

Travel Cheap

Strapped for cash? Don't let it stop you from taking a trip overseas.

Winnie Yeung rounds up the best—and some of the strangest—deals on offer.

With jobs lost, salaries cut and bonuses slashed, most of us are looking to save rather than splurge right now. But just because we're economizing doesn't mean we can't have any fun. With profits falling and would-be travelers shunning expensive overseas stays, travel agencies, hotels and airlines are clamoring for business like never before. Why not take advantage of their great deals and pick up a bargain holiday? Here are some of our favorites. (Please note that the prices listed do not include tax or surcharges, and you must travel with a partner to take advantage of the offers).

Under \$1,000

There are plenty of dodgy deals in this rock-bottom price range, but search carefully and you'll find lots of unique excursions and plenty to see and do.

Sleepless in Shenzhen: From \$451 ↻

A stay in a boutique hotel is always an experience in itself, and the brand-new, \$40 million Vision Fashion Hotel in Shenzhen is no different. There are over 60 themes in the 100-room hotel, so you can stay in a Marilyn Monroe boudoir, a kinky mirror room, or even a suite modeled after an airplane cockpit if you so wish. But if you're worried about getting stuck in a kitschy Shenzhen nightmare, fear not. All the rooms are fully kitted with amenities and free Internet. Plus, it's conveniently located beside the Grand Theater metro station, so why not take a couple of friends and go for a mad weekend jaunt just over the border?

5018 Shennan Rd. East, Luohu District, Shenzhen.

Reservations at (86-755) 2558-2888 or www.visionfashionhotel.com.



Bargain Berne: From \$340 ↻

The Shenzhen we know usually involves a grim trudge around Lo Wu Commercial City, desperately avoiding rabid manicurists and trying not to get our kidneys stolen in the public toilets. But on the eastern side of Shenzhen is a little-known slice of (relative) paradise. OCT East is like a mini Swiss village and is home to the luxurious Interlaken Hotel, as well as the brand-new car-themed Parkview O City Hotel, from which you can rent a Dethleffs Globetrotter Advantage camper van to explore the OCT East area. In addition to the Swiss village and the gorgeous lake, you can also visit a tea farm and the world's tallest four-faced Buddha statue (standing at 23.3 meters), a U-shaped glass bridge that closely resembles the Grand Canyon's Skywalk, and a recently opened waterpark. The vans are equipped with a bathroom, kitchen, beds, tables and chairs, and cost \$340 per hour, or \$567 if you need a driver.

OCT East, Dameisha, Shenzhen, (86-755) 2528-3333, www.interlakenhotel.com.

Heritage Holiday: Around \$900 ↻

The bizarre yet magnificent Diaolou Towers in Kaiping were declared a UNESCO world heritage site two years ago. They once served as guard towers back in the Qing Dynasty and are a curious mish-mash of Chinese and Western architectural styles. To get there, take a coach from Prince Edward MTR station to Kaiping (\$120 for a four-hour trip), and then get a cab to the towers, or hire a car for around \$400 per day. If you want to stay overnight, check into the town's only five-star hotel, the Everjoint Peninsula (2 Zhong Yin Rd., Kaiping, Guangdong, 86-750-233-3333) for just \$484 a room.

Both bus tickets and rooms can be booked through China Travel Services at 2998-7888.

Bangkok or Bust: \$999

With the civil unrest and the economic crisis doubling Thailand's tourism woes, flights to Bangkok have become phenomenally cheap, with hotel packages naturally following suit. The cheapest on offer is this three-day trip to the Thai capital for just \$999, which includes return flights on Oriental Thai and two nights at the Ecotel Hotel—it's a three-star hotel, but it's in a great location—a mere 15-minute walk from all the big malls as well as BTS Chitlom station.

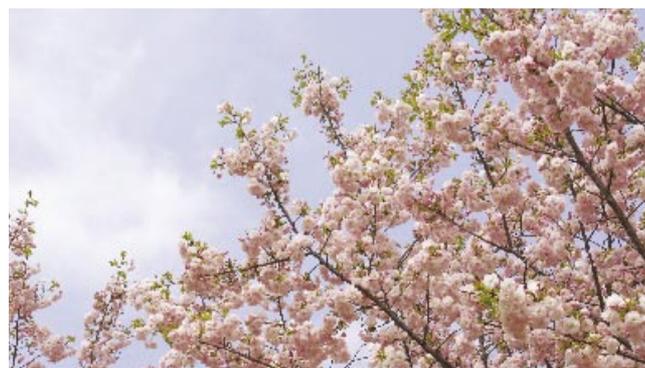
Book with Travel Expert at 2845-3232.



Super Spring Blossoms: \$420 ↻

If you've always wanted to see Japan's cherry blossoms in season but have been put off by the price, then sign up for this two-day tour of Nantou in Zhongshan, which coincides with the town's first-ever Sakura Festival; the 60-acre venue will be flooded with white and pink flowers. The price includes return ferries to Zhongshan, meals and a night's stay at the five-star Yucca Hotel in Jiangmen. The tour departs from Shenzhen on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only, and is conducted in Cantonese.

Book with EGL Tours at 3692-0888.





The rooftop bar at Banyan Tree Bangkok

\$1,001-\$5,000

At this range, there's plenty on offer for weekend getaways, though with a little careful shopping, you can find unusual offers, luxury bargains and weeklong city breaks.

Luxury for Less: \$1,690

If you'd rather not give up your creature comforts as you travel on a shoestring, then plump for a two-night stay at the Banyan Tree in Bangkok. And with the money you save on accommodation, you can afford to treat yourself a few of their famous spa treatments, as well as cocktails up on their 61st-floor bar, which has breathtaking views of the Bangkok sprawl. The package also includes return tickets on Oriental Thai.

Book with Travel Expert at 2845-3232.



Farmer's Market: From \$1,299

Get back to nature and experience old-fashioned Taiwanese hospitality with a stay in a cozy farmhouse bed-and-breakfast just outside Taipei. Once the exclusive preserve of those in the know, the trend has recently taken off now that the Taiwan Visitor Association has teamed up with several local travel agencies to launch a range of packages. Starting at \$1,299, the packages include a return flight to Taipei via Eva Air, free car transfer to a farm in nearby Yilan, a night's accommodation, breakfast and free run of the farm.

For details, call the Taiwan Visitor Association at 2581-0933. >>

El Cheapo Air

Check out these rock-bottom prices to Asia, Europe and North America.

Bangkok

\$1,400 by Cathay Pacific.
Book at www.cathaypacific.com.

Beijing

\$1,290 by Hong Kong Express.
Book at www.hongkongexpress.com.

Canada

\$5,900 (tax included) by Canadian Airlines.
Book with Instant Travel, 2521-3223.

London

\$1,780 by China Eastern Airlines (with a stopover in Shanghai). Book at Instant Travel, 2521-3223.
\$2,910 by Virgin Atlantic. Book at www.virgin-atlantic.com.
\$2,950 by British Airways. Book at www.britishairways.com.
\$2,990 by Cathay Pacific. Book at www.cathaypacific.com.

Manila

\$990 by Cathay Pacific. Book at www.cathaypacific.com.

New Zealand

\$5,300 by Air New Zealand.
Book at www.airnewzealand-hk.com/tnz.

Paris

\$3,920 by Cathay Pacific.
Book with Instant Travel, 2521-3223.

Sanya, Hainan

\$1,180 by Dragonair. Book at www.dragonair.com.

Shanghai

\$1,290 by Cathay Pacific. Book at www.cathaypacific.com.

Singapore

\$1,100 by Cathay Pacific. Book at www.cathaypacific.com.

Taipei

\$1,070 by Dragonair. Book at www.dragonair.com.

Tokyo

\$2,300 by JAL (only for three people traveling together).
Book with Instant Travel, 2521-3223.

\$1,001-\$5,000



Tokyo Tour: \$3,599

Notoriously expensive Tokyo has just gotten cheaper. This package by EGL Tours costs less than \$4,000 and includes return tickets on either JAL or ANA, landing at Tokyo International Airport, and four nights' stay at the Sunshine City Prince Hotel in Ikebukuro. Unfortunately, we can't be responsible for how much you spend on Japanese fashion accessories or square watermelons.

For more information, call EGL Tours at 3692-0888.

Holiday in Cambodia: \$4,590

The luxurious Hôtel de la Paix in Siem Reap has been featured many a time in design magazines for its subtle, romantic vibe. It's so far been an exclusive location, but a new package by Instant Travel is offering a three-night stay, plus return flights on Singapore Airlines, for just \$4,590. Bring your partner and don't forget to take a day trip to Angkor Wat, one of the most magnificent historical sites in the world.

Book with Instant Travel, 2521-3223.



Splash the cash...

Presidential Palace: Around \$7,000

Luxury resort group Anantara has just opened its Desert Islands resort and Spa in Abu Dhabi. It's located on the private island that once belonged to the late former United Arab Emirates president Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, and is unbelievably opulent. The spacious resort features 48 luxurious rooms and villas, five restaurants and Anantara's famous spa. That may sound expensive, but Anantara is currently offering a free night's stay for every two nights you book, which rounds the cost down to around \$1,900 per night for a three-night stay. To get there, fly to Dubai and get a car to drive you down to Abu Dhabi for around \$400. The cheapest fare on offer is from Singapore Airlines, costing \$3,080.

Book with Instant Travel, 2521-3223. For more information on Desert Islands, log on to www.anantara.com.



Want to go cheaper?

If these fares aren't cheap enough for you, then why not head over the border to take advantage of some of the motherland's very own travel deals? If you don't mind traveling to nearby airports in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, you can get up to 80 percent off on trips in and around China. Major mainland air-ticket providers, such as C Trip (www.ctrip.com.hk), and China Travel Service's Mango City (www.mangocity.com.hk) both sell cheap mainland tickets to Hong Kong travelers. How cheap? \$280 will buy you a one-way flight from Shenzhen to Shanghai, while Guangzhou to Nanjing is around \$350. Bear in mind that prices fluctuate constantly, so you might snap up great deals one day, but not the next.

One main barrier to people departing from within China is getting to the airports. Mango City organizes buses to take you from various locations in Hong Kong to Shenzhen airport. They usually cost \$90-\$100 and take around two hours. Guangzhou airport is a little trickier. You need to take a train from Hung Hom, and then a taxi to the airport. The trip should take about two-and-a-half hours and cost \$320. And don't forget that China's airports are likely to be rather more chaotic than our own, but with prices this cheap, who can argue?