

HOW TO SAVE MONEY BOOKING YOUR TRAVEL ONLINE

AMATEURTRAVELER.COM

by Chris Christensen



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SNCF

BILLET à composer avant l'accès au train

PARIS GARE LYON → GENEVE CFF		01 ADULTE
NORMAL ADULTE		

Départ 11/12 à 11H10 de PARIS GARE LYON
 Arriv. à 14H35 à GENEVE CFF
 A UTILISER DANS CE TRAIN 6569
 ECH/RET AVANT DEP SINON RET 50./

Classe 2	VOITURE 07
PLACE ASSISE 87	
01 COULOIR	CARRE

Départ à de	Classe
Arriv. à	

Prix par voyageur : 77.00	Prix EUR **77.00
BP 875355488011 77.00 KM0626	CB 024272690
DV 535548801	

101209 12139 661472 Dossier SREUSO Page 1/1
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Introduction

One of the greatest things about booking travel online is the multitude of tools and websites available. One of the worst things about booking travel online is the multitude of tools and websites available. The confusion over which sites to use has actually caused a number of people to throw up their arms in despair and to stop booking travel online. This eBook is intended to give you the vocabulary, tools, and confidence to book your travel. I can't guarantee that you will always find the lowest priced ticket or hotel but this guide will give you some resources to get you closer to that ideal price.

Internet tools are constantly changing, so this eBook will also continue to change over time. I will email you when this book is updated if you have joined my [mailing list](#). Just so you know, many of the links in this eBook are affiliate links that help support the Amateur Traveler.

Online Booking Sites

Before we create a strategy for how to book your travel online let's look at some of the various types of websites available. Each site type has advantages and disadvantages that are useful to understand.

General Purpose Travel Booking Sites

The best-known travel sites are the big three: [Expedia](#), [Booking.com](#), and [Agoda](#). Expedia is the biggest site in the U.S., Booking in Europe and Agoda in Asia. These are general-purpose travel booking sites where you can book airfare, hotels, rental cars, tours, and cruises all in one location. These companies can sometimes use their high volumes as clout to negotiate lower rates with hotels or other travel vendors.

Specialty Booking Sites

In addition to general-purpose booking sites that will handle all of your traveling needs, there exist sites that specialize in selling specific travel services.

[Hotels.com](#) specializes in hotels.

[cruisedirect.com](#) specializes in cruises.



Hostelbookers.com and Hostelworld.com focus on hostels (which are not just for youth any more).

airbnb.com specializes in renting a room in someone's house or apartment or maybe the whole place.

Meta Search

When you search for a flight at a site like Kayak.com, they will search many other sites to find you the best deal. hotelscombined.com does the same thing for hotel rooms. The name for this type of search is "meta search".

When you use one of these sites, you select the best match for your search, you then will be forwarded to some other site to actually book the flight or the hotel room. These meta search sites may check hundreds of sites so using meta search sites will be a major part of our strategy to save money.

It is important to note that flight meta search sites such as Kayak or hotel meta search sites like hotelscombined are not offering you an airfare or a hotel rate but are just informing you what fares or rooms they have discovered recently from the suppliers. This means that sometimes the rate that they present may no longer be available.

Discount Airlines

Discount airlines tend to be smaller air carriers that save money because they fly fewer routes, have fewer types of planes, flight to out of the way airports or fly direct routes rather than the "hub and spoke" routes that major airlines use.

Discount airlines also tend to be leading the way with special fees or with making money selling you services in flight. Discount airlines can be a great way to save money as long as you understand how they work and use them appropriately. Be aware that, for instance, a city may have as many as 4 different airports. So it might be cheaper to fly from the United States to Europe if you fly through London, but if you fly in on one plane to Heathrow airport and out of the Stansted airport on a discount carrier you need to take into account that these airports can be over 2 hours apart on public transportation.

When booking air travel within the US, don't forget to check Southwest in addition to any general booking sites. Southwest avoids paying fees to other sites by only publishing their flight schedules on their own site. In Europe, some of the major discount airlines include Ryan Air, and Easy Jet but there are many other smaller ones like Smart Wings, Baboo, and Wizz Air.



Remnant Sites

Sites like [Hotwire](#) and [Priceline](#) will buy up remnant (unsold) hotel rooms, car rentals, or airline seats and sell them at steep discounts. I have stayed in a 4-star hotel near Beverly Hills for less than \$60 a night this way. But be aware you may sometimes get treated as a second-class guest when you book through one of these sites.

Some hotels will not allow any customization of your reservation after booking, including requesting a non-smoking room. You may also miss out on certain “perks” such as free wi-fi or free breakfast. You also must pay in full immediately, with no provision for getting a refund should there be an interruption in your travel plans. When these sites work, they work terrifically. When they don’t work, you may have a difficult trip.

These sites are not for the faint of heart. With less variability in options, you might be more comfortable using them for rental cars than for flights or hotels.

[Priceline](#) made famous the option of allowing you to “name your own price” which the hotel or airline can accept or reject. The price you name for a hotel is per night and does not include Priceline’s charge to you for taxes and service fees. More recently Priceline has also added a more simple interface where they tell you what price they see at different hotels in the area you are visiting.

With [Hotwire](#) be aware that you will not know the name of the hotel until after paying for the reservation.

You will be able to specify the geographic area and select a hotel based on the number of stars and the amenities. It is sometimes possible to guess the identity of a hotel based on those details. Hotwire will list the type of hotel which qualifies as 3-star or 4-star in their rating system, so you have an idea of what you are getting.

Travel Bargain Sites

While many travel sites include special travel deals on their site and email newsletters, there are some sites that specialize in finding travel deals. This includes sites such as [Travelzoo](#).

Travel Bargain Mailing Lists

Sometimes airlines put routes on sale or they just make mistakes and accidentally put routes on sale. An email newsletter like [Matt’s Flights](#) or [Dollar Flight Club](#) will help you learn about these deals.

Round The World Tickets



There is a special class of air ticket that can save you money on a more extensive vacation and that is a round the world ticket. These tickets allow you to make multiple stops over many days but restrict your travel so that you travel west to east or east to west around the globe. If you have a more extensive trip and want to see if a round the world ticket makes sense, then I suggest you try the site airtreks.com who are the experts in this area.

Review Sites

TripAdvisor is the most popular travel review site. These sites host reviews of people's travel experiences. Reviews can be a useful tool for helping you choose a particular hotel, restaurant or other travel experience. You do need to be aware that:

1. Not everyone who is unhappy with their travel experience had reasonable expectations.
2. Some people lie. TripAdvisor, for instance, does not have any idea if the person reviewing this hotel even stayed at the hotel. Negative reviews are, at least occasionally, written by unscrupulous competitors and positive reviews are, at least occasionally, written by unscrupulous providers.

Many of the travel booking sites also support reviews. Sites that only allow people who actually booked travel to write reviews are probably more accurate overall. But all that being said, when everyone who stays at a hostel says that they had trouble getting hot water, you should plan on a cold shower.

Booking Airfare 101

When I am ready to book airfare I do something like the following:

1. Start by checking the airfare at one of the aggregator sites. I usually use Kayak or TripAdvisor flights
2. If I am booking airfare in the US, I also then check Southwest separately
3. If I am booking airfare in Europe I also check Skyscanner

Booking Hotels 101

To book hotels I do something like the following:





1. Start by checking the hotel prices at one of the aggregator sites; again, I use [Hotelscombined](#)
2. I also check on [hotels.com](#) because you can get a night free for every 10 you book, or basically a 10% discount on every rate you see.
3. If I am willing to stay in a Hostel (in a private room or a dorm room) I check one of the hostel booking sites like [HostelBookers](#) or [HostelWorld](#).
4. These days we almost always check out options on [airbnb](#) as well. If you use [this link](#) you can save \$40 on your first stay.
5. Before booking double-check the hotel's web site to see that the location is correct and also see if they will give you a better rate or some incentive if you book directly. For example, I have seen some hotels recently that waive the internet fee for people who book directly.

Booking Rental Cars 101

For rental cars I do something like the following:

1. Start by checking the rental car prices at one of the meta search sites, I use [rentalcars.com](#)
2. Check for rental cars on [Hotwire](#)
3. If I have time I double-check against [Expedia](#)

Package Deals

Airlines pay very little in commissions these days so most travel sites make more money on hotels. Because of this, you may save money by booking your flight and hotel at the same time or your flight and your rental car. This is one of the best uses for sites such as [Expedia](#).

Also, check to see what packages the airline might provide. For example, I booked a hotel and flight together for a 3 day trip to Las Vegas and paid little more than the price of the hotel alone. The same situation can be found with booking flights and rental cars. One word of caution: Package deals are often based on per-person rates. If there are two people sharing a hotel room, you may find that the per-person rate for the air-hotel deal will end up higher than if you had booked the air and hotel separately.

Flexibility

One of the easiest strategies for saving money on travel is to be flexible. Often you can save significantly on a flight by flying midweek (Tuesday through Thursday), or by flying from a different local airport.

Other airports

Many sites include the option to search “nearby airports”. Be aware that a “nearby” airport may be two hours away, so be sure to factor in the time and cost of getting to and from that airport. The worst thing to realize at the last minute is that you flew into London’s Heathrow but your next flight leaves from London’s Stansted, 65 miles away. One of the reasons that discount airlines are cheaper is that they often use alternate airports.



[Hotels](#)
< [Flights](#) >
[Cars](#)
[Deals](#)

☒ Round-trip ☐ One-way

☐ Multi-city ☐ Weekend

From [\(custom\)](#)

SFO

☒ include nearby airports

To [\(custom\)](#)

New York, NY - All airports (NYC)

☒ include nearby airports

Other Dates

Again using [Kayak.com](#) as an example, when you are searching for flights, Kayak will display a calendar of airfares recently found on different days in that month. In this example, you can see that the best day to fly from SFO to NYC is December 8th at a cost of \$229 and the worst date is December 26th at a cost of \$411.

You can also indicate that your dates are flexible by using a pull-down menu just below the date of the flight. On Kayak.com you need to create a login to use this feature. This feature is available on a number of other sites.



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[Deals](#)
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[My Trips](#)
[More](#)

☒ Round-trip ☐ One-way ☐ Multi-city ☐ Weekend

From [\(custom\)](#)
SFO
☒ include nearby airports

To [\(custom\)](#)
New York, NY - All airports (NYC)
☒ include nearby airports

Depart [\(flexible\)](#)
12/14/2009 Anytime

Return [\(flexible\)](#)
12/21/2009 Anytime

Monday, Dec 14 2009 Monday, Dec 21 2009

Depart Date Flexibility
☒ Use exact date above
1 day before
1 day after
1 day before and after
2 days before and after
3 days before and after

Return Date Flexibility
Use exact date above

☐ Prefer Nonstop

Compare sites in new windows
☐ Hotwire ☐ Expedia ☐ Travelocity ☒ Priceline

☐ Find Flights only
☐ Find Hotels too
☒ Find Cars too

[Search](#)

Best Fares: SFO to NYC Dec 2009 any trip length

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 \$248+	2 \$239+	3 \$239+	4 \$252+	5 \$239+
6 \$252+	7 \$247+	8 \$229+	9 \$239+	10 \$239+	11 \$252+	12 \$246+
13 \$327+	14 \$259+	15 \$239+	16 \$243+	17 \$259+	18 \$322+	19 \$342+
20 \$362+	21 \$352+	22 \$350+	23 \$329+	24 \$259+	25 \$259+	26 \$411+
27 \$356+	28 \$279+	29 \$279+	30 \$279+	31 \$253+		

Note: this calendar displays the best fares found by other Kayak users over the past 48 hours. Due to rapidly changing airline prices & seat availability, these fares may no longer be available.

[Visit Kayak Buzz](#)

[Show Your Recent Searches](#)

Non-Stop or Not?

Taking a non-stop flight can often cost more than stopping along the way. Of course, a non-stop flight will take less time and will probably be less stressful. It will also give the airline fewer chances of misplacing your luggage.

Note in the example below I can get from San Francisco to Paris for \$1060 if I fly direct but if I am willing to make a stop I can pay as little as \$632. Orbitz also breaks down the price by airline because you may have a preference for one airline over another because of quality of service or because you are accumulating frequent flyer points on that airline.



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Find flights by:

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KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

American Airlines

US Airways

Air Canada

Continental Airlines

United Airlines

Delta Air Lines

Air France

Northwest Airlines

TAP Portugal

British Airways

Virgin Atlantic

Lufthansa

bmi

Stops	Price														
Non-stop	\$1,060 total \$1,186								\$1,060 total \$1,180	\$1,060 total \$1,180					
1 stop	\$632 total \$896	\$818 total \$961	\$852 total \$988	\$862 total \$996	\$645 total \$1,024	\$666 total \$1,057	\$682 total \$1,069	\$985 total \$1,117	\$1,120 total \$1,245	\$1,135 total \$1,269		\$1,945 total \$2,293	\$1,916 total \$2,371	\$2,225 total \$2,610	\$3,941 total \$4,483
2+ stops	\$936 total \$1,360											\$936 total \$1,353			

Fares are per person in US dollars, using e-tickets. Total fare includes all taxes and fees.
Additional baggage charges may apply.
Some itineraries require paper tickets with an additional charge. Changes after booking are subject to change fees.

Sort flights by:

Lowest price
Departure time
Shortest flight

[Airport codes](#)

Change Search

From: City name or airport
SFO

☐ incl. nearby airports

Showing lowest priced flights (45 flights out of 196 total)
[See all 196 flights](#)

Select
\$632 + \$264 taxes & fees = **\$896 USD** per person

PRICE ASSURANCE ¹

Time of Day

The same route can cost a different amount at a different time of day. The first flight of the day or a red-eye flight (a flight that is overnight) are usually the cheapest. But airport security lines can be crazy at 6 am and hassle-free at 9 am. And if you take a night flight but lose a day of your vacation recovering that may not really be a savings. Most sites will allow you to specify what time you want to take off or land. [Kayak](#) has one of the better interfaces to filter flights by the time of day. In this example, I have specified that I want to leave no earlier than 7:56 am and arrive no later than 9:02 pm.



Anfrage vom 16.12.09, 14:40

DB IC/EC Fahrkarte
NORMALPREIS

CIV 1080
Gültigkeits: 17.12.09 - 16.01.10

VON Berlin

->NACH
->Praha

UWTAUSCH/ERSTATTUNG AB DEM
1. GELTUNGSTAG 15 EURO

3 Erwachsene

2

Seite 1 von 1

▼ **Stops** Best Fare

☒ nonstop \$362

☒ 1 stop \$361

☐ 2+ stops

▼ **Flight Times**

☒ Departure ☐ Return Flight

Takeoff (Departure) [show all](#)

Mon 7:56a - Tue 12:00a

Landing (Departure) [show all](#)

Mon 10:30a - Mon 9:02p

When to Go

The best way to save money on a vacation is to go when others are not going. Every destination has a high season and a low season. Europe's high season starts in mid-June when schools get out and more people are traveling and runs through August. Its low season is winter, especially after New Years'. Often the best option is the "shoulder" season in between high and low season. So Europe, for instance, is cheaper than at high season and often with better weather and smaller crowds in September and May.

Where to Go

One of the best ways to save money when you book travel online is to go where the deals are. If you are flexible about where you want to go you can find significant savings.

A great resource to find current deals is Kayak's Explore tool. Go to [Kayak](#) and click on "More" and then click on "Explore" to find the Kayak Explore tool. On this page select your home airport and what dates you want to travel.



KAYAK Flights Hotels Cars Packages Cruises Explore More ▾

San Francisco (SFO) Anytime

Flight time 12+ hours Budget \$500

Any stops Nonstop only Up to one stop

Map showing flight prices to various destinations from San Francisco (SFO) for the selected budget (\$500). Destinations and prices include:

- Mexico: \$243
- Mexico City: \$363
- Honduras: \$375
- Nicaragua: \$375
- Costa Rica: \$375
- Panama: \$375
- Colombia: \$424
- Venezuela: \$424
- Caracas: \$424
- Guatemala: \$424
- El Salvador: \$424
- Peru: \$424
- Lima: \$424
- Brazil: \$424
- Paraguay: \$424
- Bolivia: \$424
- Argentina: \$424
- Chile: \$424
- Uruguay: \$424
- Venezuela: \$424
- Caracas: \$424
- Guatemala: \$424
- El Salvador: \$424
- Peru: \$424
- Lima: \$424
- Brazil: \$424
- Paraguay: \$424
- Bolivia: \$424
- Argentina: \$424
- Chile: \$424
- Uruguay: \$424

Travel Hacker Must-Sees \$57+

Romantic Escapes \$227+

Amazing Beaches \$101+

Family-Friendly Cities \$101+

Ski Slopes \$161+

The results page will show which destinations would be cheap to fly to at that time. Slide the budget slider to hide destinations beyond your budget. This search found flights to Lima from San Francisco for under \$500 per person for the January dates I chose. As it turned out when I did my search both were cheaper than any destination in Europe. I also found flights to Europe as cheap as \$308.

How to Save Money After You Book

Airfare Alerts

Sites like Yapta.com allow you to set up alerts to be notified when an airfare that you have already booked goes down in price. Sadly as many airlines have increased their ticket change fees this service is not as useful as it used to be.

Frequent Flyer Miles

I recommend everyone join airline frequent flyer programs as they are free.

In addition, my wife and I pay \$40 a year to have a MasterCard from Citibank that earns us airline miles (American Airlines in our case) for each dollar we charge. Such cards are quite common these days. We never carry a balance so this card only costs us that \$40 a year. This last year both my wife and I flew to Europe on tickets we earned with miles.

It is easier to earn miles than to spend them as you commonly need to plan out 6-12 months to use miles on a popular route. Although frequent flyer miles can also come in handy for last-minute emergency trips. It would have cost me something like \$800 to fly from San Francisco to Denver to attend my grandfather's funeral since it was unplanned, but I was able to travel for free instead by using miles. You may have heard of bereavement fares but those fares are usually only a discount from a full-fare ticket.

When to use Travel Agents

By the time many of you have reached this point in the eBook you are no longer interested in booking your own travel or at least see the value in having someone else do it for you. I have not focused much on cruises in this eBook as some travel experts I know like Pauline Frommer recommend that when you are booking a cruise is a good time to use a travel agency who might be able to get free cabin upgrades or similar perks. If you are looking for a good travel agent email your travel plans to travelagent@AmateurTraveler.com and I will pass them along to someone I trust.

Feedback

If you have comments on this book or questions feel free to email host@AmateurTraveler.com.



