



'Taste the world your way'

How to Get the Cheapest Fares To UK & Europe in 2012

Written by Karen Ridge, 18 September 2011

This guide is designed to assist travellers with information about how to book good value airfares to the United Kingdom and Europe in 2012. It provides sensible advice on when to book, what to look for to ensure you get the best fares and also how to avoid the pitfalls that commonly occur when booking tickets.

1. Book in 'Earlybird' Season

Each year the big name airlines bring out special fares in approximately September/October/November for people wishing to travel the following year.

Plan ahead and make sure you know your dates for travel. Book your flights during this earlybird time and ensure they are paid for by the deadline.

2. Know Your Dates

Be sure about your dates and don't make changes. Remember that earlybird airfares and most other discounted fares can be restrictive because they are cheap, which means changing dates or the routing of your ticket may be costly.

Always work out your itinerary roughly before booking your flights. Get it right to start with and you will save money.

3. Understand Seasons

Your departure date from Australia determines the season of your airfare, and therefore the price.

Travelling to UK & Europe for their summer months is typically high season ie June, July & August departures from Australia will normally cost you more.

Christmas time is also high season (although it's winter!).

Lowest season to UK & Europe is typically for departures in October, November and late January & February.

4. Understand Availability

Airlines offer dozens of different types of fares within economy class, ranging from cheap to expensive on every single departure. They allocate a set number of seats at each price. Naturally the cheapest seats sell first. After that, the second cheapest, then the third cheapest and so on.

It sometimes helps to be flexible with your travel and check a day or two either side of your chosen dates to ensure you have got the lowest priced seat.

5. Different Seasons for Different Airlines

It's not like it used to be! Once upon a time the all airlines used the same dates to determine the seasons but now each airline has its own take on what is high, low and shoulder season. Therefore it can be worthwhile to be flexible on which airline you fly with and compare fares for the dates you want to travel.

If you want to fly with a particular airline, then find out when their seasons change. It can save you hundreds of dollars.

6. One Way vs Return

Depending on where you are flying to and from it can sometimes be cheaper to buy two one way airfares rather than a return ticket. But only sometimes! This is worth checking and can occasionally be a clever way to save lots of dollars. It can also backfire and be very costly so make sure you know what you are doing when it comes to this trick! (Or see point 11)

7. Fly Home from Different City

You can fly home from a different city from the one you flew into. For example you can fly into London and out of Paris on the same ticket with the same airline, for the same price as a return ticket to London.

Yet many people buy a return ticket to London and then a side trip (or train trip) to Paris. This costs you more money and wastes your holiday time.

It comes down to planning your itinerary and asking the right questions.

8. Combination Airfares

European based airlines that fly to Asia but don't fly to Australia (for example Swiss, Lufthansa, Austrian, & KLM) offer airfares to the Australian market in combination with airlines that fly between Australia and Asia (Qantas, Thai Airways, Malaysia Airlines, Cathay Pacific).

These airfares are rarely found on the internet because they are a bit more complicated to sell. They can however save you hundreds of dollars. Be aware that these combination airfares will most likely have two transit points between Australia and your final destination, but are an excellent option for people wishing to travel to less popular/smaller cities, as well as Eastern Europe.

9. Don't Get Sucked In By The Advertising

Too many people see what they think is a great deal and book in a hurry without thinking it through. They get stuck with tickets to cities they didn't really want and then have to add extra tickets to get where they really want to go.

Plan your trip in advance. Speak with a professional about your itinerary and get the right advice.

The biggest holiday cash waster is the poorly planned traveller, or the one who books on a whim.

Plan, research and engage a professional.

Start with the whole picture in mind. Don't just book a flight and then hope the rest can be added around it. Sometimes it will work but many times it won't.

10. Last Seats Trick

Don't fall for that tired old sales trick of 'there are only two seats left'. A certain big name travel company is famous for this. Avoid this lack of professionalism and the company at all costs.

11. How to Get the Best Fare

So how do you get the best fare and make use of all this information?

Two options – One spend hours of your own time searching online and trying to make the comparisons yourself, or two call a privately owned travel agency and they can search for you.

Be sure to avoid the big name travel stores as they operate on 'preferred commissions' with many airlines which means their advice is not always in your best interests.

Technology now allows privately owned agents to search, compare and hold seats unlike any internet system.

With one or two booking commands and within seconds, a good travel agent can tell you if a better fare, more direct route or shorter flying time is possible for your trip.

Money is not required upfront and you can hold seats on several different airlines simultaneously, for a period of time.

Complete itineraries can be sent to you, so you can make an educated decision about your travel plans and ensure you are getting the best fare available.

12. Booking Security

The other important thing to know about booking with a travel agent is that your money is protected in the event that the airline becomes insolvent (Eg Ansett in 2001). This means you would get a full refund of your ticket. Good to know! This is not the case if you book online.

You also have the support of your agent while you travel, in the event of emergency changes to your ticket or if you suddenly need help. Also good to know!

13. It Costs the Same with a Travel Agent

The airlines pay travel agents a commission on each ticket booked, so it costs no more to book your fare through a private agent than it does to book online. And look at all the benefits you enjoy. Not to mention their years of first hand travel advice that is freely provided to clients.

Smart people always book with a travel agent.

Bottom Line - Aim to buy tickets through a travel agent in earlybird season and save.

For further information on this article or to book airfares & travel with a privately owned travel agent contact:

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Karen has owned and operated travel agencies since 1993, and is the Director of Food and Wine Travel a travel agency specialising in food and wine themed holidays for Australians travelling to Europe.