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WAY TO GO

Sunday, October 15, 2000; Page E02

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Road Test

Deadbolts and chains are supposed to be enough to keep you safely locked inside a hotel room. But you're the worrying kind (and often for good reason) and want something more. We scoured stores, catalogues and the Web looking for products that promise to make your room safer, then put them through a dry run.

* Door stops. Jamming a wedge in the space between the inside of a door and the floor will prevent someone from successfully opening the door from the outside--just as a wedge works to hold a door open. Home Depot has bins full of cheap-but-effective rubber door stops for less than two bucks.

Or you can go high-tech with Magellan's Door Stop Alarm (\$9.85), a sleek, lightweight plastic wedge that sounds an ear-piercing siren if the door budges even an inch. It's small, light (about as heavy as a tube of toothpaste) and simple: Snap the plastic button on top, flip the switch and slide under the door. Info: 800-962-4943, www.magellans.com.

* Motion sensors. Using a motion sensor doesn't have to involve laser beams zig-zagging across your room. Two portable products we like are Sharper Image's Travel Companion With Intruder Alarm (\$59.95) and Telko Security's Infrared Sensor Alarm/Chime (\$17.95).

The Travel Companion couldn't be more practical. One half is an alarm clock, thermometer, calendar and flashlight; the other is a detachable smoke detector and motion sensor. Hang the detector half on your doorknob, and if it's disturbed, an alarm sounds. (A different alarm rings if smoke is detected.) Snapped together, it's about the size of a telephone handset. Info: 800-344-4444, www.sharperimage.com.

The Telco device sits nicely on a table and detects motion from 30 feet away. You can set it for a loud, doorbell-like chime in case the 110-decibel alarm doesn't suit your eardrums. Info: 877-626-1708, www.nservices.com.

* Door-jamming bars. If you're uncomfortable with devices that shriek you awake, a door-jamming bar is a good alternative. At 2 1/2 feet long, the Master Lock Entry Door Security Bar (\$34.95), available from Brookstone, might seem unwieldy to pack; surprisingly, this aluminum device is travel-friendly. The collapsible bar easily fits diagonally across a medium or large suitcase or in a garment bag, and it's easy to use. Snap one end under a doorknob, lift the side lever and angle the bar to the floor. And similar devices are made for sliding doors--handy for ground-floor rooms with balcony doors. Info: 877-468-3580, www.brookstone.com.

* Door locks. Like a door-jamming bar, Walkabout Travel Gear's Portable Door Lock (\$10.95) doesn't make any noise. And it's much smaller--about the size of a pocket comb. The lock uses two interlocking metal bits that have no chance of getting

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separated. It works by inserting the hook end in a door strike plate, closing the door, then sliding the interlocking bar across the door. Info: 800-852-7085, www.walkabouttravelgear.com.

BOTTOM LINE: Hotel managements swear by the safety of their rooms. Still, what's the harm in a little extra peace of mind? These products work as advertised, are easy to use, pack easily and are well-priced.

--Elissa Leibowitz

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Thai Lite; Pair of Isles

* With Natrabu, celebrate the 10-day Festival of Lights in Thailand for less than \$2,000--or about \$45 more than the flight alone. The \$1,695 deal, plus about \$50 in taxes, includes: round-trip air from Washington to Bangkok (fares for festival dates start at \$1,650); nine nights of "superior" deluxe accommodations in Bangkok, Sukhothai, Lampang, Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai; tours, including the parade of lanterns down the river, an elephant camp, temples and more; and daily breakfast, five dinners and six lunches. Book by Oct. 20; depart Nov. 6. For bigger discounts, find a flight to San Francisco for less than the \$330 add-on rate (AirTran is quoting \$230). 800-628-7228.

* US Airways Vacations is offering three-night island getaways to Bermuda and Grand Cayman for only a couple hundred more than air fare alone. The \$654 deal to Bermuda includes round-trip flight from BWI (typical rates start at \$365) and three nights at the Grotto Bay Beach Resort, with private beaches and ancient underground caves. The \$772 package to Grand Cayman includes round-trip air from BWI (usually \$450) and three nights at the Sleep Inn. Depart Monday or Tuesday; travel Jan. 8-March 27. Airport taxes of about \$18 are not included. 800-352-8747, www.usairwaysvacations.com.

--Andrea Sachs

SIGN HERE

Flash Photography

After we invited readers to send in photographs of funny signage encountered during their travels, we received a pile of great pictures--including the alarming shot above, snapped by Mary Buchanan of Fairfax at Capilano Canyon and Suspension Bridge in Vancouver. Buchanan wins a Travel section paperweight. We'll print more funny-sign pictures as space permits, so it's not too late to send in your entries.

Write your name, contact info and detailed caption on the back of your photo--not a separate sheet. Photos may be color or black and white. Send prints or photo-quality printouts (sorry, no slides or digital picture files) to Travel Section Sign Contest, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071. (If you want them back, send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope.) Winners receive a Travel section paperweight. Photos become property of The Post, which may edit, publish, distribute or republish them in any form. No purchase necessary. Employees of The Post and their immediate relatives are not eligible for prizes.

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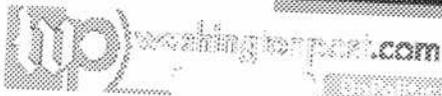
To share information with fellow travelers, www.virtualtourist.com

Most online travel sites promise some sort of travel "community," but usually there's nobody home--or worse. Virtualtourist (instantly likeable for its daring flout of the I'm-no-tourist-I'm-a-traveler smuggism) is a vibrant exception. It claims 94,000 members, and I'm tempted to believe it. Travelers create their own profiles and build pages on places they've been or have lived. This content then comes up when members search for cities or places. It's all interlinked remarkably well, so it isn't the hellish linkpatch you might assume. If you come to this clean--wanting, say, real folks' ideas for a trip to Oslo--it delivers. But it permits tangents, like a link to all members' "tourist trap tips" on Oslo. If you want to, you can become very involved, maybe too involved, as some Top Members' sites attest. Thanks to members' pictures--and a site-specific e-mail address, which functions as a creep-filter--it's a reasonably wholesome way to connect with folks around the world.

--Craig Stoltz

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More Than 1 Million Kids Will Become Addicted To Smoking This Year.



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