

Get the best value business travel

Booking business travel plans can be time consuming and, therefore, be a cost to a business, if they are made inefficiently. Ad hoc arrangements and last minute bookings can reduce the benefit of journeys made. SME's may not have the buying power of larger companies to enable them to negotiate discounts, but they can save money and effort, and buy better from suppliers. Here are six ways to achieve more from your travel budget:

1.) Get the best value – not the cheapest

Booking a hotel that is nowhere near your destination just because it's cheaper, could cost you more in the long run. When you add possible additional taxi fares, parking or hire car charges, and the trip may not end up as cheap as you thought. Be careful of using low cost airlines as often the destination airport is not as close to the named city as you might think.

2.) Use the experts

Hotel booking agents are a good option if most of your travel is within the UK, as they don't charge, and because of their knowledge of the market, they have access to a wider choice of accommodation to suit all budgets, and that could save you valuable time.

If you have a more complex requirement for overseas travel, use one of the leading booking agents like Uniglobe who can cope with this, and for a small fee can save you time and time and money by saving you from having to trawl about the market to find what you want.

3.) Avoid the rest

Beware when using online leisure travel agents as they charge hidden fees and using them can actually be quite time consuming. If you know exactly what you want, consider arranging it yourself or use the experts mentioned above.

4.) Brand loyalty pays

You always want to get the best price but showing some loyalty can be beneficial. It's possible to get free upgrades to make your money go further if you sign up to programmes that reward repeat business. During the recession such schemes have proved popular and are offered by most of the leading hotel and airline companies. Make sure though that additional journeys are made just to benefit from a loyalty offer.

5.) Don't leave it too late

It's nearly always cheaper to book in advance so planning your travel can usually save money. Consider some of the options:

- Travelling off peak or out of the main tourist season
- Buy multi-city tickets rather than a return ticket
- Purchase packages that combine accommodation and flights
- Restricted time bound tickets offer good value if you plan to travel at the right time
- Avoid buying train tickets on the day at the station
- Plane tickets can be less than the tax on them if bought early enough

6.) Plan from within

It's important that travel planning is seen as a major company expense and is controlled from the top of a company accordingly. Consider appointing one person with the authority to set and monitor a travel plan for the whole company. Ensure adequate controls are in place to ensure overspends are identified and prevented for the future.

REMEMBER!!

As part of a company's corporate responsibility programme, it should have a travel plan to ensure that journeys are only made when necessary and using public transport where possible. With fuel costs spiralling upwards, travelling has become very expensive and modern technology such as Skype and conferencing should be considered as alternative methods of communication with customers and suppliers.