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# Reference on the Web: Know Before You Go

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Last November I got the dreaded call. My travel agent for 10 years, the one who booked all my international flights, found children's fares, and helped me short-term lease a car in Belgium, was going out of business. Her business was yet another to disappear as the result of the plethora of self-service, fast, and convenient online travel sites like Expedia, Kayak, Priceline, and Travelocity, to name a few. Although I miss the personal touch of my travel agent, I do find that online travel sites are quite useful. There's certainly no lack of them, so selecting just a few to highlight here was difficult. I thought I'd forgo the big-name sites and focus on ones that reach a particular niche. Be advised: most travel sites are packed with advertisements but nevertheless contain valuable information on a variety of travel topics and destinations.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Travelers' Health.** <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>.

The CDC provides alerts, news, and general information about domestic and international travel. The site offers sections on recommended vaccinations; traveling with children, pets, or individuals with special needs; diseases related to travel; illness and injury abroad; finding health clinics; a podcast series on keys to safe travel; and more. The site offers an RSS feed for travel alerts and updates to the *Yellow Book*, a resource guide for professionals who advise travelers about health risks.

### **Eurotrip.** [www.eurotrip.com](http://www.eurotrip.com).

Eurotrip offers an online travel planner for European travel destinations. Users with an account can plan their trip and search rail and air travel between cities. Lodging and activities are recommended as well. Podcasts, itineraries, travel tips, and discussion forums are available. Recommended for those who plan to backpack.

### **Go Green Travel Green.** [www.gogreentravelgreen.com](http://www.gogreentravelgreen.com).

The Go Green Travel Green blog offers an assortment of articles and posts on ways to be green while traveling, such as tips for greening your hotel stay. There is also a section on green travel gear.

### **Luxury Link.** [www.luxurylink.com](http://www.luxurylink.com).

Luxury Link serves the folks who want the finer things in life. Vacation packages, hotels, and cruises are available for auction or purchase and include only properties that meet strict criteria for quality, service, and price. Auctions are arranged geographically and by interest—beach, family, golf, ski, and so forth.

### **MomsMinivan.** [www.momsminivan.com](http://www.momsminivan.com).

MomsMinivan offers "101" ideas to keep kids and toddlers entertained on those long car rides. The site is arranged by age group and offers printable and downloadable games, road-trip tips, and more.

### **New York Times Travel.** [www.travel.nytimes.com](http://www.travel.nytimes.com).

The *New York Times* Travel section offers informative articles, professional photographs, videos, and destination guides for cities all around the world. Searches retrieve current and past articles from the newspaper. Destinations can also be browsed by categories like food and wine, canoeing, or gay and lesbian.

### **Roadfood.com.** [www.roadfood.com](http://www.roadfood.com).

Food snobs beware: the mission of Roadfood is to connect travelers to the most memorable eateries found on back roads,

highways, and small town and cities in America. The site provides a search of eateries by location, and each eatery features reviews, photos, a list of "must eats," maps, and directions. Thirty forums provide opportunities for discussion on a variety of food and restaurant topics, and hundreds of blog posts offer more fun food and facts. Caution: don't use the site when you're hungry!

### **Roadside America.** [www.roadsideamerica.com](http://www.roadsideamerica.com).

Statues of ravens, living ghost towns, Albert the Bull, the world's largest [fill in the blank]—I think you get the idea of the nature of this site. A guide to the oddities found on America's roads.

### **Schmap.** [www.schmap.com](http://www.schmap.com).

Schmap offers city guides dynamically integrated with maps, photos, events, and reviews. It's a mash-up on your PC or MAC, or mobile phone (iPhone and Nokia). The site is available in multiple languages and offers downloadable search widgets.

### **SeatGuru.** [www.seatguru.com](http://www.seatguru.com).

SeatGuru provides maps of more than 700 aircraft seats. Maps highlight exit rows, seats with drawbacks, seats close to the galley or lavatory, and more. Reviews from users are included, offering insight into the real value of the seat. The site is arranged by airline, then aircraft type. Travel tips and frequent-flyer tips are also included.

### **TripAdvisor.** [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com).

TripAdvisor is a great travel portal with access to hotels, airfare, vacation packages, and restaurants. The best part of the site is the more than 30 million ratings, ranging from excellent to terrible, with written reviews from travelers. Many will upload photos of their hotel rooms or the view from the window, typically not the ones found in the hotel advertising. The hotel meta-search checks for the lowest prices on seven popular travel Web sites. Users may sign up for a newsletter to receive updates and special deals for a specific city.

### **Tripology.** [www.tripology.com](http://www.tripology.com).

Tripology is a service for those of us who prefer to let a professional travel agent do the work for us. It asks basic questions about your vacation plans like, Where to? And what do you want to do? and then refers the information to three travel agents who specialize in your vacation destination. There is also a directory of travel agents.

### **Yelp.** [www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com).

Yelp is a great social-networking site to share information about one's city, whether it be restaurants, shopping, Internet hotspots, festivals, spas, or other places or events. It's designed around the city, so the San Francisco page, for example, will list the food, entertainment, and services in that area. Reviews offer a one- to five-star rating; map; list of features (hours, price, kid-friendliness, alcohol or not, etc.); and comments from subscribers. This site is so Web 2.0 that users can even rate the reviews! Options for bookmarking, e-mailing, and sending to phone keep things mobile. The U.S. is featured, but the site is branching out worldwide.

