

Time Your Own Tour

Why bother to hire a guide when you can explore at your leisure? Hop-on, hop-off tours put you in charge



ON A ROLL
Tourists catch a lift between attractions on a Big Bus Tours bus in Washington, D.C.

■ One of the quickest ways to get your bearings in a strange city is also one of the cheapest: a hop-on, hop-off bus or trolley tour. These narrated rides—long familiar in Boston, Hollywood and London—are now available in New Orleans, Salt Lake City and many other American cities. The vehicles run a loop route that hits tourist

attractions, allowing riders to get off to explore at their leisure. When done, they catch the next bus—no pricey cabs, rental cars or parking woes. Typically, tickets last for 24 or 48 hours, with 10 to 20 stops. Passes (from \$26 to \$100, depending on the city) may net you discounts on local attractions, too. —*Laura Daily*



ITSY-BITSY INNS

■ There's a new way to save on hotel bills—but it's not for the claustrophobic. In London, Amsterdam and New York, micro-hotels offer tiny accommodations (a mere 60 to 170 square feet) at tiny (for big-city) prices: \$89 per night at the Pod Hotel or \$149 per night at Yotel, both in midtown Manhattan. Cleverly engineered down to the inch, micro-hotel rooms squeeze in flat-screen TVs, media hubs, free Wi-Fi and custom modular furniture. It's a trend that's sure to spread: Pod and Yotel plan to open locations in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., within the next few years. —*L.D.*

Health Crisis Overseas? Be Ready

■ You may feel fine when you leave for vacation, but accidents and illnesses happen, and your health insurance policy may be worthless abroad. Even plans that do offer foreign coverage often have low limits. Our advice: Prepare.

1 Before you go to an exotic locale, visit a travel clinic for shots. Your local health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, cdc.gov, can help you find one.

2 Check your health plan. If you're not covered overseas, ask travel insurers like Allianz Global Assistance, Travel Guard and Travelex Insurance Services about short-term health plans.

3 If you want to be taken to the hospital of your choice, buy supplemental air-medical transport in addition to health insurance. One well-priced option is MedjetAssist (medjet.com).

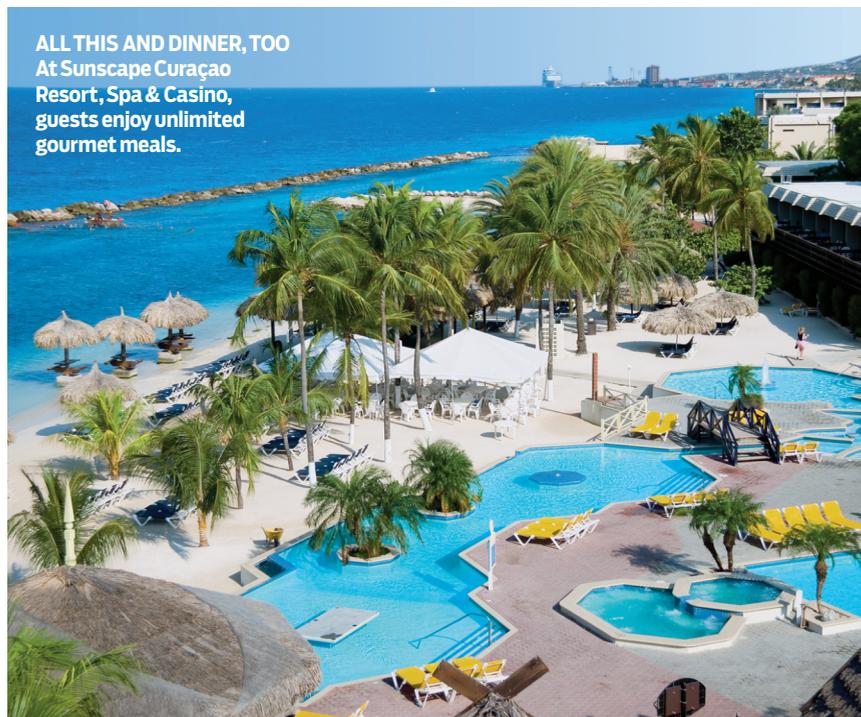
4 Pack a list of your medications and physicians, including contact information. Leave a signed HIPAA release form with your doc, allowing him or her to release any medical info. —*L.D.*



TRY THIS VACATION

All-Inclusive Resorts

New fixed-price getaways let you lock up your wallet and relax in elegance



ALL THIS AND DINNER, TOO
At Sunscape Curaçao Resort, Spa & Casino, guests enjoy unlimited gourmet meals.

Why they're hot

All-inclusive resorts—those whose daily rates cover food and drink as well as lodging—used to be mainly found in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. But in the past five years these one-price vacation spots have been popping up on smaller Caribbean isles, like Curaçao, and in Costa Rica and Panama. Plus, competition has forced an upswing in quality. Forget the watered-down booze, tacky wristbands and bad buffets. Today's all-inclusive resort might boast gourmet restaurants, butler service or rooms with private pools. "There's an all-inclusive for every budget and every taste," says Tom Carr, president of All Inclusive Outlet travel agency.

What they cost

Traditional all-inclusive resorts such as Club Med and Palladium start at less than \$100 a night per person, while more luxurious properties start at around \$175. The base price usually includes three meals daily, all beverages, lodging, activities, entertainment and tips. Add-ons like local tours or spa treatments can get pricey, so ask about resort credits when negotiating your rate. Palace Resorts, for example, gives guests \$500 or more in credit to spend at its spas and golf courses and for other amenities. For the best off-season deals in the Caribbean with the lowest hurricane risk, travel in May or between September and mid-December. Some of the best prices

year-round can be found in Mexico's Riviera Maya, on the country's south-east coast.

Buyer beware

Read the fine print. Avoid what insiders call the conditional all-inclusive: "Each property is different," says Angie Sievers, business development manager of Apple Vacations travel agency. "Some truly include everything; others have restaurants, premium drinks or activities that cost extra." A good travel agent can help you zero in on the best resorts for you. Or scour online travel rating sites and look for patterns in the online comments.

A few resorts to consider

Looking to gather the entire family? Check out Karisma's Azul hotels in Cancún; Dreams Resorts throughout Mexico; or Iberostar in Mexico, Jamaica or the Dominican Republic. Want a kid-free zone? Check out Jade Mountain resort in St. Lucia, El Dorado Spa Resorts in the Riviera Maya, Couples Resorts in Jamaica, or Excellence Resorts in Mexico and the Caribbean. Other options: The Dominican Republic's Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Punta Cana features Vegas-style gaming on the beach. And Zoëtry Wellness & Spa Resorts in Mexico and the Dominican Republic focus on health, serenity and organic foods. That sort of Zen mentality was unheard of among hard-partying resort goers 10 years ago, says Travis Katz, CEO of Gogobot, a social travel website. "Like the baby boomers served originally by Club Med, the all-inclusive has grown up." —*Laura Daily*