

The 10 most evil hidden airline fees and the carriers guilty of them

Some airlines are still up to their old tricks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen airlines take a much more customer-friendly approach to refunds and date changes. But they're not prepared to let the old tricks go entirely. Years of attrition and sneakery by airlines have ground passengers down – it's now a pleasant surprise if we don't have to pay for in-flight meals, seat selection and checked baggage. But some airline charges are particularly nasty...

The passenger usage fee Guilty party? Spirit

Plenty of budget airlines will charge you for booking over the phone, but the cunning ruse of US airline Spirit is to charge you for booking online too. At up to US\$20.99 a pop, this can seriously whack the price of the ticket up, and the only way to avoid paying it is to go to the airport and book at the ticket desk in person.

The refund administration fee Guilty party? Jetstar

While trying to upsell you to its Starter Plus bundle, Jetstar dangles the shiny carrot of greater flexibility in front of passengers. But if you need a refund for any reason, there's a refund fee of \$50. Which isn't too outrageous until you discover that there's also a refund admin. fee for processing refund. And that will be an extra \$50. Delightful.

The excess baggage fee Guilty party? Air Asia X

Many airlines don't really care how much your hand luggage weighs as long as it fits in the right-sized bag. Not Air Asia – they've got a 7kg limit, which really isn't all that much when you think about it, then some steep charges for going over it. It can be as much as AU\$91 if they catch your bag overweight, and force you to check it in.

Fuel surcharges Guilty party? Pretty much everyone

In theory, fuel surcharges shouldn't matter all that much as they don't add to the headline fare. It all has to be rolled into the advertised price. However, it does matter when it comes to paying for flights on points, as you still have to pay for these surcharges in cash. This leads some airlines – ahem, British Airways and Air France – sneaking away over \$1,000 worth of 'fuel surcharges' to whack loyalty scheme members with on flights.

The car seat charge Guilty party? Wizzair

Most airlines will allow you to take a pushchair and a children's car seat without charge, but for Eastern European airline Wizzair only the pushchair is included. That means the car seat has to be included within the weight limit of your checked luggage. Given it's up to €57 for a 10kg checked bag, then €10kg per kilo of excess weight, that could get very pricey, very quickly.

The credit card surcharge Guilty party? Emirates

Emirates is known for charging a surcharge on credit card payments

For most of the rest of the world, paying by credit card is a perfectly normal thing, and businesses just swallow the minor cost in return for convenience. But Australia is still astonishingly backwards on such things, and airlines can get away with charging a credit card surcharge. Of the big names, Emirates hits the plastic payments most harshly, applying a 1.5% extra fee, up to the value of \$70.

The name change fee Guilty party? Ryanair

Say you've accidentally booked a flight under your maiden name, or gone with "Becky" rather than the "Rebecca" that's on your passport. That should be easy enough to change, right? Well, not with notorious European passenger-stiffer Ryanair. They'll charge a whopping €115 to change a name on the booking – which is about ten times more than some of their advertised sale fares.

The seat protection fee Guilty party? Wizzair

Wizzair operates a policy of being able to cancel more than 14 days before travel for €60, but where it gets nasty is in the 14-day window beforehand. Then you have to pay, on top, the unstated fee for "other services" (it is not mentioned what these might be) and an €80 "seat protection fee". This is, blatantly, a corporate disguise for what's just a much higher cancellation fee.

The upgraded boarding fee Guilty party? Southwest Airlines

When presented with what's essentially a priority boarding fee of up to US\$50, the simplest thing to do is not pay it and just wait to get to your seat. Alas, this doesn't work when you've not got an assigned seat. Southwest works on a first come, first served basis where everyone can pick which seat they like.

The boarding pass re-printing fee Guilty party? Ryanair

Ryanair charges a brutal €55 to check in at the airport, but it has another string to its bow to get at customers who checked in online. If you forget to bring your boarding pass with you, or need it re-printed for whatever reason (maybe it's smudged and the barcode doesn't work?), then that's an extra €20 to shell out. Lovely stuff.