

Travel Websites

Specialties · By Simon Townsend · 9 min read

This article re-printed with permission. I recommend that as a travel writer you visit most of these websites.
LET ME KNOW BY EMAIL. - Simon

Travel websites

Maria Nguyen dreams of faraway places and exotic locations as she plans her next big adventure. Sydney Morning Herald

Getting ready

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade www.dfat.gov.au/travel

Before booking that dream holiday, make sure all the essentials are in order. Here you'll find information on renewing your passport and obtaining visas, a directory of foreign embassies and consulates in Australia and contact details of Australian missions overseas. Don't miss the Government's warnings and travel advice on destinations to avoid. For example, if getting shot is not high on your list of must-do holiday experiences, you should probably give Afghanistan a miss.

Travel Doctor www.traveldoctor.com.au

Recent publicity about deep vein thrombosis (DVT) has caused concern and confusion over what it is and who is at risk. Learn who is in danger and how to reduce the risks. The Staying Healthy section features fact sheets on other travel health risks, including malaria, rabies, dengue fever and cholera, as well as a useful travel health advisory service that generates health and vaccination reports based on your destination.

www.freetraveltips.com

Whether you're a first-time, seasoned, business or single traveller, this is a great resource for free travel tips. For those with young children, the Travelling with Kids link is a godsend. Find out how to pack for children, how to select a kid-friendly hotel and how to prepare for air, car and boat travel with rugrats. You can also print countdown checklists that set out things to do in the months, weeks, days and moments before you leave. That way, you won't leave behind something vital ... like the kids.

Getting Informed

Virtual Tourist www.virtualltourist.com

Virtual Tourist is a perfect example of the Net's ability to bring together communities of people who share the same interests. This is a free, colourful, slick, non-commercial and impressive forum created by travellers for travellers. One of the best ways to research a country is to read the tales of those who have gone before. Check out the Tools link for the currency and metric converter, time converter and language translator.

Lonely Planet www.lonelyplanet.com

This is the mother of all online travel guides. Catch up on world travel news with Scoop, find out everything there is to know about a particular country with World Guide and ask questions and share your experiences on the Thorn Tree. The cheeky sub-heading for the Australian and New Zealand Thorn Tree branch is "Do they speak English? Will I need a windcheater? Is there a bridge to NZ? Are kangaroos poisonous". Oh, stop it, guys, you're killing me!

Culture Connect www.cultureconnect.com/webcams

Take a break from text and peruse visuals from Web cams in more than 500 locations around the world. Try Israel's Isracam, South Africa's Kruger National Park cam, Italy's Florence Live cam and Sydney's own The Rocks cam, which lets you control the camera for two minutes.

Kodak - Taking Great Pics www.kodak.com/US/en/nav/takingPics.shtml

Dodgy photos have ruined many a holiday, so do your trip justice by learning how to take snaps you'll be happy to show off. Kodak offers the top 10 techniques and an online tutorial to get you started. Select the link, Picture Taking Tips for Any Situation, and then click on Travel Photography, where you'll find helpful advice on taking happy snaps while on holidays, supported by useful sample JPEG pictures.

Getting There

One World Alliance www.oneworldalliance.com

Most major airlines belong either to the One World group or Star Alliance. This means you can earn frequent flyer points by flying with airlines within the same group. The One Alliance group consists of Qantas, British Airways, American Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Aer Lingus and Finnair. There are links to each airline site, allowing you to search for flight and fare information and, in many cases, book flights and holiday packages online.

Star Alliance www.star-alliance.com

Members include Ansett, Air New Zealand, United, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways, Air Canada and Lauda Air.

Concierge.com - How to Get a Flight Upgrade www.concierge.com/traveler/perrin/upgrades.html

Sick of flying cattle class? This article offers a few tips on how to get a spot up the front of the plane where the attendants are extra-polite and the grog is free. You can improve your chances by becoming a frequent flyer; travelling on a Saturday, Tuesday or Wednesday; and choosing planes with large front cabins.

Frequent Flyer Tips www.frequentflyer.com.au

Make the most of your Ansett Global Rewards, Qantas Frequent Flyer and Fly Buys points. The calculator works out how many points are needed for a flight, while the destination guide determines where you can fly based on how many points you've accumulated. Visit the Bulletin Board for tips on maximising points and try the reverse auction service Bestfare. Place an offer for a flight and Bestfare tries to find a travel agent willing to sell at that price.

Sydney Travel - Freighter Cruises www.sydneytrav.com.au/cruise/freighter

Hitching a ride with a cargo ship is one way of enjoying a cruise without breaking the bank. Take your pick from freighters, smaller ships, island traders and tall ships. Sail the US, Europe and the Far East or take the Around the World in 88 Days tour.

Going places

While we have a love-hate relationship with our Kiwi neighbours, the top destination for Australian travellers, according to the Australian Bureau of Tourism Research, is New Zealand, with 453,000 of us visiting the Land of the Long White Cloud last year. Other popular destinations include the US and Canada, with 367,000 Australian visitors and the UK and Ireland, visited by 300,000 Australians.

Getting Help

Australian Travel and Tour Agencies Directory www.ozlines.com.au/agen.htm

If you're pushed for time or need advice on organising that special trip, why not get someone else to do all the hard work. More than 40 of the most popular travel agencies are listed on this directory, from Flight Centre, Harvey World Travel, and STA Travel, to Traveland, Getaway, and Travel.com.au. Let them help plan your trip, holiday packages, air fares and travel insurance.

Getting a Bed

International Hotel Search <http://internationalhotelsearch.com>

Book your own bed online. Here you'll be able to access, research and reserve accommodation from a database of about 42,000 lodgings in 140 countries worldwide. Just type in the city or country and the site will provide listings of hotels to suit any budget. You can also rent a car anywhere in the world and link to Euro-UK Rail information.

Asia Hotels www.asia-hotels.com

Choose accommodation from 24 destinations and 1,300 hotels and resorts across Asia. Read customer reviews on each hotel and search by customer ranking, city or facilities.

English Country Cottages www.english-country-cottages.co.uk

Renting a cottage in the UK is not as expensive as it sounds (although the state of the ailing dollar doesn't help). Select from an extensive range that includes converted farmhouses, medieval castles and cottages by the sea. The search facility allows you to be as fussy as you want. Looking for a pet-friendly cottage, with an indoor pool and an enclosed garden, that is handy to a decent pub? No problem.

Holi Swaps www.holi-swaps.com

Organising a house swap means one less expense to worry about. Listed on this site are thousands of people worldwide who are willing to swap homes for short and long stays. There's a handy FAQ section for newbies and a free tutorial on house swapping where you can learn about the eight types of exchange options and the risks involved.

Youth Hostel Association www.yha.com.au

Backpackers can't go past this site for cheap hostel accommodation around Australia and around the world - there are 4,300 hostels in 60 countries to choose from. Find out more about YHA member benefits, discounted travel products and services, and the overseas travel information nights. If you're not already a member, sign up online before you go.

Getting Around

UK Public Transport Information www.pti.org.uk

For those organising that big UK holiday, this is the most comprehensive guide to getting around. There's timetable and ticket information for all travel by rail, air, coach, bus, ferry, metro and tram within the UK and Northern Ireland and between the UK and Ireland. If Europe is on your itinerary, you can look up details of rail, ferry and coach journeys departing from the UK.

Travel Notes www.travelnotes.org/Travel/byrail.htm

Wherever you are in the world, one of the easiest ways to get around is train. This site helps you get the most out of rail travel, from choosing passes to getting timetable information. Find out about train travel and scenic tours in Africa, Asia, Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

NRMA www.nrma.com.au

If you want to drive on your trip, make sure you're up to date with overseas driving requirements. Click on Travel and Maps then choose the International Road Travel and Driving Overseas links. Find out what documents you'll need before hitting the road, how to get an International Driving Permit and how to take your vehicle overseas.

Getting Streetwise

Excite Travel <http://travel.excite.com>

Hit the Net before you hit the streets. Excite Travel profiles more than 14,000 destinations from Antigua to Zurich. Read up on where to eat, what to do, what to see, how to get around, and where the nearest tourist office is. This site allows you to book a car, a flight or a hotel room and is one of the best all-cities guides online.

Citysearch.com www.citysearch.com

While Citysearch offers guides to a select range of international cities, its main focus is the US. So if you're going to be in America, check on the attractions, nightlife, restaurants, shopping, events and what's playing in nearby cities. Everything you need to know to make the most of your US stay is here.

Timeout www.timeout.com/cityguides.html

For that must-do-in-this-lifetime London trip, Timeout will help you hit the ground running. Don't go past the London Shopping Guide, London Tickets (to see the best shows in town) and Essential Information for details on the Tube, post offices, banks, ATMs and tourists boards.

Getting Around Australia

Walk About Australia www.walkabout.com.au

How often have you heard it said we should see our own country before travelling the world? Investigate the history of Australia and the attractions of more than 1,400 cities and towns. You can also research accommodation and restaurants around the country.

Oz Backpack www.ozbackpack.com

This site is dedicated to backpacking in Australia and offers a directory of backpacker and budget travel essentials. Get advice on how to plan your trip, book a bed and find employment while on the road. Click on Tours and Activities to find links to surf and fishing spots, bush walks, camping sites and bike trails.

Gay Australia Guide www.gayaustaliaguide.com

Gay Australia Guide claims to be the definitive Australian travel e-guide for gays and lesbians. You'll find information on every capital city, beach resorts and the outback, ranging from accommodation and nightlife to activities and community groups. You can keep up to date with gay news and events around Australia by signing up for the free email newsletters.

Getting Connected

Techno Travel <http://home.worldonline.dk/?andersa/technotravel>

Postcards are nice but take forever to arrive. Phones are expensive and it's probably going to be 3 am in Sydney when you do get the chance to call home from some exotic location. The Internet is cheap and emailing avoids awkward time differences. Here are some useful links and tips for keeping in touch with loved ones via the Net. Check out the guides to free email and Web-based email, which lets you access messages from any Net-connected computer

Backpackers Cafe www.backpackerscafe.com

A great resource for backpackers featuring a list of Internet cafes to help travellers stay in touch wherever they are in the world. Other links include a backpacking essentials guide, backpacking tips, budget travel, camping, and backpacker hostels. If you're lost for words, the Travel Language section has a translation dictionary and also teaches you basic foreign phrases.

Where In The World Travel www.whereintheworld.co.uk

You can't get any more off the beaten track than with some of the tours offered here. Fancy a dive to visit the Titanic or a stay in the world's only underwater hotel? What about flying a state-of-the-art military aircraft and engaging in a dogfight for good measure? Other adventures include studying snow leopards in Nepal, dog sledding in the Arctic, chasing tornadoes across America and travelling more than 328,000 feet above Earth in the first ever commercial flight into space.

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