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THE JOURNAL REPORT: ENCORE
Travel
Trip Talk
A look at some of the best blogs for talking and learning about travel

 By **JUDITH BURNS**
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Travelers used to send postcards from the road and share photos with family, friends and neighbors after returning home. But that was before the Internet.

Now, any travelers with online access can use Web logs, or blogs, to send photos and notes while their trips are in progress, making it easy to stay in touch from afar.

THE JOURNAL REPORT


¹• Read [how trusts can help](#)² many families, whether their assets are hefty or modest, and [why employers across the U.S.](#)³ are trying to lure back retirees.

- See the complete [Encore report](#)⁴.

For travelers who wish to blog, there are plenty of sites that will let you do so, many free of charge. For armchair travelers, the best blogs provide a captivating glimpse of places around the world, not to mention lots of good travel tips. We

recommend starting with the following.

THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD
BootsnAll Travel
bootsnall.com⁵


IN A NUTSHELL: An online resource for independent-minded travelers.

WHAT WE LIKE: Clear and easy to navigate, with lots of links, message boards and blogs. You can see the most recent posts, top 10 blogs, or search by place name, from Australia to Zurich. From wine tasting in Oregon to touring the Wadi Rum desert, you'll find it here.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Everyone has his or her own idea on what to pack. The site includes hundreds of entries on "Men's Jackets," while the section on "Around the World Tips" includes this one: "Ditch the clothing."

SAMPLE POST: "When you watch someone else riding a camel...it looks very graceful, with one leg folded over and one hanging loose. Once you get on, though, you learn the truth. Not only are camels bouncy, but the Bedouin have put absolutely no effort into designing a decently comfortable saddle."

TravelBlog
travelblog.org⁶
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IN A NUTSHELL: Travel journals, travel blogs, diaries and photos.

WHAT WE LIKE: Travel Blog has map tools, videos, a travel forum and a travel guide in addition to blogs; the "most popular" section allows you to see who's getting all the attention. The picture section, a random selection from the best travel photos it receives, is updated every 10 minutes.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Ask people why they travel and you'll get lots of different answers. Some want to escape boredom or break out of their comfort zone; some want to broaden their perspective or find themselves by exploring other cultures. For others, travel itself is the goal. As one traveler wrote, "Because it's fun, I enjoy it, it makes me happy."

SAMPLE POST: "Today I left the North Island of New Zealand and crossed the Cook Strait by ferry to the South Island. The views of the South Island from the ferry were amazing and there were also some groups of dolphins swimming part of the way with the ferry. I arrived in Nelson in the afternoon and had just enough time to visit the Jewellery store which created the rings for the Lord of the Rings Movie and get to the geographical centre of New Zealand in time to see the sunset."

Lonely Planet

lonelyplanet.com/journeys⁷

IN A NUTSHELL: Blogs from the authors of "Lonely Planet" travel guides as they research new editions. Includes audio.

WHAT WE LIKE: Ever wonder who writes those travel guides? This site introduces you to them as they research in Patagonia, East Africa, Latvia, Ireland, Israel, Oman and other destinations.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Flamboyant wedding ceremonies are on the rise in Afghanistan, in contrast to the years of Taliban rule, when music was banned and marriages were consecrated without the bride or groom being present.

SAMPLE POST: "The wedding procession snakes for hundreds of metres with drums being beaten by men sitting atop of mini buses, Kalashnikovs being fired into the air from Corolla windows and extremely large 1980s camcorders vainly trying to capture the celebratory chaos. I'm confused; should I take cover from the gunfire? Help out with the drumming? Maybe I should just enjoy the ride."

World Hum

worldhum.com⁸

IN A NUTSHELL: Exploring all facets of travel, including how it affects travelers and the world.

WHAT WE LIKE: Superb writing and stylish layout make visiting the site like cracking open a high-quality travel magazine. Over most of last month, the site counted down the top 30 travel books of all time -- not that we needed another reason to come back.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Smoking salons in Austria's Royal Bakeries attract a steady flow of students and men reading newspapers. Ladies favor the nonsmoking rooms, where they take tea, nibble raspberry cake and gossip about their grandchildren.

SAMPLE POST: "To call volcano tourism a hot trend would not only be a bad pun, but also somewhat of an exaggeration; yes it exists, but it isn't for everybody. For those climbers and thrill seekers with summer plans to visit the slopes of Mount Merapi, the youngest and most active volcanic peak in Indonesia: Start looking elsewhere. Ash and gas have been issuing from the cone for several weeks."

Quiet American

quietamerican.org/vacation.html⁹

IN A NUTSHELL: An audio site with minute-long unedited sound recordings.

WHAT WE LIKE: Who doesn't have time for a one-minute vacation? Choices include chirping crickets, music from an Irish pub, bell ringers at a Moscow church, and sled-dog races in Duluth, Minn.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Sometimes, a sound is worth a thousand pictures.

SAMPLE POST: "It's late in the afternoon and my father, brother, and I are wandering Munich's expansive Englisher Garten. This recording was made as we approached the famous Chinese Pagoda beer

garden to slake our thirst. Hear the German band play from atop the pagoda, the clink of glasses and the merriment of Munich's citizens escaping the afternoon heat with a refreshing stein or two or three."

GREAT CITIES

Blogging in Paris

covonline.com¹⁰

IN A NUTSHELL: Claude, a 61-year-old retired teacher, writes about daily life in Paris and links to her photoblog, "Claude's Daily Snap."

WHAT WE LIKE: Lovely layout, writing and photos that capture the beauty of Paris in all seasons. The site allows for plenty of interaction -- don't miss the map of the world highlighting countries Claude has visited, or the chance to make your own.

WHAT WE LEARNED: When Claude was diagnosed with breast cancer, she found that keeping a blog took her mind off doctors, surgery and radiation treatments. She hates cooking and housework, preferring to walk around Paris for several hours a day with her camera.

SAMPLE POST: "I decided to go to Cimetiere Montmartre, not for the first time this year, but last time the weather was not as clement. My sense of direction is hopeless and I can't read a map. Can you believe that every time I go, I have trouble finding my husband's tomb? Well, I can hardly believe it, but this time, the same thing happened, it took me quite a while. On a lovely day like today, Cimetiere Montmartre is a quiet place, you can hear the rumble of the city, but also birds singing and besides the tourists and the people who have come to tend to their grave, there are also people coming to feed the cemetery cats. And a lot of animal life, magpies, crows, and more birds as you can hear on the video clip."

Living in Florence

melindagallos.com¹¹

IN A NUTSHELL: "An American moves with her husband to Florence and this is what happens."

WHAT WE LIKE: It's like getting letters from a friend who has moved abroad and is eager to share stories and impressions of her new home. Melinda Gallo, an outsider, pays close attention to Florence and the Florentines, who view their city as the true center of Italy.

WHAT WE LEARNED: At Thanksgiving, it is possible to find turkey and sweet potatoes, even in Florence.

SAMPLE POST: "I loved Florence the minute I visited it a year before I planned on moving here. I knew that visiting a city and living in the same city would be different, but I was willing to risk it.... I was a girl in love. In love with Florence. Its beauty was so intoxicating and engaging that I walked the city streets in a state of bliss. But, there was one hitch: the locals were not impressed with my love of their city. Our mutual love of Florence didn't create any bonds between us. I was an outsider and reminded of it almost every day."

NewYorkology: A New York Travel Guide

newyorkology.com¹²

IN A NUTSHELL: Want to see Julia Roberts in a Broadway show, dine in Brooklyn or take an art deco tour of the Bronx? It's all here.

WHAT WE LIKE: There are loads of information and tools to help you snag hard-to-get tickets or make restaurant reservations, with links to reviews and OpenTable.com¹³. Budget-minded music lovers get tips on a \$16 night at the Metropolitan Opera; book lovers get links to literary tour maps and suggested stops, including an antiquarian travel bookstore in Murray Hill.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Going to Shea Stadium will cost you more; Mets tickets are up an average of 7% this year. The city recently authorized the addition of 54 wheelchair-accessible taxis to New York streets, which will bring the total of ramp-enabled cabs to 81.

SAMPLE POST: "Consumer travel writer Christopher Elliott has come up with seven money-saving travel secrets, including a tip on how the site you use to book your hotel room could impact the quality of the room where you eventually rest your weary head. His advice: A hotel will classify its rooms based on how much you paid for it and where you bought it from. Did you score a cheapo room on a discount travel site? Odds are, you'll end up in the worst room in the house.

"Here's how to still save money and get a better room: buy directly from the hotel's Web site. It typically treats its direct-booking customers better than outsiders. Hotels will deny they do this when they're on the record. But off the record, they admit it happens."

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Blue Ridge Gazette

blueridgegazette.blogspot.com¹⁴

IN A NUTSHELL: News, arts, culture, entertainment, environmental issues, essays, history and travel information for the Blue Ridge Mountains.

WHAT WE LIKE: Mountain music, photos and writing show a love for things that make the region so special. Part neighborhood newspaper, part travelogue, part history book, it makes you want to put your feet up and relax.

WHAT WE LEARNED: High gas prices are blamed for a decline in visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway -- bad news for those who rely on tourism along the more than 400-mile, 70-year-old scenic drive.

SAMPLE POST: "When I was a freshman in college, I visited a cousin who is a Benedictine monk at his abbey in Louisiana. With another of the brothers, he took me on a hike through the woods surrounding the abbey, and for the first time I learned how to walk in the woods. For them, walking in the woods was not just a way to get some exercise, or to get from point A to point B. They taught me to walk slowly, and to really observe what was there. I learned to see flowers, animal tracks, tiny mushrooms, and other things that most people just walk right by."

National Parks Traveler

nationalparkstraveler.com¹⁵

IN A NUTSHELL: "News, commentary and life in America's National Parks" from Kurt Repanshek, a journalist and author of "America's National Parks for Dummies."

WHAT WE LIKE: Gorgeous photography, plus Mr. Repanshek's recommendations on books and gear. There's plenty of news and opinion on political developments affecting parks, and a good regional balance of parks in the Western and Eastern U.S.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Yellowstone National Park officials are considering allowing more cellphone towers in the park, which Mr. Repanshek thinks could increase annoying gabbing and dangerous risk-taking by visitors who figure they can phone for help in a jam.

SAMPLE POST: "A particularly bountiful winter, in terms of snow, has Yosemite National Park's waterfalls running on high. Park officials say the winter snow pack, which topped out at 185% of normal, is generating spring runoff flows that have not been seen in years.... You can get up close to these torrents of water by hiking the Mist Trail, which goes up past Vernal Fall to the top of Nevada Fall, or stay in the Yosemite Valley and hike the loop trail that takes you past Lower Yosemite Fall. Expect to get wet on either hike."

Texas RV Travel

usaer.blogspot.com¹⁶

IN A NUTSHELL: Sharing discoveries of Texas, from spring-fed rivers, scenic byways and historical sites to "larger than life Texans."

WHAT WE LIKE: Eileen, the blogger, kept her sense of humor in the face of a disaster that put her RV out of commission.

WHAT WE LEARNED: Even the weather is bigger in Texas.

SAMPLE POST: "Beauty, our travel trailer[,] and Beast, the van we use to pull it, were hit by one of the biggest hail storms in Texas history last week. The Beast escaped with a broken windshield and hundreds of new dimples, while Beauty was beat to pieces. No fairytale ending here: The Beast will be left alone, separated from Beauty, the Beast's reason for being for the past 20 years. What started out as golf [ball]-sized hail soon became softball-sized hail and, finally, grapefruit-sized hail. Falling from far above the Earth, these spheres punched through windows, roofs, gutters, windshields and trees. In less than 30 minutes, the hail did over \$10,000,000 worth of property damage in San Marcos."

--Ms. Burns is a reporter for Dow Jones Newswires in Washington. She can be reached at encore@wsj.com¹⁷.

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