

MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS  
IN A MODERN WORLD

# relating

Travel

## Book the Best Seat, Room, and More on Your Next Trip

AS YOU PLAN YOUR VACATION, FOLLOW  
THIS ADVICE FROM TRAVEL INSIDERS TO GET  
YOUR TIME AND MONEY'S WORTH.

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Photograph by Seth Mourra

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## ACCOMMODATIONS

**Avoid the expensive middleman.** To get the lowest price on hotel rooms—and potentially have the best experience—reserve directly with a property, says Melanie Lieberman, an editor at the travel site The Points Guy: “Sometimes hotel brands will refuse to honor a status or to give points for bookings made with a third party, which can certainly affect the quality of a stay.” She adds that how you reserve can also make a difference if you have a request, such as extra pillows in your room, or if you’re celebrating a special occasion.

**Location can matter.**

Light sleepers should look at a map to see if the hotel they’re considering is on a main or side street and near bars or nightclubs, says Kyle Valenta, an editor at the review site Oyster. If noise is a concern, request a room at the back of the building, where it’s often quieter.

**Your host should help.**

To make sure you won’t be disappointed with an apartment or house rental, know *exactly* what you’re getting into, says Ashley Rossi, an editor at the site SmarterTravel. Read house rules carefully—and contact the host with questions before booking. Ask about checkout procedures (will you need to sweep up or strip beds?) and must-need items (how well-stocked is the kitchen, really?).



## PLANE SEATS AND AIRFARE

**Time your purchase.**

The biggest mistake travelers make when it comes to airfare is procrastinating—though buying too far in advance doesn’t necessarily help, says Rick Seaney, founder of the site FareCompare. For the lowest prices, he says, buy five months out for international destinations and three months out for domestic trips.

**Comparison shop.** If your dates are flexible, go to [google.com/flights](http://google.com/flights) or [skyscanner.com](http://skyscanner.com) to see the cheapest time to fly. Adjusting your dates by even one day can save you hundreds. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday flights tend to be cheapest, says Seaney.

**Scout the ship.** If you’re not using a travel agent to book a cruise, the reviews site Cruise Critic compares ships and cabins. The reviews get really granular about buffet wait times, shore-excursion hits and misses, even the size of the closets. Prone to seasickness? Ashley Les, a travel agent with Protravel International, recommends a cabin on a lower level near the center of the ship, where it’s most stable.

If you're locked into dates, go to the flight-aggregator sites Momondo and Kayak to compare rates from third-party booking sites and airlines.

**Study the seats.** If you don't want to sit near the bathrooms or be among the last to deplane, visit SeatGuru, a site that curates airplane seat maps. Its color-coded system distinguishes between good and bad (e.g., nonreclining) seats. If you need a particular configuration—say, two aisle seats, a center seat, and a window seat—book directly with the airline. Third-party sites don't always allow you to pick.

## SPECIALTY ITEMS

**Prebook famous attractions.** Save time and disappointment by getting tickets to popular locations even before your trip, if possible. Some sites with multiple lines, like the Eiffel Tower, sell e-tickets that let you bypass the ticket office and go straight to security. Others, like the Empire State Building, offer skip-the-line express passes.

**Avoid lines at Disney.** Your park ticket includes FastPass+ service, which lets you book three attractions within the same park per day. If you stay at one of Disney's official resorts or hotels, you can reserve them 60 days in advance. If you stay elsewhere, you can book 30 days in advance (though you may find choices have dwindled). Either way, as soon as you buy tickets, put the rides on your calendar.

**Save on skiing.** Ski packages are least expensive just before the start of ski season and in the spring, says Rossi. Check out [liftopia.com](http://liftopia.com) for discounted packages and lift tickets. If you'll be skiing all winter and like to try more than one place, invest in a multimountain experience, like the Mountain Collective Pass or the New England Pass.

## LOCAL FOOD AND ACTIVITIES

**Use the concierge.** Get in touch before you arrive at the hotel, says Kenneth Abisror, chief concierge at Mandarin Oriental, New York. The more they know about you and your preferences, the more they can tailor recommendations. Many are happy to reserve tickets to attractions on your behalf.

**Spring for a good guide.** "Experienced guides are passionate about showing off where they live and go out of their way to share insider information," says Les. Consider booking a tour through ToursByLocals, and check out Airbnb Experiences, which offers activities hosted by locals (you'll find everything from animal encounters to cooking classes).

### Reserve tables you covet.

Plan your restaurant wish list ahead of time—to a point, says Lesley Suter, travel editor at the food site Eater. Nab a reservation for that splurgy tasting menu early: Some spots, like those with Michelin stars or a World's 50 Best Restaurants ranking, can require reservations six months out. To research other food options, Suter likes to browse city magazines, local blogs, and Instagram. (On the Instagram search page, type in a word like "eats" or "food" and the city name, then click on the Tags tab.) Once in town, she asks locals, including taxi drivers and guides, for favorites.

### Be open.

Alas, the best travel experiences often can't be planned. Suter's favorite tip for having memorable meals: Welcome serendipity. "Wander the city, look for a table on a plaza that beckons, and sit down," she says. "See a crowd of people around a steaming food cart? Join them. You won't regret it."

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