

Getting the Best Deal on Airfare

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There is no doubt that airfare is one of the biggest expenses of any vacation. Airfare costs can easily represent at least half of the total cost of a vacation and if you do not get the best possible deal on airfare it's easy to go way over budget. There are some important strategies for getting the best deal on airfares and this article discusses some of our favorites.

One of the things I've learned over the years is that it's almost always less expensive to fly out of the larger airports than the smaller regional ones. While this is not always the case and it is not true of every small airport, most larger airports have far more airlines competing for passengers. As we know, more competition generally equals lower prices for passengers.

Many of the larger airports are also home to the low cost carriers that have been such a phenomenon in the industry. While Southwest, Jet Blue and some of the other low cost carriers serve smaller airports, many are left out. The great thing about the incursion of these low cost carriers is they drive down the prices of the major airlines as well. So, even if you don't like the open seating, peanuts only policy of a low cost carrier like Southwest, chances are you can still score a good deal at an airport they serve, even on one of the other carriers.

Of course, the problem with flying out of major airports is getting there. Many people are in the same situation I am. That is, they have a small regional airport nearby with a couple of major airports a few hours drive away. What I do every time I need to fly is compare the cost of flying out of my close regional airport to the price I can get if I fly out

of a major city. While I have been able to score some excellent deals from my regional airport, in most cases the difference in fare has been at least \$200.

I then must weigh the costs of that cheaper ticket against the convenience of local flying. Usually it makes sense to head to the large airport, particularly if I am buying more than one ticket. At a \$200 price differential, it is easy to see how much money can be saved for a family traveling together.

One great trick that too few people take advantage of is booking an airport hotel for the night before your flight. This is especially valuable for those early morning flights and saves you having to get up in the middle of the night and hit the highway. Instead, head down the night before and get a good night's sleep then take the airport's shuttle right to the airport door.

The extra added bonus of this approach is that in most cases these airport hotels allow their guests to leave their cars at the hotel for the duration of the vacation. In many cases this service is free with the hotel stay, and even in cases where there is a fee involved it is usually much lower than comparable parking at the airport. So instead of paying \$10, \$15 or even \$20 a day to park at the airport, you have a safe, well lighted place for your car during the trip plus a comfortable place to spend the night. I honestly don't know why more people don't take advantage of this great way to save big bucks on both airfare and parking costs.