

What a Site: 36 Web Addresses You Should Know

Using the Internet to book travel is here to stay. In the past year, nearly 45 million booked their travel plans through the Web, up nearly 6 percent from the previous year, according to a survey by the Travel Industry Association. In this chart, we've updated our annual guide to travel sites, including new spins on old standbys and new sites worth perusing. We've also added a category on aggregators, sites that basically scan direct booking sites for the best deals and then point you there to purchase. One constant remains: Compare prices on two or more sites to make sure you're getting a fair deal. And, yes, there are plenty of other worthwhile sites out there—these are our admittedly subjective top picks.

-Carol Sottili

| | SITE | PROS | CONS | NEW & NOTABLE |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| HIDDEN-PROVIDER | www.priceline.com | Started as a name-your-price site for flights, hotels and rental cars, but now also offers regular flight-booking services and packages competitive with Travelocity and others. Bidding on hotels and cars still a good bet. | For name-your-price option, domestic flights can depart anytime from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and international flights can depart anytime at all. No refunds. Charges \$6.95 processing fee. | Seems to be putting more emphasis on traditional booking services than name-your-price functions. Go to www.biddingfortravel.com for bidding tips. |
| | www.hotwire.com | Similar to Priceline, but prices shown before purchase. Can search for hotels within certain city neighborhoods, such as NYC's Midtown East. Offers well-priced packages, especially for last-minute travel. Guaranteed lowest price within 48 hours of booking hotel, or you get double the difference. | Booking fees are not clearly stated. No refunds. Most flights depart sometime between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. | Many more car rental locations now available. |
| CRUISES | www.cruising.org | Site for Cruise Lines International Association, a trade group representing 19 of the major lines serving North America. Can search ships and cruises by special features or themes. Directs you to travel specialists by Zip code. | Only lists cruises for member lines. | Can now look up cruises by departure port. |
| | www.cruisecritic.com | Good, objective articles, such as "Best Cruises for Weddings," and reviews of more than 210 individual ships with demographics, dress codes, etc. | Reviews by readers are uneven and, because they vary so much, can be confusing. | Now has last-minute bargains offered by various discounters. Prices are good, and a lead time of several weeks is common. |
| | www.cruisemates.com | Thorough reviews of ships from 25 lines written by Anne Campbell, former AOL cruise critic and guidebook author. Information is objective. Up-to-date news section, which is valuable during hurricane season. | Almost too much information—site seems cluttered. Advertising is large and annoying. | Offers a tool called "Cruise Bazaar" that's similar to Cruisecompete.com (see below). |
| | www.cruisecompete.com | Plug in cruise particulars and site peddles your request to nearly 90 travel agencies who then send you bids. Service is free, and prices are often lower than those on traditional cruise-booking sites. | Registration required. Some agencies are much more likely than others to respond, so you still need to check prices outside the site. | List of participating agencies keeps growing. |