



News from airfarewatchdog.com

Contact: George Hobica
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What is an Airfarewatchdog?

Airfarewatchdog.com is an airfare comparison, alert and listing site that hunts for exceptionally low airfares. When we find one, and determine that a sufficient number of seats are available, we list it on our site. We're unlike Travelocity.com or Orbitz.com, which are airfare *search* sites. We do the searching for the consumer, and then list what we've found in an easy-to-access format.

Here are just some of the other ways we're (very) different:

- Our fares are found by real people, not computers
- We're the only site on the entire World Wide Web that compares Southwest Airlines' fares with those sold by other airlines
- We also list other fares that don't appear in third-party sites or searches, such as those on Allegiant Airlines and the increasingly large number of airline-site-only fares
- We include taxes on the international fares we list
- We search for seat availability for the fares we list (no other fare listing/alert site does)
- We search for value not simply lowest price (other sites would flag a connecting flight that's \$1 less than a nonstop on the same route; to us, that's computer-generated silliness)
- We only alert users to fares that have gone down a significant amount; some sites will send you an alert on a \$500 domestic fare that's gone down (literally) just \$10. We would *never*.



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Backgrounder

Airfarewatchdog.com is a free low airfare listing and alert site with a free accompanying newsletter service. It is different from a fare search engine, such as Travelocity or Orbitz, in that the site has already done the searching for users and simply lists "cherry picked" low fares that the search has generated.

The site's mission is to monitor airfares, which can change up to three times a day, and alert site users and newsletter subscribers to fares that airfarewatchdog.com analysts believe are a true bargain (and, of course, a real deal is one that actually has seats for sale).

Travel journalist and airfare expert **George Hobica** created the site, and maintains it with a team of highly-trained fare analysts. His primary area of focus as a travel journalist is consumer issues and the site embodies the spirit of consumer advocacy.

Other airfare comparison sites use computer programs to find and list low fares. Airfare Watchdog uses **human, rather than artificial, intelligence**. This unique approach uncovers airfares that computers miss, such as fares on Southwest Airlines and other niche carriers, including Allegiant Air and USA3000. These airlines don't feed their fares to airfare computer systems and thus human eyes are needed to find them.

Revenue is generated from advertising and from affiliate relationships with airfare booking engines and airlines. However, many of the fares listed, including those on Southwest, generate no revenue at all, but are included for the benefit of consumers.

Fares are judged on **two central principals**:

- 1) Are they a good deal, taking into consideration historical pricing and restrictions?**
- 2) Do the fares have seats available for purchase?**

Additional site features:

- The largest online collection of official **airline route maps**.
- Links to **airline contracts of carriage**.
- **Airfare WatchBlog**: a round-up of advertised airfare sales that isn't afraid to warn consumers if a sale isn't much of a sale at all.



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12 Ways Airfarewatchdog.com Watches Out for Consumers

- 1. SEAT AVAILABILITY** - We check seat availability for the fares we list. We try booking seats just the consumer would and if seats are scarce we say so, or if they're virtually non-existent, we don't list that fare.
- 2. ALL AIRLINES** - We list Southwest and JetBlue fares, as well as those of smaller airlines like Allegiant and USA3000. No other fare listing site lists Southwest's or Allegiant's fares, and few include JetBlue.
- 3. ONE WAY FARES** - We indicate when fares are sold one way for half of the lowest round-trip fare without requiring a roundtrip purchase. Many travelers are simply going one-way (especially for business) or traveling from City A to B to C and back to A.
- 4. INTERNATIONAL INCLUDING TAX** - We list most international fares including all taxes. Since many of these fares carry \$200-\$300 in extra taxes and fees, they are deceptively low unless all taxes are shown.
- 5. WEB SITE ONLY FARES** - Increasingly, airlines reserve their very best fares for their own Web sites, and these do not appear in computer-generated third-party fare databases. We hunt down these fares.
- 6. NON STOPS NOTED** - We specify when a flight is nonstop, because given a choice, that's what most consumers want. A \$129 one-way nonstop from Newark to Los Angeles may seem higher than a \$211 RT with a connection in Detroit, but we list both fares because some people value convenience over a slightly lower fare.
- 7. WEEKEND DEALS** - We include all weekend fares and note them separately so users can quickly find weekend getaways. In general, other fare listing sites do not.
- 8. VALUE AND TRAVEL FLEXIBILITY** - We shop for value, not just the lowest fare. For example, if a New York/London fare is being sold for \$400 RT including taxes for winter travel only and the very next day the fare on this route is \$400 RT, but it's valid for *summer* travel as well, we'll alert users to this very important distinction; other fare alert services will not.
- 9. DEEP LINKS DIRECT TO YOUR FARE** - We provide deep links to fare calendars for every domestic fare that can be purchased on Travelocity.com or Cheapair.com. These links, which no other fare listing service provides, bring you directly to the flexible date fare booking calendar for the specific fare to make finding seats easier.
- 10. NEARBY AIRPORTS** - We show fares from every conceivable airport a reasonable drive from the original search airport, all on one easy to navigate page. For example, our New York page has fares from LaGuardia, JFK, Newark, White Plains, and Islip, NY.
- 11. REAL DEALS** - We only list fares that we think are reasonable. If a fare on a particular route is in our opinion abnormally high, even if it's gone down \$10 or \$20 from the previous day, we won't list it if we believe it's still too much to pay. Other sites list all lowered fares without regard to actual value.
- 12. BETTER ORGANIZATION** - We categorize fares by domestic or international, weekend or non-weekend. Seems logical, but other sites don't do this.



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An Industry First: A Travel Newsletter with Frequency Control, Vacation Hold, and City-Targeted Content

After months of development, Airfarewatchdog.com has launched what should be a no-brainer for a travel newsletter, but is in fact an industry first.

The consumer-friendly airfare listing and alert site now allows airfare alert subscribers to put their subscription on "vacation hold" for up to a year. It only makes sense: Americans have little enough vacation time to begin with, and when it's gone, it's gone. So why keep sending people emails that they have no use for? (If you're out of vacation time, even a \$0 fare is just wishful thinking). The same applies to subscribers who are "out of office," on maternal leave, or who have no plans to travel for any other reason.

And to prevent "email overload," Airfarewatchdog.com now lets users choose how frequently they'd like to receive newsletters: weekly, daily, or somewhere in between. "Not only does this help control our email costs, but it also gives subscribers more control over what lands in their in-boxes," said George Hobic, the site's founder. "So everyone wins."

All this is in addition to airport-targeted airfare information. Subscribers only get airfare information that pertains to their nearest departure airport and any surrounding airports within a reasonable drive.

Amazingly, no other travel newsletter offers consumers all three levels of control.



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A True Airfare Story: New York to London, Summer Travel, \$398 Round-trip Including Taxes

Airfares are higher than they've been in ages, especially to Europe, and they'll probably get worse if airline consolidation spreads. But there are amazing deals now and then, if you know where to look.

Let's say last spring you were searching for a cheap fare from New York to London for travel in July. You probably saw fares upwards of \$900 round-trip including taxes, and might have thought, "Wow, guess I'm not going."

But one Saturday last April fares on that route for summer travel went down to \$198 RT plus about \$200 in taxes, on Virgin Atlantic (oddly, these fares were available only on Travelocity, not on Virgin's own web site or anywhere else, but that's another story).

Only one Web site, under-the-radar Airfarewatchdog.com, sent out free newsletter alerts about these fares, which were also good from all Virgin gateways.

Other fare alert and notification Web sites and newsletters missed these amazing deals. Why? Because the lowest fare prior to this hidden sale was in fact the same \$198 RT, but it was only good for *winter* travel. Every other fare search or listing site uses computer programs, rather than the trained airfare researchers employed by Airfarewatchdog.com, to find fares so they wouldn't have caught the fact that these low fares were suddenly available for peak summer travel. Computerized fare search sites are programmed just to look for fluctuations in price, not fare rules.

In contrast, airfarewatchdog.com is manned by real live people, digging deep into airfare rules and prices, to discover exactly this kind of information.



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George Hobica's Five Tips for saving on airfare

1. Be flexible in your travel dates.

Orbitz currently has the best flexible date search because it includes international and domestic fares over any 30 day window, whereas Expedia only checks between major US cities. Travelocity's Asian affiliate, Zuji.com, is the only search engine that lists international fares over a 330 day range, and also includes business and first class fares on a flexible date basis.

2. Search individual airline sites.

Many airlines, including JetBlue, Southwest, Allegiant Air, SAS, Aloha, Aer Lingus, Qantas, Alaska, Air New Zealand, Air Canada and others often post their lowest fares only on their own web sites. These deals won't appear on most fare listing sites or fare search sites, but they will appear on airfarewatchdog.com.

3. Buy packages.

Site59.com (recently re-named lastminute.com) will often sell you a hotel + air package for less than the price of airfare alone. It's especially valuable for last minute trips. Travelocity, with their "TotalTrip" option, partners with Site59 and often offers the same deals.

4. Check fares every day, even on weekends.

Airfares go up and down like the stock market, and the best fares are often unadvertised. Domestic fares can change three times a day during the week, and once a day on weekends, so it pays to check often. Some of the best deals pop up on Saturdays, which is also when most "fat finger fares" appear.

5. If the fare goes down, ask for a refund.

It's a little known fact, but if you buy a non-refundable fare and the price goes down after purchase, some airlines will refund the difference in the form of a voucher good for future travel as long as you don't change your travel dates or times. Delta, American and Continental generally deduct a \$100-\$200 fee from any refund due; United, US Airways, and Southwest refund without a fee. Northwest deducts just \$25. And even those airlines with more restrictive policies can sometimes be cajoled into refunding the entire difference between the original and new, lower fare so it doesn't hurt to ask.



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Airfarewatchdog.com in the News

"A Top 99 Undiscovered Web Site 2006."

--*PC Magazine*

"The source for dirt-cheap airfares"

--*Fodors.com* [italics theirs]

A "World's Best Value" 2006

--*Travel + Leisure*

One of "25 Best Travel Sites"

--*Kiplinger's Personal Finance*

"Website of the Day"

--*KSDK-TV NBC St. Louis*

"A top ten travel site"

--*The Washington Post*

"An uncanny ability to rummage through the rat's nest of airline fare structures and promotions and find the most obscure unadvertised cheap fares."

--*Joe Sharkey, The New York Times*

"My new favorite web site. This guy [George Hobica] has no life."

--*Peter Greenberg, NBC Today Show*

"One of the top Internet sites used by airfare bargain hunters"

--*Ben Mutzabaugh, USA Today*

"They scour [the internet] for these deals. Personally, I would go bananas."

--*Airfare expert Terry Trippler, quoted in Newark Star Ledger*



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GEORGE HOBICA

Founder, Airfarewatchdog.com
Travel Journalist and Airfare Expert

George Hobica began his travel writing career while still employed full time as a marketing manager for a large multinational company in the late 1980s. He started out writing a weekly travel Q&A column for his local newspaper in Newton, Massachusetts (his "Ask George" column is still syndicated by the Community Newspaper Company). When his editor left to join the then-fledgling Digital City Boston subsidiary of America Online, he asked Hobica to bring his column online, and then suggested that he add a listing of unusual airfare bargains leaving from the Boston area, updated daily. That grew to 25 daily bargains. When AOL noticed that these fares were generating a large number of page views, they eventually expanded the bargain fare service nationwide. Thus, Digital City's "Travel Guy" was born.

That relationship ended in 2004 after an eight-year run. But the emails from disappointed users of the service never stopped, and in April of 2005 Hobica launched an airfare blog, the precursor to airfarewatchdog.com, using Blogspot.com for free hosting. The blog quickly outgrew its free home and in the spring of 2006, Airfarewatchdog.com was completely redesigned and re-launched in the form you see today.

"Part of the satisfaction of this work is the positive feedback we get from users every day," Hobica says. "I get a kick out of saving people money, and they love us for it."

Hobica has written for magazines as diverse as Men's Health, Travel + Leisure, and Good Housekeeping, and still manages to contribute frequently to National Geographic Traveler and Real Simple, as well as to pen his weekly "Ask George" travel Q&A column. He has appeared as a travel expert on the ABC, CBS, and NBC networks, on MSNBC, CNBC, Fox News, and CNN, and on PBS, and for many local network affiliates across the US.

He currently resides in Manhattan with his Wheaten Terrier, on whose likeness the airfarewatchdog.com logo (and superhero), "Browser," is based.