

ASBTA NEWS...

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February 23, 2005

Major Airlines Dropping Prices, Putting Heat On Low-Fare Carriers

Ticket Pricing Changes at American Airlines And Other Carriers Helping Small Business Travelers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – DALLAS, TX – Major carriers such as American Airlines and Delta are adopting pricing changes and simpler, lower-fare structures that now rival their low-frill competitors, reported the American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA). ASBTA is a national alliance that provides valuable services and functions focused specifically on the travel needs and interests of small business owners.

“The big airlines have become much more competitive in markets where they’ve been challenged by low-cost airlines,” said ASBTA President Chuck Sharp. “This means there are greater opportunities for small business travelers to fly on the cheap and still take advantage of the benefits of larger airlines.

“Small business travelers who do their homework may find the big airline is actually cheaper than low-cost competitors,” Sharp said. “And they’re beginning to ask whether it makes sense to give up the benefits and flexibility of flying on a larger airline when ticket prices are comparable or cheaper.”

Legacy carriers offer lower, simpler fares

Most legacy carriers—such as American, Delta, Continental and US Airways, for instance—have recently introduced low-fare pricing with lowest-fare guarantees.

According to Sharp, “small business travelers have responded favorably to new, lower fare structures, particularly those that have cut prices by up to 50 percent on last-minute fares on large U.S. airlines.

“Whereas small business travelers once had to rely on budget carriers and online booking to get lower fares, now they simply go directly to large carriers’ Web sites or sign up for electronic e-mail notices of the latest—and lowest—fare specials,” Sharp added.

For example, American Airlines recently introduced its “Lowest Fare Guarantee” program, an online offer that substantially reduces the highest fares for last-minute travel in thousands of U.S. markets. Customers who find a lower American fare for the identical trip on another Web site are refunded the difference and receive a \$50 travel voucher good for any future American flight. The online offer doesn’t change any of the benefits provided by American’s Business Extra program.

“With fewer restrictions and lower fare levels, programs such as American’s are especially attractive to small business travelers,” said Sharp, “and they also eliminate minimum stay and so-called ‘Saturday Night’ requirements.”

Go online, avoid hidden fees

The ASBTA urges small business travelers to use airlines’ online capabilities, instead of their phones, when purchasing tickets or performing other related activities such as checking frequent-flier mileage and making reservations.

According to ASBTA Sales Vice President Chet Gray, “whenever you involve a live person to book your travel rather than do it online, there’s usually a fee involved that sometimes ranges from \$25 to \$50.”

ASBTA's advisory board, which is made up of travel industry experts, also recommended the following:

- **Comparison shop on the Web.** This includes fishing for the lowest fares and checking to see whether there are any issues with over-sized luggage.
- **Learn how to avoid fees.** Typically, airlines add fees for the following...
 - Headphones
 - Over-sized luggage
 - Paper tickets
 - In-flight meals
 - Reservations made by phone
 - Award travel booked less than a week before the trip
 - Reservations made anywhere except the airline's site
 - Flight changes
- **Book now while fares are low.** While fares are still falling, now's the time to book your flights. Although fares may go lower in the short-term, there's no guarantee that lower fares will be coming in future months.

Free Memberships Available

ASBTA is offering free memberships to small business travelers (SBTs) if they sign up before December 1, 2005. After that, the yearly membership fee is \$100. The group also is establishing relationships with travel agencies nationwide that cater to the needs of small business travelers.

"We're working closely with travel agencies that are set up to help SBTs with their travel needs," Sharp said. "In fact, we're already providing travel agencies with a variety of services at no cost for one year.

"We encourage travel agencies to place their links on the ASBTA Web site (www.asbta.com)," Sharp added. "This is accomplished by simply sending a check for \$50 (covers one year) to ASBTA, 7750 N. MacArthur, Suite 120-264, Irving, TX 75063. Travel agencies interested in a two-year free membership in ASBTA can also apply by visiting the Web site."

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About ASBTA:

The American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA) is a national organization serving small business travelers by providing information regarding resources and services, savings on air fares, car rentals, and accommodations, as well as and technology designed to improve and enhance the travel experience. To achieve its mission, ASBTA will utilize an integrated communication program while working closely with travel-industry companies in sectors such as airlines, hotels and lodging, car rental companies, travel agencies and other companies that serve small business travelers. If you're a small business owner and want to learn more, visit our site and register (free until December 1, 2005) at www.asbta.com. We'd like to hear from you, too. Give us a call or e-mail us at info@asbta.com if you have questions or want to share ideas about what small business travelers really need and how ASBTA can serve you effectively. Call us at 469-648-0190.