



Travel Hacks and Tips: Ultimate Guide 2018

Travel is both an art and a science. To get the best deals you need to combine both of these skills. We've taken a comprehensive view the travel industry from the perspective of both the traveller and the travel industry to provide this Ultimate Guide for 2018 with our very best travel hacks and tips.

If you know how to travel hack properly then:

- You don't have to pay more to get better. In fact, you can often pay less.
- You can access deals that the travel industry intentionally hides from the general public. They don't want you to know how great the savings really can be.
- Where you buy from does matter. If you know the right places and the right travel sites to purchase from you not only save yourself time by not having to search around all the time but you can make considerable money savings too.
- It often doesn't matter where you stay (which brand) as long as you can get the quality you're after.
- Good service doesn't have to cost you more and upgrades don't have to cost the world.

At [Genie Traveler](#) we believe that travel hacking is your right. It's not a luxury that should only be afforded to a few.

General Travel Tips

Vacuum pack

Get a pack of space saver travel bags [like these ones](#). They make a large difference in reducing the size of your luggage. Be sure not to get the type that need a vacuum to work - you might have one at home but will you have one available at the other end when you're packing again?

Having more space can make you tempted to pack more though so be careful - they won't reduce the weight of your bags.

Travel Credit Cards

If you're a frequent traveler then definitely consider a credit card that offers travel rewards. Keep an eye out as the deals are constantly changing there are often some special offers that have double the usual amount of sign up points.

Don't be afraid to get a card with an annual fee if the perks are worth it. Take a few minutes to check them out and don't be put off initially.

If you're getting a credit card for travel rewards then it needs to be usable. If you travel overseas make sure there's not surcharge for overseas and local currency use - this would largely defeat the purpose of having it.

Reward Programs

The quick tip here is to join all the reward programs and make sure you use them. It's much easier than it used to be with your account information easily saved in old emails or you can enter it into the App on your phone.

Look at alliances and try to travel within one alliance (such as Star Alliance). Even better, if you can always travel with one carrier or always stay in one brand of hotel, you'll reap the maximum benefit. However, it can be easy to end up driven by this mindset so make sure the convenience of it works for you too.

Apps

Manage Your Itinerary

Keep your itinerary in one place using an app like [TripCase](#). It's free and all you have to do is forward your booking emails and it does the rest. You'll get notifications of when to check in, delays and easy access to important information like booking numbers.

Wallet

Check in online and send your boarding pass to your wallet on your phone. It's one less piece of paper to lose and keeps life simple.

Be sure to turn the brightness up on your phone though. The airport scanners aren't all at the level to read phones as easily as they should be so do everything you can to make it easier.

Branded Apps

Consider downloading the Apps for the companies you're going to be traveling with.

For example, I recently flew on Southwest, rented a car with Avis and stayed at the Marriott. I had my boarding pass and flight alerts on the Southwest App, completed my Avis paperwork on my phone and checked into the Marriott before I even arrived there. My reward points for all were automatically added into the relevant App and all this was done from my phone.

Flights

Digital Scales

Airlines are getting tighter on overweight luggage and fees are going through the roof - it's a good way for them to make money. Don't get caught out and travel with an [inexpensive digital scale](#).

If you are overweight then check the cost of an extra bag, which is often cheaper than an overweight bag, as well as seeing how much of the heavy stuff you can put in your carry-on.

Bring Something For The Flight Crew

Want to have the very best flight experience ever? Then why not bring a gift for the flight crew. Peter Shankman [takes a bag of M&Ms](#) on every trip and swears by it. If there's a free drink or an upgrade to be had then you can be sure he's going to get it. Plus, everyone is just much happier.

Have A Treat For When You're Delayed

Getting delayed is never fun. Have something in reserve as a treat for yourself. Maybe it's a movie you've been waiting to watch, your favorite snack or new book. Something to look forward to and fill some of that time makes a difference.

Consider Economy Plus And Business

Economy plus and business class tickets aren't always exorbitant. Prices frequently fluctuate and if you're ever tempted to upgrade then make sure to always check those fares as well. You can get [some incredible deals](#) on both economy plus and business tickets so it pays to give them a quick check too.

Airline Deals Are Almost Impossible

Airlines don't pay commissions on their flights to travel agents. That's why it's almost impossible to get deals. Instead you have to really hack the system (unless you're traveling business and long haul where there are some larger margins).

Book On The Right Day

There's a myth that the day of the week you buy on makes a difference. [CheapAir does an annual study](#) and they found that the day of the week you buy on makes just 0.6% of a difference (about \$2).

However, the day you fly on does make a difference. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are the cheapest days to fly with Sunday being the most expensive. The average difference is \$73.

Book In The Right Time Window

The CheapAir study analysed 921 million airfares from 2.9 million trips and found the “Prime Booking Window”, as they call the best time to book, to be 3 weeks to 3 ½ months out. This is when, on average, the air fares are the cheapest.

If you want more peace of mind then 3 ½ to 6 months out is at a modest premium and there are plenty of options to choose from. Alternatively you can push your luck in the 2 to 3 week area when fares vary dramatically (but you risk a significant increase).

Non Stop Or Not?

It's a personal preference on whether to choose a non stop flight or to change but [FareCompare](#) believe adding in a stop can save you as much as 50%. In our experience the saving isn't generally that high but it's certainly worth considering.

Baggage

Airlines are increasingly employing upsell techniques and using their marketing funnels to get you 'in the door' at a lower price point. That result is many are charging for checked baggage so be sure to factor that in.

Some airlines, like [SouthWest](#), have turned their nose up at this and let you check your first 2 bags for free - this can be worth considering when travelling with a family. Make sure your airline search includes airlines like SouthWest (most sites don't). You'll normally need to go direct through their website unless you're using a private booking engine with SouthWest enabled on it like at [Genie Traveler](#).

Travel One Way

Most travelers are booking a return flight and often the package of the return is cheaper. But not always. Take a few minutes to check the price of 2 one-way tickets - in certain circumstances it can be cheaper.

Multi Airport?

In addition to buying 2 one-way tickets consider if using a different local airport might help. For example, SFO and SJO are pretty close and have a lot of similar destinations. You might consider flying into one of them and out of the other depending on prices.

Check to make sure this works with your overall travel plan though. Car hire companies often charge a premium to drop off at a different location so if you're hiring a car this might not be for you.

Frequent Flyer Programs

Sign up to the frequent flyer programs. Ideally, you'll prioritize travelling on the same airline (or within the same program) to maximize on the airmiles. However, life isn't always that simple. These days it really doesn't take much to sign up and the benefits can start to add up.

Many programs also understand your preferences and then automatically assign you your seat of preference or a special meal.

Minimize The TSA Wait Times

The simple answer is to enroll in [TSA PreCheck](#) or [Global Entry](#). But if you haven't done that then follow those quick tips:

- **Shoes.** Wear comfortable shoes that can be easily taken off and put back on.
- **Liquids.** Avoid large bottles of lotion and liquids. Pack your liquids in one transparent bag at the top of your carry on making it easy to access.
- **Families.** If you have a choice of line try and avoid the one with a young family in. They take more time getting kids ready, liquids out, etc.

Keeping Hydrated

You need to. Flights, especially long haul flights, dehydrate you. The humidity levels are lower than the Sahara Desert! On a two hour flight women can lose around 1.6 liters of water and men can lose around 2 liters! You should aim to drink about 8 ounces of water for every hour you're in the air.

But don't wait until you're in the air. Start before that.

We just said that you can't bring liquids through security but that doesn't mean you can't bring liquid containers. You *can* bring an empty water bottle or mug of some sort and just fill it up once you're through. It's a good, simple and economical way to make sure you stay hydrated before you've even boarded.

Hotels

If you're not booking a hotel at a discount you're doing it wrong. There's almost always a discount to be had with Hotels. There's a trick to getting discounts better than you find on the discount hotel sites and through their last minute hotel deals.

There are two major players in the Online Travel Agent (OTA) space - Expedia and Priceline. They own approximately 80% of the market through their other brands such as Agoda, Kayak, Booking.com, Travelocity, Hotwire, Trivago, Hotels.com, HomeAway and more. They offer you the Best Available Rate (known as BAR).

Because of the purchasing power of these OTAs they insist that the hotels they list maintain rate parity. Hot hotel deals just don't exist like their marketing machines allude to. That means they can't list better deals elsewhere.

That is, unless it's in a private network. A Members-Only website can list unpublished rates such as [Genie Traveler](#).

Interchangeable

If you're looking for a specific hotel at your destination then the deals might be hard to come by. But if you can afford a little bit of interchangeability then you're much more likely to be in luck, even during peak periods.

Most 3 star hotels are interchangeable with each other. The same goes for 4 star hotels and 5 star hotels. If you're not tied to a particular hotel or hotel brand then you have a much larger range to choose from and can get much better hotel deals. [Genie Traveler](#) offers a myriad of advanced search criteria including star rating so you can really find the deal that works for you.

Upgrades

You don't need to be a savvy hotel planner or have the top tier hotel rewards membership to get an upgrade. If you want to snag a complimentary room upgrade then try checking in towards the end of the day. The later it is in the day, the better idea the hotel staff will have of their room availability.

If that fails, ask for a corner room, they tend to have slightly larger square footage than other rooms.

Special Occasions

Be sure to mention if it's a special occasion such as a birthday or anniversary. Most hotels will have some sort of complimentary amenity kit and it can often lead to an upgrade.

Timing

Like airlines, most hotels use dynamic pricing. Prices are most likely going to increase for last minute bookings. We recommend booking at least 1 month ahead of schedule where possible. However, last minute deals can be available but you do leave yourself at more of a risk of either a price increase or lack of room availability.

While hotels are encouraged to fill their empty rooms and to at least make a slight profit above marginal operating costs, some are unable to provide large discounts to the public market place. Many are contractually bound to honor their rate parity agreements while others fearsomely protect their published room rates. The only way around this is to purchase through [private unpublished channels](#).

Car Rentals

Like airlines, the car rental companies have small margins so the deals are unlikely to be amazing. However, their margins are (generally) better than airlines so there are deals to be had, if you know how.

These companies often make their money on reselling their cars (they buy them at a huge discount and then compute the exact age a vehicle will make them maximum profit) and on the upsells (GPS, CDW, etc.) - more on that below.

When To Pay

These days many companies give you the option to reserve now but pay at the desk. This is a great option, particularly if your plans might change. However, just be sure you're getting the best deal as some companies will give you a slight discount if you pay at the point of reservation.

For most though, the small saving you might make isn't worth sacrificing the ability to make last minute changes so make sure you have your plans fixed in stone if you pay ahead of time.

You can 'game the system' if you book early and often, always checking for the best prices, making a new booking and cancelling the old one.

Consider The Independents

The lesser known and more independent car rental companies are also worth considering. Many airport car rental desks are all located in the same place so it often makes little difference which desk you actually have to go to.

There's nothing wrong with companies like Advantage, Fox and U-Save. They're all working hard to gain market share and are likely to be offering more aggressive deals.

Insurance

This is a big one. Most car rental companies make money with the other options they use to upsell. They often do this firstly at check out when you make your reservation by offering a you

a deal on the insurance if you purchase it then. They follow this up at the rental desk with more insurance options.

At that stage, many customers are unsure if they need it but don't want to take the risk of not having it and just sign up.

Much of what you need is probably covered by your own auto insurance policy (if you have one). Many credit card companies also cover much of this (more information below).

Car rental companies will typically break their insurance coverage into four separate sections:

Collision/Loss Damage Waiver (CDW/LDW). Technically this isn't actually insurance. If the car is stolen or you damage your rental car this will generally waive the cost of repairing it (unless there is a deductible). There are generally exclusions such as if you are off-road driving or speeding. If your auto policy is a comprehensive policy it is likely that you already have this (although you will probably have a deductible).

(Supplemental) Liability Coverage. This protects you if you damage someone else's property while driving or injure them. This has a typical \$1 million limit. Your existing auto policy most likely has this covered.

Personal Accident Insurance. If you or your passengers are injured then this will pay for your medical bills. If you have health insurance or personal injury insurance on your auto policy then you are most likely already covered.

Personal Effects Coverage. This covers any of your personal effects that might be stolen from your rental car up to a set amount. Many renters or homeowners insurance have an "off-premises coverage" that allow for a certain percentage of your property to be covered.

If you're planning to rent a car then here's the overall advice:

Call Your Auto Policy Company. Find out what you are and are not covered for. Specifically, ask them about the 4 sections above. If you're traveling overseas then check how this applies.

Call Your Credit Card Company. Find out what coverage they provide for car rentals (again, ask about how this works overseas too).

Call Your Renters/Homeowners Policy Provider. Find out how much of your personal effects are covered.

If you still need coverage then the place to get it is probably not at the car rental desk. Consider a third party provider like [Insure My Rental Car](#). If you're going to rent more than once in a year then you'll probably be better off with an annual policy too.

Lastly, make sure you have a copy of the documents with you. There have been cases of some of the less ethical car rental companies on insisting on seeing a copy. If you don't have it then you have no choice but to purchase their policy.

The Extras (GPS, Child Car Seats, Fuel and more...)

Watch out for the other extras. If you need a GPS then get a GPS but consider using your phone and, if overseas and data is an issue then try using google maps in offline mode (just download the map area to your phone ahead of time).

The extras might not sound like too much when they tell you a daily price but over a 2 week rental the prices add up.

If you can, travel with your child seat (airlines let you check them for free). Yes, it's a hassle but you save on the daily rates.

Don't prepay for the fuel - they take a markup on this. However, be sure to fill up before returning the car as the surcharges can be excessive.

Families and Kids

Use A Stroller

Even if you don't think you'll need a stroller, think again. If you're traveling with kids then you probably have a few carry on bags. There's probably quite a bit of walking to be done. It doesn't take much to leave your stroller at the door to the aircraft and only a few extra minutes to get it when the flight lands.

You then get to put a tired child in it, or load it up with your carry on baggage. Short of time between connections? Just load the kids up and get moving at an adult pace.

Double check any carrier specific restrictions as some of them are clamping down on the use of large strollers and insist that they're checked and not taken to the aircraft door.

Board First?

If you're travelling with kids you'll often be offered early boarding. This gives you extra time to get on and makes sure you'll have space to store your carry on bags. But it's not always as beneficial as it sounds.

If you're confident you can store your carry on baggage and you have an assigned seat then maybe you might want to hold off. Kids aren't the best at sitting still for long periods of time - do you really want them sat on the plane for an extra period of time? Sometimes the best option is to hang out and be one of the last ones on.

Nursing

If you're nursing then try and save it for take off. The slightly louder noise as the plane accelerates and climbs coupled with nursing can help to put your baby to sleep. Sleeping through the pressure change that might cause a little bit of discomfort during cabin pressure changes is a great way to ease it all.

Crying Baby? Misbehaving Child? Dirty Looks?

Don't worry. For every crying baby, for every misbehaving child, for every dirty look that some traveler is making there's another reaction. There's the loving glance at your beautiful family. The mother and father who now have grown up children and miss those days. The grandparent that is reminded of their grandchildren. The other family that completely and utterly understands. The parent that is travelling without their children and revels in the beauty of yours.

Don't take it to heart. Babies cry. Kids misbehave. The majority of travelers are sympathetic to it.

Child Car Seats

This is mentioned above in the Car Rental section but, for those that just skipped straight here, consider traveling with your car seats. Airlines will check them for free so why not. Yes, they're a little bulky but your child will get to sit in the seat that they're used to (so less disruption for them).

Additionally, while it might not seem like too much of a cost to rent child seats when they hire car company tells you the rate per day, this definitely adds up over a week or two (and if you have 2 or more kids then it can add up a lot more!). Be cognisant of the overall costs.

More Deals...

These travel hacking strategies have been bought to you by Genie Traveler. If you want to continue to make savings while travelling the world then check out [insider wholesale rates](#) that we have to offer.