

Book One-Way Airline Tickets Instead of Multi-Destination Tickets

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Okay, this one is **w**ay off-topic in relation to what I usually blog about, but I fully believe it's going to prevent someone who reads it from making the same mistake I made. Specifically, I believe it is going to prevent someone from booking a multi-destination ticket in the situation where, for the very same total price, that person could instead book each leg of the journey separately.

So why is it a mistake to book a multi-leg itinerary instead of booking separate one-ways, if the cost of the two is the same? I'll get to that in just a moment, but before I do you should know that in the majority of cases I have seen for the last many years, at least in regards to travel within the United States, both types of booking do in fact cost the same. That could vary from market to market, but in my experience, market is not generally a concern.

Okay, so let's talk about why you always want to go with booking your flights separately, so long as it doesn't cost you any more than booking them as a multi-leg trip (actually, after you read this post, you might decide it is even worth paying a little bit more in some situations): because it gives you more flexibility to alter your travel without incurring airline change fees. And if you haven't tasted any of the change fees being charged by airlines these days, let me just tell you that they taste very, very bitter and you very, very much want to avoid incurring them. I believe that most airlines are now charging \$150 for any change.

Here's the deal: if you change a particular flight on an itinerary, the effect is that every flight from that point onward on the ticket has to change too. That doesn't mean you have to make any changes to any other flights, it just means that they get priced as if they were changed. And that means that if those flights have become more expensive, you have to pay the difference between what you paid and what the new rate is. So to be clear, even if you aren't changing any subsequent flights, they "act" as if they are being changed and the price for them gets recalculated and you pay the difference between the new price and what you paid.

So you should already see where it benefits you to book separate flights: if you change a one-way flight, there are no subsequent flights so you won't have to pay any fare increases that affect flights you don't actually want to change. So if you book an outbound flight and a separate return flight and then you change the outbound flight, while you'll have to pay \$150 plus any fare increase for changing that outbound flight, you won't get stuck paying any fare increase for the return flight.

To make this perfectly clear, let's consider a simple example: you pay \$300 for an outbound flight and separately you pay \$200 for a return flight. Then you need to make a change to your outbound flight. Unfortunately, the fare for the new flight is \$350; you now have to pay the additional \$50 that this new flight costs over what you paid. In addition, you have to pay \$150 to make the change. Ugh. You're out \$200! But what if you'd booked a round-trip? The answer is that, best-case scenario, you'd be out the same \$200 because of the same fees; worst-case scenario you'd be out not only that \$200 but also much more because you would also have to pay any fare increases affecting the return flight: let's say that instead of \$200, that same flight now costs \$250; you'd have to pay the \$50 that the return flight--the same return flight, mind you--costs over what you paid for it previously. This is an absolutely ridiculous policy, by the way. But it is in fact the policy.

Ah, but it gets worse: there's another policy that says that if you don't take a flight on a ticket, all other flights on that itinerary are cancelled (you get to keep their value, minus that same hefty change fee, but you can't actually fly them as scheduled). Why does this matter? Because in the world of \$150 change fees, sometimes it makes the most sense to simply bail on a scheduled flight and book a new one. Think about it: if it costs you \$150 to change a flight then so long as you can buy a replacement flight for less than \$150, aren't you better off buying the replacement flight and simply not taking the existing flight? Of course you are. And with multiple one-way tickets, you have the flexibility to do that in all cases; with multi-leg trips, you can only do it where it won't be a negative impact to cancel all remaining flights on the ticket (so for instance, for the last flight on a ticket). By the way, the fact that you can't take a flight in an itinerary simply because you missed other flights in that itinerary is yet another ridiculous policy, but here again, it is in fact the policy.

So another example: let's say you pay \$100 for an outbound flight and \$200 for a return flight then you need to make a change to your outbound flight. Good news: the new flight also costs \$100; you won't have to pay an increased fare. But should you change that outbound flight? No way! You should simply skip it and book the new flight you want for \$100! Why pay \$150 when for \$100 you can achieve the same desired result (which is a ticket on the new flight you want)? But of course, if you have other flights on that ticket (that is, if you booked a multi-leg instead of multiple separate one-ways), you can't do that because they won't let you get on any flight on an itinerary on which you have missed a preceding flight. That means that if you really want to make the change, you have to pay the \$150 change fee--but remember, you also have to pay an additional increase in the fare of your return flight, even if you don't change your return flight in any way. So, let's say that return flight is now \$275 instead of \$200; you have to pay not only the \$150 change fee, you also have to pay the \$75 by which the return fare has increased. That means you're coming out paying \$225 additional--and this to change a ticket that originally cost you only \$300! But if you'd booked separate tickets, you'd have paid only \$100 because you'd have simply bailed on your original outbound ticket and bought a new outbound ticket.

I'm actually in very much this situation right now: if I had separate tickets for an upcoming trip, I could bail on the outbound ticket and buy the flight I actually want for \$105, but if I change the round-trip ticket I have it will cost me \$235. It actually would cost me less money, a total of \$210 for a \$25 savings, to go ahead and take my original flight then immediately take the first flight back home--and the logistics of doing that actually would work out for me. Now, you may say "don't be crazy--spend the \$25 extra and save yourself the hassle of the travel. And it's a valid point because while I, like everyone, would rather get something for my money, in this case I don't need it and it's actually more of a hassle to use it than it is to not use it. Ah, but by using it, there is

something I would get: miles. And those miles, coming as they would at the beginning of the year (a.k.a. the point at which earning miles for elite status resets), could months down the line be just what I need to achieve the next level of elite status (and at the very least, they would get added to my total available for redemption for award travel).

So in summary, there are two places where in making changes to airline tickets you can get zinged by having bought a multi-leg ticket instead of multiple separate one-way tickets:

1. In having to pay the change fee where you would like instead to replace a flight in the itinerary with one costing less than the change fee, but where such a replacement would mean that subsequent flights in the itinerary that you do not want to change and do want to take would be automatically cancelled when you missed your originally scheduled flight.
2. In having to pay for the increased fare of flights for which you are not actually making any changes, simply because these flights have their fares recalculated every time a change is made to any preceding flight.

So...book multiple one-ways instead of multi-legs. Enjoy the flexibility!

QED.

I do want to make it explicitly clear that it is **only** in the case where you want to change a flight in an itinerary that has subsequent flights you do not want to change where it is to your advantage to have booked those flights separately rather than as part of a single ticket; in cases where you only want to change the final flight on an itinerary, it makes no difference whether that flight is a one-way or part of a multi-leg. The reason is that effectively, the final flight for an itinerary is a one-way: changes to it don't cause you to be subject to paying the fare increases of subsequent flights because there are no subsequent flights and if you bail on it, there are no ramifications in regards to the automatic cancellation of subsequent flights because again, there are no subsequent flights. Now, if you need to change multiple flights on the same itinerary, you may well be better off if you bought all of those flights as part of the same ticket because you will only be charged a single change fee to change them whereas if they were on separate tickets, you would be charged a change fee for each ticket. However, I think it is a lot more common that you need to change only a single flight than it is that you need to change more than one flight on an itinerary so I believe that it will more often benefit you to book each leg of a journey separately than it will to book those legs together.