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This Year, The Heat's Really On

And if you think there's no upside to the subprime mortgage fiasco, consider this: "In Anaheim, there's a very interesting story going on," Bason said. As it happens, that area of Southern California near Disneyland is home to the headquarters of various firms involved in the meltdown. As a result, "business travel has fallen off, and we've been able to get good deals around Anaheim, especially midweek."

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Otherwise, this is the year to think outside the box. On home-exchange sites such as HomeExchange.com (<http://www.homeexchange.com>) and Intervac (<http://www.intervac.com>), for instance, you can swap your place with someone who dwells somewhere more exotic. Maybe consider saving on food costs by renting a home at your intended destination through an online broker such as Rentalo.com (<http://www.rentalo.com>) or Vacation Rentals by Owner (<http://www.vrbo.com>).

Or how about staying at, say, a university while visiting Britain (<http://www.venuemasters.co.uk>, 011-44-114-249-3090), where rooms with shared bathrooms in June can be found at the bargain price of \$43 a night?

Further down the accommodations food chain, this might be the year to try a camping vacation. "If you go to the Smoky Mountains it will be crowded," Leffel said, "but there are definitely national parks and state parks that won't be." A camping vacation may be the biggest summer bargain going, although there are financial traps.

"You have to have a plan before you walk into a camping store," said Henry Tom, whose Web site BeginnerCampingTips.com (<http://www.beginnercampingtips.com>) could not be more aptly named. "Shoppers are very vulnerable, and it's

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easy to go overboard and end up spending as much as you could at an all-inclusive resort."

Tom recommended researching the amenities and facilities at campgrounds in the area you want to visit (<http://www.ecamping.com> is one searchable site) and considering car camping the first time around. ("Throw a tent in your car and bring a few luxuries with you," Tom said.) For \$17, he sells an e-book on his Web site that has an exhaustive amount of information for the first-time camper.

Summer Summary

However dour their moods, all of our experts agreed that Americans are as intrepid as ever when it comes to summer vacations. "They're definitely still traveling," said SmarterTravel's Banas, sounding impressed and surprised at once. "Everybody is working harder than they ever have," said Sharak of the cruise line association. "The mind-set is, I have these few vacation days, I deserve this."

Even the contrarian author of "Make Your Travel Dollars Worth a Fortune" was struck by our resilient populace. "Everything that could have gone wrong *has*," Leffel said, "and yet people are still traveling."

In other words, our travel dollars might no longer be worth a fortune, but our vacation time is as priceless as ever, if not more so.

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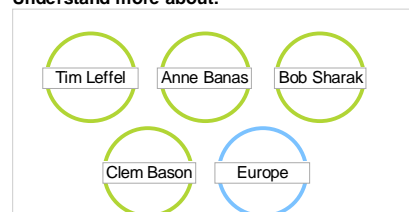
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