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Resourceful Traveler is written by June Sawyers
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Ask Arthur Frommer & Travel Better, Cheaper, Smarter

Frommer/Wiley, \$19.99

As the quintessential travel writer, Arthur Frommer knows his way around the world -- and then some. In "Ask Arthur Frommer," the travel guru discusses in his usual fair and balanced way a wide assortment of travel topics, including airfares and airlines; hotels, hostels and home exchanges; ocean and river cruises; trains, buses, bicycles and RVs; adventure tours, camping and trekking; affordable travel and vacations in the United States and Europe; learning vacations and retreats; and much more. A straight shooter, his advice is frank and to the point. If, for example, your favorite airline turns

you down when you ask to transfer frequent-flier mileage, he suggests that you turn to its alliance partners. He also challenges conventional wisdom. Despite the plethora of Web specials, he still believes that customers will get the best price by calling a hotel directly when booking rooms. He also discusses trends. "Travel to [Australia](#) is about to boom," he predicts. "Keep checking the Web sites of Qantas, Air New Zealand -- and especially V Australia," Richard Branson's new airline. Nor is he shy about sharing his opinions, lamenting, for example, on the "paltry" number of days that Americans have on average for vacation per year -- typically 2 to 2 1/2 weeks. Compare that to, say, seven weeks in Austria and Finland. The U.S. is now last in the world -- along with China -- in providing a guaranteed vacation for its residents. "An increase in vacation time is among the unfinished business of our democracy," he maintains. The last section is devoted to travel trends, tactics and tips. Given the tendency today for airlines to charge a penalty for going over a particular weight, he strongly recommends that travelers purchase a new gadget called a "travel scale" that attaches to your suitcase and will tell you the weight of your luggage.

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USA 101: A Guide to America's Iconic Places, Events, and Festivals

National Geographic, \$18.95

It's a challenge to come up with 101 places, events and festivals that encompass a country's history, faith, art, nature, adventure, sport, leisure and favorite pastimes. But that was the challenge that Gary McKechnie gave himself. The result is this entertaining book. He includes many quintessential American activities -- clambakes and fall foliage, Little League games, rodeos and state fairs, barbershop quartets and quilting bees, pie-baking contests and square dancing -- as well as stops in places associated with particular people, places and events, from Gettysburg and Graceland to the [Miss America](#) contest and the [Academy Awards](#). One of the quirkiest and perhaps silliest of the iconic events is Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, Pa., an American twist on the German holiday known as Candlemas. McKechnie also lists 101 Honorable Mentions, which include cattle drives, the Corn Palace in Mitchell, S.D., covered bridges, hog-calling contests, lighthouses and Route 66.

Ramble California: A Wanderer's Guide to the Offbeat, Overlooked, and Outrageous

Speck Press, \$19

Rambling man Eric Peterson continues his rambling ways with this out-of-the-ordinary guide to California. Southern California, in particular, he writes, "has something for everybody and is pretty much anything and everything you want it to be -- maybe too much of something, anything, everything." He describes public art in [Venice](#) Beach, reflects on the Emerald Triangle in northern California (Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity Counties are considered the largest producers of marijuana in the United States), stops by the Beat bars of [San Francisco](#) and points out the Black Panther landmarks in [Oakland](#). In addition to specific places, he includes personal travelogues to places, including spending three days -- much of it on foot -- along Hollywood Boulevard and musing about being a beer drinker in California's wine country.

Off the Beaten Path

Reader's Digest, \$30

All 50 states are covered in this coffee-table-size tome to more than 1,000 scenic and interesting places across the country. They all have one thing in common: Every sight mentioned here is in an "uncrowded" or "inviting" location. Of course, not everyone has the same definition of "inviting," but here you will find plenty of national and state parks as well as heritage and cultural centers, nature trails, historic churches and towns, and such unique museums as the [Casey Jones](#) Home and Railroad Museum in Jackson, Tenn., the Coal Miner's Daughter Museum on country singer [Loretta Lynn](#)'s ranch in Hurricane Mills, Tenn., and the Museum of the Alphabet in Waxhaw, N.C.

Parisian Hideaways: Exquisite Rooms in Enchanting Hotels

Rizzoli, \$45

This gorgeous oversize book features portraits of 30 Parisian hotels that are unique in some significant way: either because of their literary, historic or artistic flavor or because of their timeless elegance or as showcases of contemporary French art. All are family- or manager-owned, boast distinctive French decor and are small enough -- all have fewer than 100 guest rooms -- to foster an intimate atmosphere. Exotic, romantic, sophisticated, all are uniquely French. The hotels are grouped by theme, and each section is accompanied by brief descriptions of nearby restaurants, boutiques or galleries. The book is complemented by stunning color photographs.

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