



Vacation Well—the Military Way

Travel opportunities for service members abound with discounts, trips and facilities on or near bases.

By Stephen J. Bugaj

Travel benefits for service men and women are plentiful, worldwide and operate well beyond the popular lodging accommodations and flying the Space-Available way.

For those willing to keep a loose itinerary or travel near bases facilities, your military ID opens a whole world of inexpensive travel.

Temporary Military Lodging

On-base Temporary Military Lodging includes dorm-style rooms, guest-houses, suites, inns and lodges. At certain places such as Marathon Key in Florida, Seward Air Force Camp in Alaska, Ft. Tuthill in Arizona, and near Yellowstone National Park, there are off-post cabins, cottages, trailers and or chalets that are in or near some of the most gorgeous parts of the country.

A guidebook called Temporary

Military Lodging Around the World (Military Living Publications) lists TML at active and reserve military installations in CONUS and overseas. It also notes civilian accommodations such as the Soldiers', Sailors', Marines' and Airmans' Club in New York City and the Naval Club in London.

Temporary Military Lodging Around the World also has a website at www.temporarymilitarylodging.net that chronicles firsthand travel experiences involving TML.

Lodging can also be found at many National Guard posts, as well as at Air Reserve and Air National Guard Units at International Airports such as Bangor, Maine and Minneapolis, Minn.

During more than 30 years that I spent in the Army, I've stayed in TML at many posts both in the United States and overseas. I've been on the beach, in the mountains, in the heart of major cities and even in a German castle. I've also been in accommodations available through the Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard.

Navy Lodge

The Navy Lodge is a form of TML that provides accommodations to eligible service members at many Navy bases worldwide, including Italy, Spain, Japan, Cuba and Iceland. What differentiates the Navy Lodge is the use of a Central Reservations Center that can schedule the majority of requests online at www.navy-lodge.com or

through a toll-free telephone number (1-800-NAVYINN).

Certain duty stations such as Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, require permission to enter the base.

According to the website, Navy Lodges are on average 43 percent less expensive than comparable civilian accommodations.

My wife and I stayed at the Navy Lodge in Keflavik, Iceland, several years ago, and we spent approximately \$60 per night for our lodging at the time, as well as rented a car through the Lodge at a comparable rate in the States—all in a country categorized as the "most expensive" in Europe to visit.

Family Camping

If your choice is camping, you should know that many bases have a family campground right on the premises. Tent sites are usually available, as are pads for recreational vehicles (with or without hookup).

Temporary Military Lodging Around the World also lists the sites available at military posts. Another excellent source of information about camping is Paths Across America, which can be found on the Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) website.

Armed Forces Recreation Center Resorts

Armed Forces Recreation Center resorts are affordable facilities for all services that offer a full range of resort hotel opportunities for service members, their families, and other members of the "Total Defense Force."

These resorts include the Cape Henry Inn in Ft. Story, Virginia, Shades of Green in Orlando, Florida, the Hale Koa Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii, the Dragon Hill Lodge in Seoul, Korea, and the Edelweiss Lodge/Resort in Bavaria, Germany.

My wife and I enjoyed the Cape

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AT EASE

Take a break from expensive hotels and mediocre service when PCS-ing.

With Navy Lodge's convenient on-base locations and rates 45% less than civilian hotels, you can finally sit back and relax.



1-800-NAVY-INN
www.navy-lodge.com

Henry Inn near Virginia Beach for around \$80 a night. We stayed at the Hale Koa Hotel in Hawaii for \$124 per night. We literally fell in love with the Hale Koa, a "first class" hotel right on the beach at Waikiki. The Hale Koa has beach access, beach rentals (surfboards, snorkeling gear) water sports instruction, a health club and a PX.

Armed Forces Vacation Club

Another form of travel accommodations can be found through what is known as the Armed Forces Vacation Club, a 'space available' program offering Department of Defense personnel affordable vacations around the world.

At a cost of only \$329 per unit per week, resorts are listed according to sub-region (USA, Mexico, the Alps, Caribbean, Australia/New Zealand/Fiji, etc), or by activity (scuba, spa, ski, golf, boating, etc).

The term "per week unit" refers to accommodations at condominiums for a seven night stay. The Armed Forces Vacation club is not a travel package and includes lodging only. The seven night periods vary, so it is important to determine the exact dates of arrival and departure. The AFVC states that the cost of the condominium is \$329 even if you check in late or leave early.

Regarding eligibility, Department of Defense personnel include: members of the United States Armed Forces or an adult dependant; military retirees or an adult dependant; DoD civilian employees or an adult dependant; American Red Cross personnel serving overseas with the US military; DoD Dependand School teachers or an adult dependant; and Disabled American Veterans. Non-eligible travel companions may be taken provided that the eligible person is 21 and is traveling with the group.

To be informed about special rules, conditions or restrictions that a resort might have, it is suggested that you make your reservation by calling the reservation center (1-800-724-9988). You will need to provide them with your AFVC Account Number, a credit card number, an Installation Number, and the dates and location of your vacation.

Sports and Outdoor Recreation

Many opportunities for sports and outdoor recreation exist on base that can certainly enhance your stay in Temporary Military Lodging.

Athletic facilities include gyms and fitness centers that have basketball courts, handball courts and weight rooms. The only requirement to use them is the presentation of a valid military ID card.

Many posts have their own golf course, tennis courts, outdoor pool, track and baseball diamond. Several installations such as Ft Bragg, North Carolina, have outdoor stables and offer opportunities for horseback riding.

At the Dam Neck Annex to Oceana Naval Air Station, Va., as well as the Naval Amphibious Base in Little Creek, Va., there are non-public beaches that are far less crowded than others nearby. The last time that we were in the area, these beaches were differentiated by rank.

Hunting and fishing may also be available on the premises. Moreover, bases often have recreation centers where one can rent or borrow equipment such as fishing gear, snowshoes and even travel trailers.

Military Discount / Reduced Admission Fees

Military bases have Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) offices that can provide reduced rates on travel or excursions. Eligible personnel can also obtain reduced or free admission to events, activities or museums in the nearby vicinity.

Check this office periodically because the savings can be significant. During our recent trip to Hawaii, a mini-submarine tour in Oahu was priced between \$100 and \$125. We found out that the Information, Tickets and Travel Office at Hickham AFB was offering a month-long "special" of the same tour for only \$25.

Similarly, the actual attraction may offer free or reduced admission. For example, my wife and I were given free general admission to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City by presenting valid military ID cards.

Disney World offers major discounts on admission to military personnel. For example, according to Disney's website, "... (through) Dec. 23, 2009, each active or retired member of the U.S. military may obtain one complimentary 5-day 'Disney's Armed Forces Salute' ticket with Park Hopper and Water Park Fun & More options," plus the opportunity to purchase more 5-day tickets for \$99 each.

Space-A Flights

Space-A flights or "military hops" involve traveling on military aircraft from one installation to another on a space-available basis at little or no cost to the military person.

Remember that Space-A flights are military missions that happen to have available space for service men and women to accompany the aircraft and crew. Restrictions apply



based on whether you are active duty or reserve personnel, and whether flying stateside (CONUS) or overseas (OCONUS).

You are best served by finding out where and to whom you report in advance, arriving early, and being prepared to stay for an extended period of time to see if there is room on the flight. Aside from that, you can't beat the price.

An extensive publication outlines the particulars of flying "military air:" Military Space-A Air Travel Guide (Military Living Publications). Similarly, there is a website (www.spacea.info) that includes travel stories, frequently asked questions, requirements for spouses of deployed military members who desire to use Space-A travel, and a downloadable copy for AMC Form 140 for Space-A signup.

In my native state of Pennsylvania, eligible military personnel and their spouses have flown from Harrisburg International Airport to Honolulu on a KC-130 Air Force refueler. I've also known some Maine Air Guardsmen who have flown to Alaska. If you have a loose itinerary, this could be an inexpensive way to travel to Europe and elsewhere.

Cruises (Vacation Rewards)

Vacation Rewards is a recently-opened travel opportunity that offers access to savings on thousands of cruise itineraries, partner resorts and tour providers.

The program is available through International Cruise and Excursions (ICE), a leader for integrated cruise and leisure travel experiences with established, long term relationships with every major cruise line worldwide.

Available online only, the Vacation Rewards program allows National Guardsmen, reservists and retirees who do not live near a military installa-

tion to take part in discounted travel. This benefit is similar to the on-base Information, Ticketing and Reservations (ITR) / ITT service available at many military garrisons.

Vacation Rewards offers savings of up to \$1,000 on cruise purchases and experiential vacations; savings of up to \$300 at various resorts (more than 150,000 world-class properties); and

last-minute resorts, cruises, and tours at tremendous savings.

Eligible personnel include Active Duty and Retired Military, Civilian Employees, Active and Retired Federal, State and Local Government Employees, National Guard and Reserve Members, and Police, Fire and Postal Employees. For details, visit www.govvacationrewards.com.

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