Five easy ways to save on summer airfares

Rick Seaney, FareCompare.com *7 a.m. EDT July 28, 2015*

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Small changes in the way you fly or shop for airfare can save big bucks any time of year. Check out the fare differences on the following August flights but remember, ticket prices can and do change without notice (these fares were found in July).

1. Ditch the checked bag.

Sample savings: $50

You've heard this before but if you haven't tried it, do so now: Use a carry-on instead of a big suitcase. You'll avoid the $25 each-way checked-bag fee most airlines charge, but more important, carry-ons don't get lost during tight connections. Alternative: Fly Southwest, the last major U.S. airline to offer checked bags for free.

Note: Allegiant, Frontier and Spirit charge for carry-ons but allow a free small bag if it fits under a seat.

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2. Fly cheaper days.

Sample savings: $70

This may be the easiest way to save. Move departure/arrival dates around a bit to hit the cheapest days to fly: Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday. This example compares August flights between New York and Los Angeles:

Fly Friday to Sunday: $524
Fly Tuesday to Saturday: $454

If you can't fly a cheap day on both legs of your trip, fly one and you'll still save something.

3. Compare airfares.

Sample savings: $73

If you think Spirit (or Southwest or JetBlue or another favorite airline) always has rock-bottom fares, you're probably not comparing prices. Yes, Spirit and the others sometimes do have the cheapest prices, but no single airline always has the best deal. Compare these August flights between Buffalo and Las Vegas:

Spirit: $548
Delta: $475

By the way, American also had a cheaper fare than Spirit and the flights offered by both legacy carriers came with a single stop while the Spirit route had two stops. Sometimes you can save money and time.

4. Fly cheaper airports.

Sample savings: $148

It can pay to drive a little farther to fly out of a bigger airport. Here's a comparison of fares for a Southern California-Dallas flight:

Smaller airport: Burbank-Dallas: $355
Bigger airport: Los Angeles-Dallas: $207

In another example, fliers in eastern Iowa saved as much as $70 on flights to Chicago by departing from Omaha instead of Sioux City, but there are also times a smaller airport is the better deal. If you have a choice of airports, compare fares from each.

5. Choose connecting flights.

Sample savings: $312

You won't always save big by adding a stop or two to your itinerary but choosing a connecting flight over a non-stop often means a better deal. Check out these flights between Atlanta and Seattle:

Non-stop: $769
One-stop: $455

Yes, a connecting flight means more time in the air (and airport) but a savings of 300 bucks per ticket could be worth it for most families.

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FareCompare CEO Rick Seaney is an airline industry insider and top media air travel resource. Follow Rick (@rickseaney) and never overpay for airfare again.