

Personal

Reputable travel agents plan great vacations

But beware of fraudulent operators. Claudia Kerbel, a consumer information specialist, warns, "While reputable travel agents have the information and expertise to help vacation planners, other agents misrepresent tours and accommodations, omit certain costs from the 'total-price' information, or fail to explain all the details of a trip."

So always deal with established local agents, read any contract an agent asks you to sign, and learn the cancellation policy at the time you make a reservation. Make sure everything promised is included in your contract. Don't rely on oral promises or agreements — or pretty pictures in brochures.

Program offers security for camping travelers

If you're going to be camping on your vacation trip, a recently formed organization — called The Outdoor Traveler — can sell you some peace of mind for a nominal fee. For \$25 a year, you get:

- A membership card.
- Personal check guarantee up to \$50.
- Cash advance up to \$300 if your vehicle is damaged beyond minor repair.
- Credit card protection with cash advances if money stolen as well.
- Decals to identify your RV by account number.
- Lost key protection.
- Toll-free emergency road service information.
- Toll-free emergency message center service.
- Mail forwarding for extended trips.
- Toll-free reservations service.

For information or membership, call toll-free 800/648-5000 or write The Outdoor Traveler, P.O. Box 11860, Reno, NV 89510.

Painting your walls? Light colors save light

If you are spending your off-hours painting the inside of your home this summer, home economist Jean Cranston recommends choosing energy-saving colors. Light colors, such as white or pale yellow, reflect light. They make your rooms look brighter, often without use of artificial lighting. Rooms with light-color backgrounds also require less wattage to illuminate when lamps are needed.

The same rule should be followed in selecting paneling or wallpaper. Darker finishes seem to swallow light, so select light-tone wood or predominantly light-color wallpaper designs to conserve energy.

Do you know if you have high blood pressure?

High blood pressure can kill or cripple the 23 million Americans who have it — unless they control it to keep the risks to a minimum. According to health education specialist Carla Shearer, some people don't even know if they have high blood pressure — and many others don't do enough about it. She recommends regular blood-pressure checkups, even for young children.

Remember that for most people, there are no symptoms to warn of high blood pressure. (In severe cases, there will sometimes be dizziness and headaches.) If you have it and don't treat it, the first symptom may be a heart attack or a stroke. A blood pressure check is quick, easy, and painless — so get one at least once a year.

All aboard! Locomotive steams into the past

To celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, the nation's first, the Chessie Steam Special is currently chugging 8,000 miles through 10 eastern and midwestern states. An old-fashioned steam locomotive (the same one that pulled the American Freedom Train the past 2 years) is hauling 18 cars: open-window coaches, air-conditioned coaches, a first-class parlor car, an observation car, a combine car, and a snack and concession car.

Coach fares for the 8- to 10-hour round-trip runs are \$20 for adults and \$18 for children; for one-way ferry moves, they are \$2 less. For schedule information write Chessie System, Dept. C-J, 2 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21202 or call 301/237-3737.