RETIREZEST · HOW THE ZEST SCORE WORKS

Your retirement is a road trip

Think of each day of the trip as one year of your retirement. Your nest egg is your travel budget, and each day you pay for gas, meals and a hotel: your spending for that year. The Zest Score checks four things about the trip. Together they add up to 100.

PLAN SURVIVAL **PRIORITY ONE**

Can you afford the whole trip?

40 points

We take your trip hundreds of times, in sun, rain and snow, like the highs and lows of the market, and count how many reach the end with every day paid for.

How it is measured: the share of trips that reach the end. Getting there comes first, so this part is worth 40 points, twice any other. And low taxes and a full emergency fund only count when you arrive: if your plan makes it 5 times out of 10, it gets half the points for taxes and the emergency fund.

100% → 40 · 90% → about 27 · 80% → 20 · 65% → about 13

May help: the yearly budget, CPP and OAS timing, or the withdrawal order.

LIFETIME TAX COST

How much goes to taxes along the way?

20 points

The higher your taxes, the more expensive the whole trip may be: income tax, the OAS clawback and tax inside a corporation. The route is the order you draw from your RRSP or RRIF, TFSA, regular investment account and corporation.

How it is measured: all the tax paid in retirement, as a share of the spending it pays for. For example, $10,000 of tax on $80,000 of spending is a 12.5% tax share. The lower the share, the more points.

The catch: low taxes only help if you reach the destination. So these points are scaled by how many trips arrive: if 7 trips in 10 arrive, the plan keeps about 7 in 10 of its tax points.

May help: a different withdrawal order, or staying under the OAS clawback line. Tax at death counts in the cushion.

RETIREMENT CUSHION

Will there be enough left for the next trip?

20 points

Like an emergency fund on a trip: there if the car breaks down or someone gets sick. If you never need it, it may go to your family.

How it is measured: what is likely left after tax, compared with what you started with. It counts for less when a large tax bill waits at the destination, and, like taxes, in full only when the plan is well funded.

Inflation: like prices going up during the trip, it raises the cost of every day. Your plan grows your spending with it.

May help: drawing down large RRIFs earlier, or revisiting how much to leave.

SPENDING RELIABILITY

Can you pay for each day as planned?

20 points

A car repair on day 12, a tight budget on the last two days. The trip still happened, but not every day went as planned.

How it is measured: the share of the after-tax spending you want that the plan covers, averaged over all the trips. If steady markets cover more than rough ones, the lower number counts.

99%+ → 20 · 97% → 18 · 95% → 16 · 90% → 12

May help: checking the car before you go (adding known big costs, like a roof or a car, to the plan as one-time expenses, so the plan funds them on purpose), a tax-free spare for the costly days (drawing on your TFSA in a year with a big expense), or pacing the budget: a bit more in the early, active days and a bit less later.

The four parts add up to your score



90+ Healthy **75-89** Healthy, room to grow **60-74** Workable, with room to grow **40-59** Some areas to work on **Under 40** Room to strengthen

Plan Survival tells you whether you are likely to get there. The Zest Score tells you how good the whole trip may be.

RetireZest provides projections, not recommendations. For educational purposes only, not financial, tax, or investment advice. retirezest.com

WORKED EXAMPLE · SAME CAR, TWO BUDGETS

One couple, two road trips

Ana and Marc are 65 and retiring this year, with about $900,000 in savings plus CPP and OAS. They try two daily budgets. Everything else stays the same.

SAMPLE COUPLE, INVENTED FIGURES

Trip A, Steady: **$70,000** a year after tax

Trip B, Stretched: **$85,000** a year after tax

Part of the score	Trip A, Steady ($70,000)	Trip B, Stretched ($85,000)
Plan Survival Whole trip? (40)	**27** Arrives in 90 of 100 trips 90% on the scale gives about 27 points	**13** Arrives in 60 of 100 trips 60% on the scale gives about 13 points
Lifetime Tax Cost Taxes along the way? (20)	**18** Taxes: $8,400 a year, 12% of spending Full marks (20), kept at 90% because it arrives 90 times in 100	**12** Taxes: $11,900 a year, 14% of spending Also full marks (20), but kept at only 60%
Retirement Cushion Enough for the next trip? (20)	**15** About 60% of the savings left at the end 16 on the scale, kept at 90%	**7** About 25% of the savings left at the end 12 on the scale, kept at 60%
Spending Reliability Each day paid as planned? (20)	**19** 98% of the budget paid, on average A few short days in the worst weather	**14** 92% of the budget paid, on average More short days near the end of the bad trips
Zest Score	**79 Healthy, room to grow**	**46 Some areas to work on**

What the example shows

1. **Getting there comes first.** Spending $15,000 more a year cuts the chance of arriving from 90 to 60 in 100. Plan Survival alone drops 14 points.
2. **Low taxes only count when you arrive.** Both trips pay a low share in tax and earn full marks on the tax scale. Trip B keeps only 60% of them, because 40 trips in 100 run out of money on the way.
3. **The emergency fund tells the same story.** Trip B arrives with less left, and keeps only 60% of those points too.
4. **Spending Reliability falls more gently.** Most of Trip B's days are still paid as planned. The short days come late, on the trips that run low.

Neither trip is necessarily wrong. With Trip B, there is about a 40% chance the plan may not make the whole trip if nothing changes. Some couples take that chance on purpose; others prefer the safer road of Trip A. The Zest Score helps you see the trade-off, so the choice stays yours.

Ana and Marc are invented, and their figures are rounded for the example. The points follow RetireZest's scoring rules as of November 2026. RetireZest provides projections, not recommendations. For educational purposes only, not financial, tax, or investment advice.