

Friday, April 7, 2000

SURVEY

Tallying U.S. travelers' views on vacations

Nearly half of us (46%) are more interested in taking a vacation this year than last — especially younger people (18-34) and those in Western states. But 41% feel travel is less affordable. The 23% who say it's more so are likely to be younger and poorer (household incomes below \$30,000).

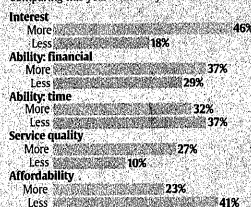
Travel digest

By Anne Goodfriend

Those are findings from the first Traveler Sentiment Index, conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America. Using a sample of 1,000 adults who traveled for pleasure in the past year, the trade group took the poll in February and plans to repeat it quarterly. Other findings: 37% — likely to be Southerners, 18-44 years old and parents with children at home — have less time to travel this year than last; 48% find quality of service about the same, while 27% say it's better.

Consumers' thoughts on travel

Comparing this year with last year:



Source: Travel Industry Association

By Julie Stacey, USA TODAY

TREND

Airport hotel spa aims to pamper

Never mind melatonin — how about a massage right by your gate? Starting in June, you can get it in Vancouver International Airport. The Spa at the Fairmont will be North America's first on-site airport hotel spa. The 6-month-old Fairmont Vancouver Airport hotel, one of only five hotels in North America that are actually in airports, is just a one-minute walk from the U.S. and international arrivals hall. Its spa will offer a luxury lineup including treatments and products to conquer jet lag — and treatment rooms for individuals, couples or groups.

ATTRACTION

Hike or bike, from sea to sea

The grand opening of the American Discovery Trail — the first coast-to-coast, non-motorized (no cars) trail in the U.S. — kicked off Tuesday at Cape Henlopen State Park in Lewes, Del. One of 16 National Millennium Trails, the 6,300-mile ADT will be unveiled at events all summer in rural areas, small towns and cities, and at historic and cultural landmarks in 15 states plus the District of Columbia. Passing through sites including the Daniel Boone State Forest, the home of President Harry Truman, Pony Express stations, Pike's Peak and the Golden Gate Bridge, most of the route is accessible to horses and mountain bikes as well as to people on foot. About 32 million people live within 20 miles of the trail, so it's viable for day trips or longer vacations. The 270-mile Maryland portion is opening through Thursday, with the final leg — nine segments spanning 366 miles in California — scheduled for Aug. 1-Sept. 3. Information: www.backpacker.com/adtr.



By Michael Meador, USA TODAY

Pike's Peak: One of the stops on the 6,300-mile American Discovery Trail.

Web watch

By Laura Bly

The view from here: North American vistas

Odds are you'll never watch a sunrise from the best campsite along California's Big Sur coast. The cliff-top perch at the Kirk Creek campground is available only on a first-come basis, and is taken almost every night.

But thanks to an interactive, 360-degree image at Virtual Guidebooks (www.virtualguidebooks.com), you can get a palpable sense of what you're missing. To be sure, not all of the site's 900 virtual-reality panoramas spanning western North America and Hawaii are worth the download time. (Among the head scratchers: a desolate parking lot at the Inuvik airport in Canada's Northwest Territories.) Though it includes lists of suggested guidebooks and fiction, Virtual Guidebooks isn't much help if you are inspired to track down real-life destinations. Still, zooming in on a sun-dappled view of Montana's Two Medicine Lake is a terrific way to inspire wanderlust.

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By Shawn Spence for USA TODAY

Breaking 50

In Bloomington, Ind., the Little 500 bicycle race outpaces even its own 'Breaking Away' myth

By Gregg Zoroya
USA TODAY

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — The trappings of raw drama — the kind that created myth around the Little 500 bike race here, in its 50th running next weekend — plays out even during qualifying laps.

Anne Holterhoff, arguably the finest female cyclist at Indiana University, falls down during a bike exchange. Yet she and the Kappa Alpha Theta team qualify.

The pole position in the men's 33-team race is taken by Delta Chi, the winningest crew in "Little 5" history. The No. 2 spot goes to the rookies of Dods House, who have never ridden a Little 500 and dropped their bike on their first qualifying effort, but blistered the track on their second.

And the inscrutable Cutters capture the No. 3 position. Stoic in their Wayfarers and electric-orange racing tops, they're led by 6-foot-5 senior Chris Wojtowich, 23, who saw Hollywood's homily to this race, *Breaking Away*, when he

was in third grade and never looked back.

The 1979 classic about class struggle and coming of age, which garnered a screenwriter's Oscar for Little 5 alumnus Steve Tesich, airs twice daily on the Indiana University cable channel this month.

This annual Little 500 bike race at the university mimics the Indy 500 car race by design, beginning with 11 rows of three bikes racing 50 miles over two hours, with pit stops to switch riders and a checkered flag at finish. For all the fanfare, there is a tendency to forget that this is an intramural sport. This isn't Bobby Knight and Hoosier-level intercollegiate stratosphere.

Please see COVER STORY next page ▶

Get to the Caribbean this fall, while the getting is good

By Laura Bly
USA TODAY

Faced with an armada of new ships, cruise lines are slashing prices on Caribbean sailings this fall. They're trying to pre-empt hurricane jitters and the trend toward last-minute booking with rates that start at less than \$500 per person, per week, including port charges — and are setting the stage for what could be the region's biggest-ever fare war.

"Every year, cruise lines and travel agents contend it's a buyer's market. This time, it's actually the truth," says Cruise Week editor Mike Driscoll. He notes that companies are floating cut-rate deals much earlier than usual, and he predicts that prices will drop below last year's already-discounted rates for

fall cruises in the Caribbean, the world's most popular cruising ground.

Behind the bargains: a classic case of supply vs. demand.

New arrivals such as Carnival's Victory, Celebrity's Millennium, Holland America's Zaandam and Royal Caribbean's Explorer of the Seas will all be based in Florida or San Juan this fall, contributing to a pool of about 3.2 million Caribbean cruise berths in 2000. That's up nearly a third from last year, at a time when cruise stocks are slumping and predicted bookings will increase by less than 10% worldwide.

"Throw in a traditional dip in demand for warm-weather autumn trips and memories of past hurricanes that snarled flights and disrupted cruise itineraries, and the Caribbean will go for a song," says Anne Campbell, editor of the

Web site CruiseMates.

Though some Caribbean prices have plummeted this winter and spring — inside cabins on NCL's Norwegian Dream were advertised last month at an eye-popping \$399 per person, per week for early April departures — rates seem to be holding steady for the summer season.

Still, "we're seeing a tremendous amount of last-minute, dump-the-space deals" for passengers who wait anywhere from a week to three months before deciding on a ship, says Patrick Webb of Galaxsea Cruises & Tours in Pomona,

Calif. He adds that by supplying widespread access to prices, the Internet is creating better shoppers. "Customers are starting to look at cruises as a commodity, and prices are reflecting that."

Flexible, Caribbean-bound vacationers willing to play chicken may score big by waiting, but even steeper discounts may carry their own price tags — including higher airfares or sold-out flights to and from home ports, particularly San Juan.

In most cases, our customers are spending more for a five-hour flight than they are for a seven-day cruise," says Jacquie Hurst of Uniglobe.com.

By Sam Ward, USA TODAY

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