



# Travel Like An Insider

Web savvy, flexibility and loyalty go a long way toward making the most of your money on vacation. **By Nadria Tucker**

It's no secret that the best time to get great deals on vacations is during the off-season—everyone in the world has heard the same stale advice. For some newer ideas, we talked to travel experts—a sales manager at one of the biggest hotels in the South, an insider at a travel agency and a former magazine travel editor—to get some fresh tips.

## Book Online

As a sales manager at Atlanta's swanky W Hotel in Buckhead, Birmingham native Darius Deavours is the ultimate travel authority. He advises travelers to book through a hotel's website. "The cheapest rates are always online," Deavours says, but he cautions against using aggregate travel discount sites like Travelocity and Orbitz. In his opinion, "you can guarantee you will be given the worst room in the inn, since you will be paying the cheapest rate." Haisley Smith, director of marketing for Brownell Travel, suggests using sites like Trip Advisor to do research before you book. Peer reviews can be telling when it comes to details and hidden problems at a potential vacation destination.

## Shop Small

For 11 years, Tanner Latham was a travel editor at *Southern Living*, and through his work with the magazine and subsequent freelance travel and feature writing, he has racked up more travel time than most of us will in several lifetimes. Though he often travels on someone else's dime (the perks of being a travel writer), Latham still knows how to stretch a dollar. His advice: Don't overlook boutique hotels. While that adorable Victorian bed and breakfast may seem out of your budget, you should check with the owners for discounts. In addition, Latham frequently books stays online through Vacation Rentals By Owner at VRBO.com, a site that matches travelers with homeowners looking to rent out properties. "Where the savings come in is that these places all have kitchens," Latham says, "so you can shop for groceries and not spend so much dining out every meal."

Smith takes the shop-small concept a step further and suggests that travelers look into booking off-the-beaten path destinations to get great deals. She calls places like Amelia Island, Fla., and Reynold's Plantation in Greensboro, Ga., "backyard destinations," and says often, all it takes to get a great deal is a bit of flexibility with your location and travel dates.

## Join the Club

Loyalty pays dividends when it comes to travel. Both Latham and Deavours agree that one sure-fire way to get great service and perks on vacation is to join a hotel's or airline's loyalty club. "Hotels consider loyalty clubs huge sources of revenue and will give you almost anything you want—complimentary wireless, free breakfast, discounted parking, complimentary upgrades—all for being part of their club," Deavours says.

Because he travels so much, Latham is a member of several loyalty clubs, which lend him flexibility. "If two properties are on par with each other, I would choose the one with the lesser rate, no matter the program," he says. "I want to save money now versus building points for later." ●

