

Lots of places to turn for trip tips

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With the snow-white vistas of our frigid winter an indelible memory — it still seems almost surreal to see the tulips and hyacinth blooming amid the soon-to-be-mowed grass — the notion of a summertime road trip never beckoned quite so enticingly.

After months of fraught driving, cruising along without fearing black ice or seeing the tilt-a-whirl oversteer of fellow commuters twirling into the highway ditch still seems like a luxury even on the humdrum daily routes. Cruising along unfamiliar byways and highways en route to the novelty and adventure of a vacation sounds like Nirvana.

Americans are reporting a hike in travel plans for the coming summer, according to a just-out TripAdvisor survey, and a good chunk of them say the experience of the polar vortex jump-started those vacation notions. The travel site reports that 36 percent of those polled intend to spend more on their jaunts this year than last, and that at least for Memorial Day weekend, three-quarters of them will motor to their destinations.

If you're planning the classic road trip — meaning the journey is just as important as the destination — there is no shortage of resources in print and online, from apps to maps. Here are a few new finds and old favorites:

American Road. Though in its 12th year, the magazine was new to me and what a find. The quarterly print edition offers travel features, columns and essays, news bites and more. It's packed with travel-related advertising — some of it for off-the-beaten path museums and attractions you might otherwise find.

The publication's website is a trove of trip-preparation info including an interactive map you can click for sample itineraries, links to state and regional tourism bureaus, podcasts and a community discussion board.

One of the most helpful features is a set of resource links that address specific road-travel needs. For example, those traveling with disabilities are directed to sites with resources ranging from lists of accessible bed-and-breakfast inns to dialysis centers to park sites.

A section on traveling with pets links to a directory of animal emergency clinics, while others offer tips for traveling with children. And be sure to follow the magazine's Twitter feed @AmericanRoadMag for more information on touring the back roads and heritage sights of the USA.

Speaking of which, my favorite part is the list of websites for the two-lane highway enthusiast; websites with info about well-known roads like Route 66 and the Dixie Highway are mixed in with links to funky roadside-attraction sites and historic highway information.

Becky Repp, who with her husband Thomas Repp runs the American Road publications, says she's traveled Route 66 at least 30 times and never gets tired of the retro roadway.

“No trip is ever the same — there’s always a surprise,” said Repp. “The interstates are great for getting there fast and safely.

“But when you get off onto the two-lane highways, that’s when you’ll start to experience the real America.”

Repp says American Road has about 100,000 regular readers in addition to website traffic, and that despite higher fuel prices, shorter vacation stints, greater access to air travel and other hurdles, the classic American road trip is alive and well.

“Interest has definitely not waned,” she said.

RoadTripAmerica.com is another site that offers itineraries, reviews and advice to inspire the adventurous motorist; note particularly its many interactive tools like a Fuel Cost Calculator and Map Wizard.

Roadtrippers.com offers a very useful mobile app if you’re into obscure sights and attractions, as well as guides to special-interest destinations. If you’re a cinema fan it’ll help you find filming locations (even distinguished by categories such as ‘chick flicks’ for the “Fried Green Tomatoes” fans and ‘iconic horror film sites’) while the Guy Fieri devotee will appreciate a guide to “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” joints.

Roadtrippers is a great armchair-dreaming site thanks to its engaging layout, similar to Pinterest, and a very quirky news feed.

Happy trails!

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