

The River Cities DAILY TRIBUNE

'Living In a Tech World' Column

For Release 5.31.2009

Rick Melchior (techguy@vccdigital.com)

Cars & Boats & Trains & Planes: Help in Planning Your Vacation Online

No matter what mode of transportation you want to use, your computer has travel planning information that makes the old trip to the AAA office totally unnecessary. The web giants like Expedia, Priceline, Hotwire, and Kayak are well known from their advertising if not actual experience. There are others that don't replace those sights but enhance them in providing broader planning information.

General Planning

A good place to start your planning and budgeting is **Travel Budget Calculator** (<http://www.independenttraveler.com/travel-budget-calculator/>). Travel expenses can add up faster than you might think. Here you can get a real cost of your vacation. By using a fill-in form it helps you estimate and include all of your likely expenses down to tips and spa treatments. You may need to go to one of the specific modes of travel sites to get an estimate of air fares and hotel prices but this one really helps to fill in those costs that you don't consider until the credit card bills hit you on your return. You can also see hotel reviews, in videos, from fellow travelers at Hotel Video Reviews (<http://hotelvideoreviews.com/index.html>). It is a new site and has more European hotels than American but it has promise to grow into a good resource.

Air Travel

Two of my favorite air travel sites are **SeatGuru** and **Farecast**. Once you have found your best price or settled on a particular airline you can go to SeatGuru (<http://www.seatguru.com/>) to find actual seating charts with information on limitations on recline, reduced legroom and where power ports are located. Farecast (<http://farecast.live.com/?>) is for those who plan in advance. This is a search engine where you enter your destination and travel dates. It provides a comparison of actual prices available from the major booking sites. It also gives you an evaluation of whether fares for that trip are likely to get more or less expensive if you wait to book. They offer a number of tools to help you compare the offers including an email alert for updated information.

Cruises

The best information on cruise travel that I have found is at CruiseCritic.com (<http://www.cruisecritic.com/>). This site offers a plethora of information on cruising in (more)

general and price comparisons for actual cruises. It also shares over 28,000 reviews written by people like us who have taken the trips. These reviews are searchable by cruise line, destination, type of cruise and other criteria.

Automobile

Unlike last summer, it looks like automobile vacations will be the choice for the budget minded in months to come. My favorite place to get an idea of what the basic costs of an automobile trip will be is Cost To Drive (<http://costtodrive.com/>). You just enter your starting place, destination and the make and model of your car and they provide not only a total gasoline cost estimate but also a idea of where you will need to stop for gas. The way gas prices change the accuracy level decreases if you plan too far in advance but by my math it is pretty accurate based on my known mileage. One interesting fact found on the site is a trip from New York to Los Angeles costs \$346 in a Hummer H3 and \$111 in a Toyota Prius. Once you have the costs estimated you might go to MilebyMile.com <http://www.milebymile.com/> especially if you are traveling by RV. This site provides road Maps, road condition photos, and other information. You just find your highway and you get an exit by exit description of what you will find at each exit. They even make it easy to download or print out the information.

Trains

The only authoritative website on US train travel I found was Amtrak (<http://amtrak.com>). There you will find that any trip you want to take is going to cost too much and take too long compared to other ways of travel. I suggest if want the romance of a good train vacation you try Eurail (<http://eurail.com>). Of course, first you have to get to Europe by boat or plane (see above).

You may need to update your plans during your trip and the easiest way to do that is online. So this guide to free wireless hotspots will help with that. Wi-FiHotSpotList.com (<http://www.wi-fihotspotlist.com/>) is a directory for finding Wi-Fi wireless Internet access.

So, stay in touch, email friends and relatives often and, most of all, enjoy your trip.

To ask a question or learn more about **VCC Digital's 'TECH GUY'** services which include a cost saving Personal Computer Consultant annual contract for individuals or business or computer repair go to <http://vccdigital.com> or email techguy@vccdigital.com