

The most effective question a senior traveler can utter is: can't you do better than that? Or as a definite statement: I'm sure you can do better than that. Not hostile. Not demanding. Just say it with conviction, backed up by an I-know-the-score smile.

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For the past decade, because of the steep rise in oil prices, the wars and unchecked inflation, travel costs have skyrocketed. But recent developments may indicate there are happier days ahead, at least for the senior traveler. Oil prices have suddenly dropped by half, and all travel prices should follow soon. This may be a most opportune time for the senior traveler to find bargains, especially in hotel, resort and cruise ship rates. How can you do it? There are internet travel agencies, such as Travelocity and Expedia, that claim they can cut prices for their customers, and if that's the way you want to look for bargains, go for it.

However, the old-fashioned eyeball to eyeball method may work a bit better. When you call to make reservations at that Miami Beach, the quote on the phone may be \$300 a night. Then you say the magic words, and you may be surprised when it drops to \$150, or you're offered the third night free.

Also, when you arrive at the front desk, just say the magic words once more, and you may be surprised all over again. Of course, don't show up during a national convention or when there's a major sports event nearby.

If you're planning a cruise, check prices on the internet, and also with your friendly neighborhood travel agency. The cruise ship industry is hurting, too, because of the uncertainties of the economy, and there will be bargains galore.

Today, like used car salesmen, travel agencies will list the retail price and then tell you they can get it at a much reduced price. Unfortunately, much of it is the old phony bait and switch game. You have to do your homework to get best prices for all travel-related services.

Your best bet, if you're a frequent traveler, is to form a friendly relationship with a travel agent near you. Knowing that if he/she gets you a good deal, you'll keep coming back to patronize the agency. Of course, never forget to use those magic words in all negotiations.