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Does it matter anymore to buy an airline ticket in advance?

Portland, Oregon – May 15, 2009 – Over the years, Topaz International has done numerous independent studies that evaluate various airfare booking alternatives in an independent and objective manner, always trying to keep a level playing field when completing the analysis. In early 2009, Topaz International did a similar study looking at whether purchasing airline tickets in advance made financial sense. As many of us know, historically one of the best ways to obtain the lowest airfares was to purchase your tickets in advance. As you got closer and closer to your travel dates, the prices tended to go up.

Then, there were changes in the marketplace where advance purchase discounts did not seem advantageous and Saturday night stay discounts seemed to disappear. The net result of this was good for the business traveler; we felt like we were being treated equally and were not subsidizing the leisure traveler. It now looks like that may have changed.

Flying domestically in the United States yields the greatest savings by buying earlier

Topaz International evaluated over 900 city pairs to determine if purchasing in advance yielded lower priced airfares for typical business trips. As part of the analysis we also looked at whether a Saturday night stay over yielded any additional savings. Remarkably, you can save up to 51% of the cost of the airfare by booking 21 days in advance with a Saturday night stay over a 3 day advance ticket with a Saturday night stay.

Domestic US	No Saturday	%age Change	Saturday	%age Change
3 Day Advance	\$421.67	n/a	\$459.56	n/a
7 Day Advance	\$310.48	(26%)	\$336.27	(27%)
14 Day Advance	\$224.63	(28%)	\$226.63	(33%)
21 Day Advance	\$228.54	2%	\$224.69	(1%)

The advantage of booking 14 days in advance versus 21 days in advance does not seem to yield as great a benefit to the price paid as the other alternatives. But changing the behaviors of your business travelers by encouraging them to book farther in advance could yield some savings to your company.

Booking airfares early when flying internationally will save you up to 24% in the cost of your ticket

There were some bigger savings when booking domestically compared to booking international trips. However there was still some savings found in booking earlier and booking a Saturday night stay. In most cases having a Saturday night stay for domestic trips could cost you more, but for international travel there was a clear trend for cheaper fares when using advance purchase options with Saturday night stays.

International	No Saturday	%age Change	Saturday	%age Change
3 Day Advance	\$715.71	n/a	\$628.44	n/a
7 Day Advance	\$667.96	(7%)	\$522.87	(17%)
14 Day Advance	\$648.09	(3%)	\$491.22	(6%)
21 Day Advance	\$601.59	(7%)	\$475.35	(3%)

The net results would suggest it makes sense for corporations looking to save money on business travel to always book as far in advance as possible. When feasible, staying over a Saturday night may yield additional savings, but each trip should be evaluated on the savings versus the additional cost (i.e. hotel, meals, etc.) of staying any extra days. If you have any questions or comments about this study, please feel free to contact us at Topaz International.

About TOPAZ International

Topaz International provides strategic support to the corporate travel management professional. With 30 years of experience analyzing travel related expenditures, Topaz is a world leader in airfare & hotel auditing, providing benchmark information and consultancy services to improve the delivery of corporate travel services. Supporting travel managers, buyers and agencies, Topaz helps improve performance and facilitate cost savings.

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