

newsworthy trends

Surfing For Summer Travel Ideas And Bargains

(NAPSA)—Before you hit the open road or take to the air this summer, make one stop first along the information superhighway. According to the Travel Association of America, nearly 60 percent of vacationers head straight to cyberspace to research and make their travel plans.

The Internet offers many resources to not only help people navigate their way to exciting vacations and local entertainment, but also to find valuable travel bargains. Keeping the following five tips in mind will make the planning more convenient and the bargain hunting much easier.

#1. Click on a One-Stop Vacation Planning Shop. With thousands of travel Web sites out there, getting on a straight path to your next vacation can be daunting. Logging onto the travel channel of your Internet Service Provider, like America Online, CompuServe, and Netscape, can often be your best bet. These services work with respected companies and leading travel experts to pool top travel resources into a one-stop shop. Combined with community elements such as travel message boards and chat rooms to exchange opinions and recommendations, these sources will save you time and frustration.

Most of these sites even assist with making hotel, car and airline reservations online. Although online booking is reliable, you should still call to confirm your reservations before your departure for a little peace of mind.

#2. Let Speed and Flexibility Be Your Guide to Great Bargains. Nearly 75 percent of leisure travelers say the Internet offers travel bargains that can't be found anywhere else. And because of economic con-



cerns, there are more bargains than ever to be found on the Internet to appease the budget traveler. The trick is, you have to be speedy and flexible because the deals come and go quickly and are often based on current travel industry trends and conditions. Being a dedicated bargain bee means logging on regularly and keeping tabs on the latest deals.

One helpful hint is to look for travel sites that offer you an opportunity to subscribe to their travel newsletter. These newsletters often include daily deals and last minute sales and you can have them e-mailed directly to you.

#3. Become an Airfare Sleuth. Not sure if you're really getting a good deal? Sometimes finding a great bargain on airfare can be tricky and it all comes down to the Web site you choose. Remember that not all sites show every airline, so pick a site that lists fares for big and small carriers. Also, compare all available airfares and look for a site with a flexible booking option. Many travelers have flexible travel plans; they're just looking for the lowest fare and don't care when they have to travel to get it. Some sites require that you enter a specific date of travel to get a fare, and that fare may or may not be the lowest.

#4. Navigate a Safe Road Trip. Despite higher gas prices, a lot of people are still planning to hit the roads this summer. Check the Internet first for road trip tips

and time-saving directions that will help you and your family get to your destination quickly and safely. Sources like MapQuest.com offer detailed maps, driving directions and a road trip planner so you can familiarize yourself with your route and plan your entire trip before stepping out the door. You can also access up-to-the-minute traffic alerts and travel information about cities and attractions along the way.

Studies show that fatigue is a leading factor in driving accidents, so stay alert by being well rested. Use mapping sites that help you research appropriate rest stops, gas stations, and accommodations in case you need to pull over and unwind.

#5. Go Digital for City-Specific Surfing. Once you have your destination locked in, the next step is determining what you're going to do once you get there. A little extra legwork can go a long way when it comes to preparing ahead of time. Sites like digitalcity.com have all kinds of information about local destinations, area events such as craft fairs and parades, and recommendations on restaurants, shopping, and sight-seeing attractions. Even if you're not venturing far, online city guide sites can help add some summer fun to your daily itinerary and activities.

The secret to blissful family vacations may be letting your kids help plan the trip. In fact, according to Forrester Research, one out of every four teens online (1.4 million) research their family travel. Not only will they be more cooperative if they have some say in the family activities, but they may not blame you for spoiling their fun.