

Across the U.S., deals aplenty

By MICHELLE HIGGINS
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Last summer, Lisa Clark, a management consultant from Los Angeles, spent about three weeks in Europe, touring Scotland by car, spending a weekend in Paris and biking in Tuscany. Though it wasn't cheap (France and Italy cost roughly \$4,300), Clark made it work by using frequent flier miles to get there and by buying packaged tours to contain her expenses.

But after using up her miles, watching airfares climb and taking stock of her savings, Clark, like so many Americans, is scaling back her vacation ambitions this summer.

"I did the blowout trips last year," said Clark. "I said, 'This year I'm not going to do it.'"

Instead, she plans to do some wine-tasting in her home state of California and save some money by visiting and staying with friends in Boulder, Colo., and on the East Coast. That way, she said, "I don't have to pay for a hotel. I might pay for taking them out to a nice dinner."

This summer, the best travel deals may be right near home. The weak dollar is making many Americans cross Europe off their lists, Rising airfares make it hard to justify a trip to far-flung places. Even Canada isn't the bargain it used to be.

But stateside, things are different. In light of rising fuel costs, tightening travelers'

wallets and the overall economy, many cities are flooding the Internet with discounts and promotions.

Destination DC, a marketing organization for the nation's capital, is offering three-night weekend stays for 30 percent off at www.washington.org. Philadelphia is promoting two-night packages at www.gophila.com/summerfun through Sept. 7 that come with a \$50 American Express gift card. Even ritzy Aspen, Colo., is offering visitors who book two or more nights at a participating hotel a \$50 gas voucher and two free bike rentals. See www.aspenchamber.org for information.

Travelocity.com has been touting "All-American Offers" including U.S. national park trips from \$729 and \$100 off five-night Colorado vacations. And Expedia is advertising up to 30 percent off U.S. destinations at www.expedia.com/summersale.

The big challenge this year is finding cheap airfares. Domestic fares are up 20 percent on average for departures through Aug. 20, according to Farecast.com, which offers airfare predictions. But rather than hold out for a fare sale, travelers may do better by heading to destinations with deep discounts, which can help offset rising airfare prices.

For example, a slowdown in tourism combined with a rise in new hotel rooms is turning Las Vegas into a bargain hunter's dream. Sure it's the desert in the summer, but travelers can find

SEE HOME. PAGE 4H
rooms as low as \$69 a night at Bally's or \$75 a night at Harrah's. Looking for luxury? The Bellagio is offering Web specials for \$179 a night. The Mirage has rates as low as \$81 a night.

Searching winter-oriented Web sites such as Ski.com for summer promotions can turn up some real gems.

For summer, the site is offering two nights in a one-bedroom residence, daily cooked-to-order breakfast, a \$200 dinner credit and two spa treatments for \$478 a person at the Sky Lodge in Park City, Utah. For the Aspen Music Festival, which continues through Aug. 17, it is offering four nights in a two-bedroom condo at Aspen Square and a three-event festival pass from \$613 a person, based on four people sharing. During the winter holiday season four nights in the same two-bedroom would cost \$1,085 a person.

But it's not just off-season destinations that are slashing rates. Take Myrtle Beach, which used to fill up months in advance for summer. In the last five years, the Myrtle Beach area, including Little River and Pawleys Island, has added nearly 12,000 rooms. The growth has kept prices down as hotels and rental units compete for guests.

This summer, a family of four can stay for three nights at the Compass Cove Resort for \$597, including daily buffet breakfast, by booking the Family Value package. The Sea Watch Resort, where oceanfront studios start at \$125 a night, is offering 15 percent off July 6 to 31.

Many theme-park destinations are offering deals too. Compared with last summer, hotel rates have dropped 7 percent in Orlando and 12 percent in Anaheim, Calif., home of Disneyland, according to Expedia.com. Under its Red Hot Deals section, Hotels.com has been featuring rates from \$69 a night at Knott's Berry Farm Resort Hotel and \$132 a night at the Sheraton Anaheim Hotel, both near Disneyland. Near Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Fla., Hotels.com is advertising rooms at the Hotel Royal Plaza from \$99.

