



My Insiders Secrets to Booking Airfare



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INTRODUCTION

Booking flights is a part of travel that even most travel agents hate doing, but let's face it, unless you are traveling to destinations close to home, it is a necessity if you want to travel.

As a travel advisor, I put together trips for clients every day, most of the trips include flights, so I have learned a few tricks that may help you with booking your flights, or at least have a better understanding of how the airline booking system works, so that you can plan ahead a little bit next time you plan on flying.

I hope you will find this helpful!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lene H. Minyard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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My Insider Secrets to Booking Airfare

Booking flights can very often be a nightmare! When should you book to get the best price? where do you check prices, and what else do you need to keep in mind?

You find a price that is OK, but decide to look a bit more to make sure you found a the best price. When you are satisfied that your price is the best one available, those seats are no longer possible to find. Not to mention if you need tickets for several people on the same flight! The price you saw for one ticket is not available for your family of 5! Booking flights can get quite stressful, which is not what vacation planning should be!

There is of course another way! You can avoid all the stress by calling your travel agent!

So, will your travel agent always find the cheapest price?

Well first of all, an airline will charge between 5 and 15 different prices for the same seat over the course of its shelf life. Normally advance prices will be lower, and as the flight fills up prices will increase. However, as the departure date looms airlines are likely to drop their prices dramatically in order to fill space - some money is better than no money, after all.

There are no hard-and-fast rules for hitting the right booking window. According to a recent study by CheapAir the lowest average fares have been available seven weeks before departure. Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC), which manages airline ticket sales for U.S. travel agencies, conducted a similar study and located the best airfares six weeks prior to flying. But that window changes dramatically depending on where you are traveling—and when.

This means that it is very difficult to say when to buy, and when the price is at the lowest. It is also important to understand that the way airline pricing works is that when you check a price it is usually the lowest price at the time for one seat. If you have a family of 5, that price may very well not be available for 5 people, so when you decide to purchase you will see a jump in price.



You may say, well buy the one or two seats that are available at the cheapest price first then, and then the three other tickets at the higher price. You can do that, just be aware that this can be very risky, esp. during high season. When you go to book the last 3 seats the flight may be full, and now you are stuck with two tickets on that flight, and will have to book the three other family members on a different flight.

If your group has more than eight people you will not be able to book everyone at one time yourself. Groups should always be booked through a professional who has access to a GDS system and can book the group together.

You may say: Surely you have some guidelines on when to book? and sure, there are certain trends that we look at.



Domestic Flights

Airlines don't really begin managing their domestic flights until about three months in advance –that's when they start releasing the more affordable seats. Your best bet is between three months and six weeks in advance. Recent data from Kayak supports this. The airfare aggregator looked at a year's worth of searches and found that six months before departure, domestic ticket prices were about 20 percent higher than the lowest fares. They started dropping three months out and hit a low three to seven weeks before departure. Whatever you do, don't wait until the last week, when prices shoot up–by about 25 percent, according to Kayak.

Winter Caribbean and Ski Getaways

There's no use waiting for fare sales here. High demand and limited flights mean that prices for winter flights to Caribbean islands and smaller ski-country airports usually don't fluctuate much—and rise dramatically fairly early. Looking at last winter's economy-class fares from the United States to the Caribbean islands, ARC found the lowest average fares 21 weeks before departure. The advice is to book both Caribbean and ski getaways about four to five months before your trip. The exceptions: flights to Denver, Salt Lake City, and other large airports serving ski destinations. You'll have extra time to book because the airports have more capacity.



Europe

Planning in advance is recommended to get the best tickets to Europe. When ARC crunched the numbers for travel between Memorial Day and Labor Day last year, it found the lowest average fares to Europe a full 31 weeks before departure. Based on this, you should begin your search around four to five months out. There are deals to Europe, but if you can't be flexible about your dates or destination, you likely won't be able to take advantage of these deals. If you do have some flexibility, the booking window decreases and the fares drop for travel in the spring or fall—outside of the school holidays.



Asia

For long-haul tickets, start your search early. Kayak's data located the best average fares for Asian flights a full nine to ten months out; they drop again (though not as low) between three and four month in advance.

South America

For South American tickets, the ideal booking window was around six months before departure.

Africa

For African trips, the site found that prices started to fall about three months out. Interestingly, they didn't bottom out until about five weeks before departure. Of course, these are all average prices. If you're hoping to catch a fare sale to a farther-flung destination, focus your search between five and two months out, when they usually appear.



Holiday Travel

The earlier the better, once again. Last year, analysts with CheapAir tracked domestic airfares for more than 11,000 markets for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's travel.

Notably, for all three holidays average ticket prices hit a low in early June. They fluctuated throughout the rest of the summer and early fall, but by the end of September they were steadily rising.



Not everyone can plan a winter holiday in June, of course. But if you're considering going from somewhere cold to somewhere warm getting the tickets as soon as possible is a good idea. A similar principle is at work for spring-break travel.

Tickets to Florida and other popular warm-weather destinations start rising early—and tend not to vary.

Five months in advance seems to be a good time to start looking. Airlines are really good at knowing when an airport's local school districts are on spring break, and will adjust airfares accordingly.

If you are planning on booking your tickets yourself you may want to sign up with a fare-watching service such as Airfarewatchdog, CheapAir, and FareCompare.

Other factors to consider

When I work with my clients I usually find that clients combine air with other travel components, which adds another complexity to the picture. While flights may be inexpensive to South Africa in January, your safari will not be.

Another big factor is of course your enjoyment! Personally I much prefer Paris in May than at the end of January! You therefore need to look at the entire picture.

You also don't want to book an expensive cruise in the Mediterranean only to find out that you have waited too long to get flights for your family for the dates you need.

As a travel agent I never focus on ticket price alone, here are a few things I consider when choosing flights for my clients, and why:



Airlines reputation - some airlines are notorious for delays, cancellations and lost luggage, which IMHO opinion is not worth the savings. Then there are some airlines that we just don't consider safe, and I would never consider as an option for my clients.

Preferably same airline - when you use different airlines your chances of lost luggage multiplies, plus let's say on your return your flight from Norway to Amsterdam was delayed by 6 hours, making you miss your connecting flight from Amsterdam. When it is through the same airline, the airline will re-schedule your flights, when it is with two separate airlines that are not partners your second flight is most likely lost, and you will be responsible for purchasing a new flight.

Other benefits to using the same airline is that there is less of a chance your luggage will be lost or delayed, and your gates will be at the same terminal, so much closer than if you have two different airlines that are not partners.

Departure and final destination airports- It is always worth looking at all your options if you live in a destination where you are able to fly out of several different airports. Sometimes there can be a very big difference in price, while other times the price saving is not worth the expense and inconvenience of getting to the airport with the lowest fare.

If you are flying in to Oslo for instance, you can fly in to Torp instead of Gardemoen, but it will cost you a lot more to get in to town, take more time and will be more difficult to re-schedule flights if there are cancellations etc.

12:08

FLIGHT	STATUS	DESTINATION	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	STATUS	DESTINATION	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL
1234	ON TIME	PARIS	12:00	12:15	ON TIME	PARIS	12:00	12:15
5678	DELAYED	BRUSSELS	12:05	12:20	DELAYED	BRUSSELS	12:05	12:20
9012	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:10	12:25	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:10	12:25
3456	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:15	12:30	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:15	12:30
7890	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:20	12:35	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:20	12:35
1122	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:25	12:40	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:25	12:40
3344	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:30	12:45	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:30	12:45
5566	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:35	12:50	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:35	12:50
7788	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:40	12:55	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:40	12:55
9900	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:45	13:00	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:45	13:00
1213	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:50	13:05	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	12:50	13:05
1415	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:55	13:10	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	12:55	13:10
1617	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:00	13:15	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:00	13:15
1819	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:05	13:20	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:05	13:20
2021	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:10	13:25	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:10	13:25
2223	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:15	13:30	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:15	13:30
2425	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:20	13:35	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:20	13:35
2627	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:25	13:40	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:25	13:40
2829	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:30	13:45	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:30	13:45
3031	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:35	13:50	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:35	13:50
3233	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:40	13:55	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:40	13:55
3435	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:45	14:00	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:45	14:00
3637	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:50	14:05	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	13:50	14:05
3839	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:55	14:10	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	13:55	14:10
4041	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:00	14:15	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:00	14:15
4243	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:05	14:20	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:05	14:20
4445	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:10	14:25	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:10	14:25
4647	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:15	14:30	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:15	14:30
4849	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:20	14:35	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:20	14:35
5051	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:25	14:40	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:25	14:40
5253	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:30	14:45	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:30	14:45
5455	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:35	14:50	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:35	14:50
5657	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:40	14:55	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:40	14:55
5859	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:45	15:00	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:45	15:00
6061	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:50	15:05	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	14:50	15:05
6263	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:55	15:10	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	14:55	15:10
6465	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:00	15:15	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:00	15:15
6667	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:05	15:20	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:05	15:20
6869	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:10	15:25	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:10	15:25
7071	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:15	15:30	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:15	15:30
7273	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:20	15:35	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:20	15:35
7475	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:25	15:40	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:25	15:40
7677	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:30	15:45	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:30	15:45
7879	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:35	15:50	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:35	15:50
8081	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:40	15:55	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:40	15:55
8283	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:45	16:00	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:45	16:00
8485	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:50	16:05	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	15:50	16:05
8687	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:55	16:10	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	15:55	16:10
8889	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:00	16:15	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:00	16:15
9091	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	16:05	16:20	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	16:05	16:20
9293	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:10	16:25	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:10	16:25
9495	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	16:15	16:30	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	16:15	16:30
9697	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:20	16:35	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:20	16:35
9899	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	16:25	16:40	ON TIME	BRUSSELS	16:25	16:40
10001	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:30	16:45	ON TIME	AMSTERDAM	16:30	16:45

JCDecaux Airport

FAST TRACK



Good flight times - I try to avoid red-eyes, esp. on the return as it makes things more challenging, and often more expensive to get back to the airport. European airports normally have good options of public transportation, but if your flight leaves at 6:00 am, and you need to be at the airport at 4:00 am you may find that your options are very limited, and a taxi may be your only good choice.

For people who have done any shopping, and need to get their refund on the VAT (value added tax) at the airport this also makes it impossible, as the office will most likely be closed.

I also look at arrival time so that I can try to get my clients arrive early in the day. The reason is that you are paying for the hotel room whether you arrive at noon or 11:00 pm at night! Why would you want to miss out on an entire day of your vacation if there are options?

Let's say you are paying \$250 for your hotel, and if you come in at 10:00 pm you save \$100.00 per person. Arriving at 10:00 pm will get you at the hotel around midnight, you will have lost one entire day of your vacation at your destination, and each day has a value! You are paying \$250 so that you can sleep there one more night. Why not arrive at 11:00 am for instance and you will have most of the day you arrive to enjoy your destination? That is why you are going!

Of course there are a few destinations where the options are not very good, and we just have to deal with what is offered, but my goal is to get the most value out of the vacation budget for my clients. It may be the cheapest, but the best value is not to spend an entire day at an airport for a lay-over!

Short lay-overs, but not too short - the trick is not to have really long lay-overs, as most people end up spending a great portion on their flight savings on poor airport food & drinks. You want to make sure that you allow enough time between flights so that you can easily make your connection w/o too much stress. (this varies a bit depending on the airport, some airports require a lot more time than others to navigate to your next flight).

I also know, or have the ability to check which airports you can get away with having a shorter lay-over, and which airport requires more time. Keflavik airport in Reykjavik for instance is a very small and easy airport to get through, so you will not need as much time as you will at Heathrow for instance.

Another important thing to check is that your layover has the arrival and departure flights flying in and out of the same airport - there are cities that have several airports. Before I became a travel agent I had someone book me a flight where I arrived at Heathrow, but my next flight was from Gatwick. This made my flight very stressful, having to collect my luggage, go through customs and then take a bus to Gatwick where I had to check in again for my next flight.



Preferable no lay-over on the return in the US - this means you have to collect your luggage at your first point of entry, go through customs and re-check your bags. This can both be stressful and take a long time making it difficult to catch your final flight.

These were some tips for you to consider when you book your next flight. If you would rather have a professional take care of your flights for you please contact me.

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So how much is the service fee - this varies a little depending on the complexity of the flight schedule, and whether or not you are booking the rest of your vacation with me.

Airlines usually do not pay commission, which is why travel agents charge a service fee. The savings can be tremendous, and the time and stress saved and the support you will receive will be well worth the service fee..

Support - as a travel agent I support all of the flights I book. If there is an issue, you have a person to contact, someone who will be your advocate, and care about you - unlike booking on-line.

I will also provide an electronic itinerary that you can access from your smart phone or other electronic device. Your itinerary will be tied to the airline, which means when there are delays, or cancellations it will usually update automatically.

Your link with your itinerary can be shared with your loved ones, so they will have your flight schedule as well as any other vacation component that you have booked through me.

Please contact me if you would like some help with your next flights or other vacation components. I would love to work with you!



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