
Admit to senior status for deep discounts

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One of the perks of age is qualifying for senior discounts offered by airlines, restaurants, retailers and other businesses. And just because you're not old enough to collect Social Security doesn't mean you can't enjoy a senior moment.

The biggest hurdles for potential bargain hunters are finding the discounts and seeing if you qualify, because "senior" is a moving target. Some businesses give senior discounts only to people older than 65. Others start at 62. Still others offer savings to younger whippersnappers.

One quick way to find many of the bargains is by going to www.SeniorDiscounts.com. The Web site features a database of 135,000 discounts, grouped by categories. Each listing gives you the amount of the discount and age requirement for getting it. David Smidt, president of the Chicago-based company, says SeniorDiscounts.com, which launched in 2001, attracts 60,000 visitors a month.

The search is easy and free. Enter your ZIP code and select a category on the dropdown menu.

There are 22 categories, including restaurants, movie theaters, retail stores, hotels and other travel-related businesses. Smidt says the average discount is 10 percent to 15 percent, but some hotels may offer as much as a 50 percent discount.

And once you find the discount you want, don't be shy. "Ask for it, because they probably won't offer it to you automatically," Smidt says.

Smidt finds the information for the database from several sources. He scours the Internet and calls major chains to find out what they're offering.

Members and businesses tell him of available discounts. Members also tell him if the listed discounts have changed or been canceled, so the database is constantly updated.

SeniorDiscounts also has a paid membership that offers exclusive discounts above the generally available bargains. Members receive a printed directory of the online discounts, a nice resource for those who don't have Internet access. The cost is \$24.

One of the pitfalls of the term "senior discount" is that it may be a turnoff to boomers, a generation that clings to its youth. Smidt's advice to someone in their 50s: Grow up.

"They may not like being called a senior, but there are some really good discounts out there," Smidt says. "It would be a shame not to use them."

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