

INSIDE SECRETS

How to get the best travel deals...



Let's face it, we ALL love a bargain, especially when it comes to holidays. But few of us are even aware of the trade secrets to getting the best travel deals - without splashing out. *The Traveller's Marie Rocher* spoke to some tourism insiders to find out how its done...



POUND WISE, PENNY FOOLISH

To prevent tears if a budget airline goes bust (it happens!), check the fine print of your service agreement with your credit card company to see if it covers refunds in the event that a supplier fails to deliver goods or services after they've been purchased.

LAND THE CHEAPEST FLIGHTS

Air travel has a reputation for costing more than it should, but a bit of forward planning goes a long way! Remember that generally airfares get more expensive the closer you book to your departure date, so take advantage of those 'early bird' specials. Before booking, compare prices between airline companies - visit www.cheapflights.co.za or download their mobile app (available on Android and iPhone).

Note that the day on which you fly can affect the price - popular flight days include Mondays, Fridays and Sundays, which tends to make them more pricey. Rather travel on less popular days - Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays - and avoid flying the day before public holidays (although flying on the public holiday itself can actually save you money!).

Similarly, the time of day at which you fly impacts cost, with the most expensive times being early morning and late afternoon/early evening.

Also, sign up to airlines' frequent traveller programmes to rack up points which can eventually be redeemed for a free airfare.

And finally, compare online flight rates to those offered by a travel agent - online deals often work out cheaper.

BUMP UP TO BUSINESS...

Bridget* is a thirty-something frequent flyer with an uncanny knack for securing free upgrades to business class. She shares her advice with the rest of us:

"Always dress well - looking like you belong in business class is the first step to getting your upgrade. Check in early and mention that you're a frequent flyer. Always treat the airline staff politely and respectfully - they're not going to go out of their way to help a cranky customer. Smile and ask about the possibility of a business class upgrade and you'll be surprised how often your request will be accommodated!"

Otherwise, check for cheap upgrades - if there's space, most airlines offer the possibility to upgrade to business class at a discounted rate when you check in.

HOT TIP!

Do check the price difference between booking tickets to and from your destination separately rather than together - sometimes two one-way tickets can prove more economical than a round-trip ticket, particularly if you split them between airlines.



HOT TIP!

Consider a holiday home swap with a reputable company where you exchange homes for a holiday - especially international destinations. Try www.homeexchange.com - a well established and professional company operating internationally, including South Africa.

STAY FIVE-STAR ON A THREE-STAR BUDGET!

Accommodation costs make up a hefty proportion of a holiday budget, so keeping these costs down will free up some cash to enjoy the sights and sounds of your vacation spot. There are two approaches here:

Go Downtown

- ★ Use Google to find lodges in your vicinity
- ★ Visit www.couchsurfing.org to find hosts to stay with the world over
- ★ Try www.airbnb.com to find affordable rented holiday accommodation across the country and the globe
- ★ Use various websites to source a good deal, including last minute offers. Try these:
 - www.hotelclub.com,
 - www.trivago.co.za,
 - www.mtbeds.com
 - www.budget-getaways.co.za

Head Uptown

- ★ Don't assume that posh hotels are completely out of the question - have a look at their websites to check for out-of-season, mid-week or 'early bird' specials.
- ★ If you travel a lot, sign up to a hotel chain's loyalty programme to earn points for free accommodation down the line.
- ★ Consider subscribing to a holiday club such as:
 - www.theholidayclub.co.za
 - www.flexiclub.co.za



HIDDEN COSTS

Be aware that some budget hotels, particularly those overseas, charge extra for amenities like soap and shampoo - this can come as a nasty surprise on your bill, so do check what's included in any discounted prices before you swipe your card.