

Sizzling Summer Savings:

Expert tips for your next trip

by Janine Boldrin

Whether you like the excitement of amusement parks, sitting on a sandy beach or traveling to Europe, service members have lots of ways they can spend their summer break (and their money!) But with so many travel options available, how do they find the best vacation for their situation while not missing out on any big military discounts?

We asked three travel experts to share their tips for great vacations that also have some of the biggest military discounts.

See Mickey with hints from this military Disney expert:

"Benefits and discounts available to the military on Disney vacations change constantly, especially from year to year," says Steve Bell, who runs a web site devoted to the military and traveling to the Disney properties.

Bell has been in the military for just shy of 30 years, but during his first few years as an Air Force Reservist, Bell's civilian job was working full-time at Walt Disney World. His employment experience combined with his ongoing visits, made Bell a natural resource for his fellow service members when it came to planning



Steve Bell and Mickey Mouse, on one of Bell's many trips to Disney World. Photo courtesy Steve Bell. their own trips. In 2008, he started his web site, Military Disney Tips.

According to Bell, this year's biggest military discount is Disney's Armed Forces Salute, which is available to active or retired members of the U.S. military, including the National Guard, Reservists and the U.S. Coast Guard through September 28, 2011.

"This year's offer consists of steeply discounted theme park tickets and resort room discounts of up to forty percent off Disney resorts at both Walt Disney World and Disneyland," says Bell.

Disney Armed Forces Salute park tickets can be purchased once arriving at Disney. However, if service members purchase the tickets at Shades of Green (located at Walt Disney World) or at their installation's Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) office,

Great (military) family-oriented promotions

Many major attractions in the United States offer discounts to service members and their families, including the Here's the Heroes program which covers Busch Gardens, SeaWorld, and Sesame Place. Other great family destinations like Hersheypark and Colonial Williamsburg also offer significant savings with their promotions. When making travel arrangements be sure to understand if you must purchase tickets or fill out paperwork prior to arrival and if the discount is available during the time you plan on traveling.

there is no sales tax. Disney's Armed Forces Salute room rates are available through Disney's Central Reservations or a travel agent. Tickets are subject to blackout dates so make sure they are available for the dates you want to travel.

Looking for other ways to save on a hotel room? Another great benefit for service members is Shades of Green, an Army MWR-owned Armed Forces Recreation Center (AFRC) located on the Walt Disney World property. According to Bell, Shades of Green has the largest guest rooms on the Disney property, but has much lower prices than what you would pay at a Disney Deluxe resort. Also check out the Walt Disney Swan and Dolphin Resorts, located in the EPCOT Resort area. They are owned and operated by Starwood Hotels and Resorts and offer significant savings on rooms for active or retired service members, including active and retired members of the United States Coast Guard and activated members of the National Guard or Reservists.

Visit Bell's web site, www.militarydisneytips.com, for more tips on how to experience the Disney properties while keeping track of all of the great military discounts available to you.

Travel to Club Med or take a cruise with help from this military discount expert:

A lot of companies offer military rates, but Diane Fish, CEO of Twin Fish Interline Travel, specializes in helping service members match up with the best military rates that are available through Club Med and various cruise lines for great vacation packages. Because the inventory for these deals are capacity controlled, Fish's agency, which also serves Airline employees and National Air Traffic Control Association members, will keep an eye out for the release of new military rates and contact customers who are seeking military discounts for specific vacations.

"With the military, each supplier has their own rules and regulations," says Fish, who opened her agency in Florida in 1995. "And they do fluctuate."

Fish emphasizes that military discounts are very piecemeal and there tends to be a lack of consistency with when they become available so it is important to

team up with an agent to keep abreast of when the best deals are released. If a service member is interested in finding a military discount for a cruise or Club Med vacation, they can be qualified over the phone by an agent at Twin Fish Interline Travel and then, as inventory opens up, their agent will contact them.

"Cruise vacations are a big bang for the buck," says Fish. "You can get on a ship very inexpensively and many cruise lines are very generous to military."

Carnival Cruise Lines, Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Disney Cruise Line and many more offer military discounts but who qualifies for the promotions varies by line, according to Fish. But she does add that military retirees do qualify for many of the discounts.

In addition to cruises, Club Med Sandpiper Bay is one of the best kept secrets when it comes to military travel discounts according to Fish. The property, located in Port St. Lucie, Florida, had its grand opening last year and is geared toward families. The resort offers an all-inclusive package that includes swimming, golf, tennis, mini Club Med (for your children),

Hit the road! And save some green.

Love the open road? Throughout the United States, there are military campgrounds and Recreational Vehicle sites that are open to service members and their families. For more information on this inexpensive option for vacation travel contact your installation MWR office and ask about Paths Across America. Private organizations also offer discounts to military who visit their campgrounds, including Yogi Bear's Yellowstone Park Camp-Resorts.

And don't forget the wonderful MWR, Army, Air Force Inn and Navy Lodge facilities located all over the world for some R&R on your next trip. Prices are typically much less than nearby hotels. Visit www.dodlodging.com, www.armymwr.com, or www.navy-lodge.com for locations to stay anywhere you want to go.

Need a hotel? Check this out!

The Armed Forces Vacation Club (AFVC) offers military the chance to take advantage of “space-available” condominium style accommodations in more than 80 countries for just \$369 per unit, per week. Many are located near major attractions like Walt Disney World and Colonial Williamsburg, along with major beach areas and overseas destination spots. Visit www.afvc.com for more information.

sailing, and healthy dining, along with many other family friendly features. They also offer significant savings for service members who travel to their resort.

If you are interested in the military rate for this Club Med property or are looking for a cruise that offers military discounts, you can contact Twin Fish Interline Travel through their web site, www.twinfishinterline.com.



Joy Awe, enjoying one of the many sights found across Europe. Photo courtesy Joy Awe

Europe bound? Let these experts show you how to do it (and not break the bank):

Traveling through Europe can be an exciting way to spend your summer vacation—especially if you are stationed overseas and want to visit beyond your current duty station.

“Unfortunately, there aren’t a ton of military discounts outside of the (United States), but if you know where to look, you’ll find a few good deals and perks,” says Joy Awe, Editor-in-Chief of Buzz Off Base, an events, travel and entertainment guide for U.S. military and civilians living overseas. “The best advice we have is to use the privileges that have put into place for you whenever possible.”

Awe offers the following reminders on those privileges and tips to help save money while traveling in Europe:

- Check out places like Camp Darby in Italy and Edelweiss Lodge and Resort in Germany, which are resorts operated solely for American service members. They offer great rates and special R&R discounts of up to 40 percent.
- Look at the European installations that are close to major cities like London, Frankfurt, or Venice as a great base for exploring as a tourist. Consider Lakenheath AFB which is just 70 miles north and an easy train ride from London. Or the base at Vicenza, which is a 45 minute train ride to Venice and Verona.
- If you are stationed in Germany and book a hotel stay in another German city, call the hotel ahead of booking to check if they take

VAT forms. With German sales tax running at 19 percent, it is worth the small amount of paperwork.

- If you stay on an installation that is close to your destination, buy gas and supplies on post for a huge savings over the economy prices.
- If you prefer to stay off-base, check the travel section of Buzz off Base, where they have links to sites that have many rooms and suites for under 100 euros a night. Also, many American or international hotel chains offer military discounts in European locations.

For more money saving tips, Awe recommends visiting Buzz Off Base at www.buzzoffbase.com. The web site is 100 percent owned and operated by Army and Air Force spouses and veterans who are committed to providing the military community overseas with local entertainment information on restaurants, shopping, event and travel reviews, as well as member recommendations for the community’s favorite off-base hotspots. ●

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