

Top Tips for Planning Your Vacation Online

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Planning the perfect vacation can seem daunting at times. Online travel planning can save you time and money, if you know what to look for and how to find it. To help you get started, here are some favorite tips and web sites of Stephen Kaufer, CEO of TripAdvisor, <http://www.tripadvisor.com/>, the award-winning search engine for travel.

- * Start with a dedicated travel search engine - Traditional search engines just don't help much when trying to plan a vacation online. Type "New York" at any of the popular search engines and you'll be overwhelmed with a lot of useless information. Instead, try www.tripadvisor.com to make quick work of finding the best information out on the web on where to go, where to stay and what to do. TripAdvisor's focus on providing relevant, insightful information for the leisure traveler makes it the perfect starting point for vacation planning.
- * Use specific search terms - When you're searching for information on a site, be as specific as possible. For example, if you're planning a trip to New York City, don't just type in "New York". You will get much better search results if you are more specific with your terms, such as entering: "Plaza Hotel New York", or "Guggenheim New York". This will eliminate many useless search results and bring back more of the information you are looking for.
- * Get inspired for an adventure - There are a number of excellent travel sites that focus specifically on adventure travel. For plenty of inspiration, as well as the ability to research specific tour packages, check out www.gorp.com, www.away.com, www.adventureseek.com and www.iexplore.com. All have great pictures and interesting content to inspire the couch-potato in all of us.
- * Take the time to fill out that profile - Many sites offer personalization features that automatically refine the information brought back to you. However, these personalization features only work if you fill out the profile. At www.tripadvisor.com, for instance, suggested articles, as well as hotel and attraction listings, are sorted according to your individual preferences. So if your preference is to stay in small, luxury hotel, make sure you let the website know about it! Other sites, such as www.followtherabbit.com and www.vacationcoach.com, use the same approach to provide specific vacation recommendations.
- * Check out the bulletin boards - Nothing beats word of mouth for helping you make a travel decision. If you want the scoop on what others are saying, check out some of the web bulletin boards. There are many valuable nuggets of information up on some of these sites. Some of the better travel postings are at www.travelocity.com, www.igougo.com and www.virtualtourist.com.
- * Bookmark or print out your research - There's nothing worse than spending hours researching a trip and then forgetting where all the information resides. If you can't print out all the websites, be sure to bookmark the valuable information you find. You can add a great

book-marking tool called Backflip to your browser by going to www.backflip.com and clicking on "get tools". Backflip allows you to save your favorite web pages and then share your bookmarked pages with friends and family.

- * Shop around for the lowest airfare - We all know that the same ticket on the same flight to the same city has many different prices. How to get the lowest one? Certainly, advance purchasing and a Saturday night stay help a lot. But it is still worth shopping around. Try www.travelocity.com and www.expedia.com for basic fare shopping for airfares, hotels and rental cars. You should also try one of the new price search engines like www.QIXO.com or www.farechase.com that scour dozens of other sites for the best fares, including the internet-only specials that many airlines offer.
- * Consider a package deal - Often, the best way to save money on a vacation is to combine the airfare, hotel and even a rental car into a single package. While it used to be the case that only the travel agencies knew of these deals, now many are advertised on the web. Try www.site59.com, www.lastminutetravel.com or www.lowestfare.com for some interesting deals.
- * Bid for it - The ability to name your own price for an airline ticket can be very cost-effective ... if you are flexible in your travel plans. In exchange for not knowing when during the day you will be traveling, and whether or not you will have a stopover somewhere ... Priceline can save you some real money. First, spend some time researching the lowest published fare, either with a search engine or on a mainstream travel site. Once you have found the best price, you can safely make a bid. But remember, it is a commitment to buy the ticket(s) if your bid is accepted. Finally, auctions are a new and interesting way to buy a vacation. Check out www.bid4vacations.com for some interesting traditional auctions, as well as www.savvio.com where the price declines the longer the ticket goes unsold. Feeling lucky? Buy it cheaper tomorrow ... unless someone else buys the last one today!
- * Look for reputable sites - And finally, a word of warning. Anyone with Internet access can put up a web site offering great deals to imaginary places, and spellbinding accounts of staying at mansions that don't actually exist. Just because it is written, doesn't mean it is truthful or valuable. In terms of getting travel advice, always look for a second opinion. In terms of buying a ticket or vacation package online, buy from a reputable source. Check out the "About Us" page that most web sites have, and look for signs of a serious company (i.e. a public company, or venture funded). If you are buying a ticket, make sure the site posts an 800 number for customer support.

TripAdvisor's search and directory services mine the wealth of the Web for the most relevant and personalized travel information. TripAdvisor enables consumers to more quickly and easily plan where to go, what to do, and where to stay on their next vacation. TripAdvisor is a privately held, venture-backed company based in Needham, Massachusetts. For more information on this topic or for a tour of the site, visit <http://www.tripadvisor.com/>.

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