

Their Mistake is Your Manna

When you want to save money on travel, the experts often say, the best thing you can do is subscribe to airlines' newsletters and websites. Doing this is a great way to take advantage of spur of the moment sales and discounts. Obviously, this is a good technique for those with massive wanderlust but miniscule budgets. If you really want to save money, though, you'll learn how to take advantage of mistake fares.

Mistake fares are like manna from heaven to travelers with tight budgets.



What Are Mistake Fares?

Mistake fares are exactly what they sound like: fares that were entered into an airline system's ticketing portal by mistake. Usually the airlines catch these mistakes quickly and correct them. If you are one of the lucky people who manages to book a ticket while the mistake is still in the system, however, most of the time, the airline must honor that ticket. They are not allowed to tack on a surcharge to make you pay the price they meant to enter into the system.

How Do Mistake Fares Happen?

Most likely, mistake fares are the result of human error. Someone transposes a number while entering the data and voila! Your \$735 price becomes \$357! Or, as was the case once with United Airlines, a \$15,000 business class trip was listed for \$1500!

Another example of human error is when the airline forgets to add the fuel surcharge fee on to the cost of the ticket (this is a technique commonly used to prevent people from flying 100% free with frequent flier or credit card miles).

Another leading factor of mistake fares is errors in currency conversion. For example, an error in conversion between Kroners (Danish) and Pounds (British) allowed travelers on United to book what should have been a \$3,000 ticket for \$79.

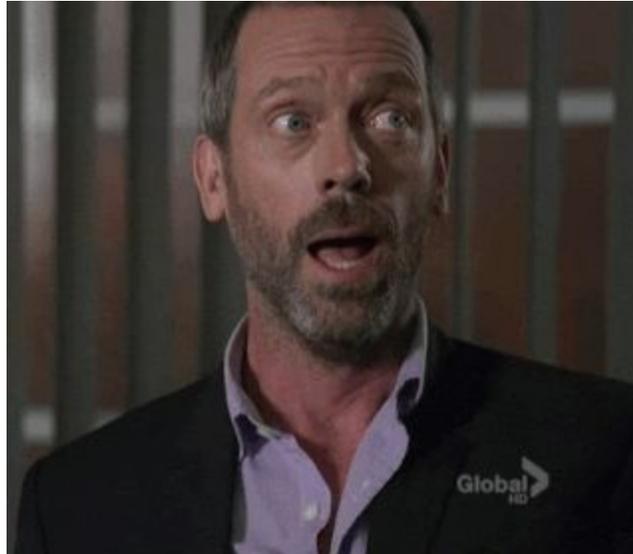
And, of course, computer glitches can happen too.



How Do Mistake Fares Work?

Until a couple of years ago, it was standard practice to force airlines to honor their mistakenly listed prices if people bought tickets while those mistakes were still active. In 2015, though, the US Department of Transportation handed down a ruling that changed things.

[As of 2015](#), provided that the airline notifies ticket buyers and reimburses them for what they've already paid, an airline can void a mistake fare and make the customer pay the intended price of the ticket. They also must reimburse the customer for any out-of-pocket expenses incurred in connection with that purchased ticket.



Many airlines are cracking down and stepping up their fare monitoring games because of this ruling. It does not mean, however, that mistake fares aren't still worth exploring—especially since the airline is required to pay you back for any money you might be out as the result of a canceled ticket!

Finding Mistake Fares

There are several sites out there that monitor all the airlines for mistake fares. [Thrifty Nomads](#) put together a quick guide that we have found quite helpful:

The simplest, easiest approach is to stalk the experts. [Secret Flying](#) is arguably the best resource out there for worldwide flight pricing errors. Each day they scrape up current mistake fares (in mysterious ways), and are prompt with updating when tickets sell out or become defunct. You can subscribe via e-mail, or follow on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) to keep hot deals on your radar.

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[Airfarewatchdog](#) has a dedicated team of deal hunters, who frequently post to their deals blog as well.

Some other great resources for finding mistake fares include [The Flight Deal](#), [I Want That Flight](#)(Australia), [Fly4Free](#), [Airfarewatchdog](#), [FlyerTalk Mileage Run forums](#), [FareCompare](#), and [SkyScanner](#).

[The top 50 fares on Airfarewatchdog](#) updates daily with some of the best flight deals of the day. Best of all, you can swap the departure and arrival cities, and the price will still be the same! Below is a **real-time** list of today's top fares."

Thrifty Nomads also suggests monitoring message boards and signing up for email notifications from sites like SkyScanner as good ways to keep tabs on mistake fares.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Mistake Fares

The biggest benefit of using mistake fares is the savings. Being able to save hundreds or even thousands of dollars on a trip is always a good thing!

The biggest drawback of mistake fares, of course, is that until your ticket is confirmed by the airline, the rate is not set in stone. Remember: the Department of Transportation has given the airlines the right to cancel a fare and refund your money.

This risk is even larger when you book your tickets through third party vendors, especially vendors that specialize in mistake fare sales.



Techniques for Taking Advantage of Mistake Fares

Flexibility is Important: Mistake fares are not for people who need to be able to definitively plan their travel or have set schedules. They're best for people who can pack up and go with little notice and who can handle changes to itineraries well.

Patience is Key: When you find an absurdly cheap flight to an awesome destination it's normal to be excited and start going crazy planning your trip. Fight this urge! Remember: the airline doesn't have to guarantee your rate. Wait until you have the airline's confirmation of your booking to start making plans, booking rooms, etc. If the airline confirms your rate, you are less likely to have your trip canceled because of the mistake in fare pricing.

Pretend This is Fight Club: The more people who know about a mistake fare, the more likely the airline is to find out and make corrections and cancellations. Keep this great deal to yourself. Seriously. Yes, even then. Yep, then too.

From a Travel Agent

Mistake fares are great for people who are free to travel at a moment's notice and are good at going with the flow. They are ideal for vacations and spur of the moment getaways. For business travel, however, relying on mistake fares can be risky. The last thing you want is to look flaky if an airline cancels your ticket! For appointment-based travel, working with an agent is the better way to find deals and reduce costs and stress.