

# Taking a Break

by Jennifer G. Williams

With summer just around the corner, it's time to think about using those vacation and leave days you've accrued—especially if you're just returning from a deployment overseas.

The Department of Defense's Morale Welfare and Recreation Department offers a myriad of choices for service members and their families, from lodging in cool places to renting equipment for camping, RVing or biking, to discount tickets for those big-name theme parks across the country.

And for those of you wanting to plan a family getaway for your two-week R&R or after your return from six, 12 or 15 months in Iraq or Afghanistan, several MWR sites offer specials for just such an occasion.

Shades of Green Resort at Walt Disney World in Florida, for example, offers a 20 percent discount on lodging and food for all service member and DoD personnel serving at least 12 consecutive months in an OEF/OIF location. This special is limited to a one-time-use and ranges from a 4-7-night stay. The offer is available during your block R&R leave or up to one year after the end of your tour. Call the reservations department at 1-888-593-2242 or visit [www.shadesofgreen.org](http://www.shadesofgreen.org) for more information and availability.

Hawaii's Hale Koa Resort offers a similar 20 percent discount on its lodging, dining and entertainment for returning service members and their families. Call 800-367-6027 or visit [www.halekoa.com](http://www.halekoa.com) for more information and reservations. Be sure to mention your status to receive the discount. Another Armed Forces Recreation Center, Germany's Edelweiss Lodge and Resort, also offers an "Operation R&R Special Package." Visit [www.edelweisslodge-andresort.com](http://www.edelweisslodge-andresort.com) for more information and to make reservations.

Other MWR sites, including Fort Benning's Destin Recreation Area in Florida, offer "Warrior Specials" for service members returning from deployment. Visit [www.benningmwr.com/destin31905.htm](http://www.benningmwr.com/destin31905.htm) for more information. Still others may not advertise any specials, but it never hurts to ask.

Keep in mind that most military installations have lodging, often for much-reduced rates when compared with surrounding public hotels. The one catch is that active-duty members on orders or TDY are typically given priority over vacationing families.

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Photo provided by Lynda Modaff

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Still, it's good to know that the U.S. Coast Guard Cape Cod Air Station offers cottages for rent in one of the country's most prestigious vacation destinations. Or that the newest Armed Forces Recreation Center resort near Virginia Beach, Cape Henry Inn, offers both hotel rooms and cottages or bungalows — and some even allow pets. And Seward, Alaska, is home to the Seward Military Resort, a stone's throw from world-class fishing.

And check with installations near your preferred destination for any specials they may be offering to service members. The United States Air Force Academy, for example, offers lodging, ski lift and other activities to service members for several Colorado ski resorts, including Keystone and Steamboat Springs. Visit [www.coloradorandr.com](http://www.coloradorandr.com) for more information.

## Go RVing

And speaking of Colorado, The Air Force Academy is just one of many MWR sites where you can rent an RV or travel trailer to do your own exploring. The AFA offers a 19-foot travel trailer for \$60 a night or \$300 a week, so whether you've just moved to the area or you want to check out some of those nearby national parks before you PCS once again, check out your local Outdoor Recreation Center for deals in your neck of the woods.

Once you reserve your travel trailer, plan your trip by going to the Army Outdoor Recreation "Guide to Army Recreational Vehicle Parks and Campgrounds" at [www.armymwr.com/portal/travel/paths](http://www.armymwr.com/portal/travel/paths). The sites offer various levels of amenities, from gravel pads to paved pads with water, electric, sewage disposal, cable TV and telephone access.

Many RV parks and campgrounds offer programs to help you take advantage of other installation MWR activities and local area attractions. The website, with its map of the United States, is the first phase of an ongoing effort by the Army to provide timely and accurate information to users of Outdoor Recreation programs. Plans are in place to soon offer an OCONUS map and a trip computer to help you get from place to place.

## More than RVs

But the Outdoor Rec Center has more than just RVs to rent. Other items typically rented include skis, bicycles (road, mountain and tandem), tents, camp stoves and even fishing boats, so whatever your fancy — or, if you want to try out a new activity before investing in the equipment for it—stop by the ORC and take advantage of just one of the benefits of being a service member.

While you're at the Outdoor Rec Center, ask about their discounted tickets for local attractions and even far-away amusement parks. Some tickets, such as those for Disneyland, may take a few days to arrive, so order early. Tickets to Six Flags Fiesta in San Antonio, Texas, cost \$25.50 for an adult or child, compared with the gate price of \$50.81. A Disneyland 4-Day Hopper Pass costs just \$155.25 per adult and \$126 per child, as opposed to \$214 and \$184, respectively.

As you can see, if you know where to look or whom to ask, you can save a lot of money on lodging, tickets and activities. It may take a little research and a few phone calls, but the resources are in place for you to plan a dream vacation for you and your family. ●