



# Finding Travel Deals Online

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# Practical Considerations

## ***Planned vs. spontaneous***

Are you looking to plan a trip to a specific destination on specific dates? Or do you want to just get away on a whim? The tools you use will vary depending on what you're looking to do. Searching for a flight on Hipmunk will be more useful for planned travel, while alerts from Airfarewatchdog and Travelzoo are useful for last-minute deals and destinations that may not have been on your radar.



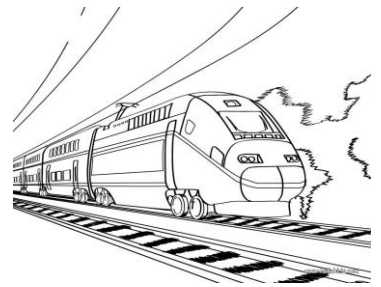
## ***Firm vs. flexible***

If you can be flexible with travel dates and times you can save significantly. Many search services offer flexible date options, and Google Flights will let you know if shifting your travel dates will offer significant savings.

## ***Look in multiple places***

Pricing for the same flights or the same hotel can vary significantly from one site to the next. Check multiple sites to ensure you're getting the best deal available.

- Remember that Southwest Airlines is not included in most aggregator searches
- Ryanair keeps its lowest fares for its own website
- Other airlines may appear on some aggregator sites but not others
- Don't forget about Amtrak—especially in the Northeast Corridor, they are often cheaper and more convenient than flying



## ***Book directly when possible***

Unless you'll save significantly on a third party website, booking directly with the airline or hotel is generally the best way to go. If you run into problems on your trip, companies will be able to better assist you if you've booked with them directly.

## ***Watch out for hidden fees***

Most airlines now charge fees to check a bag, but some (such as Frontier and Spirit) also charge fees for carry-on bags. Some hotels charge mandatory "resort fees" that aren't included in the quoted price. Before booking, do a bit of research to find out what additional fees you'll need to pay. It may end up being cheaper to book a more expensive flight that includes a checked bag.



## ***Discounted travel restrictions***

Discounted flights and hotels are often non-refundable and non-changeable, or require hefty fees to do so. You'll also likely earn fewer miles and points—or sometimes none at all.

## ***Keep your comfort in mind***

It's no use getting the cheapest flight to Paris if it means a 14-hour layover in Moscow and cramped seating. Take a look at how many stops a flight will make, total travel time, and seating density.



## Technical considerations

Travel sites can use complicated, multifaceted search terms and intricate delimiters to perform the best searches possible. Some specific tools to be familiar with are as follows:

- Drop-down menus: select the down arrow next to a value to see the options permitted in this search
- Toggle buttons: on/off button similar to a check box. Toggle on or off
- Slider bars: limit the outside values, such as dates or prices (ie: \$100 min through \$500 max)
- Calendar selection: view a calendar to determine and select dates by selecting days or periods of time
- Graphs: show a visual comparison in prices or in other quantifiable data through a bar graph
- New tabs, new windows: search engines may open and perform separate searches in new tabs within a browser or a new browser window
- Sort by: use the given value to organize the results (ie: sort by price/quantity/date)

## General Tools / Package Deals

### Travelzoo

<http://www.travelzoo.com/>



You can browse the Travelzoo website for deals, and sign up for email alerts. There are many package deals, hotels, flights, and local dining and activities. This is a good place to find last minute travel deals.

## Groupon Getaways

<http://www.groupon.com/getaways>

The screenshot shows the Groupon Getaways website. At the top, there is a search bar with fields for 'Destination' and 'Dates', and a 'SEARCH GETAWAYS' button. Below the search bar, there are two main sections: 'Browse Flash Deals' on the left and 'Flash Deals' on the right. The 'Browse Flash Deals' section lists 'All Destinations' (USA & Canada, Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Mountain, Pacific, Southwest, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean & Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa & Oceania) and 'Top Destinations' (Orlando, Las Vegas, New York, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Miami). The 'Flash Deals' section features three deals: 'Great Wolf Lodge Pocono Mountains' (a large resort building), 'Comfortable Hotel near Lake George' (a lake view), and 'Charming B&B in Pennsylvania Amish' (a small house). Each deal includes a photo, a brief description, and a price range.

Browse package deals and hotel deals on Groupon Getaways. You can also sign up for email alerts. If you're looking to get away but aren't sure where you want to go, this can be a good place to browse. They post some good deals on Twitter, too.

## Flight Tools

### Google Flights

<http://www.google.com/flights>

The screenshot shows the Google Flights website. At the top, there are tabs for 'Round trip', 'One way', and 'Multi-city'. Below the tabs, there are fields for 'New York (all airports)' and 'MIA Miami'. The dates are set to 'Fri, May 22' and 'Sun, May 24'. There are filters for 'Economy' and '1 adult'. A map on the right shows the flight path from New York to Miami. Below the map, there are sections for 'Choose an outbound flight' and 'Best flights'. The 'Choose an outbound flight' section shows a flight from New York to Miami for \$217. The 'Best flights' section shows three flight options: American (7:25 pm - 10:45 pm, \$282), Delta (6:45 pm - 10:11 pm, \$311), and American (3 similar flights, \$332). On the right side, there are sections for 'Miami hotels' and 'Limited Offers', showing hotel deals like 'The Kent Hotel' and 'Clinton Hotel'.

This is our favorite tool for finding flights. It is incredibly powerful, with the ability to search multiple destinations, create complex itineraries, browse flight price by date, and view the prices of different destinations on a map. Once you've selected flights, you can link to book with the airline directly (though this may not be possible on complex trips with multiple airlines) and sometimes through other sites such as Priceline.

## Hipmunk

<http://www.hipmunk.com>

The screenshot shows the Hipmunk website interface for a flight search from NYC to MIA. The search parameters are: NYC to MIA, Fri May 22 - Sun May 24, 1 person, Coach. The interface displays a table of flight options with columns for 'Select Leg', 'Price', 'Airline', 'Duration', 'Takeoff', 'Landing', 'Filter', 'Airlines', 'Airports', 'Stops', and 'Nonstops'. The 'Cheapest trip from \$270.00' is highlighted. The table lists several flight options, including American Airlines and Delta. The right sidebar shows a 'Compare & Save' section with logos for Orbitz, Expedia, CheapTickets, Priceline, and Hotwire. A 'Chat with Hipmunk' button is visible at the bottom right.

Hipmunk offers powerful flight searches, and sorts flights by “agony,” a combination of price, number of stops, and duration.

## Airfare Watchdog

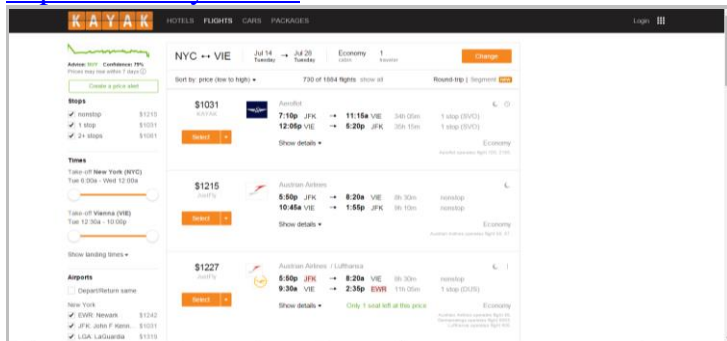
<http://www.airfarewatchdog.com>

The screenshot shows the Airfare Watchdog website interface for flight deals from New York City. The search parameters are: New York City, NY (NYC) to Accra, Ghana (ACC), Round Trip, Depart: 05/07/2015, Return: 05/14/2015. The interface displays a table of flight deals with columns for 'Price', 'To', and 'Details'. The 'Price' column is sorted by lowest fare. The table lists several flight options, including Delta, JetBlue, and Aeroflot. The right sidebar shows a 'Get Free Fare Alerts' section with a 'Sign Up' button. An advertisement for 'GET THE LOWEST HOTEL RATE GUARANTEED ONLINE' is also visible.

Airfare Watchdog, unlike most other sites, is backed up by real people scouring the web for flight deals. This means they include airlines like Southwest that are not on the aggregator search sites, and often include deals that might not be obvious elsewhere. They offer lists of flight deals to different destinations from your chosen city. You can sign up for general email alerts for deals from a particular city, or for more specific alerts for a route (such as NYC-LAX). Remember to follow them on Twitter for some of the best deals.

Kayak

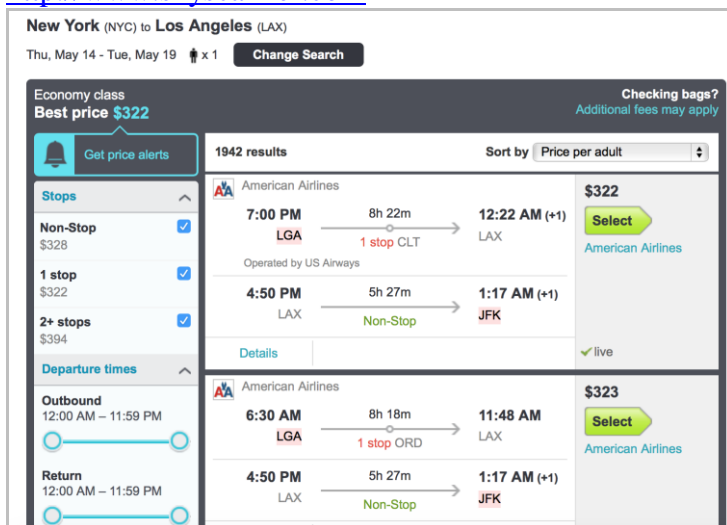
<http://www.kayak.com>



A popular flight search site, along with hotels and cars, Kayak offers a multifaceted search query. Many delimiters can be selected to determine the best flight, using a straightforward interface.

Skyscanner

<http://www.skyscanner.com>



Another popular flight search site, with similar results to Kayak.

<http://www.priceline.com>

Priceline offers the typical aggregator searches, sometimes with better prices than available elsewhere. But if you can be flexible with the time of day that you fly, there are sometimes great deals to be had using the Name Your Own Price bidding feature. If Priceline finds a flight matching your bid, it will be booked immediately—you won't know what airline you'll be flying, or what time, until your flight is booked. Flights will depart between 6AM and 10PM, which means a potentially very early trip to the airport. Bidding on a flight can be very useful, though, especially for last-minute travel when flights tend to be most expensive.

◀ Home   Trips From NYC

- ▶ **\$291** St. Louis (STL)
- ▶ **\$335** Toronto (YYZ)
- ▶ **\$345** Pittsburgh (PIT)
- ▶ **\$347** Port of Spain (POS)
- ▶ **\$357** Cancun (CUN)
- ▶ **\$387** Indianapolis (IND)
- ▶ **\$394** Washington D.C. (IAD)
- ▶ **\$432** Dallas (DFW)
- ▶ **\$435** Memphis (MEM)

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# Accommodation Tools

There are many hotel aggregators that you can use, including Hotels.com, Travelocity, and Expedia. We've found that alternate sources may have the best deals, though.

## Priceline

<http://www.priceline.com>

The screenshot shows the Priceline 'Name Your Own Price' interface. On the left, there are two steps: 'Step 1: Choose where you want to stay' and 'Step 2: Choose the star level for your hotel'. Step 1 lists 17 neighborhoods in Washington D.C. and surrounding areas, each with a 'detail map' link. Step 2 shows star level options from 4+ to 5-Star Luxury. On the right, a map titled 'Name Your Own Price® Area Map' displays the same neighborhoods with numbered callouts. At the bottom, there's a section for 'See more great deals in nearby areas' with a link to 'Maryland - DC Suburbs'.

Just like bidding on flights, Priceline allows you to name your own price on hotel accommodation. Once you've chosen your destination, choose one or more neighborhoods, choose a minimum star level, and name a price. On the subsequent screen you'll be given a complete quote that adds taxes and other fees onto your bid price—so when you bid, bid at least 10% less than you want to pay. We've had the most success bidding on 4+ star hotels at about half the median retail price (displayed when you enter your bid). If your bid is successful it is booked immediately, at which point you'll find out which hotel you'll be staying in. If your bid is unsuccessful you can change search options and try again immediately, or wait 24 hours before trying the same search again.

## Airbnb

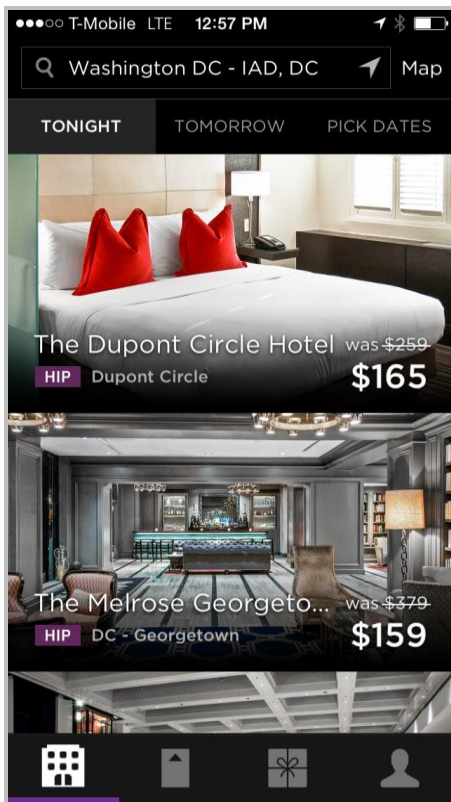
<http://www.airbnb.com>

The screenshot shows the Airbnb search interface. At the top, there's a search bar with 'Washington, D.C., DC, United States' entered. Below the search bar, there are filters for dates (04/23/2015 to 04/26/2015), number of guests (1), room type (Entire Place, Private Room, Shared Room), and price range (\$10 to \$1000+). On the left, there are two featured listings: 'Private Suite in Classic DC Home' for \$94 and 'Luxury Sunny Studio in Heart of DC' for \$160. On the right, there's a map of Washington D.C. with red price markers indicating the cost of various accommodations in different areas.

Airbnb offers a unique way to find accommodation for travel. Although not hotels, these accommodations range from simple and cheap to extravagant and quite expensive. Known mostly as a way for owners of homes to rent out their spaces to travelers, Airbnb offers a connection between host and guest when travelling. You can rate the host and comment on your stay, and viewing others' reviews may be very helpful.



## Hotel Tonight



Hotel Tonight is an iPhone app with last minute hotel deals. Specify a city and see hotel rates for tonight or other upcoming dates.

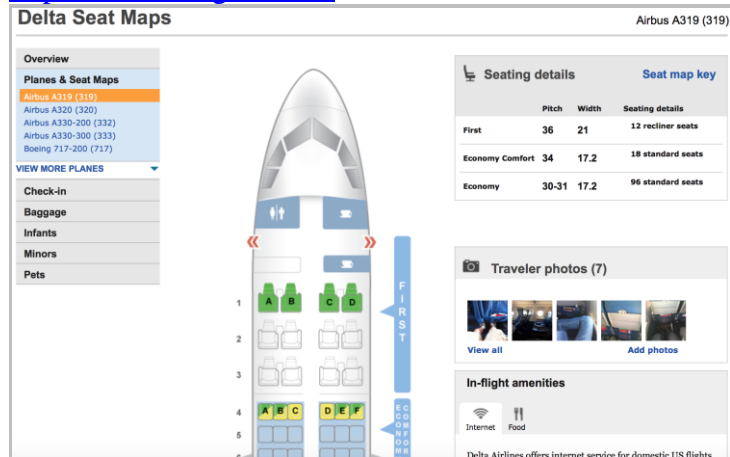
## Miles and Points

Play your (credit) cards right, and you can travel the world for (almost) free. Frequent flyer miles and other reward points can be very valuable, and with the large bonuses available with some credit cards, collecting enough miles to travel can be relatively easy. But use caution: applying for credit cards can affect your credit score, and it can be tempting to spend more than you can afford to meet the minimum spends necessary for some bonuses. If you want to explore this area, there are two blogs with a wealth of information and tips: The Points Guy (<http://thepointsguy.com/>) and Million Mile Secrets (<http://millionmilesecrets.com/>).

# Other Tools

## SeatGuru

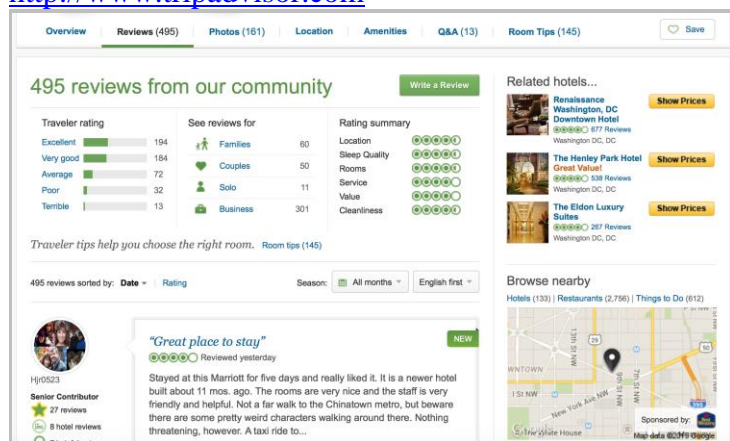
<http://www.seatguru.com>



Picking the right seat can be a challenge. SeatGuru makes it easy. Enter your flight information and they'll show you a seat map for the airplane that you'll likely be on, with information on which seats are best and which should be avoided. I always check SeatGuru when selecting seats.

## TripAdvisor

<http://www.tripadvisor.com>



Tripadvisor has reviews for accommodations and activities around the world. While anyone can write a review, and they should be taken with a grain of salt, the reviews and user photographs can be very helpful in determining where to stay.

## Follow on Twitter

These are some of our favorites for travel deals on Twitter, often the best resource for the best deals.

- @Travelzoo
- @airfarewatchdog
- @MilMileSecrets
- @thepointsguy
- You may also want to follow the airlines you'll be flying with, as Twitter customer service can be quicker than the phone if there are cancellations or delays.