

Getting The Best Travel Deals

Contributed by Steve Gillman
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Flexibility Buys The Best Travel Deals

{bot_wrgoogle}Almost any travel destination has "seasons" which are more crowded and therefore more expensive. Also, airfare varies widely in price from month to month and even according to the day of the week or time of day. Finally, there many activities which may be marginally more entertaining yet cost much more.

Suppose you go on trips to several destinations over the years, using the usual strategy of "I want to go here now and do these things." On some of these trips you'll be at the height of the season, meaning it will be expensive for hotels. Airfare will cost a lot if you happen to choose the expensive days and times. With a fixed idea about your activities, you'll also likely pay more than you need to have a great time. You'll miss out on some real fun that could be much cheaper.

On the other hand, what if you go somewhere during the off-season, go on the day that has the cheapest plane tickets, and start with the interesting activities that cost less? Perhaps you spend just half as much on average, even though over those years you go to all the same destinations. The savings could mean even more opportunities to travel because of the money saved.

Years ago I went to Ecuador because it was an inexpensive destination. The February departure was chosen because I found plane tickets for \$258 round trip from Miami. And though I hadn't considered taking a tour to Mount Cotopaxi, I discovered that I could do that day-long trip to walk on the glaciers of a volcano for just \$15, so I went. You create your own best travel deals if you are flexible and open minded.

Best Travel Deals - The Formula

Try this simple formula for getting the best travel deals:

1. Watch a few travel programs, read some travel magazines, and make a list of six to ten places you might like to visit eventually.
2. Look for the best time to go to each. This means when it would be interesting for you and cheaper than other times - an "off-season" that is still a good time for you to visit.
3. Gather information online. How much will hotels and meals cost? What is there to do and how much you are likely to spend on each of these activities. Take notes, of course.
4. Do an online search for plane tickets before you are ready to start planning. Experiment with different days of the week for departure and return flights to find the cheapest possibilities. This can change, so you'll be doing this again when you are ready to actually start specific planning. For now you just want an idea of the days that are likely the cheapest.

5. When it's time to travel, pick from among your listed destinations that are off-season and search all the possible dates you might travel, to find the cheapest airfare. Actually it's best to do this before you arrange for time off work, so you can take advantage of the best possible travel dates.

6. Purchase your tickets, do some more research, and start packing and planning.

Here's another tip for getting the best travel deals: Book a hotel only for the day you arrive, and then find your hotels(s) once there. There are many nice, less expensive hotels that you won't find online, and in our experience, even good package deals are never as cheap as finding your own hotels once you get there, as long as you are not coming there at a busy time. Doing this also allows you more freedom, so you can change your plans as you go, taking advantage of whatever great deals come up.

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