



THE LOWDOWN:

Guidebook alternatives

No need to haul a hefty tome round with you; info's free and easy if you know where to look. By **Mark Hodson**

A well-thumbed *Rough Guide* used to be an essential companion for most travellers. But with modern technology at your fingertips, do you really need to carry a book? Not with these (often free!) alternatives...

BESPOKE ADVICE – FOR REAL PEOPLE

No amount of guidebook research can replace local knowledge – that's the thinking behind new trip-planning service Tripbod.com, aimed at independent travellers who want a friend on the ground to create a bespoke itinerary. The site has more than 100 locals in locations from

Moscow to the Amazon, each recruited for their expertise in anything from nightlife to ecology. A week's itinerary costs from £30, including an annotated Google map, and Skype chats with the resident expert. Also try **Localyte.com**, which offers a free Q&A with local experts, many of whom also offer paid guiding services.

HIPSTERS' TIPS – BANG UP-TO-DATE

Thousands of people write blogs about their travels or the places where they live – the problem is finding which ones are any good. One of the best is Spottedbylocals.com, which has teams of enthusiastic, knowledgeable 'spotters' in 23 European cities, who'll recommend places to eat, drink, shop or hang out. With a focus on local neighbourhoods, the site shows you how to get off the tourist trail. You can search by theme, district or follow a particular writer. A new service is also offered by Travellerspoint.com, a travel-community site: send an email to guides@travellerspoint.com with the name of any destination in the subject field, and **it will pull together ideas from its users and email them to you in a PDF file, for no charge.**

WHAT'S HOT AND HAPPENING – THIS WEEK

If you want to know what's going on in a fast-moving city, you need a listings magazine, rather than a guidebook. Try the well-

established Whatsonwhen.com, and the more visually exciting Joobili.com. For an insider's guide into what's hip, check out Lecool.com, which has stylish weekly directories to Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon, London, Istanbul, Dublin, Moscow and Budapest; view them online or sign up to receive by email. For instant city guides, check out Inyourpocket.com. Its **50 European city guides are regularly updated and available, for free, on the web** or as PDF downloads.

GUIDEBOOK DETAIL – BUT WITH NOTHING TO LUG

Podcasts provide a practical alternative to walking around with your head in a book. You can **download a selection of city walking tours** from Mp3cityguides.com – the £7.99 price tag includes a printed route guide. There's a free sample guide to Florence on the website.

'THE SITE HAS MORE THAN 100 LOCALS IN LOCATIONS FROM MOSCOW TO THE AMAZON'

For backpackers, Indietravelpodcast.com has chatty city guides covering Europe and Asia, with lots of money-saving tips. Also worth a listen is Chris Christensen's Amateur Traveller podcast, which can be found at iTunes. Rough Guides has its own series of podcasts, although these are mainly interviews with authors and not a replacement for its books (Roughguides.com/podcasts).

THE LOCAL LOWDOWN – RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

If you want to see the digital future of guidebooks, invest in a smart phone, such as Apple's iPhone, and download a few apps (applications). What is so exciting about smart phones is not just the amount of content they can store, but the fact that they can deliver relevant local information – ie, **recommended shops, restaurants and bars – based on your GPS co-ordinates.** The big publishers are rapidly rolling out digital versions of their guidebooks. For instance, DK Eyewitness Travel has city guides for £4.99 at Traveldk.com/iphone. However, some of the new independent publishers are more interesting: try Not For Tourists which has £2.99 iPhone guides (www.nftiphone.com) to New York, San Francisco, London, Chicago, Washington DC and LA. Instantcities.com has £1.79 guides to Florence and Turin. Many iPhone guides are free, including those by Quintessentially (www.quintessentially.com/iphone) and Nileguide.com, which provides recommendations by real travellers. Also try AroundMe, a free app that locates useful nearby facilities such as pharmacies, car parks, taxi ranks and ATMs. ■