



It seems to happen every time. We check out of a hotel, knowing our online travel agency has booked us a great room for a special deal of \$98 each for three nights. So, the bill should be \$294. Right? Wrong! The desk clerk hands you a bill for \$387.

It's the same with that cruise bargain you bought, five nights round trip from Fort Lauderdale to the Bahamas. When you boarded, you even got a free upgrade to a better cabin. The price quote from your agency was \$835. When you checked out, the bill was for \$1,127.

What happened? Why are the bills so big? Well, first you should have remembered the price quote is really just a come-on. Not necessarily dishonest, but only the base price. What you forgot or ignored was a whole stack of taxes, tips, fuel charges and other costs that get tacked on and on and on.

What can you do? Here are some suggestions:

1. Make sure you actually have a gripe before you complain. Know the exact facts of the original and tacked-on charges, and be prepared to state your case clearly.
2. Make an itemized list of the charges, so you can point out the exact ones you believe to be wrong.
3. Don't argue with desk clerk. He/she is just following orders, has no authority to reduce prices, and may not be familiar with your bill and its specific charges.
4. With printed paper proof at hand, demand to speak to a manager or other person in charge who can make immediate decisions about your bill. If you're not satisfied, get the name and address of a higher-level person you can write or email your gripes to when you return home. Complaint phone calls are usually useless.
5. If your argument is weak or there's final refusal by management to admit that there are overcharges, try a different attack. Don't get angry, and in your most friendly, persuasive voice, use the old phrase: "Can't you do better than that?"

Always keep in mind that these are very tough economic times for the travel industry, and if they want to keep you as a satisfied customer, they may be willing to grant your request. Just ask to

negotiate the price down or take some charges off the bill. It may not work every time, but it's always worth the attempt.