

US CARRIERS NOT DISCLOSING FEES

Consumer Travel Alliance finds major US airlines not disclosing most fees on websites



WASHINGTON - The Consumer Travel Alliance (CTA), a non-profit organization promoting consumer interests on travel policy issues, today released an analysis showing that major **U.S. airlines are not disclosing the vast majority of existing ancillary fees on their websites, despite regular statements to the contrary by the airlines.** CTA and other leading consumer and travel organizations are meeting with U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today to support his efforts to bring full transparency to airline fees.

The analysis found:

Not a single one of the seven airline websites in the study offered a page or chart with specific fee information regarding extra legroom or seat upgrades.

Although the airline sites disclosed baggage fees, those fees were often multiple clicks away from the main page and buried in diagrams and legal fine print.

To compare baggage fees and attempt to find the fees for extra legroom, a typical traveler would have to visit seven different airline sites, view 47 different web pages, and dig through more than 11,000 words of airline fine print.

"The airlines are asking travelers to put on a blindfold and hand over their wallets every time they buy a ticket," said Charles Leocha, director of the Consumer Travel Alliance. "*There is no way for a traveler to find the vast majority of extra fees charged by airlines on their websites, because those fees aren't even listed.* That's why two-thirds of air travelers said in a recent survey that they had been surprised by hidden fees at the airport. If airlines want to charge ancillary fees, they should be required to disclose those fees through every distribution channel in which they sell their tickets."

The analysis also refuted frequent airline claims that all of their ancillary fees are listed on their websites.

For example, a spokesperson for the airline industry told Bloomberg on September 17th that "fee information is already available on carrier Web sites." In another news story, the same spokesperson said that "airlines post their fees on their websites ..." and went on to claim that "there's nothing hidden about the fees by the US airliners that have fees." Earlier this year, CTA released the results of a study showing that hidden fees charged by airlines on popular routes can increase the base cost of an airline ticket by an average of 54 percent for a typical traveler with two checked bags and extra legroom, or by an average of 26 percent for a comparable one-bag traveler. One of the routes examined in that earlier analysis was used as the basis for this current review.

Methodology: The analysis examined a single traveler with two checked bags wishing to obtain extra legroom on a flight from Washington, D.C. to Orlando, Florida. Base prices for the analysis were drawn from a popular online travel site. The analysis recorded the time and steps required to enter those fees manually, visit each of the websites of the seven airlines flying that route, attempt to locate the fees for checked baggage and extra legroom, and then calculate the full price of each itinerary.