

# Buy early, be flexible for best holiday airfare prices, expert says

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Many people will be taking to the skies during the holidays, and though the festive season is weeks away, buying tickets soon is a traveler's best chance to get a good price, says a Purdue University aviation professor.

Dale Oderman, an associate professor of aviation technology, says airline ticket prices are about 3 percent to 7 percent higher this holiday season than last year, due mainly to higher fuel prices and reduced airline capacity.

Airline load factors - the percentage of available seats that are filled with paying passengers - are at an all-time high. Oderman says airlines are resistant to add more flights for fear that it could flood the market with open seats, forcing airlines to cut fares to fill them.

"Much of this season's price increase has to do with higher fuel prices, but it also has to do with supply and demand. The reduced number of available seats forces the price up," he says.

"These two factors are why it's important for travelers to book flights early if they have a particular time they want to travel. Booking earlier generally ensures a lower price, and those with flexible travel plans can often find cheaper fares if they can vary the day and/or time of their travel."

Oderman says comparing different days of the week, as well as alternate departure times during the day, can save travelers money. Those willing

to take overnight flights or travel on the day of the holiday also can find good prices. Although Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday are generally the cheapest days to fly, that's not always true around the holidays.

He says the following dates are predicted to be the highest-priced travel dates:

\* Nov. 16-18 and 25 (the Friday-Sunday before and the Sunday after Thanksgiving).

\* Dec. 20-22 and 30, and Jan. 4-6.

He says the least expensive days to fly are predicted to be:

\* Nov. 19, 22, 23 and 27 (Thanksgiving Day is Nov. 22).

\* Anytime in December before Dec. 19, Dec. 24-28 and Dec. 31.

Oderman says during any time of the year, it's a good idea to shop around for the best ticket prices and to check out airline Web sites and discount travel sites such as Expedia, Travelocity and Orbitz.

Source: Purdue University

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