



Are You Paying Too Much for Your Travel?

Don't miss out on special nonprofit benefits.

By Steve Summers

If travel is even a small part of your budget, you owe it to your organization to find the best prices and make your employees' trips as hassle-free as possible. Here's how.

Initiate a travel policy

Set out guidelines specifying which airlines, ticket types, and hotels your employees are allowed to book. Encourage staff to stick to the travel plan. When exceptions arise, be sure they're tracked and justified.

Communicate your policy

If people don't know about it or can't find it, they can't follow it. Make your travel policy easily accessible and simple to read. Ensure workers understand why it's important to follow your travel plan and what the wider benefits are to your organization.

Find the best fares

Travel requirements differ from trip to trip. Sometimes a traveler is best served by the very cheapest,

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most restricted ticket, but a more flexible ticket might be required if plans are likely to change. If you book the most restrictive ticket and then need to alter travel dates, you may end up paying a galling price.

Special tickets exist for the nonprofit community and often provide the best of both worlds (low price and flexibility). Sometimes called humanitarian fares, these sector-specific air fares provide benefits such as delayed ticketing, which lets you hold tickets without actually making the purchase, thus getting a better price. Other perks include increased baggage allowances, reduced fees for amending and canceling tickets, and minimal hidden costs.

Understand what you get for your money

Being charged separately for baggage, food, drink, and even pillows, a practice known as unbundling, is becoming commonplace. Be con-

scious of this when looking for flights online. What on the surface seems like a great fare may soar during the buying process as non-inclusive items are added. Sometimes an all-inclusive ticket can provide the best value, even if the initial fare is higher.

When you compare an online ticket between New York and Kenya with a humanitarian flight, for example, the former may appear hundreds of dollars cheaper. But it is non-refundable, and any changes would be charged at \$300 plus the difference between the two fares. With a humanitarian package, by contrast, you can get a refund on your ticket for \$75, and you can change the return date of travel for free, provided a space in the same class is available.

Book earlier

The laws of supply and demand dictate that the smaller the gap between booking and traveling, the

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more you pay. As an exercise, take a look at the price of your travel bookings in relation to departure date. You may be surprised!

Measure your travel expenses

Review management information reports to see what your organization's travel patterns and booking behaviors are. Use the results to see where you can save. Monitor and evaluate travel spending on an ongoing basis to be sure you're getting the best value for your money.

Avoid peak travel periods

Booking your travel off-peak can save great amounts of money. Fares can double when traveling in peak season.

Know when to use what booking method

Booking travel independently online can seem like a good idea and sometimes is the most effective way; but it can also cost you time and money. If you've ever booked online and then needed to make a change, you know how time-consuming this can be.

Simple point-to-point domestic journeys can be easy and straightforward to book on your own. When traveling internationally or on more complex itineraries, however, dealing with an agent may be best. Why spend hours searching for fares when an agent can find them in minutes? If you need to amend your booking, why spend hours on hold or trawling through online booking records?

What's more, self-booking tools don't offer the special deals to which you might be entitled. Travel companies negotiate these bargains with airlines and hotel chains, and they aren't available to the wider public.

Work with experts in your niche

Align yourself with a travel agency that understands your requirements and the market in which you operate. A good travel provider will help you develop a strategy to save on travel and add value through consultative processes.

Educate your travelers

Work with your traveling employees to understand what drives their choices. Share the tips in this article to help them find the best travel options. ■



Steve Summers is chief executive of Key Travel (www.keytravel.com), which is dedicated exclusively to the nonprofit sector and has helped clients maximize travel budgets for over 30 years.

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