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AIRFARES WITH BENEFITS: FLIGHTS WITH BUILT-IN BONUSES

FREE stopovers, side-trips and transfers are among the sweeteners that airlines are currently offering to Australian travellers who are taking off overseas.

Flight Centre Limited executive general manager of marketing Colin Bowman said airlines were bundling added bonuses or options into their fares, in addition to offering deals that remained well below historical highs.

He said the bonus offers and options were not always immediately obvious, but could save savvy travellers significant dollars.

"While the internet has made it easier for travellers to research their options, understanding all of the available choices can be time consuming and confusing," Mr Bowman said.

"It is not always obvious how each airline's offers differ and what special bonuses are available in conjunction with particular fares or on particular carriers.

"For example, travellers may be able to take advantage of bonus side-trips or stopovers if they're flying long haul, airport transfers may be included if they're flying business or first class or they may be able to fly in and out of different countries if they're taking part in a cruise or overland coach trip."

To help travellers understand the options that are now available to them, Flight Centre's airfare experts have compiled a selection of flights and fares that come with extra benefits.

1) Free side-trips

If you're flying long haul, you may be able to add a destination to your itinerary without digging deep for another airfare.

Airlines occasionally offer side-trips within a particular country or region, in conjunction with long haul flights.

2) Free stopovers – get beached in Mauritius

If you're planning to take off from Australia to Europe and want to break up the trip with a stopover, consider flying Air Mauritius, Korean or Japan Airlines.

These airlines are among the carriers that include stopovers in their fares, as their flights from Australia do not connect with onward flights to Europe on the same day.

In addition, Etihad is currently offering a special stopover option in Abu Dhabi. The offer, which is available subject to some conditions, includes a free night's accommodation at various three, four or five-star properties.

Speak to your travel agent about the terms and conditions that apply to these offers.

3) Bypass the visa queues and paperwork

If you're connecting to another location relatively quickly, you don't always need to spend time and money applying for visas.

China Eastern passengers travelling on Australian or New Zealand passports and with connecting international tickets can stopover in Shanghai for up to 48 hours without a visa.

4) Take me for a ride

For travellers who book business or first class fares, the special bonuses sometimes start and end well before and after take-off.

For example, Emirates and Etihad offer premium passengers chauffeur-driven transfers to and from the airport.

5) Suite as – standalone beds and showers

If you are flying at the front of the plane, one of your biggest travel headaches may be nothing more taxing than converting your reclining massage chair into a fully-flat bed.

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has solved this problem by separating the two.

In addition to having individual cabins with sliding doors, the first class suites on SIA's A380s have armchairs and ready-to-use standalone beds.

Emirates has also broken new ground in the first class cabins of its A380s by offering shower facilities.

If you're travelling at the back of the plane, Air New Zealand's "cuddle class" seats are worth considering.

6) Circle fares

If your itinerary will take you to more than one location, you don't necessarily need to buy a series of costly add-on fares.

The oneworld alliance carriers offer a range of Circle fares that are ideal for travellers who plan to visit multiple destinations within a particular region.

Examples include the Circle Pacific fare, which allows travellers to explore the countries and continents that border the Pacific Ocean. Participating airlines may include American Airlines, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines, LAN, Qantas and their affiliates.

7) Open JAW fares

In many instances, you can visit several countries or cities on your holiday without needing to return to your initial destination to catch your flight home.

With an Open Jaw airfare, you can fly in to one city and home from another.

A hypothetical example could be a fare that allows you to fly from Australia to the UK and home from Italy, after an overland coach tour from London to Rome.

8) “Double Dip” flights

If you plan to take off to multiple destinations, you don’t automatically have to dig deep to pay for multiple airfares.

Flight Centre’s airfare experts have designed a number of “Double Dip” itineraries that allow travellers to visit two destinations for the price of one.

Examples include Phuket and Bangkok, Singapore and Bali and Rio and Dubai.

9) Companion fares

Airlines occasionally offer bonuses to two customers travelling together.

Examples include companion fares, which effectively allow travel companions to save by booking and travelling together.

Flight Centre currently has a Thai Airways companion fare from Perth to Koh Samui and Phuket.

10) Help with the kids

Gulf Air and Asiana are among the airlines that have taken steps to make the in-flight experience easier for parents.

Gulf offers a free sky nanny service at some lounges and on long haul routes.

Sky nannies can help families board and disembark, give mums and dads a break during flights, watch over little ones when required and assist at meal times and with entertainment.

Asiana has a Happy Mom program that offers mothers and babies (aged under-two) extra convenience at boarding, when breastfeeding and during long-haul flights.

11) In-flight advice

Air New Zealand now has in-flight concierges on some long haul flights.

The concierges can provide travel advice, recommend activities, escort customers to and from planes and even recommend wines.

12) myTime

While not an airline-related bonus, Flight Centre Limited has also developed a value-add for its customers after they arrive at various key locations overseas.

The company has launched a myTime program that gives customers VIP treatment at no extra cost at handpicked hotels and resorts around the world.

Examples of myTime bonuses include room upgrades, cocktails on arrival, spa treatments and priority services.

Speak to your Flight Centre Limited travel agent for details.

ENDS: Issued by Haydn Long 0418 750454