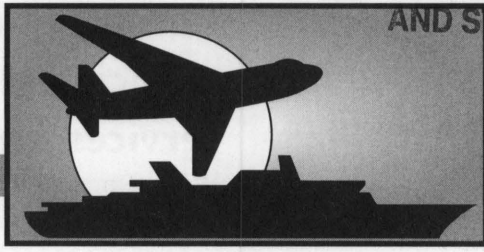


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Taking a Trip?

A Guide for Using Travel Agencies and the World Wide Web

Melissa W. Chase, Benjamas Kutintara, and Richard Marchal*

Today's travel industry provides many options to help you plan your next business or personal trip. You can make travel reservations through travel agencies, by contacting providers directly, or through travel services on the World Wide Web.

Before you make your reservations, you should consider the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy. Even consider gathering information on the web and using it with the other strategies to help you plan your trip and find the best options.

This is a basic guide for making travel arrangements. Appendix A at the end of this publication has resources for more information and to research travel-related topics.

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this publication:

Travel agency: provides travel-related services (making reservations for air travel, car rentals, hotels and providing personal service, tips and recommendations) through an agency in a physical location where customers can talk to agents or customer representatives in person to coordinate travel arrangements.

Electronic travel service: provides travel-related services (such as airline, car, and hotel reservations) through an agency that is located entirely on the web. Some services have representatives whom customers can contact for assistance; however, customers work mostly on their own to coordinate travel arrangements.

Travel provider: provides reservations for a particular company, such as a hotel, car rental agency, or airline. Examples might include Holiday Inn (hotel), Avis (car-rental agency), and Delta (airline). These providers may be contacted by phone or on the web.



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How to make decisions to plan your travel

With so many choices now available to business and personal travelers, it can be challenging to decide upon the best purchase option, especially if price is important to you. Use the following step-by-step process to help you choose the best option for your specific travel situation.

- Step 1 Decide on the location for your trip.
- Step 2 Determine the dates of the trip. (There may be savings on certain travel packages depending on how long you plan to stay, especially when booking airline reservations.)
- Step 3 Determine which type of agency, service, or provider to use based on the type of travel services you need and the information provided. (See the section "Comparison of travel agencies, electronic travel services, and travel providers" of this publication for more information.)
- Step 4 Prepare your budget. Make a list of your travel needs and the costs involved. List all options you wish to consider. Use the attached consumer worksheet to help you determine the total cost of each option you consider.

Include potential added costs, such as airport fees, fees for printing airline tickets, miscellaneous fees, food, rental car, and so on.

Also consider potential hidden costs. Check with the travel agency or travel service to inquire about such charges. Are there extra handling fees attached to airline reservations, car reservations, or hotel reservations?

- Step 5 Decide if extra fees for specific services are worth the cost. Some fees might include printing paper airline tickets, or setting up specific arrangements. Consider your needs for saving time and having the convenience of someone else handling your arrangements. Meeting these specific needs may be well worth the cost.

Ask if the travel agency keeps a personal profile on customers to save time with future reservations. Costs for these benefits may be well worth the time savings.

- Step 6 Using the consumer worksheet from Step 3, choose the best option for your travel situation.

Comparison of travel agencies, electronic travel services, and travel providers

With so many travel arrangement options available, it may be challenging to decide which type of travel agency or service best fits your needs. However, using Table 1 may help you to consider the type of information you need to assist you in setting up arrangements and which agency or service to use, depending on your situation.

How to find a travel service or provider on the World Wide Web

To find web sites for many travel providers (airlines, hotels, rental cars, etc.), visit a search engine, such as Ask Jeeves (<http://www.ask.com>), and type in the name of the travel agency, service, or provider to get to its web site. A search engine can help you find specific web sites related to your topic of interest. These search engines require you to type in a key word or words to guide you to related web sites. For example, to find a hotel chain such as Holiday Inn, type "Holiday Inn" in the "search" box to find the web-site address. Some examples of the more popular search engines are:

Dogpile: <http://www.dogpile.com> (will search multiple search engines, including google.com)

Yahoo: <http://www.yahoo.com>

Google: <http://www.google.com>

Lycos: <http://www.lycos.com>

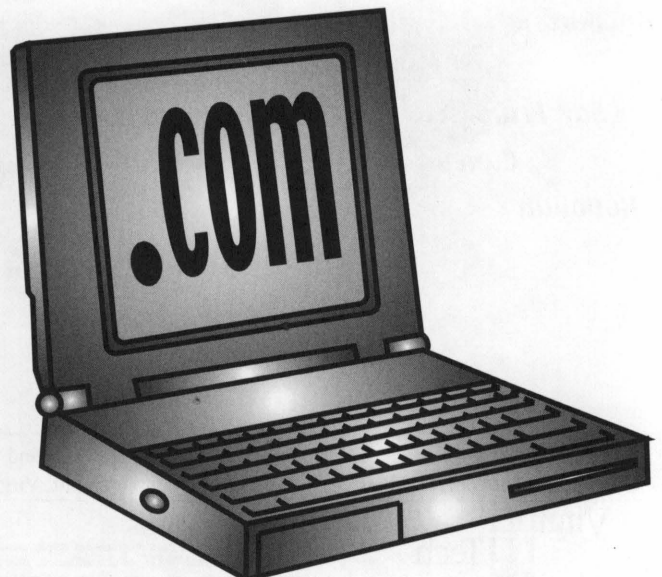


Table 1. Comparing providers

Comparison	Travel Agency	Electronic Travel Service	Travel Provider
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can make arrangements face-to-face with travel agent. • Can make some or all arrangements, depending on services provided by the agency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can make multiple types of travel arrangements with an agent. • Handles all correspondence through the web site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can make one type of travel arrangement per provider. • Direct contact with the provider.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has personal service. • Can handle all arrangements. • Can assist difficult situations. • Can provide tips for better discounts. • May offer a web site to handle arrangements by e-mail or on the site with 24-hour, 7-day service. • Can make recommendations and offer advice for travel based on experience. • Offer timely refunds on cancellations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can check and make arrangements 24 hours per day. • Can comparison shop among multiple travel services. • May be able to bargain a price by auction methods. • May have some benefits exclusive to the web site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can check multiple itineraries and schedules 24 hours a day. • Make emergency arrangements quickly (such as family emergency). • Can call directly or check the web site. • May be able to make arrangements through web site. • May give special benefits through the web site to frequent travelers.
Drawbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access may be limited to physical hours of operation if no web site or e-mail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must check all itineraries yourself. • Takes time to check these itineraries and multiple services. • Must do bargain hunting yourself. • May not be able to reach someone by phone with questions and concerns. • May not be able to find discounts available online that travel agencies can recommend. • Can be biased in disclosing flight and pricing information. • Can be cumbersome since you have to do it yourself, and you may or may not be aware of available alternatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot do multiple reservations for cars, hotels, etc. at same time; must make separate arrangements for each. • Airline or hotel reservations are not always cheaper online. • Although many travel providers are now online, keep in mind that not all providers have online reservation capabilities. • Some online agencies require credit card payment at the time of booking hotel reservations, rather than at the time you check out of the hotel.
Tips for using	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need to charge fees for services. However, even if you are unsure about making arrangements, it may be well worth the fees to have someone else take care of this for you. • You must provide specific details of what you need. However, agents are available to assist you with the right answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison shop; check more than one travel service. • Do you have to sign a contract? If so, make sure you read and agree to all aspects of the contract. • Know what the cancellation policies and penalties are. • Find out how to make cancellations or changes to reservations. • Check the refund policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask about cancellation policies and changes to reservations. • Find out how easily reservations can be cancelled on the web site. • Ask about refund policies. • Make sure the web site is secure before providing a credit card number. You can check whether the site is secure by looking for a closed padlock in the browser window, a web site address that

Comparison	Travel Agency	Electronic Travel Service	Travel Provider
Tips for using (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask agent to look at other airports (besides your local airport) for possibly cheaper fares, shorter layovers, or direct flights. • Can group your trips for better discounts, as well as arranging all details of the trip. This can be especially helpful for travel abroad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print out reservation and cancellation confirmations. If there is a dispute about charges, you will have written confirmation of your reservation or cancellation. • Print out the e-mail with any confirmation about a flight, hotel room, cruise, tour, or rental car. Keep the e-mail and the printout until you receive the tickets. • Return your web-purchased ticket to the airline ticket counter at the airport if you must cancel a flight. They can process a refund quicker than trying to work with the online web site from which you originally purchased it. • Make sure the web site is secure before providing a credit card number. You can check whether the site is secure by looking for a closed padlock in the browser window, a web site address that begins with https://, or look for a pop-up window with a statement that says it is secure. • Do not assume that the web has all available choices. • Check that all fees are included in the price of your travel package. • Check for contact information in case you have questions or concerns, especially while you are traveling. • Be familiar with restrictions, such as changes to reservations and cancellation policies. 	<p>begins with https://, or look for a pop-up window with a statement that says it is secure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not assume that the web has all available choices. • Check that all fees are included in the price of your travel package. • Check for contact information in case you have questions or concerns, especially while you are traveling. • Be familiar with restrictions, such as changes to reservations and cancellation policies.

Examples of electronic travel services available on the World Wide Web

Travel agencies and services available on the World Wide Web can provide a variety of travel services, such as airline tickets, hotel reservations, rental car reservations, and special deals. They differ from a regular travel agency in that all the reservations are completed through the web site and you are responsible for the accuracy of these arrangements. The worksheet at the end of this publication (Appendix B) can help you compare prices and package deals. Be aware of the site's customer service policies and whom to contact in case you have questions or concerns, especially during your travel. Some examples of these services are:

Expedia (<http://www.expedia.com>) provides options for choosing airline reservations, rental cars, hotel reservations, vacation packages, cruises, special deals, and guides/advice.

Travelocity (<http://travelocity.com>) provides options very similar to Expedia's, such as airline reservations, hotel reservations, rental cars, vacation packages, cruises, special deals, and corporate travel.

Priceline (<http://www.priceline.com>) provides options similar to Expedia and Travelocity, but you determine the price you are willing to pay for the service you want. Priceline searches its partnering travel providers to honor your request. However, by setting your own price, you must agree to accept what Priceline finds and cannot choose another provider. In other words, you need to be flexible with the Priceline's choice of travel provider.

Condé Nast Traveler (<http://www.concierge.com>) has options for airline travel, rental cars, and hotel reservations. It also provides travel ideas and links to other electronic travel services.

Going Shopping? Go Global: A Guide for E-Consumers, VCE publication 354-185 (<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/family/354-185/354-185.html>), is a general publication for web shoppers and its information also applies to purchasing travel services through the World Wide Web.

Additional tips for using the World Wide Web

Get to know your destination before you arrive. Local bookstores and the web have traveler guides for just about any place you might want to visit, domestic or international. Some of the more popular travel guides include the Arthur Frommer's and Michelin series. Tourist bureaus, travel agencies, and chambers of commerce can also be great sources of travel information. The World Wide Web can be used to locate some of the more popular resources.

- Arthur Frommer's budget travel books are available online (<http://www.frommers.com>). This site also has tips and resources to help you plan a trip to just about anywhere in the world.
- Chamber of Commerce.com (<http://www.chamberofcommerce.com>) provides links to state and local chambers of commerce, boards of tourism, and convention and visitors bureaus.

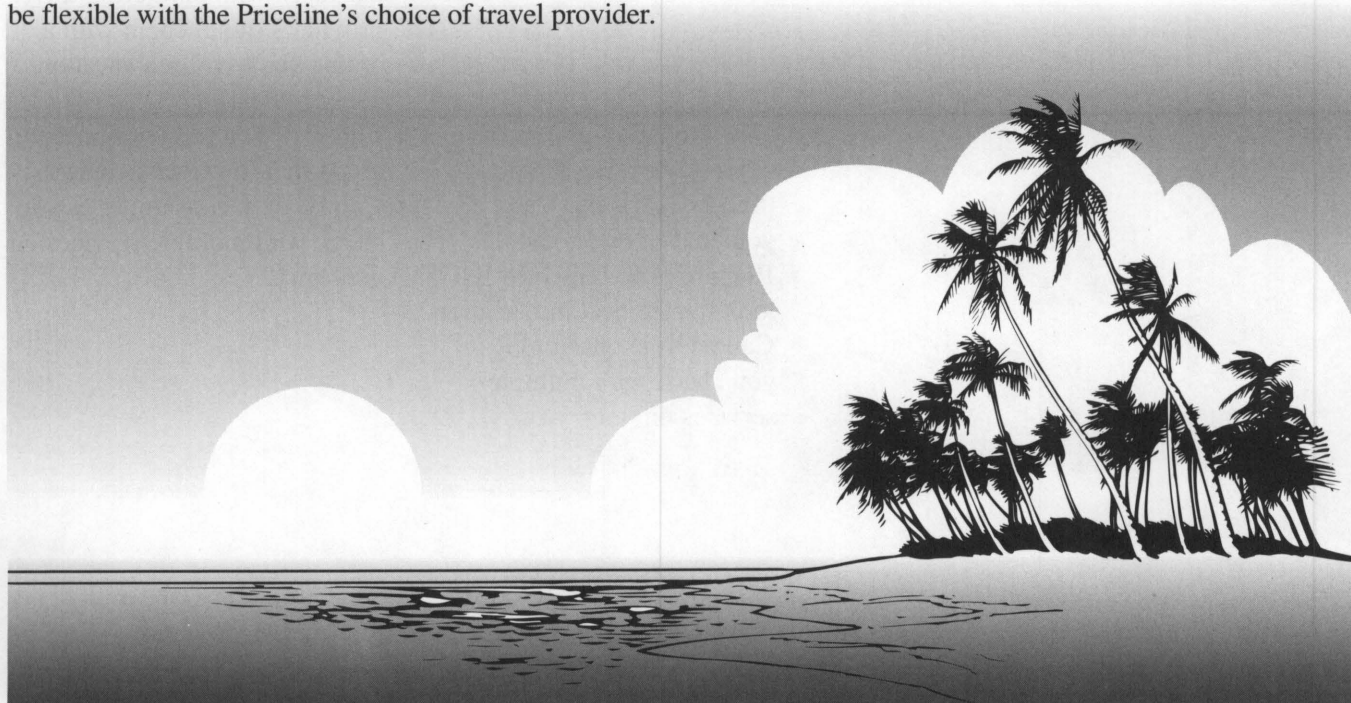


Table 2. Travel information and preparation

	Travel Agency	Electronic Travel Service	Travel Provider
Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chambers of commerce • Yellow pages • Better Business Bureau • World Wide Web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Wide Web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Wide Web • Yellow pages • National or local phone directory information (check the front of your phone book)
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down questions ahead of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the fine print. The servicemay not have choice of service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know what you want and the type of service. (Do you prefer jet service versus turbo props? Do you prefer small or mid-size cars?)
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide information simultaneously. • Has brochures, pamphlets, travel guides. • Can give you lots of tips and personal service all at once. • Can put together information quickly. • Can alert you to changes in flight reservations or cancellations. • Can set up a profile that remembers specific information about you for future travel. • Provide e-mail updates and promotional offers if requested. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to travel guides. • May have a currency converter. • May have “tools” to give you weather, e-mail updates, airport information, flight information, etc. • Can set up a profile that remembers specific information about you for future travel. • May offer special interest topics. • May have agents on call 24 hours if there is phone access. • May have vacation packages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can alert you to changes in reservations. • May have international travel information. • May list promotional deals. • May have information on some travel destinations. • May offer receipts or changes to reservations online. • Might be able to set up a profile that remembers specific information about you for future travel. • Might be able to sign up for frequent traveler benefits. • Provide e-mail updates and promotional offers if requested. • Might be able to provide pictures of hotel rooms, airplane seating, rental-car styles, etc. • May have promotional packages with partnering travel providers (hotel chain with a cruise line to offer a vacation package deal).
Cons		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have pop-up ads from other advertisers. It takes time to delete these ads if you are not interested. • Requires knowing how to look for the best information. • Can be time consuming as you check with multiple services on your own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can give you information only about their own arrangements. • Can be time consuming as you check with multiple services on your own.

Travel information and preparation

Travel agencies, electronic travel services, and travel providers may provide different types of information. Some may provide information face-to-face while others may provide all information through their web sites. Use Table 2 to assist you in deciding where to obtain information for your travel arrangements.

Consumer information

Rights and responsibilities

As a consumer, it is your responsibility to know what you are getting into before you make travel reservations. There are only a few designated consumer rights that pertain to travel.

- If you are overbooked on an airline flight, you have the right under federal law to be put on the next available flight and to be paid twice the value of the coupon (the cost of that “leg” of your journey that was overbooked). At times, airlines will offer a free roundtrip flight to customers who are willing to be bumped—actually a better deal than the federal law mandate; however, airlines are not required to offer such deals.
- If you are working directly with a travel provider, it is important to first try and work out a solution to your situation. If you are unable to settle the issue with the provider, you may wish to contact the Consumer Travel Rights Center for assistance.
- The Association of Retail Travel Agents Consumer Travel Rights Center web site (<http://www.mytravel-rights.com>) has information about your travel rights concerning air travel, hotels, car rentals, and other issues. You may also lodge complaints concerning travel providers at this site.

Insurance

The need for special travel insurance depends on your circumstances. Much depends on the total cost of the trip and the cost of the insurance. Compare the kinds of

insurance available, such as cancellation or health insurance. Consider what your regular insurance will or will not cover before purchasing additional travel insurance. Many medical and car insurance policies are not valid overseas. If you have a pre-existing medical condition, check to make sure your current health coverage will pay for health costs internationally. If not, you may want to consider purchasing additional coverage.

Check the following sources to see if you may already be covered while traveling:

- Check your homeowner’s or renter’s insurance policy to see what losses may be covered during travel.
- Check your credit card documentation or contact the credit card issuer to see what may be covered if you make travel arrangements with that credit card. Ask if this insurance is automatic or includes any fees. Some will cover losses if the travel vendor goes out of business and you have used that credit card to purchase services.

Travel agencies may have information on companies that provide traveler insurance. Request this information.

Appendix A has a list of government agencies, trade associations, etc. that offer more information on handling payments and your credit card rights under the Fair Credit Billing Act.

Where to complain

If you become a victim of a travel fraud or scam, use the following to help you find the best resources for assistance:

- Better Business Bureau (<http://www.bbbonline.org>) can tell you the reputation of companies and will take complaints.
- The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs (<http://www.vdacs.state.va.us>) has a division that deals with consumer protection issues.
- The American Society of Travel Agents (<http://astanet.com>) Consumer Affairs at 1101 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, may be able to mediate your dispute with an ASTA member.



Special travel planning

Tours

Travel agencies and tours

Travel agencies work closely with travelers to plan tours in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. In addition, travel agencies can provide the following benefits:

- Some tour companies only market through travel agencies.
- Travel agencies can tell you the specific dress codes of the tour.
- Keep in mind that tours may be cancelled if the group sizes are not large enough. Talk to your travel agencies to obtain more information.
- Travel agencies can provide tour books, travel guides, and brochures. These can provide a wealth of information to help you plan your tour.

The World Wide Web and tours

There are many options available for purchasing tours on the World Wide Web.

- The U.S. Tour Operator's Association (<http://www.ustoa.com>) has a wealth of information to help you plan your trip. There is an entire section on smart consumer tips, such as knowing what to expect and how to budget for your trip, as well as tips on how to avoid travel scams. It also lists the benefits of working with an agency that is a member of the association and the requirements for agency members.
- The Tourism Offices Worldwide Directory (<http://www.towd.com>) has addresses and phone numbers of tourism offices globally.

- Sometimes it is difficult to know whether information provided on the Internet is accurate and reliable. Appendix A at the end of this publication lists sources that can tell you how to determine accuracy of information on the Internet.

Cruises

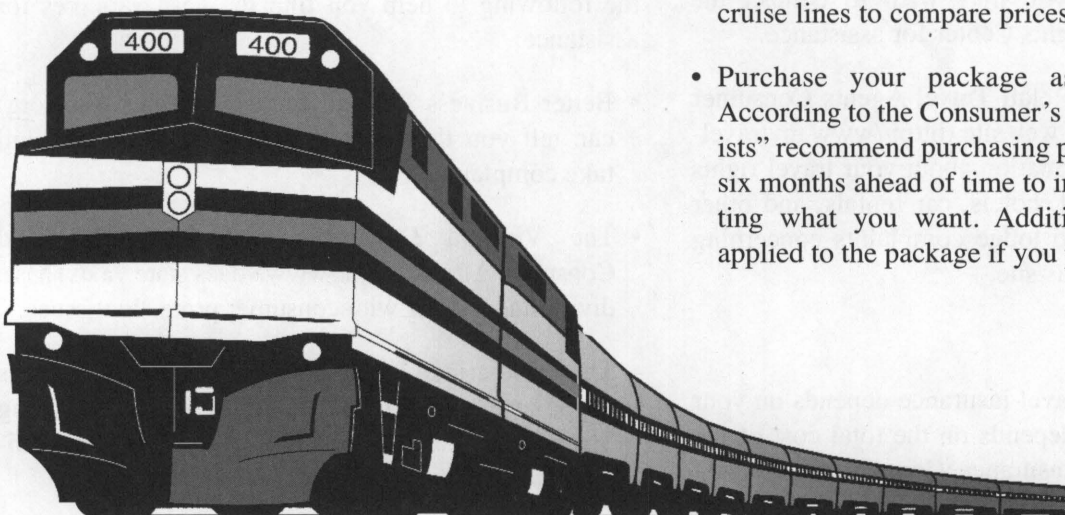
Travel agencies and cruises

Travel agents are trained to work closely with travelers to plan cruises in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. In addition, travel agencies can provide the following benefits:

- Experience in working with cruise lines. They know the standard weak points of cruise lines.
- Strong relationships with most cruise lines and often have access to special fares not available elsewhere.
- Help with information on obtaining visas, passports, and required immunizations.
- Suggest the best itinerary for you, based on your needs and budget.
- Provide additional services to assist you with rental car reservations.
- Knowledge of general and specific dress codes.
- Know the best times of year to take cruises (based on peak travel seasons vs. prices, etc.).

Things to consider prior to contacting the travel agency:

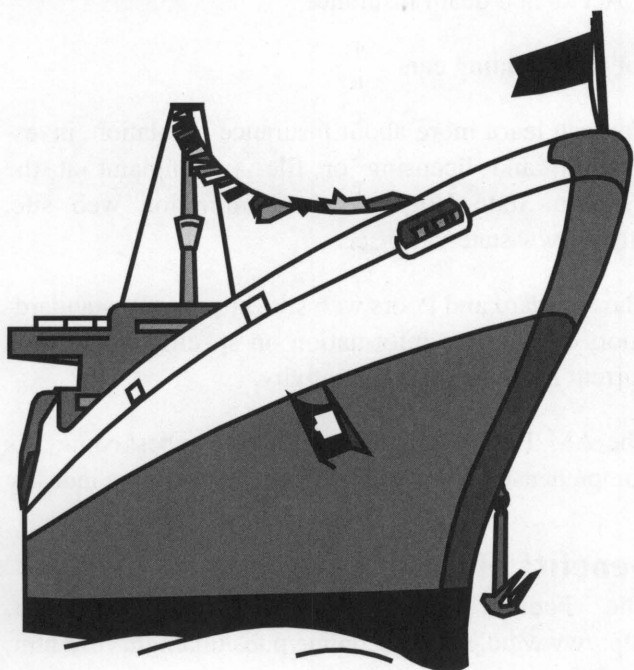
- Be realistic about your budget. Know how much you are willing to spend prior to making your purchase. Packages come in a wide range of prices and accommodations. Plan to spend only what you can afford and stick with it. Consider checking with other cruise lines to compare prices and package deals.
- Purchase your package as early as possible. According to the Consumer's Union, cruise "specialists" recommend purchasing packages at least four to six months ahead of time to increase chances of getting what you want. Additional savings may be applied to the package if you purchase early enough.



The World Wide Web and cruises

- The Centers for Disease Control provides a “Green Sheet” that lists ships’ inspection reports and updates on ship sanitation tests. Go to <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp/vsp/htm> and type “green sheet” into the search window.
- The International Council of Cruise Lines (ICCL) has published its standards for cruise ship medical facilities. Visit <http://www.iccl.com> for more details. Make sure you have enough medication to last the duration of the cruise. Alert the crew to any medical conditions you may have before the cruise and include a list of contacts in case of emergency.
- Get to know the destination of your tour before you arrive. Local bookstores and the web have traveler guides for just about any place you would like to visit, domestically or internationally. For example, Frommer’s budget travel guides are available online at <http://www.frommers.com>.
- Make sure the travel agency, service, or provider you choose is a member of the Cruise Lines International Association. Its web site (<http://cruising.org>) is full of helpful information, especially if this is your first cruise. It includes links to other cruise and travel agency organizations and cruise lines; it has information on how to choose a travel agent and vacation planning tips.

Sometimes it is difficult to know whether information provided on the Internet is accurate and reliable. See Appendix A for a list of agencies and contacts with information on how to determine accuracy of information on the Internet.



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and

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- Patricia Powley, agent and county Extension director, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania
- Bob Smith, associate professor, Wood Forest Products Center, Virginia Tech
- Alex White, assistant professor, Department of Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management, Virginia Tech

Appendix A. Resources for Additional Information and Research on Topics Related to Travel

Accuracy of online information

The Virginia Tech Libraries web site (<http://www.lib.vt.edu/research/evaluate/ty>) has information on how to evaluate whether information is correct or incorrect for purchases, product information, and research.

Avoid online fraud and privacy problems

You can learn more about maintaining security and privacy online, avoiding fraud, and how information about you is gathered as you surf the web in Virginia Cooperative Extension publications:

- *Site Seeing on the Internet: A Consumer's Guide to Travel in Cyberspace*, VCE publication 354-186 (<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/family/354-186/354-186.html>)
- *Going Shopping? Go Global: A Guide for E-Consumers*, VCE publication 354-185 (<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/family/354-185/354-185.html>)

Avoid telemarketing travel fraud

The Federal Trade Commission web site, <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/tmarkg/trvlfrd.htm>, has tips on how to protect yourself from fraud, information on your rights under the Fair Credit Billing Act, and other federal laws related to consumer issues. The site also has information on where to make complaints.

Basic travel rights

The Consumer Travel Rights Center web site, <http://www.mytravelrights.com>, has information on your consumer rights as they pertain to transactions with airlines, hotels, cruise lines, tour operators, car rental companies, etc.

Consumer protection in Virginia

The web site for the office of the Virginia Attorney General, <http://www.oag.state.va.us/Protecting/Consumer%20Fraud/complaint.htm#financialinstitution>, has a consumer guide for Virginia purchases and how to file complaints about insurance.

General choices: consumer rights and responsibilities

Kansas State University and Cooperative Extension Service has a publication on knowing your rights and responsibilities for consumer purchases. It is at <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/famer2/mf929.pdf>.

Government and city-related sites with travel information

Many state government web sites have links to travel bureaus and specific travel information. The official federal government web site also has links to state government sites. State web sites may also contain travel information on passports, visas, and customs information. For some major cities, such as Richmond, Virginia, there are commercial web sites (usually ".com") that can help you plan a trip to that city. Other cities may have government sites (usually "ci.city-name.st.us," but can be any ".xxx") that link to travel information.

- U.S. Government, <http://www.firstgov.gov/>
- Commonwealth of Virginia, <http://vipnet.org>
- Richmond, Virginia, <http://www.richmond.com>
- Richmond, Virginia, government, <http://www.ci.richmond.va.us/index.asp>

Insurance

The Insurance Information Institute web site, <http://www.iii.org>, has information on

- How to select a policy
- What to do in case of accident
- Cancellation insurance
- Baggage insurance
- Emergency medical assistance
- Accidental death insurance

for those renting cars.

You can learn more about insurance regulation, investigation, and licensing or file a complaint at the Virginia State Corporation Commission web site, <http://www.state.va.us/scc/>.

The Standard and Poors web site, <http://www.standard-poors.com>, offers information on specific ratings and current insurance market activity.

The AM Best web site, <http://www.ambest.com/>, has comprehensive information about the insurance industry

Benefits of using a credit card

The Federal Trade Commission's web site, <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/tmarkg/trvlfrd.htm>, has information on

- Rights under the Fair Credit Billing Act
- How to use your credit card
- Disadvantages of sending cash
- Knowing the company's reputation

Planning a driving route

To plan your driving travel route, you can use maps from online sources such as Maps.com, <http://www.maps.com>, or MapQuest, <http://www.mapquest.com>.

Travel magazines

There are many different travel magazines. They can be found at local bookstores or on the web. Examples of some of the leading travel magazines include

- *National Geographic Traveler*, <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/>

- *Condé Nast Traveler*, <http://www.concierge.com/cntraveler/insidersguide/>
- *Consumer Reports Travel Letter*, <http://www.consumerreports.org/main/home.jsp>

Travel updates

You can find tips on how to save money on travel packages and weekly updates on travel topics at the *USA Today* web site, <http://www.usatoday.com/>, and the Consumers Union/*Consumer Reports* web site, <http://www.consumerreports.org/main/home.jsp>.

Understanding contracts

The Better Business Bureau web site, <http://www.bbb.org/library/contracts050399.asp>, offers information on knowing and understanding the terms of a contract before you sign.

Appendix B: Consumer Worksheet to Compare Prices of Travel Reservations

Use the following worksheet to help you do a cost comparison for making travel arrangements. If necessary, make additional photocopies of this worksheet or copy onto another sheet of paper. Only fill in the spaces of those items that apply to your particular trip.

Travel Agency	Cost
Name of agency:	
Airline tickets	
Car rental	
Train reservation	
Bus reservation	
Hotel	
Food	
Other fees:	
Other fees:	
Total Expenses	

Travel Agency	Cost
Name of agency:	
Airline tickets	
Car rental	
Train reservation	
Bus reservation	
Hotel	
Food	
Other fees:	
Other fees:	
Total Expenses	

Travel Agency	Cost
Name of agency:	
Airline tickets	
Car rental	
Train reservation	
Bus reservation	
Hotel	
Food	
Other fees:	
Other fees:	
Total Expenses	

World Wide Web	Cost
WWW address:	
Airline tickets	
Car rental	
Train reservation	
Bus reservation	
Hotel	
Food	
Other fees:	
Other fees:	
Total Expenses	

World Wide Web	Cost
WWW address:	
Airline tickets	
Car rental	
Train reservation	
Bus reservation	
Hotel	
Food	
Other fees:	
Other fees:	
Total Expenses	

World Wide Web	Cost
WWW address:	
Airline tickets	
Car rental	
Train reservation	
Bus reservation	
Hotel	
Food	
Other fees:	
Other fees:	
Total Expenses	