

## Thrifty travel tips for summer fun

LOS ANGELES (5/27/09)--More Americans are planning to stay put during the summer travel season due to financial concerns.

Only 42% of Americans plan to spend their time and money on a vacation this summer, compared with 49% who planned to travel in 2005. A third have already cancelled at least one trip because of squeezed budgets (*LATimes.com* May 19).

Despite the pressure on purse strings during tough economic times, there are ways to have frugal fun in the sun without burning a hole in your wallet (*Readers Digest* June):

- **Budget basics.** Identify how much you have to spend on your excursion. Consider expenditures on meals, souvenirs, transportation, lodging and entertainment. Be sure to include funds for unexpected expenses, and take into account any membership or organizational discounts such as AAA.
- **Flight control.** If possible, check flights and cost information at 12:01 a.m. Wednesday in the time zone where the airline is based. You also can track the price of flights before, and after, you book them. Websites like *yapta.com* will notify you if the rate drops, enabling you to contact the airline for a refund of the price difference.
- **Wheels and lodging deals.** Use bargain travel sites like *Hotwire.com* to search for low rates on rooms and rental cars. When renting a vehicle, choose a location close to your hotel or airport to avoid airport convenience fees. Use **Hotels.com** when searching for lodging. The site offers discounted rates on rooms and a price match guarantee.
- **Travel insurance.** This relatively inexpensive "extra" may save you a lot of hassle and expense even if your trip costs only a few hundred dollars. Basic travel insurance will cover things like delays, lost baggage and emergency medical expenses. Use *insuremytrip.com* to compare plans.
- **Last minute planning.** When you have little time to plan, use **lastminute.com** to find travel packages that include transportation and lodging. Other sites, like **airfarewatchdog.com**, list reduced prices for last-minute air travel.