

[ajc.com](#) > [Business](#) > [Delta](#)

Bargain flights not such a steal this January
Airlines won't slash fares

By [KIRSTEN TAGAMI](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 12/31/05

The first week in January usually brings some of the best airfare sales of the year, but bargains will be harder to find this time around.

Higher fuel prices and fewer domestic seats are taking the fizz out of the post-New Year's Day deals, airfare experts say.

"Say goodbye to the super low fares," said Terry Tripler, an airfare expert with CheapSeats.com. "The sales aren't going to be as deep as we've seen in the past few years."

Overall, Tripler sees a 10 percent rise in leisure fares in 2006. Penny-pinching travelers will take the biggest hit.

"Some of the the higher fares may go up a bit, but those under-\$100 one-way fares are going to double. They were pulling people off the freeway with those fares," Tripler said. "The airlines realized they weren't going to make any money that way."

Thanksgiving was a turning point for the airlines because they filled planes without "giving away seats," Tripler said. The trend continued with Christmas and New Year's, when fares were up an average of \$40 round-trip over last season, he added.

"I really think the airlines are going to look back and say, 'November 2005 is when we began our way back,'" Tripler said.

While that may be good news for the airlines — including Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines, which is operating under bankruptcy protection — it's not so great for fliers hoping to score a deal.

For the past few months, airfares in Atlanta have been higher than they were a year ago, said **Bob Harrell, a New York airline consultant who does pricing research.** One recent snapshot, on December 26, showed that Delta's fares on 14 major routes to and from Atlanta were up 32 percent from the same day last year, **Harrell** said. Delta and Delta Connection operate most of the flights at Hartsfield-Jackson International.

Delta, like the other major carriers, is cutting its domestic capacity while expanding more profitable international routes, where it faces less competition from discount airlines.

With the stampede overseas, that means more competition on some of the more popular international routes — and the potential for some low fares, especially to Europe. This week, Northwest and American Airlines had a price of \$450 from Atlanta to London, including the fuel surcharge and government taxes. That's only slightly more than the best fare offered last year at this time, Trippler said.

The other good news for travelers is that "the second week in January to the end of January is the absolute slowest time of the year for the airlines," said travel consultant Chris McGinnis of the Travel Skills Group.

So if you want to fly somewhere during that dead zone, you're more likely to get the cheapest seats available on a flight. Some fare sales will expire at the end of January, although others will be good until mid-February or even the end of March, he said.

And for those who are patient and have flexible travel dates, it pays to shop around.

"I get e-mails from the airlines letting me know when they have sales," said Atlanta frequent flier Daniel Flinchum. "In some markets I've looked at, like Atlanta-New York or Atlanta-D.C., it hasn't been that bad. I've found some good prices."

Find this article at:

<http://www.ajc.com/search/content/business/delta/1205/31bizairfare.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.