The Great Debate: Booking through Concur/CTM vs. the Web

Since the implementation of Vanderbilt’s managed travel program, some debate emerges when VU travelers find cheaper fares on the web; however, most of our findings point to the conclusion that prices are lower through our Vanderbilt preferred suppliers. Vanderbilt has extremely knowledgeable and savvy “road warrior” travelers. The places they go to conduct Vanderbilt business, research, and present are impressive; our managed travel program is designed to support these missions.

The websites that sell travel (airfare, hotel rooms) do a great job of advertising and attracting traffic. The price advertised on that website may not be the “final price,” it may require multiple stops, long layovers or hidden fees. More importantly, it may also be old data. Most users don’t realize that these websites pay every time the airline or hotel databases are accessed by a mouse click.

In the case of airfare, websites cache the airfares available to control these costs (usually in the early morning hours). This enables the searcher to shop around and compare fares without causing the site to incur distribution costs from the airlines with every click. The farther away from the cache time that a search is conducted, the more likely it is the fare will be sold out. This is how travelers can work almost all the way through a website’s purchase process only to be notified that the fare they wanted is no longer available. And that’s just airfare, what about hotels? Many websites that sell hotels have very attractive rates, but they can be restrictive and non-refundable – once you book, it’s use it or lose it. Plus, if plans change and you’ve booked on multiple sites, you have to contact every entity through which you made your reservations to modify them. Also, what happens when travel is disrupted and you need help? Most websites do not offer 24/7, global support and often refers travelers to the supplier’s resources which are typically overwhelmed with others needing assistance.

Travelers who book through the Concur online booking tool/CTM get the added advantage of contracted Vanderbilt and CTM rates that are not available on the web. CTM travel agents work with our travelers on complex and international travel arrangements and assist with narrowing down the choices to secure the best rates and fares that will best meet your business needs. If a traveler books via the Concur tool and makes a mistake, CTM can often help mitigate the costs of those mistakes through their relationships with suppliers and their system capabilities to void transactions.

Finally, and most importantly, is safety and security. Vanderbilt is very serious about ensuring the safety and well-being of its students, faculty and staff while traveling on behalf of the university. Booking outside the managed travel program is not only against institutional policy, it limits Vanderbilt’s ability to capture location information and contact employees if they need assistance in case of an emergency. (Think Israel/Gaza, Ebola, MERS, Ukraine, various typhoons, hurricanes and earthquakes, LAX airport shooter and winter weather events – all of which affected Vanderbilt travelers within the last year.) If Vanderbilt and its travel program partners don’t know you are there, they won’t know you might need help.

Vanderbilt is now in a better position to negotiate deeper discounts, more inclusions and terms than ever before. If you find a price online that you can’t match in Concur or by calling a CTM travel agent, please contact us at travel@vanderbilt.edu, and we will work with you to find the best airfare/hotel rates for your travel plans.
Passport Fair
November 19

As part of International Education Week, Vanderbilt International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) will host a “Passport Fair” on November 19 from 9am-3pm at the Student Life Center. This event is open to students, faculty, and staff who can get their passport paperwork expedited and shipped overnight for free (excluding passport fees). It is a great opportunity for anyone at Vanderbilt who may need to get their passports soon, but just don’t have the time to do so. Passport forms can be found on the Department of State website. All processes will be handled on campus.

Applications will also be accepted for adding additional pages to an existing passport. To do so, applicants should fill out form DS4085 and bring a check/money order for $82 made out to the Dept. of State. The passport will be sent to a processing center and returned once the pages have been added.

GBTA, CWT Release 2015 Global Travel Price Report for Travel Budget Forecasts

Late this summer (August 2014), the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) and Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) jointly released the 2015 Global Travel Price Outlook Report. The report gives businesses an early indication of what to expect in 2015 in terms of airfare, hotel and ground transportation costs, especially helpful as they enter budgeting season.

The report highlights that demand from emerging markets such as China, India and Brazil and improved economic growth in advanced economies, combined with limited advances in travel supply, will result in an upward pressure on rates, particularly in high-demand travel markets. The study shows that travel managers are prepared for this, however, with those surveyed by GBTA are expecting airfares to increase the most among all categories due to consolidation in major markets. With rising demand and slowly expanding capacity, airfares are expected to rise gradually through 2015, by as much as 2.2 percent, although low-cost carriers are limiting price increases in some regions.

“The study reveals that travel managers expect price increases next year across the board on travel categories including airfares, hotel room rates and rental car rates,” said Joseph Bates, GBTA Foundation vice president of research. “Risks to the forecast including the escalating Ukrainian crisis; declining European inflation; burgeoning debt in China and oil price shocks could potentially have a negative influence on travel demand and pricing however, so travel managers are advised to consider contingencies for these risks in their planning.”

Different fares for the same flight on US Airways and American

If you are flying from Nashville to Washington DC’s National Airport in mid-December you could pay $413.70 on American; however, if you buy your ticket on USAirways it will only cost you $270.70 – for the same flights!

Why? When the airlines merged last December, they began selling tickets on each other’s flights, but they haven’t merged their reservations systems yet. Because of lags in the computer systems used to display ticket prices, the same flight can appear for hundreds of dollars more or less depending on which carrier is selling it.

CTM agents have been checking both carriers when appropriate since this began. When applicable, CTM (Vanderbilt’s travel agency) will alert the traveler that has booked one carrier on the Concur online booking tool that a lower fare can be found by purchasing the same flights from the other carrier. For now, it’s probably a good idea to look at both carriers on Concur by searching for the flight by price.