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A banner for Kiplinger.com featuring a blue and orange design. The text 'Vertically Conditions Offer' is at the top, followed by '2820 feet' in large white font. Below this is the Kiplinger.com logo and a navigation menu with links: Kiplinger.com, The Basics, Starting Out, Investing, Your Money, Your Retirement, Spending Wisely, Your Business, Guides & Centers, and Our Best Lists. There are also links for Podcasts, Videos, Slide shows, and RSS. A search bar and a 'SEARCH' button are present, along with a date 'Dec. 31, 2008'.

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TRAVEL

30 Best Travel Sites

Find the best deals for plane tickets, hotel ro vacation packages and car rentals, domestic without leaving your desk.

By Stacy Rapacon, Reporter, *Kiplinger's Per Finance*

December 2008
The bear market is putting the squeel travel industry and travelers are reap benefits. As customers cut down the budgets, airlines, hotels, and cruise l extending incredible deals to try and them back into traveling.

To help you find the best bargains, v personally surfed the torrent of trav flooding the Web and chose our favo

For airfare, lodging and car rentals, v identify which links are best for thre types of traveler. So whether you're for time, looking for the best deal or internationally, you'll find a site to fit needs. We also identify the best sou find bargains on cruises and vacatio packages.

- Airfares
- Lodging
- Car rentals
- Vacation packages
- More resources

AIRFARES

Time-Pressed Traveler
Kayak.com fetches the best fares o from more than 140 sources. Click o deal, and Kayak.com will send you t where you can buy the ticket. Boost chances of finding a deal by searchin dates up to three days before and af ideal travel dates. Or you can use th tool to search for trips that leave wit calendar month, in the six upcoming weekends, or just anytime. And if yo have a specific destination in mind, f you search by region, such as the Ca or Europe.

Tip: Book directly with the airline's V avoid additional booking fees for buy tickets in-person, by phone, or throu online travel agent.

Best-Deal Traveler
Farecast.com predicts whether fare major domestic routes will go up or c Enter your itinerary and the site will list of airfares with a recommendatio either buy a ticket now or wait for a fare. Depending on how flexible your plans are, you can score the best de the site's Flexible Map/Graph, which departures up to six months after yo selected date.

Tip: Try departing on a Tuesday or Wednesday and returning on a Satur These less-traveled days often score deals.

From time to time, airlines will offer unbelievably low fares, often referre "fire sales," on selected flights and it In our experience, **Airfare Watchdo** these travel bargains faster than oth sites and includes fares from Southw JetBlue and other small airlines that show up on bigger sites like Kayak o Farecast.

International Traveler
Even for international flights, Kayak finds the best fares. But if you head often, we recommend signing up wit Platinum membership is \$50 a year, be recouped in savings after a coupl especially on trips to Europe or Asia. Kayak and Farecast, cFares aggregat fares sold through other providers; f some travel deals require you to ret cFares.com after purchasing your tic apply for a rebate.

LODGING

Time-Pressed Traveler
TripAdvisor is the most comprehen easy-to-use hotel review site, offerin U.S. and overseas. Photos and maps usefulness of this site. TripAdvisor d Web travel agencies, such as Expedi.

Tip: When booking a hotel, try pickir manager) may find you better deals, number instead of the chain's toll-fre tickets -- airlines charge extra fees, i

Best-Deal Traveler
Priceline.com offers the best barga duration of stay and a neighborhood tickets and rental cars this way.)

Bids less than \$100 a night on luxun though: Priceline doesn't disclose the refund your money if you cancel and neighborhood.

One more hitch: We don't recomm precise location beforehand, so look

Priceline and TripAdvisor are most us B&B's, try **Bedandbreakfast.com**. l deals" in your desired location. And v family-friendly features.

Consider an alternative to hotels: Co room and amenities for the same pri having to dine out for every meal. Tl **HomeAway.com**.

International Traveler
Vacation rentals are especially more **International**, you can find cottage night throughout Europe, the Caribbi

If you're even more adventurous, yo the most well-known site for this typ someone else, usually for a one- to t unlimited transactions in the U.S. or

LateRooms.com emphasizes last-rr rates in the currency of your choice i calling to book a hotel, whenever po: number to call and a reference code city guides including recommendatio

Another tip: When you pay your hotel your bill into U.S. dollars. Decline this

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than banks charge through ATMs or credit cards. What's worse, if you're credit card issuer charges a currency conversion fee for international purchases (typically 1% of the bill), that fee may still apply -- even if the hotel provided a currency conversion. In essence, you'll be double charged.

CAR RENTALS

Time-Pressed Traveler

Orbitz aggregates rental-car rates from seven of the most affordable car rental companies in the country, including Alamo and Budget. And Orbitz does not charge an extra booking fee for car rentals, though it does for plane tickets.

But beware, extra fees run rampant among rental-car retailers. Tip: if possible, avoiding renting at the airport where you can get charged with extra fees.

the airport where you can get skinned with hefty fees.

Best-Deal Traveler

Hotwire consistently offers lower rates because it doesn't disclose which rental company you're working with until after you've paid. This approach might be risky for airline flights or hotels (for which Hotwire also applies this same blind-booking format), but with cars, you get the same sedan regardless of which company provides it.

International Traveler

Auto Europe is a rental-car rate wholesaler that specializes in pre-paid international rentals. It returned better rates than other online booking sites (for comparable vehicles) when we recently searched for cars in England, Greece, Ireland and Spain. Plus, this company staffs its customer-service hotlines (toll-free internationally) 24-hours a day.

Be wary that the rental-car chains may, independently from Auto Europe, attempt to tack on hidden charges following your prepayment to Auto Europe. Carefully review your credit-card bill after an overseas trip. If unnecessary charges appear, Auto Europe will assist with disputing them. (You can also face this problem when you book directly with the rental-car company, particularly if the company is not headquartered in the United States.)

If it's worth paying a few extra dollars for a hassle-free trip, we recommend booking overseas car rentals with an American name-brand car company such as Avis or Hertz (through Auto Europe or direct). According to anecdotal staff experiences and reports from other media, foreign-owned car rental companies often bungle reservations for American travelers, either by not having the requested cars available or by adding undisclosed charges to the final tab.

Tip: When traveling overseas, consider renting a car with a GPS device that provides turn-by-turn driving directions using voice prompts. Hertz, for example, charges about \$18 and has wide network coverage in Europe.

VACATION PACKAGES

CRUISES

With useful reviews and advice columns, **CruiseMates.com** explains the art of booking a cruise -- including how to select cabin type, theme and boarding port. (If you're cruising for the first time, consider booking through a traditional travel agent who can walk you through the whole process.)

At **CruiseCompete** than 300 travel agents vie to give you the lowest prices for dates, ports and ships you specify, whether you're booking well in advance or at the eleventh hour. You provide an email address and they'll send their best offers for you to compare. The site even staffs live agents to guide you through the process.

Quick Travel

Lastminute.com offers the best prices for booking an entire vacation as late as three hours before departure on domestic trips. Save time at the last minute by simultaneously booking airfare, hotel reservations, car rentals, activities and even airport parking.

Luxury Link offers discounted packages for high-end travel, including hotel nights, spa days, gourmet meals and sports activities, but usually not airfare. The site offers some "buy now" deals, but is really hailed for its auction packages (generally priced for two people). Some bidders boast savings of up to 65%. Flexible travel dates are required; vacation packages are subject to availability and black out dates apply. Luxury Link requires payment within 24 hours of an auction's close and does not offer refunds.

Theme Vacations

National parks. For a value vacation, consider exploring a national park. You'll discover tips on how to stretch your dollars on your next stay by visiting the **US Parks** site.

Adventure travel. If you're looking for more thrills in your vacation, start by exploring **iExplore.com**. The site offers hiking and biking trips, as well as multi-sport tours. It also boasts expert advice on "experiential travel," such as a wildlife safari or culinary tour.

Green travel. Go back to **BedandBreakfast.com** to peruse specials for green getaways. And for a more in-depth search for eco-friendly accommodations, bookmark **EnvironmentallyFriendlyHotels.com**. The site lists more than 3,600 hotels worldwide, specifying green amenities such as recycling bins or energy-efficient bulbs. Each venue receives a green score of up to seven "evergreens."

RESOURCES & TRAVEL ADVICE

Airport parking. To save money at airport parking lots, visit the aptly named **AirportDiscountParking.com**, which will direct you to bargain lots and offers printable coupons for additional savings.

Currency conversion. Check rates at **XE.com** and try to exchange your dollars at a local bank. Along with an easy-to-read conversion rates grid on the homepage, this site offers a host of tools including a travel expenses calculator, credit card charges calculator and, obviously, a conversion calculator.

Eurail. Traveling to Europe? Note that trains are often the fastest and cheapest way to travel within and between European countries. Our favorite English-language Web site for checking timetables and booking tickets on European train lines is **RailEurope**.

Flight information. **AvoidDelays.com**, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) provides online updates for flight delays; you sign up for e-mail and phone alerts, too. If you haven't booked a flight yet, you can search for the best time of day to schedule a flight from a specific airport and find out which airports to avoid for connecting flights.

Frequent flier miles. **WebFlyer** is the most useful site for getting the best upgrade for the miles you've earned. See how your miles convert between programs, learn about changes to your frequent flier program and discover how to max out the value of your mileage awards when you redeem them for merchandise or services.

Also try the Global Points Exchange program at **Points.com** to trade points and miles between rewards programs.

Packing. Pack lightly to dodge baggage fees. **OneBag.com** offers packing tips, including updates on banned carry-on items.

Seating. At some airlines, better seats come at a price. **SeatGuru.com** indicates which seats cost a fee, as well as which have the most (or least) legroom and recline.

Travel insurance. Buying travel insurance from agencies and travel providers, such as cruise lines, is usually a crummy deal because of price markups and restrictions on how the policy claims can be filed. The best value policies we've found are those sold directly by the leading travel insurance company, **Travel Guard**.

Editor's note: The original version of this article was written by Sean O'Neil, however, Kiplinger's Best Travel Web Sites is updated every year.

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