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Ultimate

SUMMER VAC

ALTHOUGH WINTER TEMPERATURES ARE STILL SMOTHERING THE MIDWEST, NOW'S THE TIME TO START THINKING "SUMMER."
PLOT YOUR ESCAPE WITH A GETAWAY TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S HOTTEST TRAVEL DESTINATIONS.



AN THE mate ATION

THIS SUMMER, AMERICANS DESERVE A BREAK. AND NOT JUST A WEEKEND AT THE CABIN, EITHER.

“With everyone’s busy lives and the uncertain economy, it’s understandable that planning a vacation may seem too daunting a task,” says Barbara Messing, General Manager of discount travel website Travel-Ticker.com. “However, we all need a vacation for exactly the reason why most people think we can’t take one: We lead stressful lives. A well-earned break rejuvenates, increasing our productivity at work and at home. On a personal level, reconnecting with loved ones is easy when you’re learning about new cultures, exploring new destinations and enjoying life-changing experiences together.”

Although travel in most markets declined during the Great Recession, people are starting to pack their bags again. In fact, 85 percent of people plan to take the same or more vacations this year compared to last, according to Travel-Ticker.com’s 2011 Travel Ticker Traveler Intentions Survey, which cited “more free time” and a “better economic situation” as major travel drivers this year.

“One message that came through loud and clear in our Travel Ticker Traveler Intentions Survey: People have a deep desire to take a vacation, and they’re looking for an opportunity that is impossible to turn down,” Messing says. “This year that inspiration is easier to find than most think. With a little preparation and some tips to point you in the right direction, people can make their travel dreams come true.”

WHERE TO GO

A successful summer vacation starts with the perfect destination. And despite the “staycation” movement of the last several years, that destination usually isn’t in your own backyard, according to Frommers.com Editorial Director David Lytle, who says this year’s travelers are looking for treasured memories and once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

“People are now traveling for specific reasons,” he says. “Instead of the traditional drop-and-flop at an all-inclusive resort, we’re seeing people travel because they want to go skiing, because they want to go horseback riding or because they want to take cooking classes and



go on wine tours. People want genuine experiences instead of packaged tours.”

For a great summer getaway – and a truly memorable experience – consider the following options, which are among the most popular 2011 travel destinations, according to travel professionals:

- **South America:** Because exchange rates there favor the U.S. dollar, South America is an especially popular destination for North American travelers, according to Lytle, who recommends Chile for its diversity. There, he points out, you can go skiing one day in the Andes, and tour wineries near Santiago the next – all without jetlag. Families should consider an expedition to the Galapagos Islands from Ecuador, according to luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent (A&K). Adventurers, on the other hand, should consider a multi-day cruise on the Amazon River, says Alyssa Schulke, a Minneapolis-based travel consultant and owner of Schulke Travel. Now is an ideal time to visit Brazil, says Lytle, who suggests beating the crowds in advance of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics.
- **Eastern Europe:** Eastern Europe is a can't-miss destination for history buffs, says Schulke. She recommends Croatia, which is home to Roman ruins and walled medieval cities, and is still less expensive than Western Europe. Plus, Croatia has the same climate, beaches, and food-and-wine traditions as nearby Italy and Greece, making it “Europe’s new Riviera,” according to A&K.

- **Africa:** Africa is the quintessential adventure destination, according to Schulke, who says a growing number of travelers visit Tanzania and climb Mount Kilimanjaro. A&K, meanwhile, recommends Zambia, where you can take a traditional safari on foot at the new Sanctuary Zebra Plains, or Kenya, where an 11-day family safari exposes kids not only to wildlife, but also local tribal traditions.
- **Central Asia:** The central Asian nations of Bhutan and Nepal are emerging as destinations of choice for spiritual travelers, says Schulke, who notes the regions’ Buddhist and Hindu temples. Because they’re uniquely isolated and remote, these nations appeal equally to active travelers, according to A&K, which suggests biking and hiking through the Himalayas for a special mind-and-body vacation.

HOW TO GET THERE

Even in an age of checked-luggage fees and enhanced airport security pat-downs, the most stressful part of summer vacations isn’t the traveling; it’s the booking.

“What’s happened with the online travel industry in the last five years is it’s gotten really overwhelming due to the increase of information,” Schulke says.

To make the trip-planning process more smooth than stressful, consider the following tips from travel industry insiders:

- **Know what you want:** Getting the most from your trip requires knowing your travel style and sticking to it, according to Messing. Decide, for instance, if you want to relax, in which case a beach resort is a good choice; if you want



Vacation Planning Checklist

SIX MONTHS OR MORE BEFORE YOUR TRIP

- Set your budget, keeping in mind foreign exchange rates.
- Research potential destinations, considering cost and distance.
- Choose your destinations and draft an itinerary.
- Purchase a guidebook.
- Use social media to monitor relevant tourism boards, hotels and airlines.
- Begin studying the native language, if you're traveling internationally.

TWO TO FOUR MONTHS BEFORE YOUR TRIP

- Book air travel three to four months out to maximize savings.
- Apply for a passport, if you don't already have one.
- Make hotel and transportation reservations two months out to get good rates; you may find better rates if you wait until the last minute, but you risk sacrificing options.
- Check with your doctor about any immunizations you may need at least eight weeks before your trip.

ONE MONTH BEFORE YOUR TRIP

- Purchase travel insurance, if you'll be traveling with valuables.
- Purchase new luggage if needed.
- Purchase appropriate travel adapters, if you'll be traveling internationally with electronics such as a computer or cell phone.
- Order traveler's checks and visit a currency exchange so you'll have at least some emergency cash when you land.

RIGHT BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- Make copies of your itinerary, passport and credit cards, in case of emergencies; give one to someone you trust and keep the other one with you, but separate from your wallet.
- Call your credit card companies to let them know you'll be charging items in a foreign country; otherwise, charges may be refused.
- Make a record of all your medications and their dosages, in case you need a refill while you're traveling.

to sightsee, you might prefer a big-city destination; or if you want to be active, your ideal destination is probably outdoors.

- **Budget before you book:** Decide from the outset what you're willing to spend, according to Lytle, who recommends booking airfares first, since they're most volatile and will likely consume most of your budget. Because it lets you compare multiple sites at once – and even shows airfare pricing trends – his favorite fare-saving website is Kayak.com. To make your dollar go further, Messing advocates flexibility. “Let the deal be the inspiration,” she says.
- **Schedule carefully:** With travel, timing is everything. “Masses of people attend Carnival in Brazil in February,” Messing says. “Travelers flock to Pamplona, Spain, for the Running of the Bulls in July. College kids flood Cancun for Spring Break. These events drive prices up. On the flip side, Paris and other European cities are quiet during August because locals are on summer holiday, so it's cheap and you'll have easier access to activities than at busier times of the year.” Pay attention to days as well as seasons. “You can save hundreds of dollars just by shifting your flights

by one day,” Messing continues. “You'll find the best fares generally are reserved for midweek travel. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are particularly good, especially for international flights.” Finally, be just as deliberate about when you book as you are about when you travel. Because fare sales often are announced on Mondays, the lowest fares typically are available on Tuesday mornings, according to Lytle.

- **Sign into social media:** Don't pooh-pooh social networks, says Lytle, who recommends “liking” tourism boards, hotels and airlines on Facebook, and also following them on Twitter. “The new thing – just in the last year – is micro-sales, which sometimes last just a day,” he says. “If you've connected yourself to the right travel providers, there are some really good deals.”
- **Pass the buck:** Don't be afraid to hire a travel agent. Although they'll charge a fee, they're worth it, Schulke says. Not only does she book airfare and hotels, but she also coordinates ground transportation, restaurant reservations and activities, which saves her clients hours' worth of web research in the case of complex trips. ♦