



Ben Plastino

Discounts help air travelers

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Senior citizens get many discounts in the business world and one of the best is from airlines, specifically at present from Delta Airlines.

In a nutshell, senior citizens 62 years old and over can fly anywhere in the nation for as little as \$184 roundtrip. That's even lower than the regular roundtrip to Salt Lake City of \$230.

As a result, passenger travel at Delta has zoomed nationwide, including the burgeoning Idaho Falls airport. It's a deal that can't be refused.

There are certain restrictions, such as flying in midweek and avoiding the usual heavy Monday and Friday loadings; and getting reservations no sooner than six days in advance. The airlines also generally want to restrict the senior citizens business at certain percentages which can vary on different flights.

"What it's doing," said the enthusiastic Dave Hays, Delta's veteran Idaho Falls manager, "is filling up the fares in the slack midweek. It is of mutual benefit to the airline and the passengers who get the discount."

Delta sells four coupons per person at \$368 each, which allow two flights to some 230 cities served by Delta and its connections within a year. The senior citizens also can buy four coupons for \$616. They allow them four roundtrips per year. It figures out at only \$154 per roundtrip. The flights include San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Seniors also can buy four coupons, which allow them to travel round-

trip to Alaska or Hawaii for \$368 each, well below the regular fare.

Hays, who has been manager for Delta or its predecessor, Western Airlines, since 1970, pointed out that boardings in August are up 16 percent over the same month a year ago, much of it due to the senior citizen fare discounts.

"Basically, passengers can get on planes in Idaho Falls at the same rate as at Salt Lake City," he said. "In fact, in some cases it is even cheaper from here."

Hays noted Delta is observing its 60th anniversary at the Idaho Falls Airport this year. In April 1987 Delta took over Western, which inaugurated flights here in 1928. Before that, National Park Airway was in operation. Delta presently has a staff of 23 here, said Hays.

The most popular destination from Idaho Falls is Orlando, Fla., gateway to Disney World, Hays said. He added that most major eastern and southern cities are also popular.

City airport manager Jim Thorsen gives the same story. Passenger boardings through August of this year totaled 63,727, a sharp rise over 49,555 for the corresponding period a year ago.

Four airlines operate from the Idaho Falls terminal, Delta, American, Skywest and Horizon. Delta owns 20 percent of Skywest, while Horizon is a subsidiary of Alaskan Airlines. Last month, for example, boardings totaled 10,382. More than half, or 5,701, were on Delta, 2,790 on American, 1,233 on Horizon, and

668 on Skywest.

"Our peak business was in 1979 right after deregulations," Thorsen said, "but we are now heading back to that."

Thorsen, who came to Idaho Falls in 1980, said Western and Hughes were operating here then. For comparison, Thorsen observed Western served 54 cities at that time, compared with the more than 200 served by the present airlines operating from here now. It also includes key points to Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

The city, said Thorsen, has a staff of nine, but there are some 100 employees at the airport, including the four airlines, restaurant, gift shop, vehicle rentals, airplane rentals and travel agencies.

Income is rising, but all city profits are plowed back to airport improvement, explained Thorsen.

"We have always broken even, even in bad times," said Thorsen. "We are doing better now, but any surplus goes right back to airport improvements. For example, if we have any money left over this year — and it looks like we will — we will reroof the old part of the terminal building."

Hays and Thorsen said about 80 percent of the airline business is handled by travel agents who can give better personal service to passengers.

A recent trip we made to Boston showed the delight of travel. "Beantown" has the welcome mat out for tourists. It is friendly and clean, despite George Bush's politically-inspired charge that Boston Harbor is the dirtiest in the nation. We also

took a sidetrip to visit an old war buddy on old Cape Cod, the playground of the more affluent. Traffic in peak hours is horrendous, especially in two-lane tunnels funneled from four-lane turnpikes.

Boston, the cradle of the American Revolution and patriotism, features its historic beginning. It has the Freedom Trail, a foot-wide red line painted on sidewalks for 1½ miles. Travelers are offered many historic sites. Among them are the famous Boston Common, public gardens, and statehouse, where Gov. Mike Dukakis, the Democratic presidential nominee, still reigns. There are also the Ben Franklin statue, Boston massacre site, Old North Church, Bunker Hill Monument and Pavilion, the U.S.S. Constitution and many, many other attractions.

Not to be missed is the eye-catching 60-story John Hancock building, all glass and steel rising 740 feet. From it, visitors are offered a panoramic view at a small fee, between \$2 and \$3. It is the tallest building in New England. It will retain this distinction in Boston, since a new law was recently passed that limits building heights to no more than 400 feet. The city wants to keep its staid skyline, something like closing the barn door after the horse has left.

Traveling is something most people cherish and with the present comparatively low air fares, it just may be within their reach.

(Ben Plastino is a Post-Register columnist.)