

Numbers are down, values are up

Passenger numbers from New England airports showed a sharp drop last year. At the same time, destination dollars have never been lower.

The question is: What constitutes real value on the beach or on the ship?

To get the real scoop, you might ask a local travel agent or go to a website that gives out real information from people who have been there.

Practically every ad out there says "50 percent off" and there are plenty of bargains even over the winter February school vacation weeks.

"People are going back to places they visited two or three years ago at a cost of a third or more less," said Alan Krensky, president & CEO of Colpitts Travel. "Another thing to be aware of is the \$500 food or other credits being offered by cruise lines and resorts while you visit their destination."

The 2008 year-end figures show a drop at every major New England airport except Burlington and the Portland Jetport. Their figures improved about seven percent last year.

Logan Airport dipped by almost two million inbound and outbound passengers with originated flights also down.

CEO Tom Kinton included these remarks in his monthly report to the Massport Board on January 22.

"Our best guess" is that we may see month over month declines in the five-to-six percent range for much of the year, with traffic perhaps staging a comeback in the second half of 2009, depending on the economy," said Kinton.

Business and private jet flights have also suffered. Operations at Hanscom Field in Bedford dropped from 165,907 in 2007 to 157,289 last year.

The Boston Globe Travel Show Section in this paper may be a good starting point to select a destination. An established travel company like TNT Vacations is celebrating its 35th Anniversary and has its headquarters in Boston.

Two other items are worth consideration as you plan a trip and an expenditure of those hard-earned dollars.

Travel insurance is now more important than ever in protecting your investment. Another important point is never to pay for a vacation with a debit card. If something goes wrong, your dollars are gone.

With a credit card payment, you can dispute a charge. The fastest growing part of the winter vacation is the short stay of three nights and four days. Airline flexibility to the Caribbean islands makes this a more affordable holiday than last year.

Record snowfalls through the end of January will get people from New England heading south with some very good values.