

Some booking fees melt in summer

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In an era when air travelers are getting nicked-and-dimed for everything from an in-flight sandwich to curbside bag check, here's some relief: Several online travel agencies have waived booking fees. For now, at least.

Hotwire.com announced this week that it would drop its \$6-a-ticket charge for airline reservations on both its 'opaque' reservations (the bargain-priced fares that don't let you know exactly what flight you've booked until after you've paid) and regular bookings through summer. Last week, Priceline.com announced it was suspending booking charges on regular airfares through Labor Day. (The deal excludes its opaque, name-your-own-price fares.) Fees range from \$5 a domestic ticket to up to \$9.95 for an international reservation.

And on Wednesday, Cheaptotravel.com, a sister site to Travelocity that launched in January and targets price-sensitive travelers, followed suit, dropping its \$3-a-ticket fee through the summer. A fourth agency, TripSync, a niche site geared to business travelers, may have triggered the no-fee movement when it permanently dropped its fees in late March.

For now, however, the top dogs of online travel agencies - Expedia, Orbitz and Travelocity - aren't biting. They maintain that their fees, which range from about \$5 to \$12 for online ticket purchases, buy value-added features such as flight-delay notification and rebooking assistance.

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