

# Senior Discounts Aren't Always the Best Deals for Retirees

## Here's how to get the best prices in 4 key areas

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David Sattler usually orders frugally off the value menu at Burger King. But on a recent burger and soda run, the 52-year-old advertising writer's bill was even lower than expected. A senior discount was applied. "I hadn't realized that I got the senior discount until I sat down in my seat and looked at the receipt," says Sattler, who sports thinning hair and a beard laced with silver. "I think it was funny that the cashier was quite sure that I should get the discount, because when I was 20 I would have looked at me as someone quite ancient. So, I am pretty sure she looked at me that way."

Of course, most people won't get a senior discount unless they ask, and many vendors require you to show proof of age or flash an AARP membership card.

Here's a look at how to negotiate some key senior discounts:

**Travel.** Seniors probably aren't going to get a break on gas prices any time soon, and most airlines aren't giving discounts, either. "The airlines used to give great privileges to seniors, but the senior airfares have basically vanished, except for Southwest," says Joan Heilman, author of *Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50*.

And even if you manage to find a senior discount price, it won't always be the cheapest fare. A recent southwest.com search for flights from Washington to San Francisco yielded a \$179 one-way senior fare, while the cheapest overall Web fare for the same flight (listed next to the senior price) was \$134, or \$45 less. It's important to shop for the lowest overall price and not just the one that says senior in front of it.

Train travel, although slower, might be a little more senior friendly. Amtrak travelers over age 62 get a 15 percent discount. At press time, Amtrak listed a \$72 ticket from New York to Washington that was \$61.20 for seniors. Greyhound offers a 5 percent senior discount on bus fares. And some rental car agencies offer discounts upon request.

**Hotels.** Nancy McDonald, 72, a retired middle school music teacher in Roswell, N.M., makes frequent overnight trips to Albuquerque to buy new piano music to play at her church. Securing a senior discount of between 10 and 20 percent off her hotel room is an important factor in her hotel choice.

If you pay a \$12.50 annual fee, an AARP membership card can famously get you 10 percent off most [hotel](#) rooms, as well as a multitude of other [discounts](#). But, as with airlines, the senior rate isn't always best. A recent online search for a hotel room in Boston listed the best senior rate as \$329.95, but a separate search for the best overall rate at the same hotel was \$319.95.

Joel Kriner, founder and editor of the age 55-plus website [Bargains4Seniors.com](#), based in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, says there's a strategy you should use to score the best hotel prices. "When calling to make reservations at a hotel, always ask for their best price. Once you get a quoted best price, then ask for the senior discount," says Kriner. He says some sales representatives will give you a bloated price quote if you reveal up front that you are going to ask for the senior discount.

**Retail stores.** Supermarkets and department stores often give senior discounts on certain off-peak days or times. William Toensing, 75, a Navy Reserve retiree, tries to shop at the local hardware store in Nevada City, Calif., on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays because those are the days he can get a 10 percent senior discount. Some exclusions apply: "They don't give it to you if the item is at a sale price," says Toensing, and lumber is only 5 percent off for seniors.

"Most companies don't provide marketing budgets for the senior discounts, so check with the businesses you already deal with and always ask," advises David Smidt, president of [SeniorDiscounts.com](#), a website that allows [frugal](#) seniors to peruse discounts for a fee starting at \$7.95 and boasts at least half a million visitors a year. One good way to find discounts is to type a store's name and "senior discount" into a search engine. You can also call and speak to the customer service department. Seniors bold enough to ask for discounts often get 10 percent off even when there is no official senior discount policy.

**Dining and entertainment.** During a recent trip to a Seattle aquarium, Linda Bowan, author of *Free Stuff and Good Deals for Folks Over 50*, was shocked by the \$15 admission. Luckily, Bowan, who declined to state her age, remembered to ask for a senior admission, which was half price. Museums, cruises, ski resorts, golf courses, athletic clubs, movies, restaurants, and college courses famously offer discounts to seniors. A national park [pass](#), which usually costs \$80 for one year, is only \$10 for seniors over age 62 and never expires. And some chain restaurants, such as Denny's and IHOP, offer a senior menu for those over age 55. It has smaller portions, like three pancakes per stack instead of four, and lower prices.

Of course, securing senior prices means you typically have to reveal your age. So, you have to decide which is more important: saving a few dollars or maintaining the illusion that age 50 is still a few years off.