



Take Control *of* Booking a Cheap Airline Ticket

by **Sam Sellers**

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This is a free sample of "Take Control of Booking a Cheap Airline Ticket."
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READ ME FIRST

Welcome to *Take Control of Booking a Cheap Airline Ticket*, version 1.0.

Rising fuel costs and increased competition have made an inexpensive airline ticket hard to find. Take control of booking a cheap ticket with this detailed guide that covers domestic and international flights, loyalty programs, and package deals. This ebook was written by Sam Sellers, edited by Don Sellers, and published by TidBITS Electronic Publishing.

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What's a Take Control Electronic Book?

Take Control ebooks are meant to get you up and running fast with solving a problem, such as booking a cheap airline ticket for a short flight next week or booking an airline ticket for a trip around the world next year.

This ebook doesn't give you a compendium of information and leave you wondering what to do about it. Instead, you'll find savvy, step-by-step instructions for how to find a ticket for less money—possibly far less money—than you'd get by randomly checking a few travel Web sites that you happen to know about. If you have trouble structuring your time, worry that you won't know when enough research is enough, or have little time to research the sometimes big cost of a ticket, this ebook should keep you organized, focused, and on track.

Onscreen Reading Tips

We carefully designed the Take Control ebooks to be read onscreen, and although most of what you need to know is obvious, note the following for the best possible onscreen reading experience:

- Blue text indicates links. You can click any item in the Table of Contents to jump to that section. Cross-references are also links, as are URLs and email addresses.
- Work with the Bookmarks tab or drawer showing so that you can always jump to any main topic by clicking its bookmark.
- In Adobe Acrobat Pro version 6 or 7, set your preferences to view Web URLs in a Web browser: choose Acrobat > Preferences, switch to the Web Capture pane, and choose In Web Browser from the Open Web Links pop-up menu.
- Find more tips in the [Take Control FAQ](#) on the Web.
- The [Glossary](#) defines a number of ticketing-related terms, which also appear in the text in blue italic formatting. You can click a blue italic term to move to the Glossary page that defines it; you can then return from the Glossary to where you were reading by using a menu command or keyboard shortcut, as noted in **Table 1**.

Table 1: How to Navigate Quickly to a Previous Point in This Ebook		
Viewing Software	Menu Command	Keyboard Shortcut
Adobe Acrobat 6	View > Go To > Previous View	Command-Left arrow
Adobe Acrobat 5	Document > Go To > Previous View	Command-Left arrow
Preview	Go > Back	Command-[

Printing Tips

Although our layout is aimed at making online reading an enjoyable experience, we've made sure that printing remains a reasonable option. Please review these tips before you print:

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- When printing on a color inkjet printer, to avoid using a lot of color ink (primarily on the yellow boxes we use for tips and figures), look for an option to print entirely in black-and-white.
- In the unlikely event that Adobe Acrobat or Adobe Reader cannot successfully print this PDF, if you are using a Mac, try Preview; several readers have solved printing problems by using Preview.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps you need to take a quick business trip. Maybe you're planning that once-in-a-lifetime European vacation. For whatever reason, you need to purchase an airline ticket, and you don't want to overpay.

Ticket prices have risen with the price of fuel, and airlines have become increasingly sophisticated in their pricing strategies, squeezing the last penny from travelers. At the same time, an increasing number of sources—most of them on the Web—now sell tickets, making the search for the best deal more vexing.

In this ebook, I take you through the process of booking a cheap airline ticket. I first have you look inward, to determine your flexibility in areas such as comfort, travel dates, and alternate airports—and I explain how each can be critical to saving money. I then offer three main ticket-purchasing procedures: “Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out,” “Book Domestic Less than 2 Weeks Out,” and “Book International.”

I also include the best strategies to help you purchase *package deals* (booking a car or hotel along with a flight). And if you have the opportunity to wait to buy, I show you how to turn time into money.

This guide covers only coach (otherwise known as economy) tickets, for flights within—or originating from—the United States. It also provides expert assistance in booking “free tickets,” tickets obtained through airline frequent flyer programs or credit card reward programs. I give steps on how to select the right frequent flyer program or reward credit card, and how to wrest maximum benefit from your miles and points.

Finally, I provide methods to fly right—travel tips from reserving a great seat to finding public transportation—to make your trip both cheap and easy.

In the coming years, airlines will transport record amounts of passengers. By taking the steps outlined in this ebook, you can maximize travel value, while minimizing travel-related stress.

Happy travels!

QUICK START TO BOOKING A CHEAP TICKET

To lock in the right ticket at the right price, you need to know yourself, as well as the array of resources available on and off the Internet. Since the procedures suggested in this ebook vary depending on your needs, use the guide below to fly to your area of interest.

Determine what kind of buyer you are:

- Understand your flexibility in dates, airports, restrictions, and ticket search, and how they can affect price. Also, expand your savings if you are booking hotels and cars. Read [Traveler, Know Thyself](#) (page 7).

Buy your ticket:

- Want to start now? See [Begin the Booking Process](#) (page 18).
- Time on your side? Turn that time into money. Read [Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out](#) (page 20).
- Need to go soon? Determine the best way to buy that last-minute ticket in [Book Domestic Less than 2 Weeks Out](#) (page 44).
- Flying abroad? It's a different world for purchasing tickets. Buy that international flight right. See [Book International](#) (page 61).
- Willing to wait for the perfect price? See [Win the Waiting Game](#) (page 91).

Take advantage of loyalty programs:

- Learn to earn and burn those frequent flyer miles for maximum effect in [Earn Flights with Frequent Flyer Miles](#) (page 102).
- [Select the Proper Credit Card](#)—determine which bank or airline credit card *loyalty programs* work best for you (page 121).

Make your flight right:

- After a great ticket comes a great flight. See [Fly Right](#) (page 132).

NOTE In order to avoid redundancy, the first major ticketing section, “Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out,” has note and sidebar information that the other two main booking discussions lack.

TRAVELER, KNOW THYSELF

Buying an airline ticket can be a confusing ordeal for even the experienced traveler, since airlines offer literally dozens of prices for the same seats on the same plane on the same flight. Flight times, flight dates, airports, travelers' ages, and ticket purchase dates can all affect price. And other travel expenses, such as hotel rooms and car rentals, can often reduce overall cost when booked properly along with an airline ticket.

For some of you, the process may be simple: You know exactly the flight you want, and you want to book it now (see [Begin the Booking Process](#), next main section). But for many, how much you eventually pay depends to a large extent on your flexibility and willingness to invest time and effort. Changing what may appear to be a minor element in your booking could lead to major savings. Waiting for the best time to buy could save you hundreds of dollars.

To succeed in the hunt for cheap seats, you need to understand the major factors that influence a ticket's price and then assess how your particular requirements and circumstances can be satisfied within the complex airline ticketing system. You need to examine yourself—determine where you can be flexible, how much effort you're willing to expend, and what aspects of your travel might produce discounts. **Table 2** (next page) summarizes these ideas and links ahead to more discussion about each idea.

If you already have a good grasp of the criteria that can lead to finding a lower price, review **Table 2** quickly and jump ahead. Otherwise, read on to determine how to best lay the groundwork for booking the cheapest flight.

Table 2: How Flexible Are You?

Flexi-Factor	Rule	Notes
Dates	The more flexible you can be with travel dates, the greater your odds of finding the cheapest fare.	Search tools can make flexible-date comparisons easy.
Airports	Flexibility helps you save money, particularly if low-cost airlines fly from <i>secondary airports</i>	Less important when flying from U.S. to foreign destinations.
Restrictions	Generally, the cheaper the ticket, the more restrictions.	Paying more up front results in paying less if you have to make a ticket change.
Flight Times	Off peak travel often cheaper.	Off peak planes often less full, so you may get more comfort.
Food	Varies widely among carriers.	On short flights, think ahead: Bring your own food and save.
Entertainment	Varies widely among carriers.	Doesn't correlate directly to price; rather a perk of the airline.
Legroom	Can vary by airline, airplane, and seat location.	Can be important to some on long flights.
Seating	Some coach seat widths are up to 1 inch more than others.	Seat widths available at SeatGuru.com.
Connections	Often the cheapest flights will have at least one connection.	Need to ask what effect delay and missed connections will have.
Your Time	The more time you invest, the greater chances you have of finding a cheaper ticket.	You can spend <i>lotsof</i> time in this process. Don't make it your life.
Timing—Your Willingness to Wait	Ticket prices generally rise closer to flight date, but can change drastically in the days leading up to the flight.	International flight fares don't vary as much as domestic fares over the time period leading up to the flight.
Car or Hotel?	You <i>maysave</i> a bundle if you buy them bundled.	Increases time involved in looking and booking.
Seniors and Babies	Discounts can still be found.	Some senior fares more expensive than the lowest available fares.

BEGIN THE BOOKING PROCESS

Now that you've reviewed what you're willing to do to get a cheap ticket, let the journey begin. The length of the booking process may vary considerably; you may finish today, or you may take months. Keep these points in mind:

- **Browse right:** The procedures in this ebook require multiple searches at multiple Web sites, and you can quickly have half a dozen browser windows open. Many of you know how to set Web-browser display preferences and quickly move between tabs or windows to search different Web sites and compare results, but if you feel you could use some tips, see [Appendix E: Better Browsing](#).
- **Take notes:** Keep good notes on what you find and where. Pay special attention to details such as taxes and fees.
- **Stay on the path:** I've made the procedures in this ebook straightforward, but you need to pay attention. Each main booking process has a diagram to help you visualize it.
- **Be creative:** Thinking out of the box may save you bucks. For instance, if you want to travel between two cities, such as Minneapolis to Charlotte, you could find some high fares. But, if you search multiple routes, you could find a bargain. Fares from Minneapolis to Atlanta may be terrific on Delta since they must match AirTran's fares. Then, AirTran may have a cheap fare from Atlanta to Charlotte and the combination of these two fares may be cheaper than the lowest Minneapolis to Charlotte fare.
- **Beware of price customization:** When you go to the grocery store and examine a carton of milk, you see its price. If you return 3 hours later, you will likely see the same price. That's not necessarily the case on the Web because of *price customization*. Price customization (also known as *dynamic pricing*) results when an online store tracks your search behavior via [cookies](#), and changes prices accordingly. If you make multiple searches at a Web site for the same routes and dates, a travel company computer might decide you are willing to pay more for it. The more you search, the higher the price. Paranoia? You can read a CNN report on the trend at <http://www.cnn.com/2005/LAW/06/24/ramasastry.website.prices/>.

BOOK DOMESTIC MORE THAN 2 WEEKS OUT

Airlines typically offer the juiciest worms to the earliest birds so if you have the opportunity to book your tickets more than 2 weeks out, you usually should. I've designed the following steps to fit the needs of most travelers flying between medium or large cities. If you plan on traveling to a smaller market or to a city that lacks significant low-fare competition, then you will probably save less, since airlines have little incentive to offer low fares to these markets.

This process can take a long time, up to several months in certain cases, if you want maximum savings; but you can skip some of the steps if you're familiar with the process. During this period of information gathering and decision making, keep records and information located in a central source in order to access it easily. The farther you go in reading newsletters, monitoring fare Web sites, and locating promotions, the greater the likelihood that you'll find a better deal.

Refer to **Figure 5** (next page) to get a visual sense of the process.

Throughout this journey, remember to be patient, and I wish you good luck!

Decide on Basic Logistics

You may want to review [Traveler, Know Thyself](#), earlier, if you haven't read it recently. Once you've done that, write down your ideal dates, times, and airports. Include backup dates and airports to search, if you have the flexibility. Decide on different combinations of dates and airports that you want to search. Each combination will likely result in a different baseline price, but gathering all that information will help you find a better deal.

BOOK DOMESTIC LESS THAN 2 WEEKS OUT

Ticket prices tend to become more expensive as the flight date nears, especially during the last 2 weeks. With less than 2 weeks out, the chance of finding a great deal is small, but possibilities exist through last-minute packages, weekend specials, and other deals airlines offer to quickly sell empty seats.

This section provides a path to visit sites that typically offer the best last-minute values for both flights and packages, but these deals are more hit-and-miss compared to those found more than 2 weeks out. The most likely outcome will be the best of several mediocre deals, but you may get lucky. As with tickets bought more than 2 weeks out, the more flexible you can be, the better your chances of finding a good deal. See **Figure 19**, on the next page, for a visual sense of your possible path to finding the best deal less than 2 weeks away.

***Wait! There's More!** To avoid redundancy, supplemental information on some of the sites listed in this section (such as Kayak and Airfarewatchdog) is included in only the previous section, [Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out](#).*

TIP BEREAVEMENT FARES

In the regrettable circumstance that you may qualify for a *bereavement fare*, many legacy airlines offer them. But *don't assume they provide the cheapest option*, as low-cost carriers or even other legacy carriers may offer a cheaper fare. Bereavement fares usually come with these caveats:

- Airlines allow you to book them only over the phone.
- Most airlines require documentation such as the address of the hospital or care facility, the doctor's name, and your relationship to the afflicted.
- Most must be booked 7 days or less in advance.
- Most low-cost carriers including Southwest, JetBlue, and AirTran do not offer them, since their everyday fares are sufficiently low.

BOOK INTERNATIONAL

For this ebook, I define “international flights” as “flights from the United States to anywhere other than the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean,” since Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean all have low-cost competition.

With international flights, you may need to search many different outlets to locate the lowest fare because no Web site aggregates the lion’s share of international deals and the international ticket market remains fairly fragmented.

Booking tickets as part of a package with a car or a hotel can be much more cost-effective than booking the services separately, so I include a path in this section for those of you who want a package. Also, booking near the flight date makes deals difficult to find, but I show you what options exist for last-minute international travel.

Special note: *If you’re booking an international ticket near the departure date, pay particular attention to Airfarewatchdog, travel agents, and consolidators since they will be the most useful in helping you find a cheap last-minute ticket.*

TIP REMEMBER YOUR LOYALTY PROGRAM

Since international flights tend to be expensive, they may be the best use for your frequent flyer miles, or better yet, for all those points you’ve gained by making credit card purchases. Even though loyalty programs require more points to fly to international destinations, ticket prices increase more than the points required to redeem the flight, so the value of your points increases.

Wait! There’s More! *To avoid redundancy, supplemental details on some sites in this section (such as Airfarewatchdog and Kayak) are covered only in [Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out](#), earlier.*

Figure 29, on the next page, shows the major steps in booking an international ticket. Most readers will not follow all these steps, but if you spend some time on the process you may want to come back to the diagram to regain your path.

PICK A PACKAGE

If you need a car or a hotel at your destination, and you have the time for some additional searching, you may be able to save by booking them as a package with your flight. The first step in the process involves searching for airfare, which you do at [Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out](#), [Book Domestic Less than 2 Weeks Out](#), or [Book International](#). At some point in those sections you will be prompted to jump here, where you can start pricing packages by searching several popular package Web sites. Read on and discover how the savings may multiply when you add a car and hotel.

Setting a Package Baseline

To evaluate how good a deal a package might be, you need an idea of standalone pricing for the parts. You should have an airfare estimate at this point, but what about the car or hotel? A Kayak search for these pieces will give you a good baseline of what they cost when they are not part of a package. To perform a Kayak search:

1. Go to <http://www.kayak.com/>.
2. Click the Hotels or Cars link near the top of the page.
3. Enter and choose your trip details; then click the Search button.

Now you should have a baseline of what your package components cost when purchased separately.

Check Travelocity, Orbitz, and Expedia

You may have seen the glitzy ads, but because they tack on service fees and don't award bonus frequent flyer miles Expedia, Orbitz, and Travelocity typically don't offer the best deals for flights, so I ignore them when booking flights alone. But when booking a flight along with a car or hotel, these sites can be winners if used properly. Don't assume that each site will quote the same price for an identical package.

Compared to airline package Web sites, sites such as Travelocity offer a wider variety of hotels, particularly in international locations where they feature many locally owned establishments.

BUY BLIND

Hotwire and Priceline offer some of the best travel deals on the Web, but to obtain them, you must contemplate the unknown. Both sites offer flights and packages that lack details, such as the name of the airline or hotel, or the exact time you fly. They do provide limited information, however, such as a list of comparable hotels, or a notice that the flight doesn't leave late at night. Both sites have bargains available for last-minute, international, and domestic travel. But unfortunately, these deals usually come with Draconian restrictions. Often you don't receive frequent flyer miles, and changes are expensive or impossible.

Hotwire and Priceline differ in one important way: Hotwire provides a fixed price for your flight while on Priceline you bid, and the site either accepts or rejects your offer. If Priceline accepts your bid, you have finished the booking process, because Priceline charges your credit card when it accepts your bid. The dissimilarity of these sites dictates that you approach them differently.

Because of the murky nature of the offerings on these sites and the potentially search-ending nature of a bid with Priceline, I advise that you come to this section only after searching and taking notes on prices offered elsewhere, such as Kayak and airline Web sites. Read information carefully and keep your credit card in the upright and locked position until advised otherwise.

Find Cheap Prices at Hotwire

If you book certain airline tickets through Hotwire, you will know the price in advance, but not the flights or exact times. Hotwire also enables you to search for hotels and car rentals along with flights, which often gives you greater savings than other package deals. Hotwire does not sell you hotel packages blindly; if you purchase a Hotwire package you *do* know your hotel before you book (unlike if you book a hotel alone). However, as with flights, Hotwire doesn't give you a specific car rental agency when you rent a car.

Hotwire sells three different categories of airfares, each with varying levels of flexibility and information about the flight times and airline:

- **Clearance fares:** These are the cheapest fares that Hotwire offers (**Figure 39**). I don't recommend booking Clearance fares at

WIN THE WAITING GAME

You should be here if you've gone through [Book Domestic More than 2 Weeks Out](#) or [Book International](#), and you have some time to spare. You're gambling now that you can catch a dip in ticket prices.

NOTE SUPPORT FOR THE FOOTLOOSE & PATHOLOGICALLY CHEAP

I've designed the procedures in this section for travelers who know when and where they want to fly but who have time to wait in the hope that a better price appears. But many of the methods also work well for another type of traveler—those who make travel plans impulsively, as long as they include an exceptionally low fare. The world of airfares is so complex and unstable that ephemeral anomalies occur—airlines sometimes dramatically reduce fares, or even post the wrong fares, which they usually honor. Many of these methods let you cast a wide net for these rare, short-lived bargains.

To win the waiting game you must develop a mix of resources to both catch a dip in a ticket's price and to monitor fare trends. You have to sign up for most of them, and take time to analyze the results (although the amount of time can vary). Therefore, you probably won't want to use them all. Rather, you will want to put together a collection depending on your circumstances. Refer to **Table 5** for a brief description of the waiting game resources and how they can serve you.

You can't play if you don't eventually pay: *You can't play the waiting game forever; at some point you have to make the decision to buy whether you're winning or losing. I can't give you ironclad rules for when you should buy. You need to examine your particular circumstances (how long you can wait, the popularity of your destination, the number of flights available, seasonal issues, and so on) to guide you in deciding when to buy. But be sure to set a drop-dead date; you don't want to wait too long or your odds of winning the waiting game will start to go down.*

USE LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Many people use loyalty programs every day without realizing it. From credit card cash-back programs to supermarket frequent shopper cards to a local pizza shop's punch card, businesses use loyalty programs to thank customers and generate return business. American Airlines introduced the airline industry's first frequent flyer program 25 years ago, and the quick proliferation of the idea demonstrated its popularity with consumers and carriers. Meanwhile, credit card companies picked up the trend of offering rewards cards—some affiliated with a particular airline, some not affiliated—that could accumulate points redeemable for airline travel.

Most of us belong to at least one air travel loyalty program, but many of us manage our programs haphazardly and don't know the best ways to maintain and redeem those miles and points. These programs have hidden pitfalls and complexities that you need to know to maximize your payout. With the right knowledge and a little work, you can make those magical miles and points work for you.

Earn Flights with Frequent Flyer Miles

Frequent flyer programs have come a long way since their inception. These days, most airlines offer endless mileage-earning opportunities, including hotel stays, restaurant dining, and airline credit card purchases, as well as myriad opportunities to redeem miles without flying at all. Although many airlines share similar standards for accruing and redeeming miles, some airlines, especially low-cost airlines, have different models.

The keys to getting the most out of frequent flyer programs are to choose the right program, accumulate and manage mileage efficiently, and redeem the miles shrewdly.

Choose the right program

Those who maximize mileage redemption focus their mileage gathering on one or two programs. Since it takes years for most travelers to accumulate enough miles for a free ticket, you need to know which airline's program suits you best in order to maximize your returns.

Unfortunately, for many of us, this selection isn't an exact science as it involves speculation as to how and where we will fly in the future—for both mile accumulation and redemption. Where you

FLY RIGHT

Even if you demand a low fare when flying, you also want a great experience. In this section, I offer tips that can help you make your next trip go more smoothly and be more comfortable. In most cases, you can find information about the particulars of your airline or airport by checking their Web site. Happy travels!

Check In Online

If you can, you should check in for your flight online, because it is easy and it allows you to skip the lines at the airport. If you are checking luggage, you may not be able to check in online.

If you fly Southwest, you have a further incentive to check in online, since you receive your boarding pass when you do so. Southwest groups passengers into A, B, or C boarding groups, and your letter determines when you board the aircraft. Letter A passengers check in first and receive the best pick of seats. Nowadays, you need to check in online to obtain an A boarding pass. Southwest allows you to check in online from 24 hours to 1 hour before your flight departs, so remember to do so early, because even checking in 3 hours in advance online could leave you stuck with a B.

Arrive at the Airport Early

Many airlines recommend arriving at the airport at least 2 hours before your flight is scheduled to depart, and I suggest following that guideline most of the time. If you are traveling during a peak period, such as a holiday, I suggest leaving yourself an additional hour, especially if you have to check bags. If you're leaving from a smaller airport, you probably won't encounter problems by arriving later. Arriving at the airport early allows you to deal with any delays or problems that may arise. If there is a delay, then you can be first in line to rebook. Just remember to bring a book or magazine to pass the extra time waiting at the gate.

Check Flight Status

Before you leave your home or hotel, check the flight status of your plane on the airline's Web site. Typically, a link to flight status can be found on the home page. Knowing the status of your flight ahead of time may make things easier if there are delays. You can bring an extra book to the airport and perhaps something to eat. Keep in mind

APPENDIX A: LINKS TO MAJOR AIRLINES

Consult this list to quickly locate airline Web sites and route maps:

- **AirTran Airways:** <http://www.airtran.com/>
Route map: http://www.airtran.com/route-map/city_information.aspx
- **Alaska Airlines:** <http://www.alaskaair.com/>
Route map: <http://www.alaskaair.com/as/www2/Destinations/Route-Map.asp>
- **Allegiant Air:** <http://www.allegiantair.com/>
Route map: <http://www.allegiantair.com/aaRouteMap.php>
- **Aloha Airlines:** <http://www.alohaair.com/>
Route map: <http://www.alohaair.com/WhereWeFly.php>
- **American Airlines:** <http://www.aa.com/>
Route map: <http://www.aa.com/content/aboutUs/whereWeFly/maps/world.jhtml>
- **ATA Airlines:** <http://www.ata.com>
Route map: <http://www.ata.com/reservations/routemap.html>
- **Continental Airlines:** <http://www.continental.com/>
Route map: <http://www.continental.com/web/en-US/content/travel/routes/default.aspx>
- **Delta Air Lines:** <http://www.delta.com/>
Route map: http://www.delta.com/planning_reservations/plan_flight/destinations/route_maps/
- **Frontier Airlines:** <http://www.frontierairlines.com/>
Route map: <http://www.frontierairlines.com/frontier/flight-info/route-map.do>
- **Go!:** <http://www.iflygo.com/>
Route map: <http://www.iflygo.com/goRouteMap.aspx>

APPENDIX B: RESOURCES

You might find the following resources helpful to buy the right ticket and fly comfortably. In particular, I use SeatGuru and Skytrax for every flight I take. The other resources may be useful under special circumstances. I maintain an updated comprehensive list of valuable air-travel Web sites at my blog, Airline Bulletin—fly over to <http://www.airlinebulletin.com/Pages/Cheapticket.htm>.

SeatGuru

With SeatGuru (<http://www.seatguru.com/>), you can view aircraft seat maps before you book your ticket. The seat maps are color-coded so you can tell what seats are best to book, and which ones to avoid. Many airlines will allow you to select seats in advance when you book online, and using SeatGuru in conjunction with a seat map on an airline's Web site can help you pick a good seat.

The best seats on an aircraft are usually in the bulkhead and in emergency exit rows, while the worst seats are in the last few rows of the aircraft and in rows before emergency exit rows, since those seats have no recline.

Some airlines have more than one seat configuration for a given aircraft, and most airlines offer multiple configurations for the most popular aircraft in order to maximize revenues. If you see a Version 1, 2, or 3 label next to a type of aircraft on SeatGuru, you may have to look at several different seat maps to find the correct configuration that you saw on the airline's Web site.

Skytrax

Skytrax (<http://www.airlinequality.com/>) offers airline reviews. Use this site for its famous ranking system and well-informed forums. The ranking system rates all aspects of the travel experience from check-in to meals to baggage handling. Each element is ranked separately and a total ranking is given for the airline. The forums offer unbiased reviews of travel from real passengers and comments about their experiences.

APPENDIX C: TAXES—AN EXPLANATION

Not only do you pay taxes on your home and your car, but you also pay plenty on air travel. These important revenue streams for airports, security agencies, and immigration/customs enforcement seem burdensome, but they're essential for these agencies. You may be surprised just how much of your ticket is taxes. Here are most of the taxes you will encounter when you fly:

- **September 11th security fee:** This tax of \$2.50 per segment flown (no more than \$5 one way and \$10 round trip) pays for the Transportation Security Administration, which conducts passenger screening at almost all U.S. airports. If you fly nonstop to your destination, the charge is only \$2.50; if you connect, that jumps to \$5, though additional connections don't cost extra.
- **Passenger facility charge (PFC):** This charge helps pay airport expenses and for expansion or improvements. Certain airports request the tax for different amounts, depending on your routing. Some airports charge \$3.00, others \$4.50, and still others nothing at all. The tax is limited at \$18 per round-trip.
- **Federal segment tax:** This tax of \$3.30 per segment helps fund FAA operations and the Airport Improvement Program.
- **Federal ticket tax:** This tax of 7.5% of the base fare helps fund FAA operations and the Airport Improvement Program.
- **Alaska and Hawaii:** If you travel to or from Alaska and Hawaii you could face an additional tax of up to \$14.60 per round trip, depending on your routing.
- **International travel taxes:** Depending on your route, you may be charged up to \$200 per round-trip when you travel internationally. Monies collected fund immigration and customs enforcement in both countries. This tax varies widely depending on destination.
- **Fuel surcharge:** Some airlines add a fuel surcharge if fuel prices spike and the airline cannot raise fares. A fuel surcharge can top \$50 round-trip on some international flights. With high fuel prices and geopolitical uncertainty poised to send them higher, fuel surcharges may become more common.

APPENDIX D: REBATE WEB SITES

If you shop at the grocery store, the cashier doesn't usually hand money back to you above and beyond your change. But when you shop for airline tickets you can receive money back, thanks to Ebates and FatWallet, which return to you in cash a certain percentage of online purchases made at certain stores.

Because Ebates and FatWallet function as affiliates for hundreds of online shopping sites, including travel sites such as Hotwire, Price-line, and United Airlines, you and they get a cut of the commission.

Follow these steps:

1. Visit <http://www.ebates.com/> or <http://www.fatwallet.com/>, and sign up for a free account before you buy your ticket.
2. When you're ready to make your purchase, visit Ebates or FatWallet.
3. If you're at FatWallet, click the Stores tab at the top of the page. Find the store you want in the Travel category on the left hand side of the page at either Web site.
4. Turn off your pop-up blocker, and click the link from Ebates or FatWallet to the store you're interested in. Two windows should pop up, one is a tracking ticket, which you should not close for the duration of your purchase. The other window is the Web site you want to buy from. Make your purchase in that window. (Do not visit other Web sites, because that may disable the tracking device Ebates and FatWallet use to ensure you've made a purchase.)
4. Once you've completed your purchase you may close both windows.

In a few days Ebates or FatWallet will send you email confirming your rebate.

APPENDIX E: BETTER BROWSING

When using this ebook, it can be helpful to use certain browser features such as tabbed browsing, text size adjustments, and bookmarking. And you will want to delete cookies if you feel you have been victimized by price customization. I discuss how to use these features in three major browsers: Apple's Safari, Firefox, and Microsoft Internet Explorer.

Browse with Tabs

Tabbed browsing lets you have multiple Web sites open in one window, but under different tabs, so that you can switch rapidly from one to another. The current version of Internet Explorer doesn't offer this feature, but both Safari and Firefox do:

- **Safari:** Open Safari and choose Safari > Preferences (Command-), switch to the Tabs tab, and select the checkboxes for Enable Tabbed Browsing and the Always Show Tab Bar.

Now, to open a new tab, press Command-T, or if you want to create a new tab by clicking a link, hold down Command when you click, and the page will open in a new tab. To navigate quickly between tabs, hold Shift-Command and use the arrow keys to navigate left or right (**Figure 56**).

FIGURE 56



In Safari, you can click a tab to view that site or press Command-Shift-Left arrow to move through tabs.

- **Firefox:** To enable tabbed browsing, choose Firefox > Preferences (Tools > Options in Windows), switch to the Tabs tab, and select the “a new tab in the most recent window” radio button.

Now, to create a new tab, press Command-T (Ctrl-T in Windows), or if you want to create a new tab by clicking on a link, hold down Command when you click (Ctrl in Windows). To navigate quickly between tabs, hold Command-Option simultaneously, and use the

GLOSSARY

Alternate airport: An airport that serves the same metro area as a larger, central airport, but which is usually further from the city. For example, Oakland and San Jose are alternate airports for the San Francisco Bay area.

Annual fee: The cost of using some credit cards (such as most airline credit cards), paid yearly.

Award ticket: A free ticket you can obtain with frequent flyer miles.

Bereavement fare: Some airlines offer bereavement fares to passengers needing to travel to visit a relative who is sick or has recently passed away.

Carry-on baggage: Baggage that you can take into the passenger cabin of a plane. Currently the FAA restricts domestic carry-on baggage to one bag and one personal item per person.

Cash-and-miles award: A frequent flyer award that enables you to obtain a free ticket for fewer miles than typical and some cash.

Cash-back card: A credit card that returns money to you, based on how much money you spent and what you bought.

Cash-back shopping Web site: A site such as Ebates or FatWallet that refunds a percentage of your purchases at various online stores.

Checked baggage: Baggage you leave with the airline at check-in that is transported in the underbelly of the plane.

Connecting flight: A flight that goes from point A to point B and then requires you to change aircraft to go from point B to point C.

Consolidator: A third-party travel site that sells heavily discounted international tickets that are not available through the airline.

Contract of carriage: The contract you sign when you purchase a ticket and that the airline is obligated to uphold.

Cookie: A cookie is a small bit of data that Web sites use to track your behavior. To learn more, see [Chuck Bad Cookies](#), in Appendix E.

Customized pricing: A tactic online stores use to manipulate prices by tracking your behavior.

Direct flight: A direct flight goes from point A to point B to point C with no plane change, often stopping at point B to refuel. Often incorrectly used to describe nonstop flight.

Elite status: Reserved for those who fly at least 25,000 miles a year on most U.S. airlines, elite members receive all sorts of perks including lounge access, preferred boarding, and mileage bonuses.

FAA: Federal Aviation Administration, the U.S. governing body of the aviation industry that regulates safety standards.

Fare aggregator: A fare search engine, such as Kayak.com, that searches most airline Web sites and third-party fare resellers.

Foreign carrier: An airline that is based in and primarily operates outside of the United States, such as Air Canada or British Airways.

Hub: An airport at which an airline offers a disproportionate amount of service, so that passengers can connect to other aircraft.

Last-minute travel: Typically, trips booked less than 2 weeks out.

Legacy carrier: One of the big six older airlines: American, United, Delta, Northwest, Continental, and US Airways.

Low-fare carrier: One of the newer carriers, such as Southwest, AirTran, or JetBlue, with lower costs and usually lower fares than their legacy counterparts. I use the terms low-fare carrier and low-cost carrier interchangeably in this ebook.

Loyalty program: A program that gives free rewards for repeatedly patronizing a business, such as an airline, or for using a particular credit card.

Narrow-body aircraft: An aircraft—such as a Boeing 737 or Airbus A320—that has only one aisle.

Nonstop flight: A flight that goes from point A to point B with no stops in between. Compare to *Direct flight*.

Package: A travel product that enables you to save money if you book flight and hotel and/or car rental at the same time.

Points card: A credit card that awards points redeemable for rewards, such as free travel.

Primary airport: An airport that serves the predominant amount of passengers traveling to a given city.

Red-eye flight: A flight that takes place overnight. Domestic red-eye flights typically leave between 9 p.m. and 1:30 a.m. and arrive early the next morning. International red-eyes may depart earlier.

Reward card: A credit card geared towards giving the user a reward such as free travel, but perhaps not a low interest rate.

Seat pitch: The distance between your seat and the same point on the seat in front. Greater seat pitch means more legroom. See the note [All about Seat Pitch](#) (page 14) for more details.

Secondary airport: A secondary airport is a smaller airport, typically located farther away from a major city than the primary airport, but often offering lower costs for airlines that operate there. A secondary airport is often a good alternate airport.

Segment: When flying, one takeoff and one landing.

Third-party travel site: A travel Web site not directly affiliated with an airline, such as Travelocity, Priceline, or Hotwire.

TSA: Transportation Security Administration, the U.S. government agency that conducts airport security checks.

Wide-body aircraft: An aircraft, such as a Boeing 777 or Airbus A330, that has two aisles.

ABOUT THIS EBOOK

In contrast to traditional print books, Take Control ebooks offer clickable links, full-text searching, and free minor updates. We hope you find them both useful and enjoyable to read.

About the Author

Sam Sellers has always been interested in transportation and geography (he was a three-time state finalist in the National Geographic Bee). Over the last 2 years, he has chronicled the turbulent airline industry on his blog, Airline Bulletin, at <http://www.airlinebulletin.com/>. Airline Bulletin offers fresh news and commentary on the airline business and contains the latest information on the low-fare strategies that appear in this ebook. For additional and updated information on booking the cheapest ticket, visit <http://www.airlinebulletin.com/Pages/Cheapticket.htm>.



When not immersed in the aviation world, Sam Sellers is a senior at Bainbridge Island High School in Washington State. There he enjoys participating on the Knowledge Bowl team (a *Jeopardy*-style knowledge competition for high school students) that placed second in the state this year, as well as watching *The Simpsons* and *The Colbert Report*. And when the teachers let him get away from their tedious, mind-numbing make-work, he likes to read a good book. Sam is happy to answer questions about airline travel if you contact him at samsellers@gmail.com.

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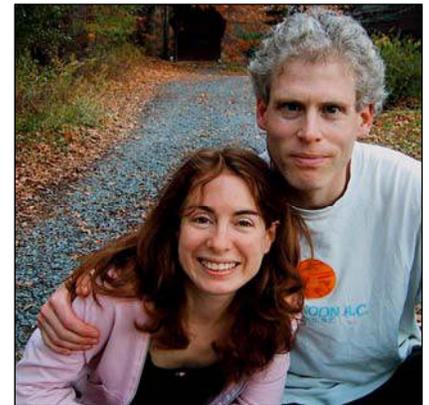
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Don Sellers has written several technical books, including *Zap! How your computer can hurt you—and what you can do about it* (winner of the Benjamin Franklin Award for best health book) and *Getting Hits*. He has edited many more. Don has provided and edited content for various Web sites, most of them related to his favorite hobby: eating. When not working with words, he turns images into stories as both a cinematographer and an editor of documentary films. He has also taught film making as a guest lecturer at Stanford University and consulted on the customization of Web sites for search engines.

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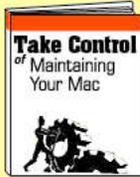
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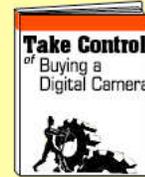


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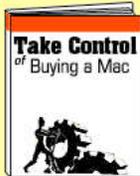


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