

Planning Your Trip to the USA

If the United States has one defining quality, it's variety. This vast area of some 3.6 million square miles—it's 2,500 miles from New York to Los Angeles, and that again to Hawaii—has something for everyone.

Although TV, suburban sprawl, strip malls, and chain restaurants have a homogenizing effect, America hasn't yet become a monolithic place. Each region still speaks with its own accent, enjoys its own favorite foods, and has its own political and social attitudes. Indeed, you sometimes wonder if we aren't one nation but an amalgam of 50 little countries. We've seen New Yorkers floored by the laid-back pace of the West Coast (but ultimately thrilled by the "enforced" relaxation), and southerners slightly frazzled by the Big Apple's breakneck pace (but totally enthused by the vast number of shopping and dining opportunities in the space of a few square miles). Whatever you want to see, do, or eat, you're likely to find it within the vast and diverse confines of the United States of America.

WHAT'S HERE & WHAT'S NOT

It's not easy to boil down the essence of such a huge, varied, complicated country. No doubt, some of you will look at the table of contents and raise an eyebrow at what's missing. That's sure to be the case with any guide professing to cover the entire United States.

This book doesn't pretend to be comprehensive. It's simply not possible to cover every great destination in the country in one usable volume. We did, however, concentrate on a select group of destinations that will appeal to a wide cross section of domestic travelers, be they road-trippers, business travelers, outdoor enthusiasts, history buffs, or museum lovers. This way, rather than glossing over lots of destinations with coverage that's broad but an inch deep, we've been able to offer you in-depth, practical coverage you can really use.

Take, for example, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket: We'd love to cover both

islands, but we chose to focus on Martha's Vineyard instead. Few travelers have time to visit both, so we used the space to include more detailed and useful information on the Vineyard, which is larger and easier to reach. We've applied the same sort of logic to our destination choices throughout. In the end, we've come up with a list of destinations that's representative of the very best America has to offer—cities, national parks, beaches, resort areas, and more.

And because we recognize the diversity of American travelers and their interests, you will find at least some information on every single state in the Union inside these pages. In appendix A, we highlight the best offerings of five states that would otherwise get the (undeserved) short end of the stick.

We hope you'll discover your own America as you hit the road and start exploring. If you'd like more coverage of

The USA—Major Interstate Routes



the destinations covered here, or if any of them prompt you to explore further—if you want to see Nantucket, say, after the Vineyard has charmed you—chances are good that we have a more dedicated, in-depth guidebook for you; see the

complete list of destinations covered by Frommer's guides at the end of this book. Happy trails!

Note: International visitors, be sure to check out appendix C as well for planning information tailored exclusively to you.

1 When to Go

Climate differences are dramatic across the United States. When it's shivering cold in New England, the upper central states, and Alaska, it's sunny and warm in Florida, California, and Hawaii. When it's raining cats and dogs along the Northwest coast, it's dry as a bone in the Southwest desert. It can be a pleasant 75°F (24°C) on the beaches of Southern California in summer, yet 120°F (49°C) just a few miles inland.

And there isn't a nationwide high or low season. In summer, room rates are highest on the Northeast and mid-Atlantic beaches but lowest on the sands of hot-and-humid Florida (though not in Central Florida, where rates can reach sky-high proportions) and in the sticky climes of the Gulf South. Winter snows virtually close the great Rocky Mountain national parks and the major tourism centers of the northern Great Plains, but they bring crowds to the nearby ski slopes. Alaska is usually well below freezing until summer, when the midnight sun smiles down on warm days, and higher hotel rates greet the tourist crowds. Hawaii is warm year-round, but winter brings massive amounts of rain—and higher prices.

The Northeast and mid-Atlantic states have their summer beach season from June to Labor Day and their great fall foliage in September and October. Climate can vary wildly in these regions: One day can be warm and lovely, the next muggy and miserable. Winter storms are not an infrequent occurrence in these

regions—New England is practically famous for its nor'easters—though some mid-Atlantic winters in the not-too-distant past have been remarkably mild (and others have been frigid—the unpredictability of the weather in this region is always a safe topic of discussion).

Summer can be brutally hot and humid in the Southeast (and is also prime hurricane season), but spring and fall last longer there, and winter is mild—with snow the exception rather than the rule. The Gulf South summers are often exceptionally sticky and hot, though winters (except in the mountain areas) are generally mild, if rainy. Southern Florida's best season is from January to April, though cold snaps can turn it nippy for a few days. The central states see harsh winters and scorching summers. Southwest weather varies from east Texas's hot, humid summers and mild winters to Arizona's dry, 110°F (43°C) summers and pleasant, dry winters. Nevada is similar, though it tends to get a bit chillier in winter. The mountains of Colorado, Utah, and the Northwest have dry, moderately hot summers and cold, snowy winters. The California coast is fine all year except early spring, when it rains; the Northwest coast is wet most of the time except July.

The long and the short of it: Late spring and early fall are the best times to visit most of the country. See "Special Events & Festivals" in all of the chapters that follow for more dates around which to plan your trip.

2 Money Matters

ATMS

Nationwide, the easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine), sometimes referred to as a “cash machine,” or “cashpoint.” The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the country; you can find them even in remote regions. Look at the back of your bank card to see which network you’re on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and daily withdrawal limit before you depart. **Note:** Remember that many banks impose a fee every time you use a card at another bank’s ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to \$5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they’re rarely more than \$2). In addition, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks’ ATM fees within the U.S., use www.bankrate.com. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

CREDIT CARDS & DEBIT CARDS

Credit cards are the most widely used form of payment in the United States: **Visa** (Barclaycard in Britain), **MasterCard** (Eurocard in Europe, Access in Britain, ChargeX in Canada), **American Express**, **Diners Club**, and **Discover**. They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN.

Visitors from outside the U.S. should inquire whether their bank assesses a 1% to 3% fee on charges incurred abroad.

It’s highly recommended that you travel with at least one major credit card.

You must have one to rent a car, and hotels and airlines usually require a credit card imprint as a deposit against expenses. (**Note:** Businesses in some U.S. cities may require a minimum purchase, usually around \$10, before letting you use a credit card.)

ATM cards with major credit card backing, known as “**debit cards**,” are now a commonly acceptable form of payment in most stores and restaurants. Debit cards draw money directly from your checking account. Some stores enable you to receive “cash back” on your debit-card purchases as well. The same is true at most U.S. post offices.

TRAVELER’S CHECKS

Traveler’s checks are usually accepted in the U.S., but foreign visitors should make sure that they’re denominated in U.S. dollars; foreign-currency checks are often difficult to exchange.

You can buy traveler’s checks at most banks. Most are offered in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and sometimes \$1,000. Generally, you’ll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%.

The most popular traveler’s checks are offered by **American Express** (☎ 800/807-6233, or 800/221-7282 for card holders—this number accepts collect calls, offers service in several foreign languages, and exempts Amex gold and platinum cardholders from the 1% fee.); **Visa** (☎ 800/732-1322)—AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a \$9.95 fee (for checks up to \$1,500) at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ 866/339-3378; and **MasterCard** (☎ 800/223-9920).

If you do choose to carry traveler’s checks, keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You’ll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

3 Travel Insurance

The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age and health, and the type of trip you're taking, but expect to pay between 5% and 8% of the vacation itself. You can get estimates from various providers through **InsureMyTrip.com**. Enter your trip cost and dates, your age, and other information, for prices from more than a dozen companies.

Note: Many tour operators, particularly those offering trips to remote or high-risk areas, include insurance in the cost of the trip or can arrange insurance policies through a partnering provider, a convenient and often cost-effective way for the traveler to obtain insurance. Make sure the tour company is a reputable one, however: Some experts suggest you avoid buying insurance from the tour or cruise company you're traveling with, saying it's better to buy from a "third party" insurer than to put all your money in one place.

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE

Trip-cancellation insurance will help retrieve your money if you have to back out of a trip or depart early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Permissible reasons for trip cancellation can range from sickness to natural disasters to the State Department declaring a destination unsafe for travel.

For more information, contact one of the following recommended insurers:

Access America (☎ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (☎ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (☎ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

MEDICAL INSURANCE

Although it's not required of travelers, health insurance is highly recommended. Most health insurance policies cover you if you get sick away from home—but verify that you're covered before you depart, particularly if you're insured by an HMO.

LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE

On flights within the U.S., checked baggage is covered up to \$2,500 per ticketed passenger. If you plan to check items more valuable than what's covered by the standard liability, see if your homeowner's policy covers your valuables, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. Most airlines require that you report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

Airlines go bankrupt, so protect yourself by **buying your tickets with a credit card**. The Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy). **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against "carrier default" for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust midtrip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than \$25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

4 Health & Safety

HEALTH

The United States doesn't present any unusual health hazards, provided travelers take reasonable precautions. **Lyme Disease**, carried by deer ticks, is a growing concern in the woodlands of the Northeast and mid-Atlantic, but you can seriously minimize your risk by using insect repellent and by covering up when hiking in the deep woods. Should you get bitten by a tick or notice a bull's-eye-shaped rash after hiking or camping, consult a doctor immediately. Another insect-related illness that's become a nationwide issue is **West Nile Virus**, spread by mosquitoes. Again, use insect repellent and avoid swampy areas during the summer mosquito season, and you should encounter no problems. To keep from contracting **rabies**, avoid contact with wild animals, no matter how cute or friendly they appear. If you even think you may have been exposed, see a doctor at once.

In the Rocky Mountain states and the high elevations of the Southwest, one of the biggest health concerns is **altitude sickness**. Don't arrive in Denver planning to tackle the Rocky Mountains on the same day—the only thing that will happen is that you'll end up short of breath, exhausted, or worse. The best way to avoid this is to ease your transition into high altitude climates, drink lots of water, and get plenty of rest; if you have breathing difficulties, your doctor may be able to prescribe medication to ease any difficulties.

If you plan on visiting some of the country's sun-soaked spots, limit the time you spend in direct sunlight and bring sunscreen with a high protection factor (at least 25). Apply it liberally—and often. This advice goes double if you're climbing at high altitudes, where the air is thinner and it's far easier to get a serious burn (even if the climate is actually cold).

Skin cancer is one of the fastest-growing illnesses in the United States and it doesn't take much time in the sun to do serious damage. Remember that children need more protection than adults do.

The other natural hazards for outdoor enthusiasts include **poison ivy** (learn to recognize and avoid it) and **hazardous wildlife** (never approach a wild animal or feed it). To minimize risks, never hike alone, notify someone of your planned hiking route, always carry a first-aid kit, and check in with park rangers to get the lowdown on possible hazards in the area in which you're hiking. If you're hiking in forested areas during hunting season, be sure to wear brightly colored clothing.

If you plan to head into the great outdoors, keep in mind that injuries often occur when people fail to follow instructions. Believe the experts who tell you to stay on the established ski trails and hike only in designated areas. Follow the marine charts if you're piloting your own boat. If you're rafting, wear a life jacket. If you're biking or rock climbing, be sure to use appropriate safety gear. Mountain weather can be fickle at any time of the year, so carry rain gear and pack a few warm layers. Watch out for summer thunderstorms that can leave you drenched or send bolts of lightning your way. In the Southwest, a summer storm can easily cause a flash flood, so be cautious and keep your wits about you.

When camping, always inquire if campfires are allowed in the area in which you are traveling. Some of the country's worst forest fires in recent years were started by careless campers who didn't follow proper safety protocols.

Tap water is safe to drink throughout the country, though you can get bottled water pretty much everywhere if you prefer it. Water in the wild should always be treated or boiled before drinking it.

The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (☎ 800/311-3435; www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on health hazards by region and offers tips on food safety.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **MedicAlert identification tag** (☎ 888/633-4298; www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through MedicAlert's 24-hour hot line. If you have dental problems, a nationwide referral service known as **1-800-DENTIST** (☎ 800/336-8478) can give you the name of a nearby dentist or clinic.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry them in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Don't forget an extra pair of contact lenses or prescription glasses.

SAFETY

Although tourist areas are generally safe, U.S. urban areas have their fair share of crime. You should always stay alert; this is particularly true of large cities. If you're in doubt about which neighborhoods are safe, don't hesitate to inquire at the hotel's front desk or at the local tourist office.

Avoid deserted areas, especially at night, and don't go into public parks after dark unless there's a concert or similar occasion that will attract a crowd.

Avoid carrying valuables with you on the street, and keep expensive cameras or electronic equipment bagged up or covered when not in use. If you're using a map, try to consult it inconspicuously—or better yet, study it before you leave your room. Hold on to your pocketbook, and place your billfold in an

inside pocket. In theaters, restaurants, and other public places, keep your possessions in sight.

Always lock your room door—don't assume that once you're inside the hotel you are automatically safe and no longer need to be aware of your surroundings. Hotels are open to the public, and in a large hotel, security may not be able to screen everyone who enters.

DRIVING SAFETY Driving safety is important too, and carjacking is not unprecedented. Question your rental agency about personal safety, and ask for a traveler-safety brochure when you pick up your car. Obtain written directions—or a map with the route clearly marked—from the agency showing how to get to your destination. And, if possible, arrive and depart during daylight hours.

If you drive off a highway and end up in a dodgy-looking neighborhood, leave the area as quickly as possible. If you have an accident, even on the highway, stay in your car with the doors locked until you assess the situation or until the police arrive. If you're bumped from behind on the street or are involved in a minor accident with no injuries, and the situation appears to be suspicious, motion to the other driver to follow you. Never get out of your car in such situations. Go directly to the nearest police precinct, well-lit service station, or 24-hour store. You may want to look into renting a cellphone on a short-term basis. One recommended wireless rental company is **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchusa.com).

Park in well-lit and well-traveled areas whenever possible. Always keep your car doors locked, whether the vehicle is attended or unattended. Never leave any packages or valuables in sight. If someone attempts to rob you or steal your car, don't try to resist the thief/carjacker. Report the incident to the police department immediately by calling ☎ 911.

5 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling in the U.S. There are more options and resources out there than ever before.

The **Golden Access Passport** gives visually impaired or permanently disabled persons (regardless of age) free lifetime entrance to all properties administered by the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. This may include national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges.

You may pick up a Golden Access Passport at any NPS entrance fee area by showing proof of medically determined disability and eligibility for benefits under federal law. Besides free entry, the Golden Access Passport also offers a 50% discount on federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm or call ☎ **888/467-2757**.

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. Among them are **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ **507/451-5005**; www.flyingwheelstravel.com); **Access-Able Travel Source** (☎ **303/232-2979**; www.accessable.com); and **Accessible Journeys** (☎ **800/846-4537** or **610/521-0339**; www.disabilitytravel.com). **Avis Rent a Car** has an "Avis Access" program that offers such services as a dedicated 24-hour toll-free number (☎ **888/879-4273**) for customers with special travel needs; special car features such as swivel seats, spinner knobs, and hand controls; and accessible bus service.

Organizations that offer assistance to travelers with disabilities include

MossRehab (www.mossresourcenet.org); the **American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)** (☎ **800/232-5463**; www.afb.org); and **SATH** (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality) (☎ **212/447-7284**; www.sath.org). **AirAmbulanceCard.com** is now partnered with SATH and allows you to preselect top-notch hospitals in case of an emergency.

The community website **iCan** (www.icanonline.net/channels/travel) has destination guides and several regular columns on accessible travel. Also check out the quarterly magazine **Emerging Horizons** (www.emerginghorizons.com); and **Open World** magazine, published by SATH.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

The **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA)** (☎ **800/448-8550** or **954/776-2626**; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. Among them are **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ **800/397-2681**; www.abovebeyondtours.com); **Now, Voyager** (☎ **800/255-6951**; www.nowvoyager.com); and **Olivia Cruises & Resorts** (☎ **800/631-6277**; www.olivia.com).

Gay.com Travel (☎ **800/929-2268** or **415/644-8044**; www.gay.com/travel or www.outandabout.com), is an excellent online successor to the popular **Out & About** print magazine. It provides regularly updated information about gay-owned, gay-oriented, and gay-friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping establishments in every important destination worldwide.

The following travel guides are available at many bookstores, or you can order

them from any online bookseller: *Spartacus International Gay Guide* (Bruno Gmünder Verlag; www.spartacusworld.com/gayguide) and *Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner* (Odysseus Enterprises Ltd.); and the *Damron* guides (www.damron.com), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention the fact that you're a senior when you make your travel reservations. Many hotels offer discounts for seniors. In most cities, people over the age of 60 qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions, as well as discounted fares on public transportation.

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 888/687-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

The **U.S. National Park Service** offers a **Golden Age Passport** that gives seniors 62 years or older lifetime entrance to all properties administered by the National Park Service—national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges—for a one-time processing fee of \$10, which must be purchased in person at any NPS facility that charges an entrance fee. Besides free entry, a Golden Age Passport also offers a 50% discount on federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm or call ☎ 888/467-2757.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (☎ 877/426-8056; www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for

those aged 55 and over. **ElderTrekks** (☎ 800/741-7956; www.eldertrekks.com) offers small-group tours to off-the-beaten-path or adventure-travel locations, restricted to travelers 50 and older. **INTRAV** (☎ 800/456-8100; www.intrav.com) is a high-end tour operator that caters to the mature, discerning traveler (not specifically seniors), with trips that include guided safaris, private-jet adventures, and small-boat cruises.

Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include: the quarterly magazine *Travel 50 & Beyond* (www.travel50andbeyond.com); *Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the Mature Traveler* (Avalon); *101 Tips for Mature Travelers*, available from Grand Circle Travel (☎ 800/221-2610 or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com); and *Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50* (McGraw-Hill), by Joann Rattner Heilman.

FAMILY TRAVEL

To locate accommodations, restaurants, and attractions that are particularly kid-friendly, refer to the “Kids” icon throughout this guide.

Familyhostel (☎ 800/733-9753; www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel) takes the whole family, including kids ages 8 to 15, on moderately priced U.S. and international learning vacations. Lectures, field trips, and sightseeing are guided by a team of academics.

Recommended family travel websites include **Family Travel Forum** (www.familytravelforum.com), a comprehensive site that offers customized trip planning; **Family Travel Network** (www.familytravelnetwork.com), an award-winning site that offers travel features, deals, and tips; **Traveling Internationally with**

Your Kids (www.travelwithyourkids.com), a comprehensive site offering sound advice for long-distance and international travel with children; and **Family Travel Files** (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com), which offers an online magazine and a directory of off-the-beaten-path tours and tour operators for families.

Frommer's and the Unofficial Guides both publish a "With Kids" series that features some of the major tourist destinations in the United States.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

More and more hotels in the United States are ratcheting up security measures for women traveling alone on business or for pleasure. Some are even offering secure "women only" floors, with the added perk of spa services.

Check out the award-winning website **Journeywoman** (www.journeywoman.com), a "real life" women's travel-information network where you can sign up for a free e-mail newsletter and get advice on everything from etiquette and dress to safety; or the travel guide *Safety and Security for Women Who Travel* by Sheila Swan and Peter Laufer (Travelers' Tales, Inc.), offering common-sense tips on safe travel.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN TRAVELERS

Black Travel Online (www.blacktravelonline.com) posts news on upcoming events and includes links to articles and travel-booking sites. **Soul of America** (www.soulofamerica.com) is a comprehensive website, with travel tips, event and family-reunion postings, and sections on historically black beach resorts and active vacations.

Agencies and organizations that provide resources for black travelers include: **Rodgers Travel** (☎ 800/825-1775; www.rodgerstravel.com); the **African American Association of Innkeepers International** (☎ 877/422-5777; www.africanamericaninns.com); and **Henderson Travel & Tours** (☎ 800/327-2309 or 301/650-5700; www.hendersontravel.com), which has specialized in trips to Africa since 1957. For more information, check out the following collections and guides: *Go Girl! The Black Woman's Guide to Travel & Adventure* (Eighth Mountain Press), a compilation of travel essays by writers including Jill Nelson and Audre Lorde; *The African American Travel Guide* by Wayne Robinson (Hunter Publishing; www.hunterpublishing.com); *Steppin' Out* by

On Your Own or with a Furry Friend

Prefer to do your traveling alone? So long as you avoid all-inclusive resorts and vacation packages (which base their prices on double occupancy), you likely won't face the dreaded "single supplement," a penalty added to the base price of a room or package. For more information, Eleanor Berman's latest edition of *Traveling Solo: Advice and Ideas for More Than 250 Great Vacations* (Globe Pequot), a guide with advice on traveling alone, either solo or as part of a group tour.

If, like John Steinbeck, you want to take your dog (or cat, or whatever) with you for companionship on your travels, many hotels across the U.S. (for example, all Motel 6 properties) will be happy to roll out the welcome mat for your pet. For travel tips and advice on traveling with Fido or Fluffy, head online to www.petswelcome.com, www.pettravel.com, and www.travelpets.com.

Carla Labat (Avalon); *Travel and Enjoy Magazine* (© 866/266-6211; www.travelandenjoy.com); and *Pathfinders Magazine* (© 877/977-PATH; www.pathfinderstravel.com), which includes articles on everything from Rio de Janeiro to Ghana as well as information on upcoming ski, diving, golf, and tennis trips.

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6 Planning Your Trip Online

SURFING FOR AIRFARE

The most popular online travel agencies are **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com or www.travelocity.co.uk); **Expedia** (www.expedia.com, www.expedia.co.uk, or www.expedia.ca); and **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com).

In addition, most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to and within the United States, go to appendix D.

Other helpful websites for booking airline tickets online include:

- www.biddingfortravel.com
- www.cheapflights.com
- www.hotwire.com
- www.kayak.com
- www.lastminutetravel.com
- www.opodo.co.uk
- www.priceline.com
- www.sidestep.com
- www.site59.com
- www.smartertravel.com

SURFING FOR HOTELS

In addition to **Travelocity**, **Expedia**, **Orbitz**, **Priceline**, and **Hotwire** (see above), the following websites will help you with booking hotel rooms online:

- www.hotels.com
- www.quickbook.com
- www.travelaxe.net
- www.travelweb.com
- www.tripadvisor.com

Of the sites listed above, we really like Travelaxe. It's an excellent free program that can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of—and conveniently lists the total price of the room, including the taxes and service charges.

If you plan on bidding for a hotel room on Priceline, be sure to visit the **BiddingForTravel** website (www.biddingfortravel.com) before placing the bid; it features a fairly up-to-date list of hotels in the U.S. that Priceline uses in major cities and you'll get a fairly good idea of how much to bid for a hotel in your selected area. The downside is that the site does not offer information on Hotwire hotels—for help in getting a good hotel room on that site, try **www.betterbidding.com**.

It's always a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

And keep in mind that hotels at the top of a site's listing may be there for no other reason than that they paid money to get the placement.

SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars, too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

TRAVEL BLOGS & TRAVELOGUES

To read a few blogs about destinations within the United States, try:

- www.gridskipper.com
- www.salon.com/wanderlust
- www.travelblog.com
- www.travelblog.org
- www.worldhum.com
- www.writtenroad.com

Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

For an excellent travel-planning resource, we highly recommend **Frommers.com** (www.frommers.com), voted Best Travel Site by *PC Magazine*. We're a little biased, of course, but we guarantee that you'll find the travel tips, reviews, monthly vacation giveaways, bookstore, and online-booking capabilities thoroughly indispensable. Among the special features are our popular **Destinations** section, where you'll get expert travel tips, hotel and dining recommendations, and advice on the sights to see for more than 3,500 destinations around the globe; the **Frommers.com Newsletter**, with the latest deals, travel trends, and money-saving secrets; our **Community** area featuring **Message Boards**, where Frommer's readers post queries and share advice (sometimes even our authors show up to answer questions); and our **Photo Center**, where you can post and share vacation tips. When your research is done, the **Online Reservations System** (www.frommers.com/book_a_trip) takes you to Frommer's preferred online partners for booking your vacation at affordable prices.

7 The 21st-Century Traveler

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cybercafes. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—two places to start looking are at www.cybercaptive.com and www.cybercafe.com.

Aside from formal cybercafes, most **public libraries** in the United States offer Internet access free or for a small charge. Avoid **hotel business centers** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

More and more hotels, cafes, and retailers are signing on as Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) "hotspots." Mac owners have their own networking technology, Apple AirPort. **T-Mobile Hotspot** (www.t-mobile.com/hotspot) has wireless connections at more than 1,000 Starbucks coffee shops nationwide. **Boingo** (www.boingo.com)

and **Wayport** (www.wayport.com) have set up networks in airports and high-class hotel lobbies. iPass providers (see below) also give you access to a few hundred wireless hotel lobby setups. To locate other hotspots that provide **free wireless networks** in cities around the world, go to www.personaltelco.net/index.cgi/WirelessCommunities.

For dial-up access, most business-class hotels in the U.S. offer dataports for laptop modems, and a few thousand hotels in the U.S. and Europe now offer free high-speed Internet access. In addition, major Internet service providers (ISPs) have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by placing a local call. The **iPass** network also has dial-up numbers around the world. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com and click on "Individuals Buy Now." One solid provider is

Online Traveler's Toolbox

Veteran travelers usually carry some essential items to make their trips easier. Following is a selection of handy online tools to bookmark and use.

- **Airplane Food** (www.airlinemeals.net)
- **Airplane Seating** (www.seatguru.com; www.airlinequality.com)
- **Maps** (www.mapquest.com)
- **Subway Navigator** (www.subwaynavigator.com)
- **Time and Date** (www.timeanddate.com)
- **Travel Warnings** (<http://travel.state.gov>; www.fco.gov.uk/travel; www.voyage.gc.ca; www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice)
- **Universal Currency Converter** (www.xe.com/ucc)
- **Visa ATM Locator** (www.visa.com)
- **MasterCard ATM Locator** (www.mastercard.com)
- **Weather** (www.intellicast.com; www.weather.com)

i2roam (www.i2roam.com; ☎ 866/811-6209 or 920/235-0475).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them to guests.

USING A CELLPHONE

Just because your cellphone works at home doesn't mean it'll work everywhere in the U.S. (thanks to our nation's fragmented cellphone system). It's a good bet that your phone will work in major cities, but take a look at your wireless company's coverage map on its website before heading out; T-Mobile, Sprint, and Nextel are particularly weak in rural areas. If you need to stay in touch at a destination where you know your phone won't work,

rent a phone that does from **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchglobal.com) or a rental car location, but beware that you'll pay \$1 a minute or more for airtime.

If you're venturing deep into national parks, you may want to consider renting a **satellite phone** ("satphone"). It's different from a cellphone in that it connects to satellites rather than ground-based towers. Unfortunately, you'll pay at least \$2 per minute to use the phone, and it only works where you can see the horizon (i.e., usually not indoors). In North America, you can rent Iridium satellite phones from **RoadPost** (www.roadpost.com; ☎ 888/290-1606 or 905/272-5665). InTouch USA (see above) offers a wider range of satphones but at higher rates.

8 Getting Around the United States

BY PLANE

For long-distance trips, the most efficient way to get around the United States is by plane, even in these days of increased security and poor airline service. See appendix D at the end of this book for a

list of airlines, with their toll-free numbers and websites.

GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

- Arrive at the airport 1 hour before a domestic flight and 2 hours before an

international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and he or she will probably whisk you to the front of the line.

- Beat the ticket-counter lines by using airport electronic kiosks or even online check-in from your home computer, from where you can print out boarding passes in advance. Curbside check-in is also a good way to avoid lines.
- Bring a current, government-issued photo ID such as a driver's license or passport. Children under 18 do not need government-issued photo IDs for flights within the U.S., but they do for international flights.
- Speed up security by removing your jacket and shoes before you're screened. In addition, remove metal objects such as big belt buckles. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners.
- Use a TSA-approved lock for your checked luggage. Look for Travel Sentry certified locks at luggage or

travel shops and Brookstone stores (or online at www.brookstone.com).

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

- Passengers who can book their ticket either **long in advance** or **at the last minute**, or who **fly midweek** or at **less-trafficked hours** may pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see "Planning Your Trip Online," above).
- Keep an eye on local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars**, when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars offered for peak travel times, but if you can travel in the off-months, you may snag a bargain.
- Join **frequent-flier clubs**. Frequent-flier membership doesn't cost a cent, but it does entitle you to better seats, faster response to phone inquiries, and

Tips Coping with Jet Lag

Jet lag is a pitfall of traveling across time zones. If you're flying north-south and you feel sluggish when you touch down, your symptoms will be the result of dehydration and the general stress of air travel. When you travel east-west or vice versa, however, your body becomes thoroughly confused about what time it is, and everything from your digestive system to your brain is knocked for a loop. Traveling east, say from San Francisco to Boston, is more difficult on your internal clock than traveling west, say from Atlanta to Hawaii, because most peoples' bodies are more inclined to stay up late than fall asleep early.

Here are some tips for combating jet lag:

- **Reset your watch** to your destination time before you board the plane.
 - **Drink lots of water** before, during, and after your flight. Avoid alcohol.
 - **Exercise and sleep well** for a few days before your trip.
 - If you have trouble sleeping on planes, **fly eastward on morning flights**.
 - **Daylight** is the key to resetting your body clock. At the website for **Outside In** (www.bodyclock.com), you can get a customized plan of when to seek and avoid light.
-

Tips for Digital Travel Photography

- **Take along a spare camera—or two.** Even if you've been anointed the "official" photographer of your travel group, encourage others in your party to carry their own cameras and provide fresh perspectives—and backup. Your photographic "second unit" may include you in a few shots so you're not the invisible person of the trip.
- **Stock up on digital film cards.** At home, it's easy to copy pictures from your memory cards to your computer as they fill up. During your travels, cards seem to fill up more quickly. Take along enough digital film for your entire trip or, at a minimum, enough for at least a few days' of shooting. At intervals, you can copy images to CDs. Many camera stores and souvenir shops offer this service, and a growing number of mass merchandisers have walk-up kiosks you can use to make prints or create CDs while you travel.
- **Share and share alike.** No need to wait until you get home to share your photos. You can upload a gallery's worth to an online photo sharing service. Just find an Internet cafe where the computers have card readers, or connect your camera to the computer with a cable. You can find online photo sharing services that cost little or nothing at www.clickherefree.com. You can also use America Online's Your Pictures service, or commercial enterprises that give you free or low-cost photo sharing: Kodak's EasyShare gallery (www.kodak.com), Yahoo! Photos (www.photos.yahoo.com), Snapfish (www.snapfish.com), or Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com).
- **Add voice annotations to your photos.** Many digital cameras allow you to add voice annotations to your shots after they're taken. These serve as excellent reminders and documentation. One castle or cathedral may look like another after a long tour; your voice notes will help you distinguish them.
- **Experiment!** Travel is a great time to try out new techniques. Take photos at night, resting your camera on a handy wall or other support as your self-timer trips the shutter for a long exposure. Try close-ups of flowers, crafts, wildlife, or maybe the exotic cuisine you're about to consume. Discover action photography—shoot the countryside from trains, buses, or cars. With a digital camera, you can experiment and then erase your mistakes.

—From *Travel Photography Digital Field Guide, 1st Edition*
(John Wiley & Sons, 2006)

prompter service if your luggage is stolen or your flight is canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. And you don't have to fly to earn points; **frequent-flier credit cards** can

earn you thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping. With more than 70 mileage awards programs are on the market, consumers have never had more options. Investigate the

program details of your favorite airlines before you sink points into any one. Consider which airlines have hubs in the airport nearest you, and, of those carriers, which have the most advantageous alliances, given your most common routes. To play the frequent-flier game to your best advantage, consult Randy Petersen's **Inside Flyer** (www.insideflyer.com). Petersen and friends review all the programs in detail and post regular updates on changes in policies and trends.

BY CAR

Usually, the most cost-effective, convenient, and comfortable way to travel around the United States is by car. Many highlights of the country just can't be seen any other way.

The interstate highway system connects cities and towns all over the country; in addition to these high-speed, limited-access roadways, there's an extensive network of federal, state, and local highways and roads. **Note:** To help you plan your driving routes, check out "The USA—Major Interstate Routes" map at the beginning of this chapter.

If you plan on driving your own car over a long distance, then automobile-association membership is recommended. **AAA, the American Automobile Association** (☎ 800/222-4357; www.aaa.com), is the country's largest auto club and supplies its members with maps, insurance, and most important, emergency road service. The cost of joining is \$58 for a single member.

If your destination is too far from home to drive, but will require a car once you arrive, see appendix D at the end of this book for a list of car-rental agencies, with their toll-free numbers and websites. These national companies have offices at most airports and in many cities. You must have a valid credit card to rent a vehicle. Most also require a minimum age,

ranging from 19 to 25 (some companies that will rent to the under-25 crowd will nevertheless assess underage driving fees of up to \$25 per day extra), and some also set maximum ages. Others deny cars to anyone with a bad driving record. Ask about rental requirements and restrictions when you book to avoid problems later.

Car-rental rates vary even more than fares. The price you pay depends on the size of the car, where and when you pick it up and drop it off, the length of the rental period, where and how far you drive it, whether you purchase insurance, and a host of other factors. A few key questions could save you hundreds of dollars; you should comparison-shop and be persistent because reservations agents don't often volunteer money-saving strategies.

- Is a weekly rate cheaper than the daily rate? If you need to keep the car for 4 days, it may be cheaper to keep it for 5, even if you don't need it that long.
- Does the agency assess a drop-off charge if you do not return the car to the same location where you picked it up? Is it cheaper to pick up the car at the airport instead of a downtown location?
- How much tax will be added to the rental bill? Local tax? State use tax? Some state's rental-car taxes can top 25% of the base rate, so be sure you know exactly how much you'll be paying in total before making a decision. Recently, many online booking sites have begun posting the total rental price of a car instead of just the base rates.
- What is the cost of adding an additional driver's name to the contract?

Before you drive off in a rental car, be sure you're insured. Hasty assumptions about your personal auto insurance or a rental agency's additional coverage could end up costing you tens of thousands of dollars—even if you're involved in an

accident that was clearly the fault of another driver.

If you already hold a private auto insurance policy, you are most likely covered for loss of or damage to a rental car, and liability in case of injury to any other party involved in an accident. Be sure to ask whether your policy extends to all persons who will be driving the rental car, how much liability is covered in case an outside party is injured in an accident, and whether the type of vehicle you are renting is included under your contract.

The basic insurance coverage offered by most car-rental companies, known as the **Loss/Damage Waiver (LDW)** or **Collision Damage Waiver (CDW)**, can cost as much as \$20 per day. It usually covers the full value of the vehicle with no deductible if an outside party causes an accident or other damage to the rental car. In many states, you will probably be covered in case of theft as well (ask before making any assumptions). **Liability coverage** varies according to the company policy and state law, but the minimum is usually at least \$15,000. If you are at fault in an accident, however, you will be covered for the full replacement value of the car but not for liability. Some states allow you to buy additional liability coverage for such cases. Most rental companies require a police report to process any claims you file, but your private insurer is not notified of the accident.

Most major credit cards offer some degree of coverage as well—if they were used to pay for the rental. Terms vary widely, however, so be sure to call your credit card company directly before you rent.

If you're uninsured, your credit card provides primary coverage as long as you decline the rental agency's insurance. That means the credit card will cover damage or theft of a rental car for the full cost of the vehicle. (In a few states, however, theft is not covered; ask specifically about state law where you will be renting and driving.) If you already have insurance, your credit card will provide secondary coverage—which basically covers your deductible.

Credit cards will not cover liability, the cost of injury to an outside party, and/or damage to an outside party's vehicle. If you do not hold an insurance policy, you may seriously want to consider purchasing additional liability insurance from your rental company, even if you decline collision coverage. Be sure to check the terms, however: Some rental agencies cover liability only if the renter is not at fault; even then, the rental company's obligation varies from state to state.

BY TRAIN

Long-distance trains in the United States are operated by **Amtrak** (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com), the national

Other Transportation Options

Traveling the U.S. in a **recreational vehicle (RV)** is an increasingly popular way of seeing the country. One good RV-rental agency with locations all over the country is **Cruise America** (www.cruiseamerica.com). It would take dozens of pages to thoroughly discuss the ins and outs of RV travel, so if you're thinking of hitting the road this way, check out *Frommer's Exploring America by RV*.

If you're more of the *Easy Rider* sort and have dreams of cruising the country on a **motorcycle**, know that you'll need a special motorcycle license and that almost every state also requires that riders wear a helmet. The best outfit for renting a bike nationwide is **EagleRider** (☎ 888/900-9901; www.eaglerider.com).

rail passenger corporation. Be aware, however, that with a few notable exceptions (for instance, the Northeast Corridor line between Boston and Washington, D.C.), intercity service is not particularly fabulous. Delays are common, routes are limited and often infrequently served, and fares are seldom much lower than discount airfares. That said, if time isn't an issue, train travel can be a very scenic method of traveling the country. If you choose to travel by train, do it for the experience, not for the convenience.

There are discount rail passes sold to U.S. residents who want to see the country by rail though you'll need quite a bit of time on your hands to make the pass worth your while. Rail travelers can buy a **North America Rail Pass**, good for up to 30 days of unlimited travel in economy class on Amtrak (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com) in the U.S. and Canada, except on the Acela Express trains and the Auto Train that run on the East Coast. There's also a peculiar quirk—you must travel at least one

segment of your journey in Canada. Meals and sleeping accommodations are extra. Reservations are generally required and should be made for each part of your trip as early as possible. For full details and prices on this pass and on regional rail passes (in California and Florida), call Amtrak or check its website.

Amtrak also offers rail/fly packages that allow travelers to fly to their destination in one direction and to take the train in another.

BY BUS

Bus travel is often the most economical form of public transit for short hops between U.S. cities, but it can also be slow and uncomfortable—certainly not an option for everyone (particularly when Amtrak, which is far more luxurious, offers similar rates). **Greyhound/Trailways** (☎ 800/231-2222; www.greyhound.com), the sole nationwide bus line, offers several pass and discount options geared to domestic travelers.

9 Special-Interest Vacation Planner

Here's a sampling of companies that offer escorted adventures and tours, and some suggestions on where to go to enjoy your favorite activities. For information on the individual states mentioned below, see the appropriate destination chapter in the book.

ADVENTURE-TRAVEL COMPANIES

Scores of “soft” and “hard” adventure-travel companies have sprung up in recent years. Most travel agents have catalogs that list upcoming trips. More than 500 different tour operators are represented in the **Specialty Travel Index Online** at www.specialtytravel.com. Another good source of up-to-date information is the monthly *Outside* magazine,

available on newsstands throughout the country, or online at <http://outside-mag.com>.

Mountain Travel—Sobek (☎ 888/687-6235 or 510/594-6000; www.mtsobek.com) is perhaps the granddaddy of adventure-travel companies, guiding its own trips and acting as an agent for other outfitters. It began with river rafting, which is still its strong suit. **Backroads** (☎ 800/462-2848 or 510/527-1555; www.backroads.com) originally sold bicycle tours, but now has walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, trail running, and other trips. It's especially noteworthy for having options catering to adults traveling solo. **Bicycle Adventures** (☎ 800/443-6060 or 360/786-0989; www.bicycleadventures.com) offers biking, hiking,

and cross-country skiing, as well as other multisport options in the West Coast states, the Rocky Mountain states, and Hawaii. Tours are tailored to ability levels; some are designed for families, others for solo travelers. The venerable **Sierra Club** (☎ 415/977-5522; www.sierraclub.com) offers a number of trips each year.

These and other operators plan their adventures at least a year ahead of time, so ask them or your travel agent for their schedules and catalogs as far in advance as possible.

WHERE SHOULD I GO FOR . . . ?

BEACHES Miami (chapter 5) and Southern California (chapter 12) have the best beaches in the continental United States, though they all pale in comparison to the spectacular sands on all the islands of Hawaii (chapter 14).

The entire **Atlantic** is lined with sand where you can sun and swim in the summer, and you'll find no shortage of resorts and beach motels. If you try hard enough, you can even find a little undeveloped solitude at the **Cape Cod National Seashore** near Provincetown, Massachusetts (p. 57) and at **Cape Hatteras National Seashore** on North Carolina's Outer Banks (p. 285).

The **Maine coast** (chapter 2) is gorgeous, but too cold for actual swimming. The same goes for the lovely, dramatic scenery in **Northern California** (chapter 12) and along the **Oregon coast** (chapter 13).

BIKING Biking is a great way to see the country up close and personal. Except for the interstate highways, you can bike on most roads in the United States. Among the best are the **Maine coast**, **Cape Cod**, and the hills of **New England**—especially Vermont (chapter 2); Virginia's rolling **Shenandoah Valley** (chapter 4); the combined **Skyline Drive** and **Blue Ridge Parkway** in Virginia and North Carolina (chapter 4); the **Outer**

Banks of North Carolina (chapter 4); the dramatic **California coast** (chapter 12); the **Oregon coast** (chapter 13); the **San Juan Islands** near Seattle (p. 952); and the road circling the **Big Island** of Hawaii (p. 1018). Exceptional mountain biking is also available in most of **West Virginia's state parks** (p. 1036). Biking is an excellent way to see some of the national parks, especially **Shenandoah** (p. 233), **Yosemite** (p. 877), **Yellowstone** (p. 585), **Grand Teton** (p. 576), and **Glacier** (p. 567).

An ongoing nationwide program is converting some 50,000 miles of abandoned railroad beds into biking-and-walking paths. For a list, contact the **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy**, 1100 17th St. NW, 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20005 (☎ 202/331-9696; www.railtrails.org), which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2006.

Several companies and organizations offer escorted bike excursions, including **Backroads** and **Bicycle Adventures** (see "Adventure-Travel Companies," above). **American Youth Hostels** (☎ 301/495-1240; www.hiayh.org) has trips for its members. **CrossRoads Cycling Adventures** (☎ 800/971-2453; www.crossroads-cycling.com) offers nationwide excursions, including California to Massachusetts and Maine to Florida.

BIRDING The entire East Coast is on the Atlantic Flyway for migrating water birds and waterfowl. You can see them all the way from the Maine coast (chapter 2), particularly **Monhegan and Machias islands**, to the **Wellfleet Wildlife Sanctuary** on Cape Cod, and on south to Maryland's eastern shore, where **Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge** on the Maryland-Virginia line is the best bet (☎ 757/336-6122).

Shorebirds also migrate along the Pacific side of the country, with good viewing anywhere along the Washington

and Oregon coasts but especially in **Malheur National Wildlife Refuge** in southeastern Oregon.

Once endangered, the **bald eagle** is now widespread across the country. Dozens make their winter home at **Lake Cachuma** near Santa Barbara in California. In January they flock to the **Skagit River** north of Seattle to feast on salmon, and you can even spot them while riding a Washington State ferry through the **San Juan Islands** (p. 952). In September, look for them along **Alaska's southeastern coast** (chapter 14). Alaska also has many other birds not found in the lower 48 states.

In the Arizona (chapter 11) desert, **Ramsey Canyon Preserve** is internationally known as home to 14 species of **hummingbird**, more than anywhere else in the United States. **San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area** is another good spot in Arizona, with more than 300 species.

For tropical species, head to **Florida** (chapter 5), especially to **Everglades National Park** (p. 386).

Hawaii's (chapter 14) tropical birds are found nowhere else on earth, including the rare **o'o**, whose yellow feathers Hawaiians once plucked to make royal capes. Large colonies of seabirds nest at **Kilauea National Wildlife Preserve** and along the **Na Pali Coast** on Kauai; and **Molokai's Kamakou Preserve** is home to the Molokai thrush and Molokai creeper, found nowhere else.

For information about escorted bird-watching trips, contact **Field Guides** (☎ 800/728-4953 or 512/263-4795; www.fieldguides.com) or **Victor Emanuel Nature Tours** (☎ 800/328-8368 or 512/328-5221; www.ventbird.com). The **National Audubon Society** (☎ 212/979-3000; www.audubon.org) runs superb bird-watching programs for both aspiring and experienced naturalists.

CANOEING & KAYAKING There's a wide variety of rivers, streams, lakes, and sounds for canoeing and kayaking enthusiasts. In fact, most cities with rivers running through them now have a contingent of outfitters.

Out in the hinterlands, some of the best paddling takes place along **Maine's coast** (chapter 2) or through its 92-mile **Allagash Wilderness Waterway**, a series of remote rivers, lakes, and ponds.

In summer, it's hot and humid in **Florida's Everglades National Park** (p. 386), but winter offers great opportunities along a maze of well-marked trails. You can rent canoes at the main park center at **Flamingo**.

The peaceful lakes of Minnesota's **Boundary Waters Canoe Area** north of Minneapolis are another good choice.

Puget Sound's **San Juan Islands** (p. 952) near Seattle are enchanting when seen by canoe or kayak. **San Juan Kayak Expeditions** (☎ 360/378-4436; www.sanjuankayak.com) and **Shearwater Adventures** (☎ 360/376-4699; www.shearwaterkayaks.com) both have multi-day trips to the islands, and biologists and naturalists lead educational expeditions sponsored by the nonprofit **Sea Quest Expeditions** (☎ 888/549-4253 or 360/378-5767; www.sea-quest-kayak.com).

For a truly unique kayaking experience, you can paddle among the humpback whales taking their winter break in Hawaii. Contact **South Pacific Kayaks** (☎ 800/776-2326 or 808/661-8400; www.southpacifickayaks.com).

For general information, contact the **American Canoe Association**, 7432 Alban Station Blvd., Suite B226, Springfield, VA 22150 (☎ 703/451-0141; www.acanet.org), the nation's largest organization, for lists of trips and local clubs.

CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELDS The Civil War started in 1861 at **Fort Sumter**

in Charleston, South Carolina (p. 271). Battles raged all over the South during the next 4 years. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant took **Vicksburg**, Mississippi (p. 431), after a long siege, and Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman burned **Atlanta** (p. 240), but the most famous fighting took place within 100 miles of **Washington, D.C.** (p. 191). This area has more national battlefield parks than any other part of the country.

It won't be in chronological order, but you can tour them by starting at the battles of **Fredericksburg**, **Chancellorsville**, and **The Wilderness** in and near Fredericksburg, Virginia (chapter 4). Proceed north to the two **Battles of Manassas** (or Bull Run) southwest of Washington, then north across the Potomac River to the **Battle of Antietam** at Sharpsburg, Maryland. From there, go northwest through Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, to the **Battle of Gettysburg** (p. 173), the turning point of the war, in south-central Pennsylvania. Gettysburg is perhaps the most moving and well preserved of the battlegrounds. You'll also pass several battlefields driving through the **Shenandoah Valley** (chapter 4).

FALL FOLIAGE Fall in **New England** (chapter 2) is one of the great natural spectacles on earth, with rolling hills blanketed in brilliant reds and stunning oranges. The colors start to peak in mid-September in the **Green and White mountains** of Vermont and New Hampshire, and then bleed down into the **Berkshires** of Massachusetts. The colors move progressively south down the East Coast, through New York's **Hudson River Valley** (p. 132), into October, when bumper-to-bumper traffic jams **Virginia's Skyline Drive** through Shenandoah National Park (p. 233). The precise dates for prime viewing vary from year to year, depending on temperatures and rainfall, but the local newspapers and TV stations closely track the coloration.

Fall is also quite spectacular in the Rockies, especially in **Colorado** (chapter 10); in **West Virginia's mountains** (p. 1036); and in the **Wisconsin Dells** (p. 519).

Tauck World Discovery (© 800/788-7885; www.tauck.com), **Maupintour** (© 800/255-4266 or 913/843-1211; www.maupintour.com), and several other escorted tour operators have foliage tours; see your travel agent.

FISHING The United States can boast of record-setting catches and has every type of fishing invented—from surfcasting off **Cape Cod** or **Cape Hatteras** to flicking a fly in **Maine** or **Montana**.

Fly-fishing camps are as prolific as fish in the Maine woods. **Grant's Kennebago Camps** in Oquossoc has 18 of them, built on Kennebago Lake in 1905. Over in Vermont, **Orvis** (© 800/548-9548; www.orvis.com) runs one of the top fly-fishing schools in the country. See chapter 2 for more on New England fishing.

The nation's other great fly-fishing area is in the Montana and Wyoming mountains near **Yellowstone National Park** (p. 585), made famous by *A River Runs Through It*. The top river out here is Montana's **Madison**, with headquarters starting in the park, but cutthroat trout make the **Snake River** over in Wyoming almost as good—and the resort of **Jackson Hole** offers luxury relief within casting distance (see chapter 8).

Most ports along the nation's seaboards have deep-sea charter-fishing fleets and less expensive party boats (all you have to do is show up for the latter). The best tropical strikes are in the **Florida Keys** (p. 388) and off the **Kona coast** of the **Big Island** in Hawaii (p. 1018). **Alaska** (chapter 14) is famous for summertime salmon and halibut fishing, with the biggest in the **Kenai River** and on **Kodiak Island**, which has the state's best roadside salmon fishing.

FLOWERS & GARDENS Flower lovers have many opportunities to stop and smell the roses, especially in **Portland, Oregon** (p. 965), which calls itself the City of Roses. Many other cities have gardens of note, including **Atlanta, Boston** (p. 29), **Denver** (p. 666), **New Orleans** (p. 438), **New York** (p. 103), **Seattle** (p. 933), and **Tucson** (p. 766). **Longwood Gardens** in the **Brandywine Valley** (p. 172) is noted for its greenhouses as well as its grounds. The **Biltmore Estate** in Asheville, North Carolina (p. 294), has a walled English garden on its 25 acres. **Magnolia Plantation** near Charleston, South Carolina (p. 271), is famed for its azaleas, camellias, and 60-acre cypress swamp. If you like gardens from the Elizabethan era, head for **Colonial Williamsburg**, Virginia (p. 222).

It's also a spectacular sight to see the commercial flower farms of **Washington State's Skagit Valley**. In the spring, tulips and daffodils carpet the farmlands surrounding the town of **La Conner** with great swaths of red, yellow, and white. In March and April, the town hosts an annual Tulip Festival; the countryside erupts with color in a display that matches the legendary flower fields of the Netherlands. See chapter 13 for more on Washington.

You may also be interested in seeing wildflowers in bloom out West. Springtime brings glorious color to the **Texas Hill Country** (p. 660), just north of San Antonio. The **deserts of New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California** (chapters 11 and 12) are also magical in the spring. Two of California's prettiest viewing areas are **Anza-Borrego Desert State Park**, near San Diego, and the **Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve**, in the high desert near L.A. There are also beautiful spring blooms in the Washington Cascades, especially in **Olympic National Park** (p. 956) and throughout the **Rocky Mountains** (chapter 10).

A few travel companies have escorted tours of gardens, others include them on their general sightseeing excursions, and still others organize trips for local botanical gardens or gardening and horticultural groups. Check with those in your hometown for upcoming trips, or try **Maupintour** (☎ 800/255-4266 or 913/843-1211; www.maupintour.com).

GOLF & TENNIS You can play golf and tennis almost anywhere in the country, although the southern tier of states, where the outdoor seasons are longest, offer the best opportunities. In the Southeast, top golfing destinations are **Pinehurst**, North Carolina; **Hilton Head Island** and **Myrtle Beach**, South Carolina (chapter 4); and almost anywhere in **Florida** (chapter 5). You can get information about most Florida courses, including current greens fees, and reserve tee times through **Tee Times USA** (☎ 888/465-3356 or 904/439-0001; www.teetimesusa.com). This company also publishes a vacation guide that includes many stay-and-play golf packages.

In the Southwest, the twin desert cities of **Phoenix** and **Scottsdale**, Arizona (p. 754), have some of the country's most luxurious golf resorts. The same can be said of **Palm Springs** and the **Monterey coast** in California (chapter 12).

And **Hawaii** (chapter 14) has some of the most famous and most unique courses in the world.

Most of the nation's top golf resorts also have excellent **tennis** facilities. For the top 50 tennis resorts, see *Tennis* magazine's rankings each November. Good choices include the **Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne** in Key Biscayne, Florida (p. 382), Tampa's **Saddlebrook Resort—Tampa** (p. 409), and **Sea Pines Plantation** on Hilton Head, South Carolina (p. 267).

MOUNTAIN BIKING If mountain bikes are your thing, you'll find plenty of

dirt roads and backcountry pathways to explore. Many national parks and forests have a good selection of trails—**Acadia National Park's** (p. 98) carriage roads, for example, are unique. You can also take guided tours through 60 miles of connected trails in the **Sebago Lake area**, near the New Hampshire border, with **Back Country Excursions** (☎ 207/625-8189; www.bikebackcountry.com).

Out in Colorado (chapter 10), ski areas often open their lifts to bikers in the summer. **Winter Park** is considered the state's mountain-bike capital (☎ 800/903-PARK or 970/726-4118). The state's single best route, the 30-mile **Tipperary Creek Trail**, ends at Winter Park. Another popular area is the **Bryce, Zion, and Canyonlands** regions of southern Utah (chapter 10). Contact **Rim Tours** (☎ 800/626-7335; www.rimtours.com) or **Escape Adventures** (☎ 800/596-2953; www.kaibabtours.com), based in the town of Moab.

West Virginia (p. 1036) is a top destination for mountain biking; especially good spots are **Canaan Valley Resort** and **Backwater Falls State Park**.

The companies mentioned under “Biking,” above, also offer mountain-biking expeditions throughout the country and abroad.

NATURE & ECOLOGY TOURS Not just for bird-watchers, the **National Audubon Society** (☎ 212/979-3000; www.audubon.org) has its Ecology Camp on Hog Island off the Maine coast and another in the Grand Tetons of Wyoming, and it sponsors ecology excursions to such places as California's Death Valley. The **Sierra Club** maintains base camps in the Rockies and sponsors a wide variety of nature- and conservation-oriented trips (☎ 415/977-5500; www.sierraclub.com). On a tour sponsored by a conservation association, you'll learn more about our national parks than you could just by driving through them. To find out what's

available, contact the individual park you plan on visiting.

RIVER RAFTING The most famous place to run the rapids is the **Grand Canyon** (p. 782), with steep walls that tower above you as you race down the **Colorado River**. It's also the most popular spot, with bumper-to-bumper rafts in summer.

You may have less unwanted company on the Colorado upstream in **Utah**—which also has good rafting on the **Green River**. Call the **Utah Travel Council** (☎ 800/200-1160 or 801/538-1030; www.utah.com) and ask for a copy of *Raft Utah*. The **Snake River** south of Yellowstone National Park near Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is also a best bet. The Snake River flows into Idaho, where its wild Hells Canyon offers exciting rides—as do the Salmon and Middle Fork rivers. For more information, see chapter 8.

The **New River** cuts a dramatic, 2,000-foot-deep gorge through the Appalachian Mountains inside **New River Gorge National River Recreation Area** (p. 1039), near the town of Beckley, West Virginia, making it the most scenic rapids route in the east.

SCENIC DRIVES There are so many wonderful driving tours that it's impossible to offer anything like a comprehensive list, but here are just a few favorites.

In New England (chapter 2), the dramatic **Kancamagus Highway** (N.H. 112) cuts through New Hampshire's White Mountains between Lincoln and Conway. Nearby is the privately owned **Mount Washington Auto Road**, to the top of one of the tallest peaks in the east. The loop road in Maine's **Acadia National Park** is another beauty.

In the Southeast (chapter 4), you can't beat Virginia's **Skyline Drive** and the **Blue Ridge Parkway**, which continues south to North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains near Asheville.

You'll traverse a wild and undeveloped portion of Monongahela National Forest on the **Highland Scenic Highway** in West Virginia (appendix A), a drive that's especially beautiful during fall foliage season.

The **Historic Coastal Highway** stretches along the eastern coast of Florida, offering up prime ocean views and lots of wildlife.

In the Gulf South (chapter 6), the **Natchez Trace Parkway** winds through forested beauty in the states of Mississippi, Tennessee, and Alabama on the way from Natchez to Nashville. Another good option in this region is the stunning beauty (including trees, rock formations, and waterfalls) along the **Red River Gorge Highway** in Kentucky. For picture-perfect views of marshlands and their accompanying wildlife, look no further than the **Creole Nature Trail** in Louisiana.

In the Great Plains (chapter 8), a driving tour of Glacier Country in Montana puts you on **Going-to-the-Sun Road** through Glacier National Park, one of the great summertime drives in the country. Over the border in Wyoming, the **Beartooth Scenic Byway** (U.S. 212) from the northern part of Yellowstone National Park east to Red Lodge climbs over 10,947-foot **Beartooth Pass**, from where you can see mile upon mile of Wyoming and Montana mountains. Custer State Park in the **South Dakota Badlands** offers not one, but three scenic auto routes, though if you have time for only one, make it **Iron Mountain Road**.

In Colorado, a driving tour of the Western Slope follows the **Million Dollar Highway** (U.S. 550) across 11,008-foot **Red Mountain Pass**, an unforgettable drive. The **San Juan Skyway**, a 236-mile circuit that crosses five mountain passes, takes in the magnificent scenery of the San Juan Mountains,

including some wonderful Old West towns. And visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park should not pass up a drive on the exceptionally scenic **Trail Ridge Road**, especially in spring when the wildflowers are in bloom and wildlife is out in force.

In the Southwest (chapter 11), the **Kaibab Plateau—North Rim Parkway** winds itself through the trees of Kaibab National Forest before landing at the scenic northern edge of the Grand Canyon. In the **Arizona desert**, the drive from Phoenix through Prescott and Sedona includes huge red rocks and the cool oasis of Oak Creek Canyon. The desert's most spectacular scenery is in **Monument Valley** on the Arizona–Utah border in Navajo and Hopi country and the nearby **Canyonlands**.

Out in California and the Pacific Northwest (chapters 12 and 13), driving doesn't get any more dramatic than it is along the **California** and **Oregon coasts**.

Up in Alaska (chapter 14), one of the world's great drives begins in Anchorage and leads roughly 50 miles south on the **Seward Highway** to Portage Glacier; chipped from the rocky Chugach Mountains, the **Turnagain Arm** provides a platform for viewing an untouched landscape full of wildlife.

Out in Hawaii (chapter 14), the drive from Honolulu to Oahu's Windward coast on **Highway 61** offers an unparalleled view down from the near-vertical Pali cliff. The narrow, winding **Hana Road** on Maui will reward your driving skills with wonderful seascapes.

For a comprehensive list of the major scenic byways and roads in the U.S., check out the U.S. Department of Transportation's **America's Byways** website at www.byways.org; while you're online, be sure to request their free *America's Byways* map.

SKIING New England may have started downhill skiing in the United States, but for the best, forget about the East altogether and head for the deep powder out West.

Colorado (chapter 10) is endowed with more than two dozen ski resorts, including world-renowned Aspen, Vail, Breckenridge, and Wolf Creek; **Utah** (chapter 10) is home to Alta, Beaver Mountain, Snowbasin, Park City, and Deer Valley; and **Taos** (p. 815) in New Mexico has well-known slopes. In California's Sierras, **Lake Tahoe** (p. 870) is home to Alpine Meadows, Heavenly Resort, and the famous Squaw Valley USA. And there's **Jackson Hole** (p. 576) in Wyoming, plus the Big Mountain and Big Sky resorts nearby in Montana (chapter 8).

New England (chapter 2) does have good cross-country skiing, especially at the **Trapp Family Lodge Cross-Country Ski Center** (☎ 800/826-7000 or 802/253-8511; www.trappfamily.com) in Stowe, Vermont, and the entire village of Jackson, New Hampshire, which is laced with a network of ski trails maintained by the **Jackson Ski Touring Foundation** (☎ 800/927-6697; www.jacksonxc.org). Moving south along the East Coast, you'll find good options in Lake Placid, New York (chapter 3) and Snowshoe in West Virginia (appendix A). Out West, many of the downhill resorts mentioned above have cross-country trails as well. The best are in **Yosemite** (p. 233), **Yellowstone** (p. 585), and **Glacier** (p. 567) national parks. The rims of the **Grand Canyon** (p. 782) and **Bryce Canyon** (p. 721) national parks also present some unusual skiing venues.

WHALE- & WILDLIFE WATCHING

The best whale-watching on the East Coast leaves from **Provincetown** on Cape Cod (p. 56), where some boats sight humpbacks and finbacks with a 99% success rate from April to November.

On the West Coast, you can see Pacific gray whales during their spring and fall migrations from **Point Reyes National Seashore** north of San Francisco; **Depoe Bay** and other points on the Oregon coast; and the **San Juan Islands** near Seattle, which also have orcas. See chapters 12 and 13 for more information on these areas.

The port of **Sitka** (p. 992) in southeastern Alaska, **Kenai Fjords National Park**, and nearby **Seward** are great spots to watch humpbacks feeding in summer—plus a profusion of seals, otters, and other marine mammals.

For many humpbacks, the fall migration takes them south to sunny Hawaii (chapter 14), where they frolic in the warm waters from December to May. They are best seen here from **Mauī's west coast**.

For wildlife watching, you can see moose in **Rocky Mountain National Park** (p. 680) in Colorado, maybe a bear in the **Great Smoky Mountains** (p. 298), or alligators and other critters in **Florida's Everglades** (p. 388). But the best places to spot a variety of animals are undoubtedly the national parks out west and in Alaska. Without question, **Yellowstone** (p. 585) offers some of the top opportunities, with an abundance of elk and bison. Some of them will walk right up to your car. **Glacier** (p. 567) has this and more—mountain elk and the occasional grizzly bear. Alaska's **Denali** (p. 998) national park offers visitors a great chance to see grizzlies and other types of bears.

10 Tips on Accommodations

The United States has a wide range of accommodations: from roadside chain motels, to park lodges, to rental condos, to mammoth themed resorts, to historic

inns (where George Washington really did sleep!). And there are tons of excellent campgrounds located all over the country.

For a list of the major hotel and motel chains' telephone numbers and websites, see appendix D. In the individual chapters in this book, we also provide information on local reservation services, if available. Most state tourism offices put out directories or other information on available accommodations—contact them and they'll be happy to send you the information. Much of the information is also available on the states' tourism websites. A list of all 50 state tourism bureaus is available in appendix B.

If you prefer the intimacy and character of a bed-and-breakfast, there are several reservation agencies and online websites that deal solely with B&Bs. A few of these B&B-only websites include **Inntravels.com**, **Bed & Breakfast Inns Online** (www.bbonline.com), **North American Bed & Breakfast Directory** (www.bbdirectory.com), and **Bedand Breakfast.com**.

For historic lodging in the United States, look no further than the **Historic Hotels of America** (☎ 800/678-8946; www.historichotels.org), operated in conjunction with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We've noted several hotels rich in American history throughout the book.

For information on campgrounds and RV parks in the United States, pick up the comprehensive *Frommer's RV & Tent Campgrounds in the U.S.A.* You can also contact the **National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds** (www.gocampingamerica.com); or **KOA** (☎ 406/248-7444; www.koa.com), which operates numerous campgrounds and RV parks all over the country.

SAVING ON YOUR HOTEL ROOM

The **rack rate** is the maximum rate that a hotel charges for a room. Hardly anybody pays this price, however, except in high

season or on holidays. To lower the cost of your room:

- **Ask about special rates or other discounts.** You may qualify for corporate, student, military, senior, frequent flier, trade union, or other discounts.
- **Dial direct.** When booking a room in a chain hotel, you'll often get a better deal by calling the individual hotel's reservation desk rather than the chain's main number.
- **Book online.** Many hotels offer Internet-only discounts, or supply rooms to Priceline, Hotwire, or Expedia at rates much lower than the ones you can get through the hotel.
- **Remember the law of supply and demand.** Resort hotels are most crowded and therefore most expensive on weekends, so discounts are usually available for midweek stays. Business hotels in downtown locations are busiest during the week, so you can expect big discounts over the weekend. Many hotels have high-season and low-season prices, and booking even one day after high season ends can mean big discounts.
- **Look into group or long-stay discounts.** If you come as part of a large group, you should be able to negotiate a bargain rate. Likewise, if you're planning a long stay (at least 5 days), you might qualify for a discount. As a general rule, expect 1 night free after a 7-night stay.
- **Avoid excess charges and hidden costs.** When you book a room, ask whether the hotel charges for parking. Use a cellphone, pay phones, or prepaid phone cards instead of dialing direct from hotel phones, which usually have exorbitant rates. Don't be tempted by the room's minibar offerings: Most hotels overcharge for water, soda, and snacks. Finally, ask

about local taxes and service charges, which can increase the cost of a room by 15% or more.

- **Book an efficiency.** A room with a kitchenette allows you to shop for groceries and cook your own meals. This is a big money saver, especially for families on long stays.
- **Consider enrolling in hotel “frequent-stay” programs,** which are upping the ante lately to win the loyalty of repeat customers. Frequent guests can now accumulate points or credits to earn free hotel nights, airline miles, in-room amenities, merchandise, tickets to concerts and events, discounts on sporting facilities—and even credit toward stock in the participating hotel, in the case of the Jameson Inn hotel group. Perks are awarded not only by many chain hotels and motels (Hilton HHonors, Marriott Rewards, Wyndham ByRequest, to name a few), but individual inns and B&Bs. Many chain hotels partner with other hotel chains, car-rental firms, airlines, and credit card companies to give consumers additional incentive to do repeat business.

LANDING THE BEST ROOM

Somebody has to get the best room in the house. It might as well be you. You can start by joining the hotel’s frequent-guest program, which may make you eligible for upgrades. A hotel-branded credit card usually gives its owner “silver” or “gold” status in frequent-guest programs for free. Always ask about a corner room. They’re often larger and quieter, with more windows and light, and they often cost the same as standard rooms. When you make your reservation, ask if the hotel is renovating; if it is, request a room away from the construction. Ask about nonsmoking rooms, rooms with views, rooms with

twin, queen- or king-size beds. If you’re a light sleeper, request a quiet room away from vending machines, elevators, restaurants, bars, and discos. Ask for a room that has been most recently renovated or redecorated.

If you aren’t happy with your room when you arrive, ask for another one. Most lodgings will be willing to accommodate you.

In resort areas, particularly in warm climates, ask the following questions before you book a room:

- What’s the view like? Cost-conscious travelers may be willing to pay less for a back room facing the parking lot, especially if they don’t plan to spend much time in their room. If, on the other hand, you can’t do without that view of the ocean, the skyline, the Strip, whatever, then be prepared to pay extra for it.
- What’s included in the price? Your room may be moderately priced, but if you’re charged for beach chairs, towels, sports equipment, and other amenities, you could end up spending more than you bargained for.
- Is there a resort fee? These are recent and particularly heinous schemes (anywhere from \$5–\$20 per day!) dreamed up by hotel executives trying to make an extra dime off travelers. They ostensibly cover items (local calls, a bottle of water, a newspaper, the electricity in your room) that used to be free, but that you’re now being charged for. And these extra charges are *never* included in the quoted rate. You’ll find this sort of gouging mostly at resorts in the major resort destinations such as Florida and Hawaii, but we’ve seen even small chain hotels in some of these areas assessing this fee.