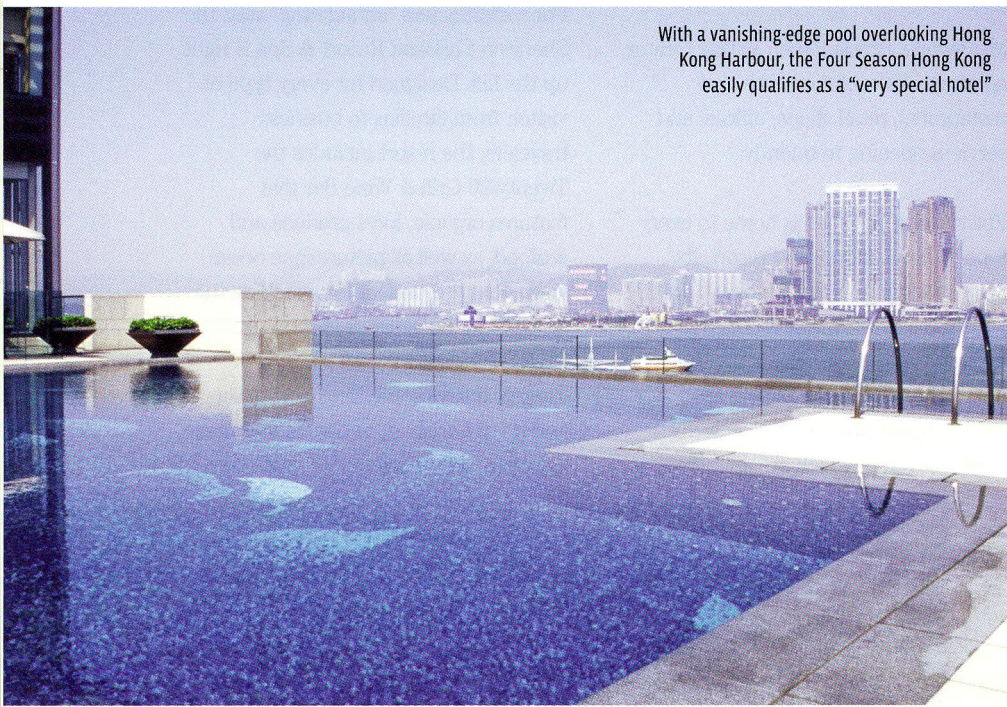


Tips From The Travel Pros



With a vanishing-edge pool overlooking Hong Kong Harbour, the Four Season Hong Kong easily qualifies as a "very special hotel"

I'm good at finding off-the-beaten-path destinations. I know lots of very special hotels. But, when it comes to getting the cheapest airfare and the absolute lowest price lodging, I leave that to the specialists.

Here's what the best-of-the-best have to say:

Are the best prices on airline Web sites?

"No," says John DiScala, *very* frequent flyer and owner of the popular Web site JohnnyJet.com. "It's a huge mistake. Most members of one particular airline's frequent flier program are so single-minded, that they only price tickets on that airline's Web site. Travelers should shop fares using multiple search engines."

"There isn't one Web site out there that has the absolute cheapest price for airfares, hotels, car rentals, cruises, and package deals, so the trick is to do your research and check them all to see who has the best deal at that moment in time. Prices can vary greatly even for

the same flights." He also recommends signing up for airline newsletters to stay current on specials and deals.

Peggy Coonley of Serendipity Traveler advises: "Use a multi-search engine and then book directly with the airline. It also helps if you have a flexible schedule."

Best multi-search engines?

JohnnyJet.com has a good one. I also like Airfarewatchdog.com where I can file a fare alert, check the top 50 bargain fares, use a flexible-date search engine, and compare airline baggage fees (only Southwest and JetBlue don't charge them).

What's the best way to use frequent flyer miles?

When I asked Peter Greenberg, travel editor at CBS News and owner of PeterGreenberg.com, he advised using miles for off-peak travel. For example, an AAnytime coach seat to Hawaii on American Airlines or one of its partners is 45,000 miles most days, but using the

Mile SAAver award, it can be as few as 22,500 miles.

JohnnyJet.com's DiScala adds:

"American Airlines has just launched a new tool called Award Map that makes searching for and booking award travel with your AAdvantage miles so much easier."

Be sure to use your miles before you lose them. According to AwardWallet.com, there are about 10 trillion unused FF miles in circulation and 20 percent or more will never be redeemed. Delta miles don't expire, but other airlines require activity on the account to prevent expiration.

What insider info do the pros use to get good airfares?

Greenberg says, "Don't limit yourself to U.S. carriers or the national airline of the country you're visiting. Foreign carriers offer perks in economy and business that outpace U.S. airlines, and they are allowed to pick up passengers in a country between their base and their final destination." For example, award-winning Air New Zealand stops in Los Angeles en route from Auckland to London. Passengers traveling from LAX to London will likely enjoy lower fares and a less crowded plane than on a standard LAX-London flight. Ditto Air Tahiti Nui passengers flying the LAX-Paris leg of a Papeete-Paris flight.

5-star hotel rooms at 3-star prices?

Bob Diener, co-founder of Hotels.com, says: "You can get the best prices for hotel rooms by picking up the telephone. Hotels give us rates that can't be published online, but you can often get them by going direct. Luxury rooms average around 30 percent lower. Booking well in advance will give you the best chance of getting a good deal — 14 to 21 days before travel.

Going cycling in New Zealand?
Air New Zealand doesn't charge
for carrying bikes

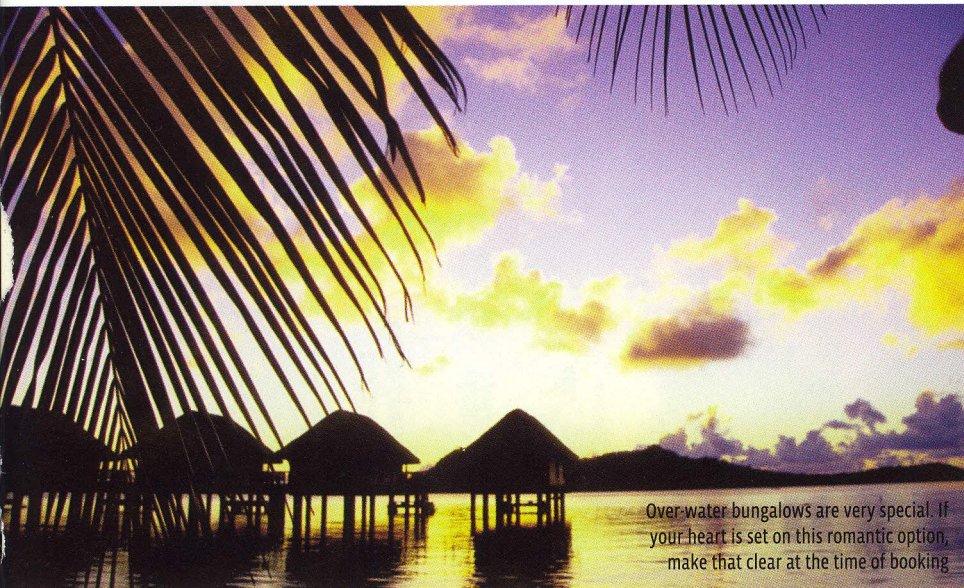


Some luxury hotels will offer three nights for the price of two, or four nights for the price of three. Always check this option.”

I agree with Diener about calling hotels. When I do this, I ask for the “direct booking” price, which is a nice way of saying “the lowest price because you don’t have to give a commission to a travel agent or Web site.” I also think it’s a good idea to call the hotel a day or two before your arrival to see if they have lower last-minute rates or special packages.

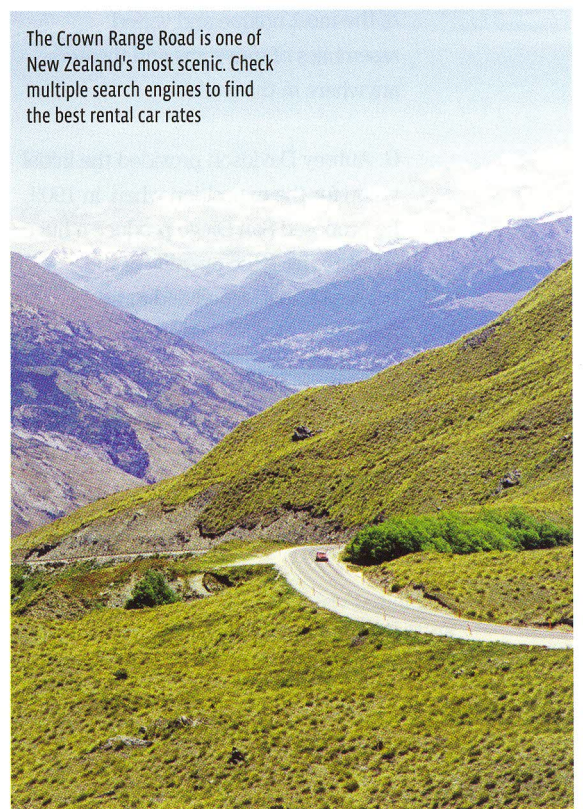
What are the best resources for independent travelers?

I’m a big fan of guidebooks, both online and in print. Before becoming the travel editor of *Ranch & Coast*, I wrote books in the Frommer’s series and I know how much valuable information they offer. I also hope you’ll visit AuthenticLuxuryTravel.net where I write about ways for travelers to connect with the local lifestyle and create wonderful memories. ELIZABETH HANSEN



Over-water bungalows are very special. If your heart is set on this romantic option, make that clear at the time of booking

An African safari doesn't have to involve roughing it. This suite at Phinda Private Game Reserve in South Africa is quite luxurious



The Crown Range Road is one of New Zealand's most scenic. Check multiple search engines to find the best rental car rates