

Pauline Frommer's

spend less see more  
**TRAVEL TIPS**



Smart Advice  
from a  
Travel Expert

pauline frommer's



# spend less see more TRAVEL GUIDES

**S**pend less, see more. Discover a fresh take on budget travel with Pauline Frommer's Travel Guides. Written by travel expert Pauline Frommer (who is also the daughter of Arthur Frommer) and her team of hand-picked writers, these guides show how to truly experience a culture, meet locals, and save money along the way.



- Industry secrets on how to find **the best hotel rooms**
- **Alternate accommodations** like home stays, apartment stays, and monastery stays
- **Great little neighborhood restaurants** and ethnic places
- **Cool, offbeat finds** that only the locals know about
- Packed with **personality and opinions**

For more information on Pauline Frommer's Travel Guides, visit [Frommers.com/pauline](http://Frommers.com/pauline)

## Are you ready to travel smart?

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GET THE MOST out of your dollar and your trip, Pauline Frommer's Travel Guides are for you. I put a fresh spin on budget travel, showing you how to experience the best for less and how to see it in a more authentic way—the way the locals do.

From living it up in an antiques-filled Fifth Avenue mansion in New York City for just \$75 to having an elegant high tea at London's British Museum for half of what you'd pay elsewhere, each guide gives you great ways to get closer to the culture of a destination.

Inside this booklet, you'll find some terrific tips to help you get the most out of every trip. Read on!

Happy Travels,

Pauline Frommer

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## Getting Great Airfare Deals



### **Book when others aren't flying.**

Prices tend to be lower on those flights that no one wants to take, by which I mean the ones that depart just as the sun is rising or long after it's set (i.e., the first and last flights of the day). You'll lose sleep, but may save a lot of money. Some flight costs will vary by area. For example, Las Vegas is a popular weekend destination. If you fly in on Monday and out on Thursday, you can usually save big bucks.

### **Include a Saturday night stay-over in your itinerary.**

Since business travelers are the bread and butter of the airline industry and they don't like to stay away from their families on weekends, they usually fly on itineraries that get them home before Saturday night. The airlines penalize them for this with higher prices, and lure vacation travelers who can stay over Saturday by lowering the rates on those itineraries.

### **Be flexible.**

You can often save a bundle by flying out a day or two earlier or later, or picking a different airport than you originally chose. For example, by picking Long Beach instead of Los Angeles, you'll open yourself up to flying JetBlue (which is often cheaper); by flying into Fort Lauderdale rather than Miami you have the option of flying Southwest or Spirit Air (again, two consistently affordable carriers). To be more flexible, search more flexibly. Many booking engines now allow you to open yourself up to searches several days around your dates, and of a cluster of airports.

### **Consider less well-known airlines.**

This works especially well internationally, but sometimes domestically as well. Spirit Airline, Frontier, Alaska Air, and other smaller airlines often have great prices within the U.S. Internationally, you can sometimes save a bundle by hopping a plane whose ultimate destination is farther than you need to go, but makes stops along the way. For example, often the cheapest way to get to London is via Air India (which flies NYC–London–Delhi); to Paris, Air Kuwait can be a cheap way to go; to Frankfurt, go via Icelandair, Royal Air Maroc, or Air Singapore.

### **Search smartly.**

Companies like FareCompare.com, FareCast.com, Sidestep.com, and Kayak.com do for travel prices what Google does for information. They cull data via very powerful search engines and they often get quotes from both the middleman sources (Expedia.com, Travelocity, Orbitz, etc.), which occasionally offer deals, and the travel providers' sites (American Airlines, JetBlue, Spirit Airlines, etc.), which in some cases give those who come directly to their Web sites the best rates. These sites give a more impartial search than the third party sites, don't charge a fee for bookings (often simply passing you from their site to the one you'll purchase on), and don't add onerous change fees, as some travel agency sites do. FareCast and FareCompare even compile data on how much fares on certain routes have cost in the past and will advise you whether to purchase now or to wait.

### **For international travel, go to the ethnic travel agencies.**

In cities around the U.S., expat communities are served by their own travel agencies and often these folks know every trick in the book and can help you, an outsider, find the best airfares to their "home country". You can find these specialist agencies at the Web site [www.cheapflights.com](http://www.cheapflights.com), which lists agencies and their price ranges. Often these agencies are so small, this is their only Web presence.



### **“Insure” your ticket through YAPTA.com**

YAPTA.com is a fab new Web site. It stands for “Your Amazing Personal Travel Assistant” and tracks prices on specific flights on Alaska Airlines, America West, American, Air Tran, ATA, Continental, Delta, JetBlue, Midwest, and US Airways. If the price of your ticket goes down, it alerts you and you can contact the airline and demand either cash back or a voucher (towards future travel) for the difference in price. How well this works will depend on the airline. If you booked a ticket for, say, New York to Dallas for \$400 round-trip on United, and the price dropped to \$250, you could get a voucher for the difference good for travel in the next 12 months. This is called a “rollover”. In testing of the site, about one-third of the prices scanned dropped in price an average of 16% (though some dropped more). Now on some airlines, such as American Airlines, if the price dropped less than \$100, changing your ticket wouldn’t make sense, as American charges a \$100 change fee, but others, such as Southwest and Alaska Air, are much more generous and don’t charge a change fee at all in these circumstances. One last caveat: You have to buy the ticket direct from the airline to get the vouchers or money back. It won’t work if you’ve booked with Expedia or Orbitz.

## Using Frequent Flyer Miles

### **Go with the more generous airlines.**

If you’re a frequent traveler, say a business traveler, and earning miles is important to you, you may want to patronize Continental and Aloha Airlines, the only two of the bunch whose miles never expire. While not quite as generous, American Airlines still gives its passengers a full three years before miles expire.

### **Avoid the miserly airlines if miles are more important to you than price.**

US Airways changed their policy so that miles would expire in 18 months, if there is no activity on the account, rather than in three years. United Airways instituted the same policy, also halving its expiration time from 36 months to 18. Delta made a similar move, though its plan is a hair more generous: You have two years with it before your miles go bye-bye. Southwest also gives its customers two years. JetBlue and Air Tran have always had the strictest expiration policies in the biz: Miles disappear just one year after they’re earned *even* if your account is active, making it nearly impossible for most people to earn free flights with these two (a shame as they’re often the price leaders).

### **Look into getting a miles credit card.**

If you get a miles credit card and accrue new miles that way, it will keep your account current. The downside is that these credit cards are often saddled with terrible fee structures and higher-than-normal penalties for late payments. You can also use your miles to buy non-airline ticket items with partner organizations—shops, hotels, car rental companies—and this usage will keep your account active. It will also, unfortunately, deplete your account, so it’s a double-edged sword.

You can also fly a partner airline of the airline you're loyal to and accrue miles that way, keeping your account active. Two generous things you can do to keep your miles active: Give some to charity, or give them to another mileage user.

### **Beyond the expirations, what can you do to use your miles?**

*Do your research.* There's a terrific Web site called Webflyer.com that tracks which months are best for redeeming miles with each airline and posts calendars on their Web site.

*Be persistent.* Seats open up 330 days in advance of the flight, and if you can, it's good to try then. But if you don't get seats, try in another month or two, and then try again. On some flights, the seats aren't released until they know how well a particular flight is selling.

*Include a Saturday night stay-over in your itinerary.* As with regular flights, you're more likely to strike gold this way. Without a Saturday night stay, you may be required to use double miles (50,000 instead of the usual 25,000).

### **Use your miles when flying internationally.**

Don't forget that you can use your miles on your airline's partners as well as the airline directly. Sometimes it's a good idea to call the airline to get information on what seats are available this way. Don't book though, as using your miles through a phone call often includes a \$15-\$20 fee. Use the call to gather info only and then go online to make your booking.



## Avoiding Getting Bumped

### **Get to the airport on time—or early.**

Call the airline the night before to reconfirm your flight and ask at that time if the flight you're on is overbooked. If it is, give yourself at least another half hour to get to the airport. The last to arrive is the first to be bumped. Checking in at home and pre-printing your boarding pass (doable with some airlines on domestic flights only), will also get you towards the front of the queue and can help. But sometimes, they simply bump the people at the bottom of the food chain, economically speaking, and that will be the folks with the award mileage seats or the really cheap seats.

Booking flights later in the day is also a way to avoid being bumped, as the airlines tend to overbook more heavily earlier in the day, assuming that they'll be able to get passengers on later flights.

### **Complain effectively.**

If you're on one of the so-called "Legacy Carriers" (American, Delta, United, Continental, Northwest, USAirways) and traveling domestically, the Condition of Carriage (what used to be called Rule 240) generally states that if you're delayed for a significant amount of time in getting to your final destination, the airline must give you meal vouchers, perhaps a hotel room, or even buy you a ticket on a competing airline. Most ticket agents won't volunteer this information, so you should know it. If you get bumped but the airline gets you on another flight that arrives at your final destination within one hour of your originally scheduled time, you aren't entitled to anything. If the airline arranges substitute transportation that is scheduled to arrive at your destination between one and two hours after the original arrival time (or up to four hours on international flights), the airline owes you an amount equal to the

one-way fare for the journey, up to a \$200 maximum. You get double the money (double your fare, up to \$400) if the alternate transportation gets you there more than two hours later (four hours internationally) or if the airline doesn't make any arrangements for you.

In all the above instances, you still get to keep your original ticket and use it on another flight. The airlines are simply reimbursing you for your inconvenience. If you end up having to make your arrangements, you can pursue your claim against the airline by requesting an “involuntary refund” for the ticket for the flight you were bumped from. If being bumped ends up costing you more money than the carrier was willing to pay you at the airport, you can take it up later with the airline's customer service department.

Bumping rules never apply to charter flights, or to scheduled flights on planes with 60 or fewer seats. Nor do they apply to international flights heading to the United States, or foreign airlines' flights outside the United States, though some airlines may choose to honor them anyway.

### To volunteer or not?

Volunteer only if you have a few extra days to kill. People used to volunteer to get free travel, but now many fewer flyers are volunteering to be bumped because unlike in the past, if you get bumped from a flight today, it could mean that you'll have to wait days rather than hours to get on another flight. Planes are going out full and simply don't have room for bumped passengers. And if you volunteer, make sure the voucher you're given is in a cash amount and *not* for a free trip. Cash vouchers can be used for any flight whereas “free trip” vouchers put you into the same bucket as all the award mileage passengers and you'll be competing with them for seats.

### Background on passenger bumping

Bumping is a deliberate strategy on the part of the airlines to maximize revenue. They know that a certain percentage of travelers (usually

about 8%) won't show up for their flights. Many of those who don't show up are business travelers, traveling on refundable tickets. When they don't show and get the value of their ticket back, the airline will lose hundreds of dollars on that seat—unless it overbooks. The problem today is that so many planes are leaving at or near capacity—the average flight is expected to go out 85% full—that there's little room for error if the plane is overbooked. The airlines are flying fewer and smaller planes to keep their profits up and there's been an increase in demand. These two factors are a recipe for disaster.



## Renting a Car

### Keep checking rates.

Car rental rates fluctuate more wildly than airfares, but the perk with car rentals is you don't have to put any money down until you get to the counter. So make your reservation and then check back a couple of times to make sure prices haven't dropped. If they have, make a new reservation at the lower price.

### Rent the smallest model of car available.

It's always much less expensive to upgrade at the car rental counter than to do it in advance, and the economy cars usually go before the luxury ones do, so you may get a free upgrade anyway (especially if you're arriving late in the day).

### Consider renting from a local firm.

Such companies as Rent-a-Wreck and Fox don't renew their fleets yearly, so while you may be driving an older car, you could be saving a

significant amount. You can often save as much as 30% by shopping outside the major brands. This is particularly true if you're thinking of renting a car in Europe. To find local car companies, go to [www.bnm.com](http://www.bnm.com). The downside with these companies: lack of service. If you drive the car outside of their immediate vicinity and something goes wrong with the vehicle, you won't get the kind of quick help that you would from an Avis, Hertz, or Enterprise.

### Check your own car insurance before you get to the counter.

Rental car agents are trained to up-sell you, and you usually don't need everything they're offering. Most car insurance policies will usually cover you for third-party liability and other things as well.

**Consider an opaque booking engine.** Try Priceline.com or Hotwire.com. They only deal with the national companies (so you won't be getting a lemon) and can save you a lot of money.

### Rent off-airport when you can.

Taxes and additional fees for cars rented at the airport can add a significant amount on to the total cost. In Dallas for example, a \$4-a-day fee is added just for the use of the airport rental facilities (this is on top of other taxes for airport use). Car rental offices not located at the airport will usually send a shuttle to pick you up; in fact, there are times when this type of service may end up being faster and more convenient.

### Look into public transportation options.

In such cities as London, Paris, New York, and Washington, D.C. you have a much easier vacation *without* a rental car because the hassle of parking and driving in these cities is tremendous.

### Compare apples with apples.

Some Web sites don't include all of the costs in their estimates of price, so be sure that you're getting all the figures before you make a decision.

### Crunch the numbers.

Usually, even if you only planned on renting for five or six days, the weekly rate will be lower. So consider renting at that rate and then just turning the car in early.



## Staying Healthy

### Check your insurance before leaving home.

Find out what medical services your health insurance covers. To protect yourself, consider buying medical travel insurance. Very few health insurance plans pay for medical evacuation back to the U.S. (which can cost \$10,000 and up). Consider purchasing medical travel insurance if you're going to a country where the medical facilities are poor. A number of companies offer medical evacuation services anywhere in the world. If you're ever hospitalized more than 150 miles from home, MedjetAssist (800-527-7478; [www.medjetassistance.com](http://www.medjetassistance.com)) will pick you up and fly you to the hospital of your choice. Annual memberships are \$225 individual, \$350 family; you can also purchase short-term memberships.

### Find a doctor.

Any foreign consulate can provide a list of area doctors who speak English. Consider asking your hotel concierge to recommend a local doctor—even his or her own. For travel abroad, you may have to pay all medical costs up front and be reimbursed later. Medicare and Medicaid do not provide coverage for medical costs outside the U.S.

### Pack prescription medications in your carry-on luggage.

Carry them in their original containers with pharmacy labels—or they won't

get through airport security. Know the generic name of your prescription medicines, in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name.

### **Deal with jet lag.**

Jet lag is a pitfall of traveling across time zones. If you're flying north-south and you feel sluggish when you touch down, your symptoms will be the result of dehydration and the general stress of air travel. When you travel east-west or vice versa, however, your body becomes thoroughly confused about what time it is, and everything from your digestive system to your brain is knocked for a loop because most peoples' bodies are more inclined to stay up late than fall asleep early. Here are some tips for combating jet lag:

- *Reset your watch* to your destination time before you board the plane.
- *Drink lots of water* before, during, and after your flight. Avoid alcohol.
- *Exercise and sleep well* for a few days before your trip.
- *If you have trouble sleeping* on planes, fly eastward on morning flights.
- *Daylight is the key* to resetting your body clock. At the Web site for Outside In ([www.bodyclock.com](http://www.bodyclock.com)), you can get a customized plan of when to seek and avoid light.

### **Avoiding Digestive Ailments**

Traveler's diarrhea is an all-too-common vacation spoiler. According to the Centers for Disease Control between 20 and 50 percent of those who travel internationally, some 10 million people each year, suffer from it. To prevent getting sick yourself, avoid food sold by street vendors in exotic locales, as it may have been prepared under unsanitary conditions. In those countries where the water isn't potable, remember to also avoid salads and unpeeled

fruits, as they will have likely been "cleaned" in the same water (and brush your teeth with bottled water). If you're in a situation where hundreds of people are isolated together in close conditions—as on a cruise ship—wash your hands often and thoroughly, in warm soapy water. Carrying a small bottle of hand sanitizer is another smart strategy.



## **Swapping Homes**

### **The advantages of home exchanges.**

A family of four can save from \$3,000 to \$4,000 for a two-week vacation taking into consideration money that would have been spent on a hotel room, rental car, and three meals a day in restaurants. Equally important, visitors transform the nature of the vacation experience, by staying in places like a houseboat in Sausalito, an underground home in Taos, a beachside cottage in the Caribbean, a winery in Sonoma County, an ancient farmhouse on a Turkish island, an apartment on the Left Bank in Paris . . . the possibilities are endless (and I found all of these in current online directories of available swaps!).

### **Setting up a swap.**

While it can be done informally among friends or friends of friends, most people join a home exchange club which lists (online or in a directory) thousands of potential swappers around the world. You simply contact the people whose home interests you and correspond

back and forth until you come up with a plan. The costs for joining these clubs are generally \$100-a-year and up. Some of the bigger clubs (and bigger is always better in the world of exchanging) are:

- Intervac Home Exchange ([www.intervacus.com](http://www.intervacus.com))
- The Home Exchange Network ([www.homeexchange.com](http://www.homeexchange.com))
- HomeLink International ([www.swapnow.com](http://www.swapnow.com))
- The Invented City ([www.invented-city.com](http://www.invented-city.com))

### Swappable items.

While most people do simultaneous swaps (i.e., you're in their home while they're in yours), some people use their second or vacation home in the swap. Most swappers also exchange the right to use one another's cars, and many swap pet care. Another bonus of swapping is that families will often swap baby gear and toys, so that they can pack lightly when they travel.

### Safety precautions.

Surprisingly there are very few reported cases of theft or even damage in the world of home exchanges. Most people spend so much time corresponding back and forth with their potential swappees (the average is about four months) that they know their partners pretty well by the time they exchange. If you are worried about this, there are ways to protect yourself in advance of and during a swap:

- *Ask a lot of questions* before you swap.
- *Create a written contract* (setting forth your expectations on how your home will be treated, whether or not the car is involved, who will pay for phone bills, if the computer can be used, etc.).
- *Lock away* any valuables.
- *Ask friends* to check in on your home and tenants during the swap. This last suggestion leads to one of the hidden bonuses of swapping:

exchanging friends. This can be a great way for people to meet locals worldwide.

### Getting the best swap.

- *Be flexible* with dates and destinations.
- *Be proactive* in pursuing the swaps that interest you.
- *Have the luck* of living in a great place. While people travel for many reasons other than sightseeing—e.g., weddings, graduations, etc.—it's usually possible to set up a swap from anywhere if you're one of those lucky people who has a home in New York City, Paris, London, Orlando, etc.



## Accessing Money

### ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM. The CIRRUS and PLUS networks now span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination.

You may also consider getting a four-digit PIN number. In many foreign destinations, longer PINs won't be accepted by local machines.

*Note:* Remember that many banks impose a fee every time you use a card at another bank's ATM, so if you're a member of a global bank do some research to find out where its machines are in the destination you'll be visiting. If that's not possible, know that the fees can be higher for international transactions (\$5 or more in some cases) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than \$2). In addition,

the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks' ATM fees within the U.S., use [www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com).

Even with these fees, you'll often save money by using ATMs simply because the exchange rate they give is generally excellent (and will often beat the rate of exchange being given to those who exchange money at the bank counter). Changing money in this way also allows travelers to take out small amounts at a time, which is always the better part of wisdom. One of the reasons tourists are often targeted by pickpockets is that they unwisely carry large amounts of cash on their person. Don't make that mistake.

### Traveler's checks

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the ATM made cash accessible at any time. They've become so uncommon that many hotels and restaurants will no longer accept them as a form of payment. And certain exchange bureaus and banks now charge an additional fee to convert them.

Still, they're a good back-up as they can be replaced within 24 hours should they be lost. Many travelers also get a sense of security from seeing the denominations they have left to spend, and knowing that the checks can't be easily used if stolen.

American Express, Thomas Cook, Visa and MasterCard offer foreign currency traveler's checks. You'll pay the rate of exchange at the time of your purchase (so it's a good idea to monitor the rate before you buy). Most companies charge a transaction fee per order.

*Note:* You'll get a better exchange rate if you use traveler's checks at banks, rather than currency exchanges, hotels or shops.

### Credit cards

Credit cards are another safe way to carry money. They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and generally offer good

exchange rates. However, you should NEVER use a credit card at a bank machine to get a cash advance. You will be charged an outrageous fee if you do so, as the bank considers this type of usage as a "loan" rather than a "withdrawal".

Mastercard, American Express, and Visa all charge a 2% fee for the use of their cards abroad. On top of that, the issuing bank may often add a transaction fee (usually between 1% and 3%), whether you're using the local currency or U.S. dollars. If you plan to be traveling a lot, therefore, it might be wise to get a credit card from Bank One or a credit union in your community; neither of these sources adds on additional fees. It must be said that even with these additional fees you'll often spend less with a credit card than you will by changing dollars into the local currency at an exchange bureau. That's because these agencies generally offer lousy rates of exchange and add on fees, to boot.

It's a wise idea to notify your credit card company about your impending trip abroad, so that they don't become suspicious of foreign transactions and block your charges. If you forget to do so, contact the credit card company immediately if a charge is refused. You may have to do an Internet search to find the correct number to call, as U.S.-based toll-free emergency numbers generally don't work from abroad.



## Traveling with Kids

### Involve the entire family in the planning.

While you'll want to control the choice of destination, you should enlist your children's help in researching activities for your vacation. With children over the age of eight, you may consider allowing them

to plan a full day's activities. It's remarkable how giving each member of the family his or her day cuts down on complaints. Your ten-year-old son will be better able to tolerate a visit to the Doll Museum knowing that a baseball game is in his future.

### **Immerse your children in the destination before you start the trip.**

Bring home books of fairy tales from the country you'll be visiting or age-appropriate novels, set in the destination. Rent movies that feature places that you'll see. By preparing your children in this fashion, you'll increase their ability to enjoy the destination exponentially.

### **Consider renting an apartment or vacation home rather than staying in a hotel.**

Usually the costs will be equivalent, but with a rental you'll likely have much more space. That means that instead of the entire family having to pile into one bedroom, the parents can take the bedroom while the kids sleep on a fold-out couch in the living room (or may get their own second bedroom). As importantly, with a rental you'll have a kitchen in which to prepare baby bottles or cook meals for finicky eaters. And being able to prepare at least some of your meals will help your budget immeasurably.

### **Give each child a souvenir budget.**

And don't give in if they spend it too soon. It's a terrific way to teach them about fiscal responsibility and keep your kids engaged in the trip.

### **Build in time to your schedule just for blowing off steam.**

Sure it's great to see and do new things but children, especially very young children, need time to simply run around or loll in the grass. So research where the local playgrounds and parks are when you get to your destination and budget at least a fifth of each day just kicking back and relaxing in them. A hidden perk to hanging out in the

park: you get to meet local parents, who can tell you where the great child-friendly restaurants are, or what life is like in the locale you're visiting. (Some of my fondest travel memories are of these impromptu conversations).

### **Prepare your child (and yourself) adequately for the flight.**

If you're traveling with toddlers or babies, make sure to have a bottle or pacifier handy for take-off and landing. Young ones scream during these times of flight because they can't adjust the pressure in their ears. Having something to suck helps with that. For older children, be sure to bring enough distractions to last the flight plus two hours—delays are endemic nowadays! For that very same reason, make sure you bring meals and extra food along with you. Many airlines now sell onboard snacks, but they're rarely the fare children enjoy (the same goes for the "kids meals" the airlines give away). And before you get on board the flight, don't sit in the terminal—you'll be doing that for hours on the plane. Instead, try and find a terminal playground (many have them nowadays) or an out-of-the-way place where you and your children can run around and play tag. The more tired they are before they board, the quieter the flight will be for you.

### **Check out kid-friendly events on [whatsonwhen.com](http://whatsonwhen.com) or at the local library.**

Look for fun happenings like parades, circuses, festivals, puppet shows and country fairs. You'll also find that local libraries in the places you're visiting can be wonderful resources for diversions such as story times or craft hours.

### **Teach your children some of the language, if it will be different.**

Not only is it polite to know how to say such basics as "Please" and "Thank You", it will give your child a sense of control as they're traveling.



## Traveling Solo

### **Skip the air/hotel packages; be careful with cruises and tours.**

With prices computed for couples, they're rarely a good idea for single travelers as the "singles supplement" (sometimes between 50% and 80% of the actual cost of the vacation and impossible to argue your way out of) will often wipe out any sort of savings. The same could be said for standard tours and cruises, though many cruise lines and tour operators will hook you up with a roommate of the same gender, free of charge. If they can't find you a roommate, you still get the vacation at the doubles rate. However, if they do find someone for you, be sure to interview that person before signing up. There's nothing that can ruin a vacation quicker than a crotchety stranger sharing your room who keeps different hours than you do, has vastly different standards of cleanliness, or is expecting a traveling companion out of the experience, rather than just someone to help cut the cost of the room. If you'd rather keep control of the roommate-finding process yourself, go to a Web site on solo travel, such as Connecting: Solo Travel Network ([www.cstn.org](http://www.cstn.org)) or TravelChums ([www.travelchums.com](http://www.travelchums.com)) and post an ad for a roommate *before* you put any money down on that cruise or tour.

### **Book vacations where it doesn't matter that you're single.**

Many solo travelers sign up for volunteer vacations or learning vacations, where the emphasis is on group activities and not on romantic dinners for two. Travel with organizations such as Global Volunteers, Earthwatch, or to a learning center such as the Penland School, Oxford University (which in summer has classes open to all), or the Omega Institute, to name just a few volunteer and learning vacations. For older travelers, the tours of Elderhostel can be wonderful for singles and attract a number of solo travelers. For younger travelers, the tours of Contiki are party-heavy singles' paradises, for a certain sort of under-35

traveler. Many people also create vacations around interests they may have, and then contact the international societies that specialize in these interests (such as genealogy, archeology, and gardening) and may have special events going on in a place they're planning to visit. The site SpecialtyTravel.com has dozens of these sorts of vacations.

### **Consider joining a hospitality club.**

Clubs such as the World for Free, The Evergreen Hospitality Club, and Women Welcome Women specialize in hooking up travelers with people around the world who enjoy meeting and offering hospitality to these strangers. Each club has a directory which travelers then use to contact people in the areas they'll be visiting. Sometimes that person will offer to show you around their home town, or invite you to dinner, or maybe even offer up their spare bedroom or couch for three nights or so. It's a fascinating way to see the world, and joining most of these clubs costs only between \$30 and \$50.

### **If you want to meet your significant other on vacation, go with a dating service, or on a specialized romance trip.**

Matchmaking services and Web sites JDate.com (for Jewish singles), Catholic Singles (for Catholics), and Singles in Paradise and Singles Travel International (for anyone) plan trips to exotic places across the globe, with group activities and meals and a lot of free time so that participants can meet and then hopefully pair-up on their own on dates. Trips are competitively priced and they will hook people up with roommates. I've seen trips to China, Maui, Costa Rica, and Israel on offer, as well as shorter trips throughout the U.S. The singles cruises of Windjammer Barefoot Cruises and singles weeks at Club Med are among the two most popular (and I hear, successful) offerings of the many singles weeks offered all over the world.

## Traveling Green



### Ask a lot of questions.

There's no international organization setting standards for what makes a hotel, resort, cruise ship, or what have you, eco-friendly. Instead there are 100-or-so smaller organizations, each with their own standards, giving out certificates. It's a jumbled mess, and even in countries where the government is the one certifying that a resort or hotel is "green", such as Costa Rica, often the bureaucratic hassles for getting the designation are such that worthy organizations go without.

So travelers have to do the legwork themselves. When you call up to book, speak with a manager and ask how the hotel is husbanding its resources and protecting the surrounding environment. Some sample questions you might want to ask: "What types of lightbulbs do you use" (energy saving bulbs is the answer you're looking for); or what kind of water do you use to water the lawn ("grey water", which is recycled from the laundry or kitchen, helps conserve water). And if they tell you they get some of their energy from solar panels or wind mills: Ding, ding ding, you've hit the jackpot!

### Pick an eco-friendly destination.

Costa Rica and Tanzania both have put aside 25% of their land as area that will be free from development. Scotland, too, is making a big eco-tourism push, as are many other areas around the globe. Seek them out and use your spending power as a thank-you for doing the right thing.

### Travel with eco-friendly tour companies.

There are certain tour companies that adopt sustainable tourism models for their businesses. Some of the most prominent include:

- *Intrepid Travel*: On its tours, the group takes public transportation together, stays in local guesthouses, and eats in small, local restaurants (to help the local economy). It also donates a substantial amount each year to environmental projects. Intrepid goes throughout Asia, Africa, Latin American and Europe.
- *The Sierra Club*: This group not only lobbies Congress to protect the environment, but also runs trips to our National Parks to show folks what they're protecting. Some of these trips are called "Service Trips" and are partially vacation and partially volunteer work.

### Consider renting a hybrid rather than a standard car.

In key markets across the U.S., Hertz, Avis and Enterprise have now added Toyota Priuses to their fleets. Renting one of these energy-efficient cars costs more than a standard rental, but with the high price of gasoline, you may end up saving money in the end. And you're certainly cutting down on your carbon emissions this way.

### Look into public transportation.

Don't assume that you have to rent a car at all. In many parts of the U.S. and Europe, it's actually preferable to rely on public transportation. This is certainly true in traffic-clogged cities such as New York, Paris, London, Rome, and San Francisco. Those traveling along the eastern corridor of the U.S. should look into the options Amtrak offers. In Japan, Canada, and Europe, taking the train between major cities is an efficient, affordable and quite comfortable option. Taking public transportation is also an excellent way to cut down on the greenhouse gases you're putting into the atmosphere.

### Book non-stop flights when you can.

The largest emissions occur during takeoff and landings.

**Don't buy ecologically-suspect souvenirs.**

Avoid purchases of items made with endangered species or hard woods. If we all did so, the market would dry up and we'd have a better chance of regrowing our forests and repopulating threatened species.

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### Surely, the top current airfare sale in America is the offer of an \$898 round-trip between the U.S. and New Zealand for flights in May or August



Milford Sound  
Uploaded by [Suzanne](#)

I would be remiss if I were not to pass on news about a round-trip airfare of only \$898 between either Los Angeles or San Francisco and [Auckland](#) on [Air New Zealand](#) (tel. [800/663-5494](tel:8006635494); [www.airnewzealand.com](http://www.airnewzealand.com)). It can be booked up until March 17; it is valid for flights within the months of May or August; it includes the fuel surcharge; and the only thing you need add is \$69 in government fees and taxes. And if you'll insert the words "New Zealand" in the box found at the top right-hand side of this blog, you'll learn about all sorts of schemes for renting a mini-recreational vehicle for travel within New Zealand, once you've arrived.

There's more to be learned on the airline's website, like air stopovers in [Christchurch](#) or [Wellington](#) for \$50 more, or the right to stop en route -- if you leave from Los Angeles -- in the [Cook Islands](#), [Samoa](#) or [Tonga](#) for only \$100 per destination. When you consider the vast distances of the Pacific Ocean, these prices provide an undreamed-of travel opportunity for an outlay that would normally be impossible.

Although you can also phone with questions, booking this way will bring about a higher airfare. Go to the website instead.

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