

Travel Web Site Guide

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Travel Made Easy with this Guide to Travel Web Sites

Travel Web Site Guide

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Travel, hotels deals, cheap flights ... finding and planning these has changed dramatically, thanks to [travel web sites](#). Gone are the days when people were dependent on a travel agent or the airlines for prices and availabilities on flights and hotels. Now a few keystrokes tells you which days have cheap flights, what you might bid for a hotel room, which luxury hotels are the most tempting, where to spend the perfect honeymoon.



[LibbyMcMillan](#)
Sanibel, FL

FIND A HOTEL: Hotel Reservations & Hotel Deals

[Priceline.com](#) is an amazing resource when it comes to getting hotel deals; it lets you bid for rooms. Do NOT use this site to bid on any hotel with less than three stars, but DO use Priceline - especially - to bid on four-star properties. You'll often get the handicap room in a luxury hotel -meaning more space and an immaterial toilet rail - for about 55% of the rack rate. Just check to see the full list of four-stars before bidding, because you could get any one of them. Make sure all of them work for you before bidding. The same story applies to three-star hotels. Slightly over half of rack rate often gets you a great room. (Do not be tempted to use Priceline for airfare unless you mind crazy routes, long layovers, multiple stops, etc. The site is great for getting hotel discounts, discounted rental car, however, if you know you're definitely going on your trip ...you pay up front).

[Hotels.com](#) is the pick on [Concierge.com](#) for hotel web sites. Its rates are often better than those found on [Expedia](#), [Orbitz](#), [Quikbook](#), or [Travelocity](#), and occasionally it even beats a hotel's own web site at room rates. You can sort your results lots of different ways, and the inventory is huge. [Concierge.com](#) ranks [Orbitz.com](#) second, unless you're looking for a hotel in Asia or the Pacific Rim; then they send you to [Kayak](#) or [Asia-Hotels.com](#).

FIND LUXURY ACCOMMODATIONS

I would send you to [KiwiCollection.com](#), or to one of the luxury brand web sites, such as [Orient-Express.com](#), [Mandarin-Oriental.com](#), [RosewoodHotels.com](#), [FourSeasons.com](#) and [RitzCarlton.com](#).

[LuxuryLink.com](#) lets you bid on luxury hotels. According to [Concierge.com](#), you can save \$146-\$1966 per night with a winning bid.

[KesslerCollection.com](#) features some of America's most beautiful and unique hotels and resorts. [SmallLuxuryHotels.com](#) and [LeadingSmallHotelsOfTheWorld.com](#) will appeal to those looking for something small and luxurious. For boutique hotels in NYC, D.C. and California, visit [ThompsonHotels.com](#).

FIND A FLIGHT

[Kayak.com](#)

Concierge.com ranks Kayak.com the most popular or "best" travel web site for actually booking flights, (although you can also make hotel and cruise reservations, and book rental cars). Kayak actually searches 140 different travel web sites for you, looking for the best deals on flights aka cheap flights. Kayak offers low-fare alerts. Click on BUZZ to see late-breaking fares from your home airport, and even tips from the Travel Channel. BONUS: Click on any of the links in Buzz's trip ideas" section, and you'll get a large pinpointed map, plus a whole list of Trip Ideas by category: romantic, ecotravel, family, arts/culture.....so you can browse to your heart's content, reading content that is specific to your way of life.

Kayak's copy is also fun to read. A recent check of "final frontier" vacations (Florida space coast) listed lots of great info, then concluded with a sign-off by the site's personable owners:

*Live long and prosper,
Paul and Steve, Kayak Co-Founders*

How many other travel web sites do that? A little personality coming through.....

[Expedia.com](#) is the partner site to [Travel & Leisure's](#) Concierge.com, but forged its reputation on its own. Expedia saves your itineraries (even in the planning stages), and sends flight confirmations to your email address after every booking. Trip changes and cancellations are easy, but do incur a \$35 cancellation fee by Expedia, and possibly other fees by the airlines. (Expedia also offers hotel reservations in the U.S. Europe and the Caribbean.)

[Travelocity.com](#) is another well-known popular travel web site, although it's not as visually appealing as kayak. It offers quick rates and availability on flights, (plus international hotels, vacation packages and even Eurail and Amtrak trains, including select cities in Canada.) The section called My Stuff stores itineraries, preferences and allows you to sign up for "hot deal" emails, which are often tempting. Plus you can start watching your favorite destinations with FareWatcher PlusSM. Travelocity has a page to check flight status, and also offers themed ideas for last-minute trips (food, romance, etc).

Concierge.com ranks **ITASoftware.com** as its second favorite travel web site, after comparing ten domestic and international itineraries, claiming the site found the **lowest fares** for 7 out of 10 routes, besting Kayak. The fares came via multiple carriers, however, with quirky connections...

FareCompare.com is the hot ticket for the very latest news - the fare information you'll find here (on flights going to, from or within North America) is often posted often BEFORE the airlines post the same info on their sites, and BEFORE travel agency web sites. You can receive alerts on cheap fares, and learn the most advantageous times to purchase tickets. Farecompare even lets you compare the prices they post with their "partners," Orbitz, UltimateFares, Hotwire, Priceline, Cheapair and OneTravel.

BUT BEFORE YOU BUY AIRFARE...

[Farecast.com](#) tells travelers when to buy tickets for domestic flights to 24 cities in the United States. As the joke says, "How do it know?" Frankly, we don't care. This site really works. Time your purchase, save money. It's that simple.

Your **destination airport web site** will list which airlines fly there. Often it will be serviced by a low-cost carrier (Southwest or JetBlue, for example) which does not share its flight info with Expedia, Travelocity, Priceline, etc. It's always advisable to check with **low-cost carriers** on airfare.

Low-Cost Carriers also offer **one-way airfares**, a cool option if you'd like to visit more than one city. Three one-way tickets are almost always cheaper than two round-trip tickets, using low-cost airlines that offer this opportunity.

Make sure you're comfortable. Before making plans to use an **unfamiliar airline**, visit **Skytrax.com**, which reviews hundreds of airlines and airports, based on professional audits. Concierge.com recommends the "**Seat Reviews**" section of Skytrax, or Seatguru.com before choosing your seats; a particularly important idea for long flights.

RENT A CAR

As stated above, Priceline.com (which lets you make your own offer on travel products) is a great place to book a car rental if you're SURE you're not going to change your plans, because you pay up front. You can bid just over half of rack rate on a rental car, and quite often, your bid is accepted. I like Priceline for hotels and cars, but not for airfare.

If you need more flexibility on your travel plans, then you still have lots of options. You can use any of the rental cars web sites for booking (although don't expect the BEST deals): **Alamo, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, Fox, Hertz, National, RentAWreck, Thrifty, Toyota and others**. The major travel web sites are great resources when it comes to booking a cheap rental car: Expedia, Orbitz, Travelocity, Kayak, Hotwire. They allow you do to direct price comparison of all car rental companies. And, if you want to read car rental company reviews, read what Viewpoints members say first.

BOOK A CRUISE

Not all the major travel web sites offer rates on cruise lines. You can find prices and itineraries for various cruise ships, however, on Orbitz, Expedia, and Kayak. And, like rental cars and airlines, you can book cruises on each of their web sites or through a travel agent. No matter what review you're looking for, you'll likely find it on Viewpoints.com, posted by one of our reviewers. We have consumer opinions on Argosy, Carnival cruises, Celebrity cruises, Disney cruises, Holland American cruises, Norwegian cruises, Princess cruises, Royal Caribbean cruises and other cruise lines. Read that others have to say and decide which cruise works best for you.

GET INSPIRED

Concierge.com

For pure travel inspiration, beautiful photos, great trip ideas and reading pleasure, check out Concierge.com, the web site of Conde Nast Travel & Leisure. Just like the magazine, the site is visually stunning, and makes you want to do nothing but travel. Concierge also has nifty newsletters and emails that are worth signing up for, if only to escape a dreary day with armchair travel. If you go deep enough on the site, there are ways to book trips, but this site is recommendable for its supreme inspiration factor.

KiwiCollection.com

Luxury Travelers can't do better than **kiwicollection.com** (and be sure to sign up for this stunning newsletter). By far, the most inspiring luxury travel site there is. Information is always current, and is compiled by a team of globe-trotting luxury travel experts.

SuzannesFiles.com

A simple yet fun to read web site for discerning travelers. Suzanne and her friends scour the globe for off-the-beaten-path finds and thoroughly check out all recommendations before sharing them with readers.

DailyCandy.com

Even armchair travelers should sign up for Daily Candy's Travel Edition newsletter; it has unexpected goodies in it. A recent newsletter featured "weird hotels" including Canadian tipis, houseboat vacations, tree houses, and alpine tents.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

[Weather.com](#) gives 10-day **forecasts** for any city in the U.S. Why not check to see what you should *really* throw in the suitcase, instead of just packing what you hope to get to wear? **Accuweather.com** provides the same info for foreign cities.

Print out driving maps and hotel directions using **Mapquest.com**, or send the directions to your cellphone as a text message, directly from the site. Mapquest also tells you how far it is from Point A to Point B and is usually accurate on times. It occasionally doesn't choose the fastest route. If you're going to drive in urban traffic, ask for a second opinion from a local who looks smart.

Overseas travelers should always check **travel.state.gov** for safety and security alerts, as well as health precautions and necessities (inoculations). Double-check with the destination embassy or consulate on travel documentation requirements.

Flying to the U.S.'s Eastern or Gulf coast between June and October? Check **NOAA.org** for [hurricane information](#) before you pack. If a tropical storm is inbound, be sure you know the cancellation policy at your resort and what your options are, should your destination airport close.

TIPS WHILE ON YOUR TRIP

Check your **flight status or flight information via Google** now, simply by typing in the Airline and the flight number. Easy on an iPhone, easy on a computer.

Do flight tracking or check flight delays at the FAA web site, [fly.faa.gov](#) to see what's really happening. Currency exchange rates are easy at [xe.com](#). Know what your dollar really gets you. Bookmark this in your [iPhone or PDA](#) if math is not your strong suit. [Freetranslation.com](#) isn't perfect, but it can get you out of a jam, in several countries.