

# Our Trip Takes Us

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By Becky Hirn

It's the question some people have asked, other people want to and I think everybody wonders. "How much does all this cost?"

Reporters are usually the most straightforward with the question. "What is the bottom line?" or "How much money did you save for this trip?" they ask. Other people have said the credit card companies must really love us or we must have a back pocket full of money to attempt a year-long trip.

The answer comes down to choices. Everyone makes choices about what they want. Our trip is a choice, for better or worse. And it does cost money, but we planned for that. Hopefully, our planning was good and will last for a full year.

For us, it all started with a budget. The budget was the first thing we worked on. It's something we worked with for 18 months and we continue to tweak it as we go. At first we made two columns: Expenses at Home and Expenses on the Road. Early on it was easy to see the major differences between the two. On the Road we wouldn't have major expenses like childcare, tuition and utilities. But we gained some big ones too, gasoline, health insurance and an RV payment. We learned a lot just putting the two side by side. We found out how much we needed to save. We figured we'd have to sell my truck. We were reminded of what we already knew: eating out is expensive. So this budgeting process was a matter of making things work for our family. This would vary for every family with things like number of prescriptions each month, eating habits and outstanding debt.

Another thing we did was make cuts. We decided to try life on the road without television, saving us about \$100 a month and an initial investment of more than \$200 for the TV and other hardware. We are eight weeks in and I really don't miss it. We also find free overnight parking about half the nights we are out, saving us \$25-50 each day. We also cook in, instead of eating out much more than before.

It's also really amazing how many free things there are to see and do in this country. We've done river walks and boardwalks, concerts, parades, moose watching, the Fourth of July in Boston, toured a submarine, swam at beaches, rode the Staten Island Ferry, walked in Central Park, toured Independence Hall and got our picture with the Liberty Bell, all for free.

One news reporter in Buffalo, NY asked Dan how we could afford this trip. As I listened to his response from behind the camera, he said there were a lot of things we gave up to go on this trip. I tried to remember what those things were. Last summer we didn't take a family vacation. We took time off, but we stayed home. Also Dan kept on driving his 16-year old truck, which he loves anyway, but could be replaced. Last Christmas Dan and I put a strict limit on gifts for each other, \$25. Our real gift is this year with each other.

The most important thing is our family. We are fortunate to have a very generous family and group of friends. We couldn't do this trip without a tremendous amount of support. With their help in planning, and the gift of their time and energy, they've definitely saved us money by providing us with services we'd surely have to pay for. But that's not a number I can put in a column on a budget.

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at [www.ourtriptakesus.com](http://www.ourtriptakesus.com). Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. Or learn how to partner with the trip as an advertiser. You may e-mail Becky at [beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com](mailto:beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com)