

# WebGuide | TRAVEL & RECREATION

**GETAWAY GURU** BY SUSAN BRESLOW SARDONE



## Auction Fever

Bid wisely for vacations and you could score

ALL THOSE INTERNET USERS PLACING BIDS ONLINE ARE NOT just buying Beanie Babies. Forrester Research predicts that Web travel auctions will pack in more than \$2 billion annually by 2003. If you haven't hopped on board already, should you? ■ Approach travel auctions with caution, as you would anything else that seems too good to be true. Before bidding, research the real cost of a trip. Overzealous buyers run the risk of paying more than retail. And don't forget to read the fine print: *All sales are final, absolutely no refunds, and blackout dates and surcharges apply.* Still, savvy and dedicated surfers can score legitimate vacation bargains at up to 80 percent off list price.

Get the first word on new sales by subscribing to Web site newsletters. **BID4VACATIONS.COM**, the largest vacation auctioneer, offers one to registrants who supply their credit-card information. It also maintains a cadre of "experts"—regular folks who've signed up to answer your e-mail about hotel and cruise offerings.

Specialty sites, too, provide e-mail auction alerts: **ADVENTUREBID.COM** tempts the intrepid with wild 'n' woolly outdoor trips, while **LUXURY LINK TRAVELER** [[luxurylink.com](http://luxurylink.com)] seduces voluptuaries with upscale packages. And **EBAY** [[ebay.com](http://ebay.com)], which peddles Disney VIP Getaway auctions, lets you set personal shopper preferences.

**BIDDER'S EDGE** [[biddersedge.com](http://biddersedge.com)], an aggregator that searches multiple sites, sanctions the most reliable offerings with a Trusted Auction designation. Sign up for the PingMe! service and you'll receive notification—via phone, pager, fax, or e-mail—to help you avoid being outbid just before your auction closes.

### LODGING

## House Exchanges

**TEMPORARY SWAPS**  
**Trading-Homes.com** If you can't afford a Parisian pied-à-terre, swapping houses with another family for a week or two is a great way to live like the (well-heeled) natives. Offered by affluent owners, properties featured here include a 17th-century Dutch canal house in the heart of Amsterdam. Browse international postings and bookmark the most tempting in your My Trading Homes page. Annual Silver membership (\$65) provides password-protected access to detailed listings; a Gold membership (\$95) includes a print directory published thrice yearly. [[trading-homes.com](http://trading-homes.com)]

**VACATION EXCHANGES**  
**Intervac International** Intervac pioneered house-swapping vacations nearly five decades ago and now handles 10,000-plus exchange offers annually in more than 50 countries. The downside is that the site's extensive database produces minimal descriptions, with cryptic codes such as "Dlx 5 bdrm priv villa; ae best location, pool te golf hs Virgin Islands." Direct contact information is available only to members, who pay \$50 per year for Web-only access; for \$111 each year, you also get a print directory. [[intervac.com](http://intervac.com)]

**RENTALS & HOSTING**  
**International Home Exchange Network** Will your next vacation take you to an efficiency apartment in Hong Kong or a golf-course condo in sunny Florida? In addition to traditional house swapping, this trading network arranges vacation rentals and hospitality exchanges: Two families agree to host each other at no charge, or a host and guest agree on a hospitality fee. Unlike members-only sites, the IHEN lets anyone browse its extensive listings and get direct e-mail links to homeowners. [[homexchange.com](http://homexchange.com)] —CARL FRANZ, LORENA HAVENS

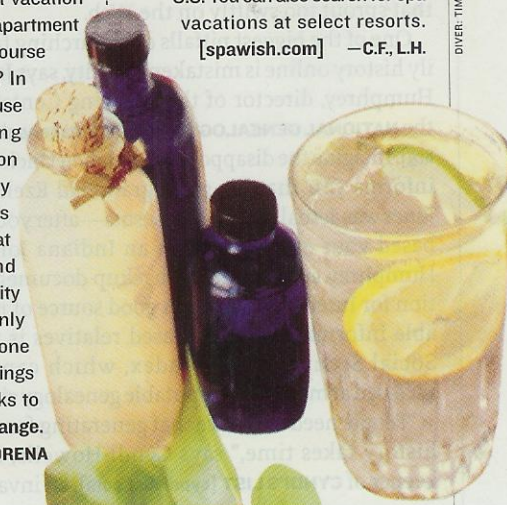
### DESTINATIONS

## Spa Vacations

**EXPERT GUIDANCE**  
**About: Spas** Forget Prozac. When it comes to soothing frazzled nerves, nothing compares to a relaxing soak in thermal hot springs, followed by a seaweed body wrap. Decide where to indulge yourself with About's lists of the world's best spas. Refine your search by special interest, such as weight loss or stop-smoking programs. The excellent Spa Reporter, found in the Spa Reviews section, details how you'll be treated at dozens of top facilities, and also rates nudity policies, pickup potential, and celebrity sightings. [[spas.about.com](http://spas.about.com)]

**GLOBAL LISTINGS**  
**World Health Spa Directory** Studies show that rather than being care-free, most vacations are actually stressful. In contrast, a spa sabbatical almost guarantees healthy meals, early bedtimes, and a bright-eyed return to work. Consult this directory for more than 800 spas around the world, including ultraluxurious retreats such as Le Meridien Limassol Spa & Resort on Cyprus. [[worldhealthspa.com](http://worldhealthspa.com)]

**GIFT CERTIFICATES**  
**SpaWish.com** So little time...so many spas. With the purchase of a SpaWish gift certificate, you can send a friend or relative (or even yourself) to any one of nearly 1,000 participating day spas in the U.S. You can also search for spa vacations at select resorts. [[spawish.com](http://spawish.com)] —C.F., L.H.



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