



Empowering the Frequent Flyer

**Understanding how
to use ExpertFlyer
to your advantage.**

An EduGuide from ExpertFlyer.com

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What is ExpertFlyer?

It's no secret that being an airline passenger has become a challenge these days. Changing competition, route structures, low cost and legacy carriers have all contributed to many choices, and many new issues for the frequent flyer. Even the most experienced flyers must have the tools necessary to insure they are getting the most for their money and minimize the problems associated with modern day commercial flying.

ExpertFlyer was created to give the frequent, and not so frequent, flyer a wealth of information in a simple to use, web-based service. It used to be that only a travel agent or an airline agent had access to the information available on ExpertFlyer. But now, this information is available to subscribers of ExpertFlyer. The key to this information is understanding that making a flight reservation is not as simple as it appears and that the underlying information is changing all the time.

Let's take a look at the features of ExpertFlyer and how you can use it to your advantage.

The Fare Buckets

Ever wonder why you paid one price for your seat on a flight and the person next to you paid something very different? The answer is *fare buckets*. On a flight with three different classes of service (First, Business and Economy) there may actually be as many as 20 different fares available at any one time. Airlines allow you book these fares up to 11 months in advance. To make things more complicated, these fares will constantly change at any time during the 11 months leading up to the flight. Airlines have revenue management computers and personnel whose job it is to constantly adjust the availability of certain fares and the cost of the actual fare for each and every flight they offer. They use past experience for the same flight, competitive fare information, seasonality of the flight and other special events and promotional considerations to set the fares.

On ExpertFlyer, these fare buckets appear in the **Flight Availability** section. Let's look at the fare buckets for a flight from JFK to LAX on American Airlines (AA):

0 Connections

AA 1 0 JFK LAX 762 B P7 A2 J7 D7 I6 Y7 B7 H7 K7 M7 L7 W7 V7 G0 S0 N0 Q0 O0
01/01/06 09:00AM 01/01/06 12:10PM

AA flight 1 departs JFK at 9:00am and arrives at LAX at 12:10pm local time. The "0" after the flight number means it is a non-stop flight. The "762" is the type of aircraft. Clicking on the aircraft type on the actual response screen will give you a pop-up show the actual name of the aircraft type. In this example, AA1 on this day is a Boeing 767-200. The "B" next to it, indicates that breakfast is served on this flight. Clicking on the meal letter will give you pop-up that describes the meal codes. Please note, on many flights the level of meal service is not consistent in each class of service.

Let's look at the entries on the right side. These are the fare buckets. They are designated by a letter that designates the *booking class* and a number that designates the minimum number of tickets that can be purchased in this booking class. Some of these booking classes are for First class, some for Business and some for Economy. Let's look at them in more detail:

P7 and A2 are the booking classes for First class on this particular flight. Keep in mind that the letters used for a particular class of service will vary by airline. In this case, "P" is the designation for a full-fare "Premium" class ticket.

The “A” is the designation for the same seat but at a discounted price. Notice the numbers next to each. The “7” in P7 means there at least 7 seats that can be sold at this price. In fact, there are probably more. Notice how all the booking classes have a maximum number of 7. Different airlines will show different maximum numbers. Some use 9 and some use 4. In this case, it’s 7. Looking at the “A” booking class you see there are only 2 available for sale at a discounted price. So, why not buy the discounted seat instead of the full-fare “P” seat? Well, the “A” discounted seats usually come with purchase or travel restrictions. Maybe it can only be purchased in conjunction with a larger round-the-world ticket.

J7, D7 and I6 are the booking classes for seat in the Business class section of the aircraft. “J” is full-fare price for Business class and “D” and “I” are discounted fares, each with their own rules and restrictions.

In Economy we see many more fares. “Y” is the full-fare price for Economy and the other 12 fare classes represent discount Economy fares all with their own sets of rules and restrictions. In general, the fare cost goes from the most expensive to cheapest as you move through the buckets from left to right.

The actual letter used for a booking class will vary from airline to airline. “D” in one airline may be a Business class code, but in a different airline it may be an Economy code. ExpertFlyer provides a pop-up for all codes on each airline. It is this booking class code that is printed on your boarding pass under Class.

So, how many seats are actually available for sale on this flight? That’s hard to tell. In Business, this flight has 30 seats. Yet we see from the buckets (J7, D7 and I6) that the total is only 20. Remember, the number next to each booking class letter is the *minimum* number of seats available at this fare price. You may buy four J-fare tickets tomorrow and that fare class may still read “J7”. Also, if you add up all the numbers next to the letters, that is *not* the total number of seats left on the flight for sale. It may be more or less. The number can also be used as an indicator of how many seats are left for sale in that booking class.

One final note about fare buckets. Some deep discount fare buckets are only available between a specific pair of cities even if a connection is used. So, for a trip between JFK and LAS you may see a low-cost fare by using a connection through DFW or SLC. But if you look at each segment individually you may not see the same deep discounted fare buckets on each individual segment. This is because the airline is not offering a deep discounted fare between JFK and SLC or between SLC and LAS. It’s only available when you book JFK-LAS connecting through SLC.

The Actual Fare

So now that we know how many different fares may actually be available for a particular flight, how do we find out what the actual fare is? On ExpertFlyer we use the **Fare Information** section. Let's look at the fares for this same flight on the same date and see what we get:

Fare Basis	Airline	Booking Class	Trip Type	Fare		
23 Fares Returned						
SR7GNR	AA	S	Round-Trip	318.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
SA7GNR	AA	S	One-Way	159.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
GA7GNR	AA	G	One-Way	179.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
GR7GNR	AA	G	Round-Trip	358.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
VA3GNR	AA	V	One-Way	199.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
VR3GNR	AA	V	Round-Trip	398.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
WA0GZN	AA	W	One-Way	269.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
WRGNR	AA	W	Round-Trip	538.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
LRGNR	AA	L	Round-Trip	598.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
LA0GZN	AA	L	One-Way	299.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
K26Z	AA	K	One-Way	499.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
YRUP7ZN	AA	A	Round-Trip	1088.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
YRUPMZ	AA	A	Round-Trip	1158.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
Y3CUPMZ	AA	I	One-Way	594.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
Y26	AA	Y	One-Way	699.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
Y263CUPS	AA	D	One-Way	1183.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
Y	AA	Y	One-Way	1584.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
J26S	AA	J	One-Way	1830.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
F26S	AA	F	One-Way	1830.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
P26S	AA	P	One-Way	2245.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
J	AA	J	One-Way	2339.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
J	AA	J	One-Way	2339.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing
F	AA	F	One-Way	2339.00 (USD)	View Rules	View Routing

The *Fare Basis* is the airline's code to uniquely identify the fare. The most important letter in the Fare Basis is the first letter. The *Airline* identifies the specific airline that is offering that particular fare. The *Booking Class* is the code that identifies the class of service that you get when you buy that Fare Basis. Class of Service refers to where you will sit on the airplane: Economy, Business, First, etc. Notice that some Fare Basis codes may actually get you into a higher Class of Service. For example:

YRUP7ZN (a coach class Fare Basis) has a Booking Class of A (a first class seat)

How do we know that "A" is a first class seat?

Click on the letter "A" under Booking Class and you will get a pop-up for that airline which describes the class of service for each Booking Class. The fares shown include taxes but do not include airport specific and security related fees. So, the actual ticketed price you pay will be slightly higher than those shown. Of course there are restrictions and conditions that apply to this Fare Basis. That is where the two links at the right side become very useful:

View Rules – This is where all the ground rules, conditions and restrictions are spelled out for this particular Fare Basis. Here you will see rules for purchasing your ticket, refunds, valid dates and changes.

View Routing – Many fares are only valid on certain routes that the airline flies. Some of the lowest fares may only be available on non-stop flights. Some may not be available on code share flights. Here is where you can find out if there are any routing restrictions.

The So-Called “Hidden Fare Buckets”

Normally, ExpertFlyer only displays fare buckets on the **Flight Availability** response screen that are revenue producing. However, most airlines have separate fare buckets for non-revenue inventory. These “hidden fares” are used to allocate available seats for upgrades and mileage-only awards. Presently, only a few airlines make their hidden fares available through ExpertFlyer. Refer to the Support section and the FAQ’s on ExpertFlyer to get the latest list. Let’s use AA as an example to see how this works.

The X hidden fare of AA is used to designate the inventory for non-revenue upgrades from coach to first class on domestic flights with only two classes on AA. There are many ways one can qualify to use this inventory such as an elite status upgrade, 500-mile segment upgrades, etc. AA usually, but not always, makes this inventory available for booking starting at 100 hours prior to departure for any 2-class domestic flight. Every airline tries to maximize revenue so they are not so quick to give away free or mileage upgrades. As a result, often times on heavily traveled routes or on flights with a limited number of seats, this upgrade inventory may not be made available until just hours before flight time.

Let’s see what happens if you try to use ExpertFlyer to view X inventory within the 100 hour window prior to departure. Let’s look at LGA to ORD for the morning of May 11, 2005 by entering X in the Class box on the **Flight Availability** entry screen:

<i>0 Connections</i>		AA 301 0 LGA	ORD	S80	B X3
		05/11/05 06:00AM	05/11/05 07:19AM		
<i>0 Connections</i>		AA 303 0 LGA	ORD	S80	B X2
		05/11/05 06:30AM	05/11/05 07:48AM		
<i>0 Connections</i>		AA 305 0 LGA	ORD	S80	B X0
		05/11/05 07:00AM	05/11/05 08:28AM		
<i>0 Connections</i>		AA 309 0 LGA	ORD	S80	B X0
		05/11/05 08:00AM	05/11/05 09:30AM		
<i>0 Connections</i>		AA 317 0 LGA	ORD	S80	S X3
		05/11/05 10:00AM	05/11/05 11:29AM		
<i>0 Connections</i>		AA 361 0 LGA	ORD	S80	S X7
		05/11/05 09:00PM	05/11/05 10:24PM		

We can see that the first two flights of the day show there are three and two seats respectively available for the X form of upgrade. The next two flights show none and the two flights after that show three and at least seven seats available. We say “at least seven” because AA’s inventory for all fare buckets will never show more than seven regardless of how many are actually available.

By using this information you can see what your chances are for an upgrade if you are now buying a ticket. Remember, this inventory changes all the time and what you see now may not be there one minute from now. If you have an upgrade request pending with the airline that has not yet been honored and you see that X inventory is available for your flight, you may want to contact the airline immediately to find out what the cause of the holdup might be.

But what if you do this same query on ExpertFlyer but for a time longer than 100 hours before departure? Let's keep everything the same but just move the date of the query out one month. Remember, in this case, the airline has not yet made available the X inventory based on their rules:

1 Connection

CO 451	0	LGA	CLE	735	X9
		06/11/05 06:45AM	06/11/05 08:18AM		
AA 4334	0	CLE	ORD	CR7	F Y7 B7 H7 K7 M7 L7 W7 V7 N0 G3 Q0 S0 O2
		06/11/05 08:54AM	06/11/05 09:14AM		

1 Connection

CO 2276	0	LGA	CLE	ERJ	X9
		06/11/05 03:00PM	06/11/05 04:44PM		
AA 4209	0	CLE	ORD	ER4	F Y7 B7 H7 K7 M7 L7 W7 V7 N0 G7 Q0 S0 O7
		06/11/05 05:20PM	06/11/05 05:43PM		

1 Connection

CO 2290	0	JFK	CLE	ER3	X1
		06/11/05 03:10PM	06/11/05 04:45PM		
AA 4209	0	CLE	ORD	ER4	F Y7 B7 H7 K7 M7 L7 W7 V7 N0 G7 Q0 S0 O7
		06/11/05 05:20PM	06/11/05 05:43PM		

ExpertFlyer will now display flights that best meet your criteria of the specific date, selection of AA and the use of X inventory. In each of the above cases, note that the requirement for an AA flight is there in each connection and the requirement for X inventory is satisfied with a flight on CO whose X inventory is a normally available fare that can be purchased. Although the result might not be the intended results, it is a valid one from the point of view of the GDS (Global Distribution System) that search for the results based on our criteria.

For those airlines that make it available, hidden fare buckets for non-revenue mileage award inventory that is not time sensitive can be viewed at any time the flight is available for booking. Of course, there are no assurances that inventory will be available but it does change all the time especially as it gets closer to the day of departure.

Strategies for Using ExpertFlyer

There is a wealth of information that you have access to through ExpertFlyer. The question is, how to use it to support the types of pre-flight activities from planning to the day of flight. Let's look at a few of these.

- **The Mileage Run** – There are those amongst us who will take advantage of fare sales and circuitous routing to maximize the collection of miles at the lowest possible cost per mile. Some do it to extend a business trip for sightseeing at no additional cost, some to obtain qualifying miles, points or segments towards higher elite status with an airline and some do it just for the joy of flying and visiting different destinations. Whatever the reason, the so-called mileage run requires a good deal of planning to maximize the mileage for the least cost.

ExpertFlyer can be used in a number of ways to help achieve this goal.

- **Force a connection city** – In the **Flight Availability** section, enter your query to force a connection through a particular city. If you want to go from JFK to LAX, put in MIA as a connection city and legal connections through MIA will be shown, usually at the same price as the non-stop but with substantially more miles.
- **Check the Routing and Fare Rules** – If you have come up with a route that involves one or more connections you can check on the Routing and Fare Rules if you are a Premium subscriber to ExpertFlyer. From the **Flight Availability** response screen, click on the "View Fares" link at the top of the screen. This will bring you into the **Fare Information** section and show you all the fares. Now click on the Routing Rules link on the right side of the fare you are interested in to see if there are any cities that you are restricted from routing through or which you must route through for that fare. Also check the Fare Rules link to see if there are any other restrictions such as seasonality or advance purchase requirements.
- **Award Availability** – Getting a mileage award or mileage upgrade award is one of the toughest and most frustrating processes for frequent flyers. Even when booking many months in advance it is all too common to find no awards are available. Sometimes awards are available for a flight at a different time of day than desired. Sometimes it is available for a different day of the week than desired. You can use two features of ExpertFlyer to maximize your search:
 - **Time of Day** – In the **Flight Availability** query screen the time of day drop-down serves as a starting point for which to search for flights based on your criteria. Direct flights will always be displayed first followed by connecting flights starting at or near the time of day you specify. The total amounts of flights returned will vary but on heavily serviced routes, not all flights for that day will show. It is best to try two or three time of day changes to insure that you see all available flights for that day.
 - **Variable Date** – ExpertFlyer now has the ability to make a query from the **Flight Availability** screen by specifying not just one but up to seven days for the same query. Use the Exact Date drop-down feature to show available for up to seven days.
- **Upgrade Availability** – The rules for upgrades vary greatly from airline to airline. But there are some strategies you can use to try to maximize your chances of an upgrade based on those rules.
 - **Look before you book** – Let's say you need to book a flight for ten days from now. Upgrade award inventory is usually not made available by the airline that far in advance. But, you may

be able to garner some insight into the *probability* of availability when the time comes by looking at the fare buckets in **Flight Availability**. Enter your dates and route and look at the fare buckets for the class of service you want to upgrade into. Does it still show plenty of availability particularly at the discounted fares? Maybe the direct flights show poor availability but the connections are wide open. Perhaps by changing your desired departure time you can increase your odds.

- **Is it available now** – If you are about to book a flight that is currently within the upgrade window, do a **Flight Availability** query for the day and time you desire. Does it show up upgrade availability? If not, change the time of day or force a connection to see if upgrades are available for an alternate time or route.
- **Finding the best fare value** – Premium service subscribers to ExpertFlyer have access to the wide range of fares offered by an airline. As we saw before, there are many fares even for simple routes. So which is best for you? In some cases it may be the one that is least expensive. In some cases, however, it might not be the cheapest but the one that offers the greatest routing flexibility for a mileage run or has the best refund policy.
 - **The “cheap” seats** – One of the simplest ways to get the lowest fare seat is to be flexible with the time of day you want to depart. Certain routes are heavily traveled by an airline. LGA-ATL on DL is one example. It’s possible the cheapest seats may be available only on the first two flights of the day but not the ones after 9 am. Look at the fare buckets in the **Flight Availability** response screen to see which flight with the lowest fare buckets still have availability.
 - **Upgradeable fares** – It used to be simple. Buy a cheap Economy ticket, use miles or a special “VIP” certificate and sit in the next class of service. Not anymore. Airlines now have restrictions regarding upgradeable fares and routes. The miles needed to upgrade are now usually based on the fare basis for the ticket you are upgrading from. Know the rules. They vary by airline, change at a moment’s notice can be quite complex. But one thing is usually true, the more you pay the easier and less expensive it will be to upgrade.

So-called “full-fare” coach fares are usually upgradeable with a minimum number of miles. For AA, these are the Y and B fares. B fares can be substantially less expensive than Y fares but carry some restrictions that will vary by route. But a B fare from North America to Europe on AA, for example, can be upgraded with just 10,000 miles one-way. Compare that to the “discounted” coach fares that require 25,000 miles and \$250. You may find it less expensive overall and less restrictive to buy a B fare rather than a less expensive coach fare. Look for B fare inventory using **Flight Availability** on ExpertFlyer and ask for it when you book your flight.
 - **Stopovers and routing** – Certain fares come with many restrictions regarding what routes they are valid on. Some are only for non-stop routes. Some offer a great deal of flexibility for stopping in a city before traveling onto the next destination. Look at the rules and routing restrictions for the fares you are considering. You may be able to construct a more complex itinerary on the same fare.
- **The Saved Query feature** – Premium subscribers to ExpertFlyer have a unique and convenient feature. Repeated queries can be saved using any naming structure you choose. This feature is useful to find out if upgrade inventory for a particular flight has become available or to see if your favorite seat has opened up. You will find it to be a great time saving convenience.

Seat Maps

Let's face it; the airline seat is not the cozy lounge chair in your home. But there are some things you can do to minimize the pain. ExpertFlyer offers you seat maps for over 100 airlines. These airlines feature seat maps only for select flights and classes of service. ExpertFlyer will display which seats are presently assigned or blocked for the particular flight and date you are interested in. Use this information along with information from sites like SeatGuru.com and SeatExpert.com to pick the best seat.

In some cases, airlines will block seats only for top paying and elite frequent flyers. On ExpertFlyer's seat maps, this will show as Premium seating if the airline so designates it. In any case, pick and ask for the best seat you can find. If the one you want is not available now, Premium subscribers to ExpertFlyer can save the seat map query and recall it often to see if the desired seat has become available. This is a great feature to use, especially as the day of departure approaches. People routinely change their flight plans especially in the business and first class cabins where penalties for changing flights are almost non-existent.

Glossary of Terms

Booking Class – A single letter designation that defines the category of fares available for a particular flight. A booking class can encompass more than one fare. It is used in conjunction with fare buckets to show how many seats are available for that particular booking class. The letter designation and definition of a booking class may vary from one airline to another.

Class of Service – The general category of service on the flight. Usually there are from one to four classes of service on a particular flight. The name of the class of service will vary from airline to airline. For example some airlines refer to the lowest class of service as Coach, others call it Economy.

Direct Flight – Any flight between a departing and arriving city that does not require a change of planes. Non-stop flights are one form of direct flights, but not all direct flights are non-stop. A direct flight may stop in several intermediate cities without a change in flight number.

Elite Frequent Flyers – Airlines have multi-tiered frequent flyer programs to recognize their best customers. Some airlines may have as many as three elite tiers in addition to the “general” frequent flyer population. The higher the tier, the more perks and benefits you receive. These benefits vary depending upon the airline.

Fare Basis – The fare basis can be a complex code of letters and numbers that uniquely defines the price, rules and routing restrictions for a fare on a specific route. There may be more than one fare basis for a booking class.

Fare Bucket – The fare bucket is the number of seats available on a particular flight and date for a specific booking class.

Fare Code – Sometimes used to describe a booking class.

Fare Inventory – The actual number of seats for sale for a particular fare basis. This number may be greater than actually shown on ExpertFlyer.

GDS – Global Distribution System. The GDS acts as distributor of airline and other travel information between the source (airline, hotel car rental company) and the user (travel agent, airline reservations operations, ExpertFlyer). Some additional services may be offered by a GDS such as booking and ticketing capabilities. Galileo, Sabre, Amadeus are some of the worldwide GDS networks.

Hidden Fare – These are booking classes not directly viewable by travel agents and other GDS customers. These are typically non-revenue classes that are used to inventory upgrades and mileage awards.

Mileage Run – An activity used by frequent flyers to accumulate the maximum number of miles at the lowest cost per mile. It is sometimes done to achieve or maintain a higher level of elite status or just for the joy of travel.

Non-Stop Flight – A flight that does not stop between the departure and arrival city.

Stopover – A stopover is defined as a minimum period of time, usually 24 hours or less, in a city between flights. It is measured between the scheduled arrival time of a flight and the scheduled departure time of the next flight. Some fare routing rules allow stopovers and some do not. What may appear to be a connection on some self-constructed itineraries may actually be defined as a stopover according to the fare rules.