



Every time I research the net to plan a cross-country or overseas flight, the info is different. Aircraft seat locations are listed as economy, premium economy, business, first class and whatever else the airlines decide to do to make more money.

Even more frustrating is what does or doesn't come with the seats, such as meals, soft drinks, booze, peanuts or other . How can I book the best deal as simply as possible? *Marilyn L., Chicago IL*

A: A quick answer: Nothing about airline pricing today is simple or certain. Dealing with it can be like a casino bet, win or lose. If you don't want to attempt all the math about flying, let an expert do it for you. Set up a personal contact with your friendly neighborhood travel agency. To take the challenges yourself, do the required homework on getting the lowest prices. First, understand air ticket pricing. Such basics include travel on weekdays, preferably at night (called red eye flights) and never on heavy holiday times, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Get to know how pricing is affected by aircraft seating. Economy features the most cramped, smallest space. Meanwhile, those who pay double or more for first class ride like royalty in their roomy easy chairs.

Beyond the basics, when forming plans early for your next trip, do daily scans of airline and travel websites. To lure passengers and fill empty seats, temporary special pricing, such as upgrades on limited seating, is offered on a daily, sometimes hourly, promotion.