

THE SAVVY SENIOR

Senior Travel Discounts

July 2006

Dear Savvy Senior,

*Can you write a column on travel-related discounts for seniors (hotel, air travel, etc.)? My husband and I are both about to retire and love to travel, but also love a bargain.
Savvy Travelers*

Dear Travelers:

Everybody loves a bargain but with so many baby boomers at or near retirement age, senior discount travel deals that have real value are getting harder to find. Here are some tips that may help.

Hotel Bargains

It's nice to know that most hotels in the United States offer some type of a senior discount. However, the age you're eligible will vary. As you look for the best deals, keep in mind that the larger senior discounts (30 to 50 percent) are generally found at the more expensive hotels. Inexpensive chains such as Motel 6 and Super 8 typically offer more modest (10 to 15 percent) savings. Also, be aware that from time to time hotels, to attract business, offer special deals or promotions that may be a lower rate than what the senior discount is. Be sure you check. Here are some of the better senior discount offerings by various chains.

+ **Hyatt Hotels:** Offers its guests (ages 62 and older) up to 50 percent off regular rates at participating hotels in the U.S. and Canada. Call 888591-1234 or visit www.hyatt.com.

+ **Starwood Hotels** (Sheraton, Four Points, W Hotels, Westin Hotels and Resorts): Offers a 50 percent discount on 21-day advance purchase rates or 15-25 percent off reservations every day. Other restrictions may apply and you must be at least age 60. Call 888-625-5144, or visit www.starwoodhotels.com.

+ **Wyndham Hotels and Resorts:** AARP members can save between 35 to 40 percent off regular room rates; call 877-999-3223, visit www.wyndham.com.

+ **Choice Hotels** (Comfort Inn, Comfort Suites, Quality, Sleep Inn, Clarion, MainStay Suites, Econo Lodge and Rodeway Inn.): Offers 20-30 percent discounts to guests over the age of 60, and 10 percent to those 50 plus; call 800-4246423, visit www.choicehotels.com.

+ **La Quinta Hotels:** Provides up to 30 percent discounts to people age 55 and older; call 866-725-1661, visit www.lq.com.

+ **Marriott Hotels:** Seniors (62 and older) can save at least 15 percent off normal rates; call 888236-2427, visit www.marriott.com.

+ **Radisson Hotels:** Offers a "Senior Breaks" program which provides 10-20 percent off the regular rate to people 50 and older; call 800-3333333, visit www.radisson.com.

Savvy Tip: If you like staying at bed-and-breakfasts, and you're age 50 or older, you should consider the Evergreen Club (www.evergreenclub.com). For an annual membership fee of \$60 (\$75 for married couples) you can have access to nearly 2,000 private-home B&Bs and pay only \$15/day (\$10 for singles).

Air Travel

While many airlines may offer senior discounts or special senior fares, they are usually loaded with restrictions and offer slim savings. Here are two airlines that offer the most enticing deals and some others to check into:

+ **United Airlines:** Offers the "Silver Wings Plus" program, one of the best discount programs for seniors (55 and older) who travel frequently. For a yearly membership fee of \$240 (a less expensive \$25/year membership plan is also available) you'll get \$300 in travel credits every year, extra bonus miles, hotel and cruise discounts and vacation offers. Call 800-720-1765 or visit www.silverwingsplus.com.

+ **Southwest Airlines:** They offer special senior fares to travelers 65 years or over that are definitely worth a closer look; call 800-435-9792, visit www.southwest.com.

+ **Other options:** Delta, American, US Airways, Continental, ATA, Horizon, Midwest, America West, Virgin Atlantic, Alaska Airlines and Air Jamaica are other airlines that may offer discounts or special fares in select markets to older travelers. Call the airline to find out what's available.

Take the Train

Amtrak offers seniors (62 and older) a discount of 15 percent on most tickets. These discounts, however, don't apply to sleeper accommodations or the Auto Train. Call 800-872-7245, or visit www.amtrak.com.

National Parks

For a one-time fee of just \$10, seniors (62 and older) can get a Golden Age Passport which allows them free entrance into any national park for life, along with a 50 percent discount on in-park facility charges like camping fees, tours, fishing licenses and more. Visit www.nationalparks.org. Passports can be obtained in person only at a federal area (National Park, Historic Site, Wildlife Refuge, etc.) where an entrance fee is charged.

Savvy Resources:

A great place to look for senior discounts nationwide is at www.seniordiscounts.com. To find out the various membership discounts AARP offers, visit www.aarp.org/aarp_benefits or call 888-687-2277. And to keep updated on senior travel deals and discounts, visit www.smartertravel.com/senior-travel.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, Oklahoma 73070, or visit www.savvysenior.org. Jim Miller is a regular contributor to the NBC Today Show and author of the book, *The Savvy Senior*.