — Take only the top three further. Check flights, sample hotels, and one honest travel blog each. Depth beats breadth from here on.

4. Crown the winner — Pick the one you keep coming back to in your thoughts. Then stop researching the others — second-guessing is the thief of anticipation.

TALE

STORY

Harold's shortlist was down to two cities when his wife asked, "Which one are you already telling people about?" He had been bragging about one of them for a week.

Decision made.

!

Save the runners-up in a note on your phone. Next year's trip is already half-planned.

Take care: Do not let a flash sale crown the winner for you. A cheap trip to the wrong place is still the wrong trip.

THE HONEST NUMBER

Set Your Total Trip Budget

Money arguments ruin more vacations than bad weather. One honest number, agreed up front, prevents nearly all of them.

Name the total › Agree it together › Write it down › Guard it fiercely

1. Name the total — Decide the full amount you can comfortably spend, all in, before looking at a single price. This number is your boss for the whole trip.

2. Agree it together — If you travel with a partner, agree on the number out loud. “About three thousand” means different things to different people — say the exact figure.

3. Write it down — Put the number at the top of a notebook or a phone note. Every booking gets subtracted. Watching it shrink keeps spending honest.

4. Guard it fiercely — When a tempting upgrade appears, ask the number, not your heart. If the number says no, the answer is no — and the trip stays happy.

TALE

STORY

A couple set a firm four-thousand-dollar budget for a cruise, then nearly added a thousand-dollar drinks package “just in case.” They asked the number instead. The number said no. They drank the free coffee, watched the sunset, and came home under budget and overjoyed.

! Build your budget in Canadian dollars and convert foreign prices as you research, so comparisons stay honest.

Take care: Do not count on “we'll figure it out later” money. Later always arrives, usually with interest.

THE BIG FOUR

Where the Money Actually Goes

Nearly every trip's spending falls into four buckets. Learn the four and you can budget any vacation on a napkin.

Getting there › Sleeping there › Eating there › Doing things

1. Getting there — Flights, trains, or driving costs are usually the biggest single chunk — often a third of the budget. Price this first; it anchors everything else.

2. Sleeping there — Hotels and rentals are the second bucket. Location costs money: a central hotel saves taxi fares, so compare total cost, not just the nightly rate.

3. Eating there — Food surprises people most. Three restaurant meals a day adds up fast. One self-catered meal a day — even just breakfast — cuts this bucket nearly in half.

4. Doing things — Tours, tickets, and souvenirs are the fun bucket and the easiest to overspend. Set its limit in advance and spend it joyfully, not guiltily.

TALE

E STORY

Jim budgeted carefully for flights and hotels, then spent nine hundred dollars on restaurant meals in six days without noticing.

He now calls food “the bucket with the hole in it” and plans one picnic a day.

!

A rough starting split: 35 percent transport, 30 percent lodging, 20 percent food, 15 percent fun — then adjust to your style.

Take care: Taxis and airport transfers hide in the cracks between buckets. Give them their own small line.

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