

Sunday Features



Simple tips help take bite out of utility bills

There are certain fixed expenses we have no choice but to spend on, including utilities.

I managed to reduce my utility bill this winter quite substantially over past years, with a little effort and help from a mild winter.

I had always been careful, but a few extra changes really tipped the scale in my favor this winter. First off, our winter was warmer than normal, and this is automatically a savings, as it costs less to heat our homes. Second, I dropped my thermostat a few more degrees from last year. I like to wear shorts and T-shirts year-round when home, but this year I kept my home four degrees cooler and put on long pants and a sweatshirt; it was a small sacrifice to lower my utility bill.

I used to justify keeping my home warmer because I have small dogs. I got them a heated bed, and they were just fine with the heat completely off during the day. On the coldest evenings, a heated mattress cover or heated blanket helped me to keep warm with the heat much lower or off.

Every year, I insulate my windows with either builder's Styrofoam or heavy curtains. If sunny, windows are uncovered to let the sun's passive solar energy naturally heat up the room. If cloudy, windows are covered to hold in precious heat.

I also switched a great deal of my lighting to energy-efficient LED lighting. LED lights use 75 percent to 80 percent less energy than incandescent lights.

When selecting LED lighting, I pay special attention to the color temperature. Most LED lighting is slightly blue in tone, rather than the softer golden tone we are accustomed to in lighting our homes. Buying "soft white" or "warm" white LEDs makes for light that is more pleasing to the eyes.

I find the light from a compact fluorescent bulb more comfortable for reading, so for my reading lamps I stick to CFLs, but virtually everything else in my home has been converted to LEDs.

Many people underestimate how much wasted energy drain occurs when lights or appliances are not being used. Many lights and appliances continue to drain energy when turned off or left on standby. I'm lucky to have a dedicated light switch that directly connects to most of my outlets I like to use during the evening. By flipping this switch, I can cut power to the outlets that would otherwise continue to drain even if the light or appliance is turned off.

This same effect can be achieved by using a power strip that can be switched off, or by unplugging items not in use.

I also use LED night lights. The night lights I use claim to use 25 cents of electricity a year. Having these low-wattage night lights in my kitchen, hallway and bathroom helps me cut down my overhead light usage at night.

It takes a little effort to make a dent in utility bills, but I saved roughly \$100 a month from last year by lowering the thermostat a few degrees, switching to LED lighting and being disciplined about turning off outlets not in use. That is savings enough to make the extra effort worthwhile.

Sea lions sun themselves on an islet in Glacier Bay as seen from onboard the Sea Bird, Lindblad Expeditions Alaska.



Three if by sea: Wildlife watching on Alaska cruise

The chill of it all



PHOTOS BY STEVE HAGGERTY/COLORWORLD/MCT

Kayakers explore the coves in the Tongass Narrows, Ketchikan, on Revillagigedo Island, Alaska. Some cruises designed for the adventurous allow people to get up close to the wild side of Alaska and explore shorelines, beaches and shallow coves teeming with marine life.

By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty
McClatchy Newspapers

FREDERICK SOUND, Alaska — "There's a whale right here, next to us!" whispered 15-year-old Will, leaning over the railing and frantically trying to focus his camera on the shiny black hump off the portside bow. "And there's another one, right there!" he said, pointing at the second giant head that rose up and tipped sideways, fixing a round black eye on the ship.

Humpback whales, too many to count, circled the Sea Bird as the 62-passenger vessel, a Lindblad Expedition cruise ship, idled in Alaska's Frederick Sound. Like kids at the circus, afraid of missing something, Will and his cousin, Dagney — my nephew and niece — dashed back and forth across the deck, counting the whales: two close to Will, another four off the starboard bow and more in the distance. Gently rippling the water's glassy surface, the behemoths rose, blew long frothy breaths, and with a final flip of enormous white-flecked flukes, dove out of sight.

Warmed by long sunny days, the Inland Passage's krill population explodes in summer, attracting hundreds of humpbacks, and in some places, nearly as many cruise ships. As long as the food lasts, the migrat-

ing whales — who haven't eaten in five months — patrol the sound, following the food, surfacing, diving, hunting, and eating nonstop, putting on pounds for the return swim back to Hawaii.

"You don't have to whisper," said Jonathan, the ship's onboard naturalist, out on deck to take photos of his own. "The whales can't really hear us talk," he told us. "They can hear banging and engine noises. High-pitched whines, too. If there were five or six ships here, they might swim away. But we're the only ship with the time to stay and watch."

Being alone is what wildlife watching is all about, especially in the hidden inlets of the Inside Passage, the inter-island coastal route between Vancouver and the Gulf of Alaska. Come July, however, if you chartered a float plane for an aerial tour of the main channel, you could count on spotting 10 mega-ships on the move and another 15 docked at ports from Ketchikan and Sitka to Juneau and Skagway.

And on shore? Thousands of disappointed travelers standing in line when they'd expected to see eagles, orcas and sea otters. Precious vacation time spent waiting for tour buses and queuing up to pay for souvenirs. Towering 3,000-passenger ships so big calling at ports so small

See ALASKA, 6M



The Sea Bird sails in Glacier Bay, where larger ships can't maneuver. Such treks are for the more adventurous and nature-loving visitors in search of solitude apart from the lines of tourist boats plying Alaska's waters.



Ketchikan welcomes visitors to "The Salmon Capital of the World." Mega-cruise ships line up in the harbor and disgorge scores of travelers waiting for their chance to visit nature.

OSCARS

from 1M

predictions prove more accurate than mine, you could win 20 Malco movie tickets. (At today's prices, that's nothing to sneeze at, unless you're allergic to popcorn.)

My record in the first 16 years of the contest is 119-41. That includes my one Year of Perfection, the 10-0 year of 2009 ("Slumdog Millionaire" was Best Picture), as well as the 3-7 Years of Shame, 1999 ("Shakespeare in Love") and 2004 ("Chicago").

Monday, The Commercial Appeal's crack "Beat Beifuss" team will tabulate the ballots to discover how many of you (if any) beat me. If 10 of you succeed, you'll each get 20 Malco movie tickets. If more than 10 best me, we'll draw the 10 winners at random from the eligible ballots.

Names of the Beifuss-beaters will be published Thursday at gomemphis.com and in the newspaper's M section.

Here are my picks:

Best Picture: The nominees are "Amour," "Argo," "Beasts of the Southern Wild," "Django Unchained," "Les Misérables," "Life of Pi," "Lincoln," "Silver Linings Playbook" and "Zero Dark Thirty."

I still think "Lincoln" is a possibility. But wins for "Argo" from the major motion picture guilds (producers, writers, directors), plus Golden Globe and British BAFTA awards for Best Picture, suggest Ben Affleck's spy story has wide appeal for voters who want entertainment with their "art." The Oscar will go to "Argo."

Best Actor: The nominees are Bradley Cooper for "Silver Linings Playbook," Daniel Day-Lewis for "Lincoln," Hugh Jackman for "Les Misérables,"

THE OSCARS

Hosted by Seth MacFarlane, at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, ABC-TV (WPTV Memphis). Red Carpet coverage begins at 6 p.m.

Joaquin Phoenix for "The Master" and Denzel Washington for "Flight."

This may be the evening's only sure bet: Declared "The World's Greatest Actor" on the cover of the November issue of Time magazine, **Daniel Day-Lewis** will become the first three-time winner of the Best Actor Oscar. (He's already won for "My Left Foot" and "There Will Be Blood.")

Best Actress: The nominees are Jessica Chastain for "Zero Dark Thirty," Jennifer Lawrence for "Silver Linings Playbook," Emmanuelle Riva for "Amour," Quvenzhané Wallis for "Beasts of the Southern Wild" and Naomi Watts for "The Impossible."

Quvenzhané is cute, but I don't think the Academy wants the award to go to a 9-year-old. I would not be surprised if Chastain or the 85-year-old Riva wins, but I think this might be the category where "Silver" shines: I'm predicting **Jennifer Lawrence**.

Best Supporting Actor: The nominees are Alan Arkin for "Argo," Robert De Niro for "Silver Linings Playbook," Philip Seymour Hoffman for "The Master," Tommy Lee Jones for "Lincoln" and Christoph Waltz for "Django Unchained."

Both Jones and De Niro are scene-stealing people-pleasers this year. Jones hasn't won since "The Fugitive" (Best Supporting Actor, 1994); De Niro hasn't won since "Raging Bull" (Best Actor, 1981) and hasn't even been nominated since "Cape Fear" (1991). Flipping a mental coin, I pick **Tommy Lee**

Jones.

Best Supporting Actress: The nominees are Amy Adams for "The Master," Sally Field for "Lincoln," Anne Hathaway for "Les Misérables," Helen Hunt for "The Sessions" and Jacki Weaver for "Silver Linings Playbook."

If screen time and importance to the story determined the winner, Helen Hunt would walk away with the award: "The Sessions" couldn't exist without her (frequently nude) sex-therapist character, while the other nominees portray people who arguably are extraneous to their stories. But significance never has been paramount; after all, Judi Dench earned her Supporting Actress Oscar for only *eight minutes* of screen time in "Shakespeare in Love." Making a big impression is more important than having a big part, which is why the Academy will give its love to **Anne Hathaway** as the teary-eyed, Falconet-coiffed seamstress-turned-prostitute whose show-stopping solo rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" is the most emotionally wrenching in-your-face moment in a movie filled with looming close-ups.

Best Director: The nominees are Michael Haneke for "Amour," Ang Lee for "Life of Pi," David O. Russell for "Silver Linings Playbook," Steven Spielberg for "Lincoln" and Benh Zeitlin for "Beasts of the Southern Wild."

This is the Snub Category. Affleck would be the front-runner, but he wasn't nominated. Other surprising omissions include Kathryn Bigelow ("Zero Dark Thirty"), Quentin Tarantino ("Django Unchained") and Tom Hooper ("Les Misérables"). I think anyone other than Haneke (and, to a lesser extent, Zeitlin) has a chance. Ang Lee might be a smart dark horse choice, but I predict **Steven Spiel-**

berg.

Best Adapted Screenplay: The nominated films are "Argo," "Beasts of the Southern Wild," "Life of Pi," "Lincoln" and "Silver Linings Playbook."

The Writers Guild of America gave the award to "Argo." I prefer a screenplay rife with such words as "mephitic" and "pettifying." I'm going to predict a win for **Tony Kushner** and "**Lincoln**."

Best Original Screenplay: The nominated films are "Amour," "Django Unchained," "Flight," "Moonrise Kingdom" and "Zero Dark Thirty." The choice is between two controversial films: "Django," which Spike Lee (among others) accused of turning slavery into a joke, and "Zero," which became a political football for critics on the right and the left. I have a sense that people respect but don't really like "Zero," and are wary of yet genuinely enjoy "Django." I think the Oscar will go to **Quentin Tarantino** and "**Django Unchained**."

Best Original Song: The nominees are "Before My Time," from the global-warming documentary "Chasing Ice"; "Everybody Needs a Best Friend," co-written by Oscar ceremony host Seth MacFarlane, from the raunchy teddy bear comedy, "Ted"; "Pi's Lullaby," from "Life of Pi"; "Skyfall," from the James Bond movie; and "Suddenly," a new Oscar-bait number added to the film version of the Broadway musical "Les Misérables." The Academy's inexplicable love for "Les Mis" could give "Suddenly" a win, but I'm going to predict that **Paul Epworth** and **Adele** will win for "**Skyfall**."

Best Animated Feature: The nominees are "Brave," "Frankenweenie," "ParaNorman," "The Pirates! Band of Misfits" and "Wreck-It Ralph." Disney trumps Pixar: The Oscar will go to "**Wreck-It Ralph**."

Dark colors best to hide weight

By Lois Fenton

Special to The Commercial Appeal

Q: I have lost a little of the weight I put on in recent years, but realistically doubt I will lose much more and also seem to have a settling of those pounds on my body. So, the question now is trying to make this weight look as best possible. Can you provide any clues about which clothes make a man look slimmer?

A: This is one of those few areas where the same fashion information fits for both men and women. Aside from recommending that you don't give up on those diet efforts, perhaps join Weight Watchers' new focus on men, a few other suggestions may be helpful.

■ Dark colors are the best fool-the-eye trick. Of course, that helps explain the tremendous popularity of wearing black. But you don't need to be stuck in a black rut. It is not the only dark color that can achieve this end; dark blues, deep grays, and chocolate browns are all equally slimming. Dark colors won't actually make you look svelter, but they do help.

■ Wearing the same color from top to bottom is another surefire method, because it directs the eye up and down in a sweeping vertical motion. This also works when the color you are repeating is not dark. You don't need to have every item you are wearing be the same color: the same effect can be accomplished with a top and pants in the same

color when the jacket over them is different, or when the jacket and pants are one color and the shirt is different. As long as one piece on top and one on the bottom are the same color, the effect is elongating.

■ Vertical stripes are also slimming. Create an illusion of slimmness by using vertical lines when possible: pin-, chalk- or shadow-striped suits, striped shirts, cardigan jackets, and ribbed sweaters all work.

On the other hand, anything that directs the eye horizontally across the body can make you appear 10 to 15 pounds heavier. Avoid horizontal stripes and also too much contrast between the top and bottom colors of an outfit.

■ Try to avoid a too-clearly-defined waist. A trim guy can look great in a belt or a tucked-in sweater that shows his waistline. A heavier man always looks better in something that slides over and camouflages the actual waistline.

My last suggestion may require a bit of convincing. While well-tailored and properly-fitted clothes are ideal, if you must err on one side or another, choose clothes that are a bit too loose rather than ones that are a bit too tight.

Even though it is human nature to want to wear a smaller size, the stuffed-sausage look does exactly the opposite of what a too-heavy person is trying to accomplish: rather than making him look slim, it actually makes him look heavy.

ALASKA

from 3M

that the sidewalks feel like Times Square. Floating hotels so huge that Alaska is little more than scenery for onboard cooking demonstrations, yoga classes, floor shows and wellness seminars.

That's not my idea of wild country. I want to see the glaciers from a deck near the water, close enough to hear a fish jump.

To kayak along the shoreline, looking for brown bears scratching up gravel in search of a meal. To snap photos of Bird Island, where sea lions haul out on the rocks. For me, being in the scene is what Alaska cruising is all about.

Cruise West's fleet used to sail these routes, but the company is gone now, having folded in September 2010. Fortunately, five of its expedition-style ships still sail in the "silver triangle," the waterways roughly between Skagway in the north, Sitka in the west and Ketchikan in the south.

A network of channels, bays and inlets protected by adjacent islands, the region teems with life.

Three of those ships now belong to Inner Sea Discoveries and its deluxe division, American Safari Cruises — rebranded "Un-Cruise Adventures" a few weeks ago.

The new name reflects what the company has been doing all along, says Un-Cruise spokeswoman Sarah Scoltock. "We focus more on adventure and less on the on-ship experience," she told me. "You can pick a ship and route that best fits your kind of adventure: luxury, active or heritage."

Un-Cruise's seven-ship Alaska fleet has been redesigned to carry fewer passengers, more crew and a lot more outdoor gear: kayaks, inflatable rafts, snorkel and scuba gear.

The company's so-called "luxury yachts" offer extras like yoga classes and spa treatments. The "active" ships are designed for travelers who'd rather join than watch, sportsmen on the go.

"We've gotten very good at breaking up large groups into units of eight



COURTESY STEVE HAGGERTY/COLORWORLD/MCT

Snow melt cascades into Tracy Arm, as viewed from the Lindblad Expedition's Sea Bird, in Alaska.

IF YOU GO

Per-person rates for Lindblad Expedition Cruises include all meals, guided shore excursions, and use of kayaks, sports and weather gear. Not included are alcoholic beverages and some outfitter-guided shore tours, mostly in Sitka and Juneau. To understand the region, invest in my favorite map, the "Inside Passage Cruise Guide," from Coastal Cruise Tour Guides, at \$15.95, available at trektools.com.

Itineraries: Most small ship routes in the Silver Triangle sail half-circle routes between Juneau and Sitka. Check websites for specifics.

Prices: Rates for a seven-day cruise can range from \$3,000 to \$7,000, depending on the cabin type and date: early season, midsummer or late summer. All meals, table wines and use of kayaks, snorkels, rubber boots and Zodiac excursions are usually included; alcoholic beverages and tips may not be.

For more: Un-Cruise Adventures: un-cruise.com 888-862-8881.

Fantasy Cruises: smallalaskaship.com. 800-234-3861.

Lindblad Expeditions: expeditions.com. 800-EXPEDITIONS.

Silver Seas Cruises: silverseas.com. 800-334-6544.

or 10, each with a guide, so that when you're out in a Zodiac or walking along the beach, you feel like one of a very few," Scoltock said. "Even with 80 passengers on board — and that's not a lot — each person has a truly personal experience."

As for the Sea Bird, she sails where giant ships can't go, maneuvering in shallow coves and through narrow fiords. With flex time built into the schedule, her captain

is free to follow a pod of swimming orcas or to stop to photograph a raft of sea otters.

"Each trip has an intended itinerary" said Brian Silver, an adventure specialist at Lindblad's headquarters. "But these are expeditions with a purpose, to show you wildlife and the wilderness. And since animals travel and weather conditions vary, it's possible that you'll visit slightly different places."

The onboard naturalists on our trip — experts in marine biology, geology, regional history and native cultures — guided most onshore outings and led the daily pre-exursion orientations, sometimes with spot-on timing.

We were standing by the rail, talking about melting glaciers, just as a giant chunk of ice calved off into water.

Our only port-of-call was at Petersburg, a fishing village settled by Norwegians. We stretched our land legs on a guided "bog walk," then wandered about, visiting the history museum and the drugstore (handy if you run out of toothpaste).

And we sampled one of the town's several fish-and-chip joints, serving the world's best (no kidding) fresh halibut, beer-battered and deep fried.

The Sea Bird's interior is small but efficiently designed, with several lounges, a dining room and 32 outside cabins. The décor, in simple blue and white, is renovated annually; the cabins are small, but have adequate space and spotless efficiency bathrooms.

Dress and meals are casual, with buffet service at breakfast and lunch.

Hearty three-course dinners with white and red wine were waiter-served at a single seating, with no assigned tables. That gave us a chance to move around and sit with passengers we'd met on excursions, kindred spirits with similar life experiences and sometimes even politics.

"The people on these kinds of cruises are birds of a feather," said Joyce Hunter, a retiree from Michigan.

For this or any other expedition cruise, I recommend hiking boots or sturdy tennis shoes. You may have to walk on a dirt path or a gravel beach, and will probably climb in and out of the Zodiacs.

Our passenger contingent ranged from 35 to 65 years of age, but there were exceptions: a toddler, two teenagers and several octogenarians.

While we tramped on the beaches and paddled kayaks, the seniors were happy to watch from the deck or the lounge. On a small ship cruise, Alaska is that close.