

## *“The Consumers Guide To Choosing The Perfect Vacation”*

- How to avoid five travel industry rip-offs.
- Five costly misconceptions about all inclusive travel
- The seven dangers of making a wrong choice in choosing a travel agent or travel web site.
- Eight mistakes to avoid when choosing a travel agent or web site.
- Why you want a professional who is a real person helping you plan your next vacation.
- Why you want a stress free and unforgettable vacation.
- Why you want accurate up to date information
- Four steps to a perfect vacation
- Five problems people have with booking a vacation and what we have done to solve them.
- It is true that there is a perception about saving travel dollars when booking on the internet? But the perception may not hold water. Find out why.
- How do you know you are getting the best price. Why the travel industry consistently baits and switches prices and what you can do about it.

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Dear Fellow Traveler,

It is a bold new travel world out there.

Never before has the consumer had so many choices and decisions to make before to plan and purchase their next vacation. Where do you start? How do you find the perfect vacation that really fits your needs? What's the best source? How do I know if I can trust?

We are here to help.

This consumer guide is an educational service to help consumers shop in our industry.

Thank for taking the time to read our guide.

Please feel free to contact our office if you would like more information.

Sincerely,

Donald C. Fuener  
President

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## **How to avoid five travel industry ripoffs.**

The terrible, the bad and the really bad deals. Here is our list of five travel practices that you should avoid.

1. The price we list in our advertising is not the price we charge. Bait and switch unfortunately exists in the travel industry. Mention bait-and-switch, and it's hard not to think of a hotel, airline or car rental company. You're quoted one price. You pay another one. We discuss the reason why the travel industry constantly baits and switches in its advertising later in our report. The good news is that there has been a move from government regulators to help curb some of the more blatant excesses of travel advertising. Always read the fine print before you buy. Don't be fooled by teaser prices.
2. The travel insurance we sold you as part of our package doesn't cover everything about your trip. Nearly all the English and French, the Germans and Japanese, the Latin Americans and Koreans, buy travel insurance when they go on a trip. Nearly all Americans don't. Yet things can happen on a trip, or even worse, things can happen before you even travel, making it impossible for you to even travel. Tour operators as a rule offer their own 'in house' insurance policies. Often, all these policies protect you from is from that company's own cancellation fees if you cancel your travels. This type of insurance can be very limited in its coverage, and while it might be less expensive than a comprehensive policy, it is rarely a good value. If you are going to buy travel insurance, don't purchase it from the supplier, always look for outside independent travel insurance companies for your coverage.
3. Any quest for the lowest fare invites hollow promises. The awful truth: anyone's lowest fare probably can be beaten. Airline ticket prices change every hour. And there is no logic to the whole system. Why do one way tickets cost more than round trip ones? While a "shopping" system that visits every web site can include JetBlue and Southwest fares on specific city pairs, as well as those of legacy airlines and AirTran, we know of no system that can deal constructively with all geographical variations, e.g., use of Manchester (MHT) as a Boston (BOS) alternative, or Long Beach (LGB), an 11-mile away alternative to LAX.
4. Telephone charges from your hotel room are out of sight. Don't even think about picking up the in-room phone unless it's ringing. Instead, use your cellular phone. Why? Hotels mark up the phone bill by 100% or more. Oh, and that "deal" with free local calls? Check the fine print, because sometimes, calls of more than 20 minutes — even local ones — get billed at a different rate.
5. Optional auto rental insurance. Car-rental employees like to pressure you to buy their own insurance. They show you pictures of damaged cars and they tell you your insurance

policy may not cover your rental if you're in an accident. I'm not saying these employees are wrong, but you have to be smart. Find out what's covered under your policy (normally, your credit card takes care of almost everything). Remember: These policies often account for a hefty portion of a car-rental company's profit. So while these add-on insurance policies can be useful for you, they're even more useful to the rental company. Specifically, its bottom line.

### **Five costly misconceptions about all inclusive travel.**

We have the same goal as you a perfect all inclusive vacation. Here is our list including one misconception about cruises and why the all inclusive may be a better value.

1. Is an all inclusive really right for you? Many people choose all inclusive vacations because they consider them to be good value. Remember all inclusive doesn't necessarily mean less expensive. The truly budget conscious could spend considerably less by doing some of their own, by cooking or by making prudent restaurant decisions. Choosing an all inclusive resort means choosing less freedom when choosing restaurants. There are other considerations, when selecting an all inclusive resort: Will it be the same buffet every day? How many restaurants to choose from? Any restrictions on menu selections or choice of a restaurant? If you are a finicky drinker, be sure to check whether the program includes premium alcohol; a lot of resorts include only the local hooch.
2. Just because a hotel offers discounts does not mean that the quality of the room and amenities is below standard. Offering discounts is actually a common practice, even among big hotel chains, especially during off-seasons. Shop wisely.
3. Bring along some extra funds. Even if you're going to an all-inclusive resort, be prepared for on-site expenses like international phone calls, gift shop items, gambling, and laundry service. They can ambush any budget.
4. There is a misconception that cruise vacations are in general less expensive and the best vacation value. Although there are deals to be had, cruises are not really all-inclusive vacations; drinks (both alcohol and soda) cost extra. Although your accommodations, food and entertainment are included in the price of the cruise, gratuities (\$140 per couple for a week) are extra. Shore excursions are costly. Many people find they spend between \$250-\$400 per person more on seven night cruises, which brings the overall price more in line with moderately priced all-inclusive resorts in Mexico and the Caribbean.
5. All-inclusive resorts are a relatively new phenomenon, and they are limited mostly to the

Caribbean and Mexico. Here, for one up front price, your vacation does indeed include virtually everything, including all your drinks, ice cream, water sports, diving, and yes, even golf if it is available.

Be sure the all-inclusive resort lifestyle is for you. Most all-inclusive vacationers are content to remain on the resort property just basking in the sun, one umbrella over their head and another in their drink. The resorts generally do offer side trips to local attractions for guests who get antsy; the prices for these are comparable to what you would pay for a shore excursion offered by a cruise line.

As on a cruise ship, the food at an all-inclusive resort will be plentiful and varied in the main dining area. Most resorts will have several theme restaurants for you to try out as well; these restaurants generally require a reservation and have a dress code, but they are available at no additional charge.

As you plan your “all-inclusive” vacation, you need to keep one more thing in mind: Many destinations are very affordable once you get there, but the cost of getting there is sky high. So choose your resort carefully. Cancun and Jamaica (the epicenters of all-inclusive resorts) offer affordable airfare worldwide, but other locations are more expensive to fly to and sometimes require a day long flight with several changes to get there.

### **The seven dangers of making a wrong choice in choosing a travel agent or travel web site.**

In the beginning there were travel agents. They had the key to reservations systems. Then came the internet and suddenly travel information became available to the masses. Now virtually everyone can book any variety of travel packages. And with that ability comes pitfalls and dangers. How do you distinguish the good from the bad, the legitimate from the con artist? It's not always easy. Here is what can happen when you make the wrong choice:

1. The travel certificate or other discount program you sold me is practically worthless. The weekend rate was far cheaper than my discount program rate.
2. I booked online and now I have no way to change the trip and even verify the reservation I just made. There is no telephone number to call to verify your reservation or have someone to call if something goes wrong. I don't even know the address of the business I just bought my trip from.
3. I took advantage of this email and fax offers of free travel. I guess this deal sounds too good to be true because the company I bought the offer from doesn't even exist.

4. I tried to check prices online but there is no single system consistently delivers all fares on all airlines. Is your Internet booking made with a legitimate company (i.e. one that actually has a license to sell travel or book flights?) Are you absolutely certain that the money you give to the company will actually be forwarded to the supplier and that your vacation will materialize the way you have dreamed it would? Are you sure you are actually saving money? Reality check. There is a very real reason that the airlines are keen to drive you away from travel agents and to force you to deal directly with them. The reality is that there is a major 'cost' to the airlines which travel agents cause them - a cost they are desperate to hide and eliminate. And, what is that cost? It is the cost of losing revenue every time a travel agent advises a client how to save money on an airfare (for example, by changing routing or flight times), and/or the lost revenue every time a travel agent advises a client about a more convenient schedule or a lower fare on a competing airline. With the difference in two fares being potentially the difference between perhaps \$300 and \$1500, good advice from a travel agent can 'cost' the airline (and save you!) a huge amount more than just \$20.
5. Although the website description of the quality of the hotel was great, it was really a dump. I guess you can't determine the quality of a hotel by a website description.
6. When you bid on a travel product you must accept whatever they offer you. Get ready for very inconvenient travel times. My flight leaves at 6:00 a.m. and doesn't return until after midnight and there is nothing I can do about it.
7. Because I booked the room at a deep discount online my hotel told me that they couldn't move me even if I requested a non smoking room, away from the elevators. I guess you really get what you pay for.

#### **Eight mistakes to avoid when choosing a travel agent or web site.**

Unlike most products, travel services usually have to be paid for before they are delivered. This creates opportunities for disreputable individuals and companies. Some travel packages turn out to be very different from what was presented or what the consumer expected. Some don't materialize at all!

1. If you call for help are you calling a real live agent or an automated telephone system. Is your agent a real live person or an agent in some far off country.
2. Are you booking a vacation or a high pressure sales presentation? All too often the offer you are getting is nothing more than a disguised sales presentation for a real estate purchase. Make sure you know what you are getting into.

3. Ask about the cancellation fees in case your travel changes. If they can't help you with what we in the industry call the "fine print", move on.
4. Does the price quoted really exist? If they can't tell you the name of the supplier, airline or determine the complete cost of the trip in dollars, including all service charges, taxes, processing fees, etc. run. Seeing the offer on a Web site does not count as getting an offer in writing. A Web site can be easily changed and provides no proof of what the offer was like when you first saw it. (Source: National Fraud Information Center, part of the National Consumer League)
5. Can they offer hidden fares, consolidator airfares, unpublished fares? If not find someone else who can. A good agent Web site offers fares from a variety of sources.
6. Can they offer an upgrade? Simply ask. Good agents have good deals for their clients.
7. Is the agent in love with a vendor? Sometimes the only reason an agent will book a vacation for a client is because on an incentive offered by the vacation company to the agent. Make sure you get at least two quotes from two different suppliers.
8. If you are told that you've won a free vacation, ask if you have to buy something else in order to get it. Some packages have promoted free air fare, as long as you buy expensive hotel arrangements. Others include a free hotel stay, but no air fare.

### **Why you want a professional who is a real person helping you plan your next vacation.**

You are the only one who should decide what you want in a vacation package or tour; however, with a myriad of alternatives in destinations, prices, levels of service and facilities, you need the assistance of a travel professional to help select the package or tour that's right for you.

An experienced travel professional can advise you impartially on what is best suited to your requirements and recommend the programs from which you can make a selection with confidence.

Agents are travel information experts, eminently qualified to pinpoint your dreams, present your choices, and help pick the package that's best for you. With even the most experienced travelers feeling edgy these days, making plans through a real live travel agent can help alleviate some of your fears. Finding someone who knows the ins and outs of the industry can also help you to avoid the pitfalls.

When you book with a you are dealing with a top professional. You are also dealing with a real, live human being who not only provides you with full travel services and advice, but is 'there' to lobby on your behalf should anything go wrong with the arrangements.

The good on-line travel agencies are truly individual customer oriented and their main strategy and key to success is to build a lasting mutually beneficial relationship with the individual traveler.

## **How (good) on line Travel Agents Help You**

Good travel agents don't just find you 'the lowest published fare' and 'the most convenient itinerary', although if this was all they ever did, you'd still want to use them all the time. Here's a list of some other things that good travel agents can sometimes (but not always) help you with. Note that this list only relates to airline travel, there's much more that agents can do when helping you with cars, hotels, tours, cruises, etc.

- Negotiate with an airline to make available seats on flights that are otherwise sold out
- Get you priority wait listing on flights
- Negotiate with an airline to get you a lower fare even though it is showing sold out in the computer
- Help you to get the best seat pre-assignments possible
- Treat you as a person and provide, in turn, personal service; and use their personal knowledge of your likes/dislikes/preferences to ensure that your travel plans best match your needs
- Pro-actively monitor your flights and fare and tell you if better itineraries or fares come along
- Act as your advocate in dispute and problem resolution
- Be available for emergency problems and flight changes
- Can sometimes obtain discounted consolidated tickets on domestic flights
- Can almost always obtain discounted consolidated tickets for international flights

## **Why you want a stress free and unforgettable vacation.**

At the heart of every good, stress-free vacation experience is the perfect plan....are you looking forward to getting away and having a worry-free vacation? Advance planning can help you to stress-proof your travels so that you can have the most fun and relaxing experience possible without undue worry.

Relax... And Increase Your Performance

Peak performers take time to play and relax. Interestingly enough, they are not workaholics. They work hard, but they also play hard. They carefully plan their leisure to give their bodies and minds a chance to renew their strength and energy so they can be at their best when they do work.

Many top achievers take lots of little mini-vacations throughout the year. Short periods of rest

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and relaxation, such as long weekends brings them back to work refreshed and ready to get on with their goals.

It's the time that you've been waiting for all year long. You have an uninterrupted two weeks away from work. While it should be a time of non-stop relaxation, the idea of your vacation is already beginning to stress you out. You wonder if you'll return from your trip more frustrated and agitated than when you left.

At this point, you're stressed out about the cost of the trip...whether your plane will arrive in time for you to take your cruise...if you'll have enough clothes for your journey...how to keep your children in line during the trip...and whether you will actually enjoy yourself. Instead of being a soothing trip away from it all, your vacation is quickly becoming a major stress event.

It doesn't have to be this way. You can enjoy a vacation that carries with it a minimum amount of stress. However, it will not happen without some concerted effort on your part. In essence, you must work to have fun—and the sooner you realize that, the less stress you'll encounter.

A relatively stress-free vacation requires a great deal of advanced planning. To begin with, you should develop a budget for your vacation, based upon how much money you've saved. Resist the temptation to charge it all on your credit card. Otherwise, you'll have to endure a great deal of financial stress once you return from your trip. Once you've established a budget, be sure to stick to it. Overspending will simply exacerbate your stress.

A vacation should be the most relaxing event of the year. That's why it's important that you try to make it as stress-free as possible. By maintaining a sensible budget, doing some extensive planning, and asking for help if you need it, you should be in a position to reduce your stress level considerably. Bon voyage!

### **Why you want accurate up to date information**

Were you one of 703 million international tourist arrivals worldwide? Do you want to be part of those travelers who found exactly what they were looking for in their travel destination? If you answered yes, We believe that accurate and up to date information is a basic necessity for all travelers. Travel changes, especially air travel, on a regular basis. What was accurate last week, may not be this week. The only way to make sure you have the most travel information is to talk to a travel professional that keeps on top of what is happening now.

### **Four steps to a perfect vacation.**

1. Don't assume that one site will always have the best deals. It just doesn't happen consistently. It never takes too long to check a second portal or even to see what can be found by booking directly through the airline or hotel site. Even if it means that your initial instinct was right, you have nothing to lose beyond a little extra time.
2. Don't ignore the fine print. Are there any surcharges? What is the cancellation policy? Are changes allowed? If you have to make travel changes after you've booked your trip, your best defense is to know each site's rules and procedures.
3. Book your travel when you're ready. There are two camps here. The early birds want to lock in current prices as soon as possible while the late crowd is banking on sweet last-minute deals that may or may not materialize. A few years ago, you could have played it both ways, but now that more and more sites are instituting change and cancellation penalties you're probably best to finalize your travel when you find the rate or fare you're happy with.
4. Determine your budget. Price plays a part in most people's vacations.

### **Five problems people have with booking a vacation and what we have done to solve them.**

***The price quoted is not the final price.*** All too often travel suppliers advertise low prices for destinations as a way of stimulating potential clients to call them for travel quotes. And nothing more. They know the fares either don't exist or are so limited in availability or time, that they can't possibly meet the average traveler's needs. At Planet Travel we have never jumped on the bait and switch advertising wagon. When you ask Planet Travel and its sister web sites for price quotes, you always get the total fare, taxes and fees included, and is always available to purchase at the time of the quote.

***Failure to compare apples to apples*** Often people will get a price for a particular itinerary then go compare this price elsewhere. They get excited when they see a much lower price posted somewhere online. As they go to confirm this lower price they find out this lower price did not include things like airport/hotel transportation or certain taxes and fees. After doing the math they sadly realize their bargain ended up costing them more money. At Planet Travel we make sure that any vacation we include is the total fare and includes the extras.

***Failure to read small print.*** Folks get excited at the thought of a vacation. They happily click away online...yes, yes, yes they want this trip. They simply accept all the terms and conditions without taking the time to read the small print on travel contracts. Later they find out it will cost them dearly to change the spelling of the typo of their child's name OR they are upset to find out that they cannot change their mind about the date of their departure OR at the last minute they

didn't realize passport rules had changed and they don't have the appropriate documents to travel. If you confirm a trip with one of the travel companies posted on our website, you will be agreeing to the terms and conditions of that company. We here at Planet Travel cannot intercede. You will need to work thru any issues on your own directly with that travel company. At Planet Travel we make sure that you get all the fine print before you book your vacation.

***Failure to purchase travel insurance.*** Again vacations bring to mind happy thoughts. People don't want to think about illness, injury, weather problems, accidents or problems of any kind. Crazy scenarios like power failures grounding planes or forgetting to make a kennel reservation for Fido only to find out at the last minute there is no one to care for the beloved family pet can ruin a long anticipated fun holiday. Something as minor as a child's earache at the last minute can ground your family's plans to travel. If you don't have coverage, you could be forfeiting the total cost of your trip. Most folks don't realize that many health insurance plans, HMO's and Medicare do NOT cover people outside of specific geographic areas so if your family is traveling out of the country you may not have any health coverage. Many countries will take your passports and NOT allow you to leave the country until any medical bills are Paid in full! At Planet Travel we only offer travel insurance from reputable companies that have a reputation for paying claims. We want to make sure your family and vacation investment is protected.

***Having no one to call when things go wrong.*** Because travel is not guaranteed and you are quite likely to have delays caused by weather, mechanical difficulties, traffic, health and so on. When you have missed a flight, you need someone that you can call immediately and they can start to pick up the pieces. If for no other reason, booking your vacation with a Planet Travel professional makes tons of sense. If you purchase your vacation from an on-line discounter, who are you going to call that will pick up the pieces when something happens? At Planet Travel our agents are on call seven days a week until 10:00 p.m. Central Time to help you when things go wrong. If you end up booking the vacation from hell, yourself, you have no one to blame but yourself. If you used Planet Travel, at least you'll have someone to complain to.

**It is true that there is a perception about saving travel dollars when booking on the internet. But the perception may not hold water. Find out why.**

The most common myth is that Internet fares are lower than what the travel agent can obtain. While this may be true at times for the individual who has unlimited time to search the system and nearly unlimited flexibility in their travel plans, it is a very different story for corporations and organizations.

Every study done on Internet fares vs. Global Distribution Systems (GDS) used by travel professionals fares has shown that the GDS is cheaper a larger percentage of the time. Topaz International, an airfare auditing company, did the most recent study (Topaz press release July 12, 2002). Between January and June 2002, TOPAZ compared approximately 19,000

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agency-booked itineraries with various internet travel sites including Orbitz, Expedia, Travelocity and carrier-specific sites. TOPAZ found that the itineraries booked through a designated corporate travel agency averaged \$116 (about 20%) less than the same itineraries booked on the Internet travel sites. TOPAZ found lower fares on the Internet only 8% of the time while 77% of the time the cost for the same itinerary was higher on the internet travel sites compared to a corporate travel agency.

The National Business Travel Association (NBTA) conducted a survey of their members who have done web audits and discovered that companies were reporting lower fares between 3 to 5% of the time. They concluded that the savings were not enough to justify the time. The lower fare the traveler thought they were getting was often sold out or involved a convoluted routing. The conclusion is that a good travel agency that incorporates the Internet into its fare searching process will be substantially cheaper than the traveler just shopping the Internet on their own

The money that is wasted where people think they can beat the system by surfing the internet for hours, with no knowledge of the loopholes and ticketing rules, is truly amazing. People think backpackers and internet savvy individuals get the bargains. They don't. Corporate customers get them because winning their business generates far more for airlines and top city hotels than individual consumers." In fact, the internet is neither impartial nor accurate.

**How do you know you are getting the best price. Why the travel industry consistently baits and switches prices and what you can do about it.**

Definition of bait and switch advertising...an illegal sales tactic in which a consumer is lured by a low price only to be told that the "special offer" is no longer available and steered to a higher priced product.

It is probably the nature of advertising to state as low a cost as possible. The key figure is the final cost. The only result of hiding fees and not having the advertised price available at the time of booking the travel product will be that the user gets farther into the purchase prior to backing out as they check for other sources.

For many travelers, price will decide how they book their trip. Are you going to find the best deal on-line, or from a travel agent? When you find a low deal online, is it available? Or do you need to upgrade to a higher category to find availability? Seeing the offer on a web site does not count as getting an offer in writing. A web site can be easily changed and provides no proof of what the offer was like when you first saw it. (Source: National Fraud Information Center , part of the National Consumer League)

Why does the travel industry consistently bait and switch in their advertising? Because it works.

## **Planet Travel's vacation guarantee.**

We want your vacation dreams to come true just as much as you do. If something does go wrong, we promise to do everything possible to make it right. We have a customer service professional available seven days a week to help. All you have to do is call.

Planet Travel was founded in 1999 as small travel agency in Springfield, Illinois. Embracing the internet growth in travel sales, Planet Travel now hosts four travel web sites and one travel oriented blog. Each year Planet Travel plans vacations for thousands of travelers in the United States, Canada and Western Europe. Planet Travel clients get the best of both worlds. The immediate access to pricing of internet with the personal attention of a travel professional.

Our clients choose Planet Travel:

1. Because they want an agent who is a real person that cares about your satisfaction.
2. Because they want accurate up to date information.
3. Because they want an agent who is a specialist on the destination they pick.
4. Because they want to book with an agency recognized by travel suppliers as a top agency.
5. Because they want a great rate.