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Good-Buys

By: JON HALBERG, Gazette Staff Writer December 26, 2001

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Now is time to get best deals, area agents say.

Angel McCracken, a travel consultant at Aztec Travel in Indiana, said she expects business to pick up as the weather gets colder. (Gazette photo by Tom Peel)

With the Christmas hustle and bustle behind and the holiday's halfway over, now is the time to make winter travel plans.

And area travel agents say if you're looking for a good deal on a trip to warmer climates, you need to move fast.

"You'll only get the really good deals in January," said Judy Maschak with Aztec Travel Service in Indiana. "Once February starts, the deals are over."

While almost all travel-related businesses are looking at a different picture after Sept. 11, one of Maschak's colleagues agreed that if things are anything like normal this year, business will start picking up in the next few days.

"October, November, December is always the slow time in the travel industry," said Angel McCracken, who specializes in package tours and cruises at Aztec. "Once Christmas is over, things get hysterical."

While McCracken and other travel professionals are still in suspense about when travelers will start buying trips like they did before, she said she has high hopes for some back-to-normal "hysteria" in her office after the holidays.

But she added that the weather plays a major factor in bookings to warmer places.

"We need it to get really cold and miserable before a lot of



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people come in wanting to go someplace warm," McCracken said.

But McCracken and others agreed that cruises and packages to the sunny, warm locations are at least starting to get the attention of travelers.

"The main thing that's been drawing attention is Caribbean cruises and vacations," said agent Crystal Jordan at AAA Travel Agency in Indiana. "Seven days someplace warm for a great price."

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- If the phrase remains, remove the pledge from public schools

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In Blairsville, agent Pat Kusky at the Friendly Travel Agency agreed, listing some possible destinations:

"Cancun (Mexico), Aruba, Punta Cana (Dominican Republic) - we're constantly getting faxes," Kusky said.

"Three-, four-, five-, seven-day cruises from Miami, Tampa, San Juan - there's some really good deals available."

Kusky also offered a tip on timing your travel plans.

"If you can go at the last minute, that's the way to go," Kusky said. "That's how you can get the real deals, and there are some out there."

Most agents agreed that at this time of year, the best place to go, with still a little time before the best prices slip away, is somewhere with a tropical climate and a good beach.

"The Riviera Maya area south of Cancun. That's my personal favorite," said Jordan at AAA.

"It's totally different than Cancun," she added. "It has quiet beaches, it's more beautiful, secluded, private and peaceful."

And most important, she added, "You can get some really good deals there."

Maschak at Aztec said one of the sweetest packages she'd seen lately was one to Punta Cana.

"At the Catalonia Bavaro Resort, it's \$800 a week per person for a junior suite - including airfare, hotel, meals, it's all included," Maschak said. She added, however, that departure taxes when leaving the Dominican Republic may cost a few dollars more.

McCracken added a simple recommendation for another destination a little farther west.

"The only place you can go is Hawaii," McCracken said simply.

"We just sent someone - a week on Maui, airfare, rental car, accommodations for two people; all for less than \$2,000."

According to Maschak, wherever you go, the best way to get there is on a cruise ship.

"Personally, cruising to me is the way to go," Maschak said. "All your meals and service are included in one price. You get to see everything from the ship, and get off if you feel like it when it stops somewhere."

And the best part of cruising, said Maschak, is "you only have to unpack once. It's really the way to go."



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have to unpack check the train and the way to get.

Jordan at AAA added a few possible destinations in the continental U.S.

" (Las) Vegas is giving big discounts on hotel stays," she said.

In an effort to draw people back after Sept. 11, she said the gambler's paradise has cut rates even lower than normal. But places that always draw a crowd don't need to lower prices, she added.

"Places like Disneyworld aren't giving any discounts because they always have business, no matter what happens," Jordan said.

Still, she suggested that with the traveling public still a little leery of long-distance air travel, West Coast destinations might be worth a look.

"I would think that you might be able to find some good deals in places like San Francisco, L.A., San Diego," Jordan said.

And Maschak offered reassuring words about security for those who might still be insecure about air travel.

"I've traveled recently, both on cruise ships and on the airlines," Maschak said. "Security is getting tight. That was OK with me."

McCracken, who just got back from a Hawaiian cruise last month, concurred.

"Everything on the ships and at the airports was very secure," McCracken said. "It took a little more time, but it was a good thing."

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