

## How To Pick Great Destinations

**Finding great vacation spots is not as easy as it sounds. Try these tips and tools to get you going**

By [Randy Ross](#) – October 17, 2008

After being laid off from my job a year ago, I decided to take a four-month, solo trip around the world that included stops in Venezuela, Greece, South Africa, Bangkok, Vietnam, Cambodia, Australia and New Zealand.

To prepare for the trip, I read chirpy guide books full of four-color photos. I visited government Web sites that listed so many exotic diseases that I was afraid to leave my apartment, never mind the country. Which sources could I trust?

As in real life, the truth was somewhere in the middle: I never got sick or had problems with crime. But many accommodations and modes of transport were sketchy. In the end, I found both the guide books and the government Web sites to be somewhat biased -- the former too rah-rah, the latter overly cautionary.

So in [Tips&AdviceBeat](#), my goal is to help you save time, aggravation and money with balanced, real-world advice. Every couple of weeks I'll look a various tools, techniques and news updates that will help you plan a trip AND survive to happily tell the tale. To get you going, my first post explains how to select appropriate travel spots.

### How to Pick Great Destinations

Finding great vacation spots is not as easy as it sounds. You've got a big world to choose from and a limited amount of time and resources. Try these tips and tools to get you going.

To narrow your focus, zero in on what you like to do at home and when you travel. Here's a list of common options and recommendations.

#### *Sight-seeing:*

Start with a list of [World Heritage Sites](#). These are forests, mountains, lakes, deserts, monuments, buildings, etc. of exceptional cultural or natural importance, according to UNESCO. There are 878 such sites in the world. A word of caution, some of these spots are now overrun with tourists, so pick some alternatives or at least brace yourself for the crush.

For example:

- [Angkor Wat, Cambodia](#): The temples are fascinating, but I became templed-out after one day. Passes are available for one day or three days and will cost more than a decent guest house. (I paid \$40 for a three-day pass). Also, due to the crowds, I couldn't get a guide, which I'd recommend. Upshot: Once you've booked a room, ask the hotel to book you a guide.
- [Ha Long Bay, Vietnam](#): Mob scene, worse than a Red Sox game during pennant season. Still, it's worth a day or two.

2) *Participatory Sports:*

- For wind and water sports in the Caribbean and South America, check out [Vela Windsurf Resorts](#). As a beginner, I had good luck at the Margarita resort in Venezuela. For more exotic options, consider [Club Mistral](#) with some caveats. The company is based in Germany, and the salesman who responded to my e-mails had a marginal grasp of English. In addition, when I started asking too many questions, he simply stopped responding.
- For extreme sports, like [bungy jumping](#), [white-water rafting](#), [river boarding](#) (white-water rafting with just a boogie board), you can't go wrong with New Zealand. But New Zealand isn't cheap. If you happen to be in South Africa, try bungy jumping at the [Bloukrans Bridge](#), which costs less and is almost twice as high as the highest jump in New Zealand. [Bungy jumping](#) is available in other countries, including France, Bali, and Kuala Lumpur.
- For more ideas, check out our [SportsloversBeat](#).

**[Dancer in Berlin's Love Parade]**

(Photo: [jpatokal/Wikimedia](#))

Loveparade-girl-jpatokal.jpg

3) *Partying and Festivals:*

[Rough Guides](#) has an interactive list of major parties and festivals around the world. You can sort the list a number of ways including by destination, theme or date range.

- If you're looking for drugged-out raves, check out a [Full Moon party in Ko Pha Ngan](#), Thailand, or the [Amsterdam Cannabis Cup](#).
- Just want to enjoy some basic nudity? You probably can't miss with [Berlin's Love Parade](#) (right) held the second or third weekend in July.
- If food festivals are more your style, the [Adelaide, Australia, Festival of Arts](#) might be a good bet.

If you have any suggestions or questions you'd like me to answer in future posts, feel free to post a comment right here on [Tips&AdviceBeat](#), or e-mail me at [publisher@rosstravels.com](mailto:publisher@rosstravels.com).

## Experience At-a-Glance

*Great links to help you plan your itinerary.*

- [World Heritage Sites](#) -- UNESCO chooses 878 of the world's most wondrous natural sights, including forests, mountains, lakes, deserts, monuments, and buildings.
- [Bungy Jumping Sites](#) -- AJ Hackett offers jumping in New Zealand, Macau, Bali, Germany, Kuala Lumpur, and other locations. There is no excuse not to go!
- [Best Parties and Festivals](#) -- Whether you're looking for something civilized like an art or food festival, or something edgier like a full-moon rave or cannabis celebration, the Rough Guides site makes it easy to find.

*Other resources:*

- [World Party: The Rough Guide to the World's Best Festivals](#) (\$16.49, plus shipping, paperback)