



Budget airline advice

Transcript 029

September 2007

Linda: Hello and welcome to the Indie Travel Podcast.

Craig: I'm Craig

Linda: And I'm Linda

Craig: And this is episode 29 of the Indie Travel Podcast. Coming to you from London hours before we fly out for Italy. I love doing this. Well, hello anyway and thanks to all our listeners -- especially those of you that have taken the time to subscribe, tell friends about us, email us or leave comments on the site. You guys all rock!

Linda: This week we're going to highlight a few issues around budget travel that we've come across lately, so if you fly regularly or if you're thinking about taking your first budget airline flight, this will be a good eye-opening episode for you. We're covering buying, preparing and arriving for the flight, thinking about our experience and about comments we've heard in various airports around the world.

Craig: First of all, on buying tickets: Most travel agents do not sell budget airline tickets. You have to book them yourselves instead, mainly through their websites although phone lines are also available for some airlines. This means you have to be a bit more careful when you're buying - especially looking at dates, times and connecting flights.

Linda: People tend to spend a lot of time visiting each company's website that they know of, and then compare them for prices and times before making a choice. This research is vital but you need to follow things through right to the end to get a real price. Most of the time the price you first see doesn't bear much relation to what you pay at the end, at all. Some of the hidden costs include taxes, baggage costs, booking extras and, of course, you don't get any complimentary food or drinks on board!

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Craig: And that can count. You can save a lot of time though by going to a price comparison site like [skyscanner.com](http://www.skyscanner.com). You just have to enter your travel info - departure and destination airports and a flight date, and it'll look at dozens of budget airlines for you. It is great because it gives an estimated price including taxes instead of the advertised price - which might only be one cent or one pound! Unfortunately all the budget airlines have other costs that skyscanner doesn't and can't reflect - usually a charge for paying by credit card, and with Ryanair, a charge for check-in luggage. Also, make sure you book in advance - as much in advance as you can, as this often gives you the best deal.

Linda: Another thing to think about is being flexible. Maybe the day that you want to fly, the flights are expensive, but if you look a couple of days on either side, you might be able to get a cheaper deal.

Craig: Yeah, skyscanner is good like that, it give you a graph that kind of shows you the price difference over time.

Linda: Yeah, it's really useful. Anyway, once you've bought your ticket you'll get an email with all the information on it. Be aware that these tickets are usually non-refundable, though with some airlines you can make a change for an exorbitant fee. For most airlines you don't need to print out your ticket, just make a note of the booking reference number - we usually do that in two or three places so that we don't lose it. Quite often when you get to the airport you don't need it anyway, if you hand over your passport they'll have that on their computer.

Craig: Next, make sure you know what the baggage allowance is - it varies from company to company and the excess costs are sky-high. Most of the time it's 20 kilos for check-in luggage and around seven kilos for carry-on. Some airlines, however, not only charge you to take a bag in the first place, but also severely limits your check-in luggage. Ryanair only gives you 15 kilos, and you can take ten kilos of carry-on though as well. So what we often do is some last-minute shuffling at the check-in desk.

Linda: This is a really big thing to remember. We were talking to a man at Heathrow the other day who was moaning about baggage allowances. He'd tried to save money

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by buying his transatlantic flight from a travel agent, then buying onward flights online. But he hadn't considered the change of baggage allowance, and he had about 15 kilos too much baggage! Apparently if you book all your flights together on one carrier, you can carry all your luggage all the way to your destination, not just on your long-haul flight. But if you go cheap, or if you change carriers, you also have to down-size.

Craig: When you've got to the airport, you've got your passport, you go up and get your boarding pass, you'll notice one thing that's really different from traditional airlines - you won't have a seat number. It's faster and cheaper just to let everyone choose their seat as they board. You can pay extra to either get a certain seat if you like flying at the beginning of the plane, or you want that exit row for extra leg room, you need to pay for it. Or you can just be the first to board which often causes a bit of a scrum. I don't recommend paying for your own seat, it's a waste of money in my eyes.

Linda: The different companies approach boarding the plane quite differently. We've really only flown with Easyjet and Ryanair, so we'll tell you about those ones. With Easyjet, when you get your boarding pass, they write a letter on your boarding card when you check in, and the people with A on their card board first, then the people with B, then C, then D. Depending on the size of the plane, sometimes it's just A and B, sometimes A-D. We think this is a really great system, because you don't end up with a mob of people all trying to get on the plane. With Ryanair, they don't have any sort of organisation at all. They've got their speedy boarding, so the people with that fight their way to the front of the crowd and get on first, but everyone else just starts lining up about half an hour before the flight is called, there's a real mob mentality, just a group of people trying to get on the plane first. And it's really stupid. We always just wait in our airport seat until there's only a few people left, then we join the queue. We've flown with Ryanair heaps of times because of our work, and we've only had to sit separately once, and it was only a 90-minute flight, so who cares really?

Craig: Another thing, be aware that no food or drinks will be provided free on the flight, although you can normally purchase some if you want to. Also, you may well be advertised at throughout the flight ... notably Ryanair's Fly to Win a Million scratch-card scheme. Fly to Win a Million.

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Linda: That's one of the phrases we hate most in the world, along with "welcome to Victoria Place shopping centre".

Craig: Yeah.

Linda: Yeah. Anyway, I think that's about it for budget airlines today. They are a lot cheaper, and you do notice the difference in pre-flight and in-air service - we flew BA last month to get to Turkey, and it felt like a luxury compared to the budget flights. We got a movie, we got a meal - it was great.

Craig: Mmm, free wine.

Linda: And wine - it was a magic, magic flight. But I think if you're just going a short distance, budget is the way to go.

Craig: Of course there's lots of ethical debate around the environmental effects of flying at present, and cheap airlines just make it so much easier to hop on board. So be aware of that and please consider your options. Mark Smith made a good case for train travel in episode 24, so you can check that in the archives.

Linda: And, until next week, travel well.

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