Hey everyone, my name is Alberto Lara, and I am here to hopefully save you some money on your flights. Of course, keep your expectations reasonable and don't expect to save hundreds of dollars per flight. Unfortunately, the focus will predominantly be on domestic travel, as I do not fly internationally often enough to be knowledgeable in this area. I am sure some of my basic advice and tips though could be of aid to those in Europe, Australia, and other regions. I will give multiple practical examples of my tips working. I hope that you guys find this article useful, as I put an exorbitant amount of time into it.

Part I: Important Resources

When booking a flight, there are only five websites you need to use. Often, there is no difference in price when booking a flight between websites such as Expedia.com, Orbitz.com, Travelocity.com, etc., as they are all owned by a single corporation, Expedia, Inc. Kayak.com is the best one out of these "travel agent websites," as it doesn't limit some airline options when looking for flights. Otherwise, here are the five websites to look at.

1. *Matrix.itasoftware.com*

This is a general search engine, and you can not actually book a flight through this website. It is fairly accurate, and the prices for flights-listed often reflect those on an airline's website. It is also extremely flexible and convenient when it comes to manipulating preferences, such as adjusting airports, stops allowed and departure/return dates. It essentially does what every other booking website does, but more conveniently.

2. *Skiplagged.com*

This website searches for flights that may have a layover in the city you are looking to go to, but is actually cheaper than booking a flight directly to your destination. For example, you are looking to book a flight from Orlando to Los Angeles, and the cost for a one way ticket is $200. Skiplagged searches for flights to other large airport hubs that may have a layover in Los Angeles and is cheaper than $200.

The website could potentially find a flight from Orlando to Sacramento for $150, with a layover in Los Angeles. So instead of booking the flight from Orlando to Los Angeles, you book the one from Orlando to Sacramento, and just never board your connecting flight. The only minor inconvenience with this method is that you can not check in bags, as they would end up in the wrong city.
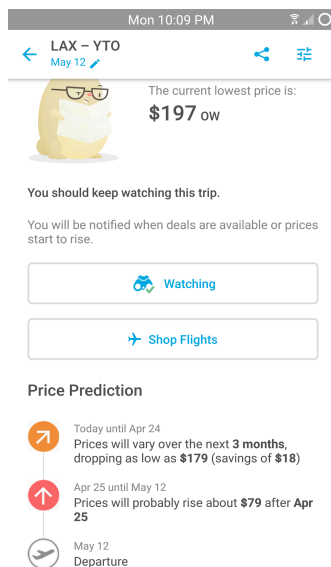
3. *Southwest.com*

When searching for flights on a typical "travel agent websites," Southwest flights do not appear in their results. Southwest flights as far as I know can only be viewed and booked through their own website. I always recommend checking their website for flights, as they can potentially be cheaper than the other airlines.

4. *StudentUniverse.com*

You need to have a .edu email to take advantage of this website. While this websites often provides mixed results when it comes to saving money on flights, there have been times where it offered a cheaper price on a flight that I was already going to book. It is at least worth a search after you have found a flight you are looking to book, as it could potentially save you money on that flight.

5. *Hopper.com*

This application (available for iOS and Android) is great for monitoring prices and giving advice on when to book a flight. It uses past data to gives you an idea of when you should expect prices to rise or fall. I essentially use this app as a tool to gauge prices and see whether or not I am getting a good price for my flight.

Now that you have the five tools you need when searching for and booking a flight, here are some basic tips that will come in handy whenever you are looking to book a flight.

Part II: Tips for Booking Flights

1. Never book a round trip flight!

If you only take away one concept from this article, it should be this one. Booking a round trip flight **DOES NOT** save you money, and only limits your options. You limit yourself to only a few airline combinations when booking a round trip ticket (Kayak.com), and that is not the case if you book your departing and returning flight separately.

2. You do not have to book your departing and returning flight at the same time.

I almost never book both at the same time, as you are potentially limiting your opportunities to evaluate prices. I frequently book departing and return flights weeks apart, and you should only book either of these when you are satisfied with the price. How do you determine this price? That's tip number three.

3. Set a price you are happy to pay for a flight, and do not look back.

Trying to predict flight prices to get the cheapest flight possible is a gamble that will not always work out in your favor. Hopper can give you a good estimate of whether it is a good deal by averaging the potential lowest price and the current cost of a flight. If the current cost of a flight I am looking into is $200 and Hopper predicts it can drop as low as $150, anything under $175 is what I will be looking for. This is totally up to your judgement, but I typically try to follow this guideline.

4. Booking as early as possible does not necessarily mean you are getting the best price.

While it is advised to book as early as possible, it will not always save you money. [Gavin Michaels], is the prime example of this. He has booked his flights to the 2016 Florida Regionals and 2017 Georgia Regionals only a week before the event and did so for a cheaper price than when I booked months in advance.

Although prices change everyday, Tuesdays are usually the day you should expect a rise or drop in price. I regularly check flight prices everyday, but if you are not as dedicated to finding a cheap flight, you should at least check on Tuesdays. This may just be a coincidence, but I have noticed that the prices of flights are cheaper between the times ~11pm-3am PST. Three of my flights that I have booked this season have been booked around these times, and then prices have risen drastically within 24 hours.

5. Check surrounding airports.

If you live in a large city, you likely have multiple airports at your disposal. Matrix.itasoftware.com does a great job of showing which airports neighbor your primary airport when you click on the nearby tab. If you live in Los Angeles, you have five potential airports that you can fly out from or into. While it may not always be suitable for you based on your situation, it could potentially save you some money.

Departing from LAX, LGB, SNA Nearby

- Cost per mile filter

Destination Toronto Lester B Pearson, ON, Canada (YYZ)

☒ Airports near Los Angeles International, CA (LAX)

Reverse route Advanced routing codes

Within 75 miles ▼

Dates ◉ Search exact dates
       ○ See calendar of lowest fares

☑ Los Angeles International, CA (LAX)
  0 miles from Los Angeles

Departure Date 05/12/2017 Departure ▼ On this day only

☑ Long Beach Daugherty Field, CA (LGB)
  17 miles from Los Angeles

Preferred times

☐ Burbank Bob Hope, CA (BUR)
  18 miles from Los Angeles

Adults 1 ▼ Children, seniors

☑ Santa Ana John Wayne, CA (SNA)
  36 miles from Los Angeles

☐ Ontario, California Int'l, CA (ONT)
  46 miles from Los Angeles

Cabin Cheapest available ▼

Stops No limit ▼

☐ Select all

Extra stops Up to 1 extra stop ▼ ⓘ

6. Flexibility can save you money.

Although school and work obligations make flexibility difficult, it is something to consider when booking a flight. As an example, I attended the Dallas Regionals that took place on Dec 31 and Jan 1. A returning flight from Dallas to Los Angeles on Monday, Jan 2nd, cost around $180. However, when searching for a returning flight on Tuesday, Jan 3, the cost was only $83.10. Obviously you have to factor in the cost of other expenses, such as extra food and hotel, but I got to enjoy Dallas for an extra day while saving money.

7. Airlines have sales sometimes

This one is pretty niche, but airlines do have sales that may come at a convenient time. You can occasionally check the slickdeals.net/deals/airfares/ to see if any airlines are having any sales.

8. Find the hubs and focus cities

All airlines have "hub" and "focus" cities, which are essentially locations they fly to and from frequently. You can find an airline's "hub" and "focus" cities on their wikipedia.org page.

IATA	ICAO	Callsign
WS	WJA	WESTJET

Founded February 29, 1996

Hubs
- Calgary International Airport
- Toronto Pearson International Airport
- Vancouver International Airport

Focus cities
- Edmonton International Airport
- Winnipeg James Armstrong Richardson International Airport

This tip requires manually searching for flights through Matrix.itasoftware.com from your departing location to these "hub" or "focus" cities, and hoping that there is a layover in the city that you actually want to fly to.

Skiplagged.com essentially does for you, but they do not always find all of these "hidden city" flights. You can also add other large airports throughout the United States to the search list when attempting this method. I also typically add a few large airports to my search query in addition to an airline's "hub" and "focus" cities. If I am looking to book a flight from Los Angeles to Seattle, I will not search flights from Los Angeles to Orlando hoping for a layover in Seattle.

Here is the list I use for potential airports. I add airports that seem practical in terms of location in regards to the city that I actually want to fly to.

Part III: Proof of Concept

I am writing this article on January 23rd, 2017 and January 24th, 2017 for context. So I will be searching for flights for some of the remaining regionals in North America for the VGC17 season. Although St. Louis regionals has already occurred, I will included it as an extra example.

I will not be giving examples for some of these events for various reasons (not attending or sparing you from too many examples). Here are the typical guidelines I use for myself when booking flights. This is up to personal preference, but these are factors that are important to me when looking to attend a regionals.

1. Flight must arrive at the designated location on Friday the day before the tournament at a reasonable time. This usually means that a 10-11 p.m. arrival time is the latest. This way, you can still get some sleep the night before the tournament.

2. The departing flight must leave later than 4 p.m. on a Sunday or anytime on Monday. You do not want to potentially miss your flight on Sunday if you make top cut or the tournament is running slow. 4 p.m. is a fairly safe bet, as most regionals are now two-day events that finish in the afternoon on Sunday.

3. If a flight has a layover, it must be a reasonable amount of time. Personally, this means any flight that has a two hour layover or longer is out of the question.

4. This will vary for your flights, but I have access to three airports that are reasonable to fly out from, LGB (Long Beach), SNA (Orange County), and LAX (Los Angeles). When looking for flights, departures or returns to any of these airports are acceptable for me.

I need to set a starting point to be able to measure how much money can actually be saved using my methods. I will use Kayak.com or Matrix.itasoftware.com as my starting point for the price of a round trip ticket for my examples, as they are nearly always cheaper than the other booking websites. Whichever one of these websites is cheaper and allows me to book my requested flight, will be the starting basepoint for price.

So does booking one ways really save you money? Are these websites, Skiplagged.com, Matrix.itasoftware.com, Southwest.com StudentUniverse.com, and Hopper actually going to save me money? Well let us find out.

Example #1: Missouri Regionals March 4th and 5th

$319	Los Angeles (LAX) to St Louis (STL) — Fri, Mar 3			
	Los Angeles (LAX) to Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) — Fri, Mar 3			
	American 2406	Dep: 12:30 am	Arr: 5:40 am	3h 10m
		Layover in DFW		1h 30m
	Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) to St Louis (STL) — Fri, Mar 3			
	American 323	Dep: 7:10 am	Arr: 8:47 am	1h 37m
	St Louis (STL) to Los Angeles (LAX) — Sun, Mar 5			
	American 1705	Dep: 4:25 pm	Arr: 6:46 pm	4h 21m

$309	Los Angeles (LAX) to St Louis (STL) — Fri, Mar 3			
	Los Angeles (LAX) to Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) — Fri, Mar 3			
	American 2406	Dep: 12:30 am	Arr: 5:40 am	3h 10m
		Layover in DFW		1h 30m
	Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) to St Louis (STL) — Fri, Mar 3			
	American 323	Dep: 7:10 am	Arr: 8:47 am	1h 37m
	St Louis (STL) to Los Angeles (LAX) — Mon, Mar 6			
	American 1705	Dep: 4:25 pm	Arr: 6:46 pm	4h 21m

After searching for round trip tickets,, Matrix.itasoftware.com gave me the cheapest round trip option. Flying out on Sunday would cost $319 round trip, and flying out on Monday would cost $309. So now I will try to find a flight that meets my guidelines for cheaper, but using these different websites and booking one ways instead. The cheapest one way I found to St. Louis on Friday, March 3rd, was on Southwest.com for $155.94.

So now it is time to find our return trip for Sunday, and this time Skiplagged.com found the cheapest one way returning flight. A flight from St. Louis, MO to Las Vegas, NV is $116.80 with a layover in Los Angeles, CA, and it is actually the exact same flight as our return trip in our original round trip ticket.

If I were to book one way flights instead of a round trip flight from Los Angeles, CA to St. Louis, MO I would save $46.26. Southwest offers the cheapest one way to St. Louis on Friday,

and American Airlines for the return flight if you were to book it from STL to LAS and not STL to LAX. When looking for a return flight on Monday, there is a very similar story.

If I were to book one way flights instead of a round trip flight from Los Angeles, CA to St. Louis, MO I would save $36.26. Essentially the same explanation as above, except you save $10 less, as the original Friday to Monday round trip was $10 cheaper. So to recap, down below are the prices for flights.

1. Booking round trip Friday-Sunday $319

2. Booking round trip Friday-Monday $309

3. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Sunday $271.94

4. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Monday $271.94

5. Price I payed when I booked my flight a few months ago $220.60 (Friday-Monday)

Example #2: Oregon Regionals March 25th and 26th

Kayak.com was cheaper to book round trip Friday to Sunday, $243.40, and Matrix.itasoftware.com was cheaper to book round trip Friday to Monday, $241.50. So now let me try to find a flight the meets the guidelines for cheaper by following my methods. The cheapest one way I found to Portland, OR on Friday, March 24th, was on Matrix.itasoftware.com for $65.20 through JetBlue, which departs from LGB (Long Beach airport), and not LAX. So there is an airport difference here, but that does not bother me, as both airports are convenient for me.

So now let me find a returning flight for Sunday. Matrix.itasoftware.com has found the cheapest flight, but it had a small blunder. As I mentioned earlier, it is mostly accurate, but sometimes its pricing is a bit off. That is why it is important to double check to make sure the listed flight is bookable through the airline's website. Matrix.itasoftware.com had the flight listed for $144.20, but on Spirit.com's website it is actually $139.19. While no one is obviously a fan of Spirit Airlines, it was the cheapest option. A flight from Portland, OR to Los Angeles, CA is $139.19.

5:38 PM	**7:55 PM**	**Nonstop**		Standard	◉ **$139.19**

Your **effective government tax rate** for this selection is 18%.

YOUR ITINERARY

Portland	PDX	Sunday		Departure:	5:38 PM
Los Angeles	LAX	March 26, 2017		Arrival:	7:55 PM

If I were to book one way flights instead of a round trip flight from Los Angeles, CA to Portland, OR for Friday to Sunday, I would save $39.01. The only difference between the two flights are the departure times and the airport. The round trip ticket departs from LAX, while the one way departs from LGB. The return flight flight on Sunday is the exact same one. Now let us look at the other option of leaving on Monday and not Sunday.

Portland – Los Angeles

Monday, March 27		HIDDEN-CITY TRIP — **NO CHECKED BAGS**
✈ **American Airlines 6025**		2:52 pm – 5:29pm
Portland to Los Angeles PDX-LAX Need a hotel in Los Angeles?		2h 37m
Los Angeles LAX		3h 36m layover
✈ **American Airlines 111**		9:05 pm – 10:21pm
Los Angeles to Las Vegas LAX-LAS		1h 16m

$94   [1 Adult ▾] [No Children ▾]   [Book Now!]

As you can see there was a substantial decrease in cost booking one ways instead of round trip, and both your flights would be non stop. The original round trip ticket had a 45 minute layover in San Francisco, CA and departed later. If I were to book one way flights instead of a round trip flight from Los Angeles, CA to Portland, OR for Friday to Monday, I would save $82.50. So here is the recap of the prices for the flights, and how much I paid personally.

1. Booking round trip Friday-Sunday $243.40

2. Booking round trip Friday-Monday $241.50

3. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Sunday $204.39

4. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Monday $159

5. Price I payed when I booked my flight a few months ago $116.20 (Friday-Monday)

Example #3: Utah Regionals April 7th and 8th

$204	jetBlue	**Long Beach (LGB) to Salt Lake City (SLC) — Fri, Apr 7**
		JetBlue 232 Dep: 8:20 am Arr: 11:04 am 1h 44m
	jetBlue	**Salt Lake City (SLC) to Long Beach (LGB) — Sun, Apr 9**
		JetBlue 1631 Dep: 4:20 pm Arr: 5:10 pm 1h 50m

$167	jetBlue	**Long Beach (LGB) to Salt Lake City (SLC) — Fri, Apr 7**
		JetBlue 232 Dep: 8:20 am Arr: 11:04 am 1h 44m
	jetBlue	**Salt Lake City (SLC) to Long Beach (LGB) — Mon, Apr 10**
		JetBlue 1631 Dep: 4:20 pm Arr: 5:10 pm 1h 50m

Matrix.itasoftware.com provided the cheapest round trip tickets for both Friday to Sunday and Friday to Monday. A round trip ticket for Friday to Sunday would cost $203.40, and for Friday to Monday, it would be $166.40. The cheapest one way I found to Salt Lake City, UT on Friday, April 7th, was on Southwest.com for $83.94. This flight though brings up the issue of personal preference, as while this is the cheapest flight for Friday, it includes a 1 hour 20 minute layover in Phoenix, AZ, while you can get a non-stop flight for $98.20 from JetBlue.com (The same Friday flight in our round trip tickets).

– Air   Modify | Remove

APR 7 FRI	**Depart Flt 1732/1653**
	LAX ⇨ SLC
	6:45 AM 12:10 PM

Adult Air fare
Wanna Get Away fare

Cost Breakdown
Adult $83.94 x 1   **$83.94**
Govt. Taxes & Fees
We'll reserve the flight upon
purchase completion.

Trip Total $83.94

Not ready to book yet? Save
this trip and book later.

Save Flight   Checkout

$99 | jetBlue | **Long Beach (LGB) to Salt Lake City (SLC) — Fri, Apr 7**
JetBlue 232 | Dep: 8:20 am | Arr: 11:04 am | 1h 44m

Let us look for the return ticket for Sunday, and this time StudentUniverse.com has found the cheapest flight. A flight from Salt Lake City, UT to Los Angeles, CA is $103.99, and it is the exact same flight as our Sunday return flight in our original round trip ticket.

$104 | Jetblue Airways | SLC 4:20p - LGB 5:10p | 1h 50m | 0

Select
Flight Details ∨

jetBlue | **Jetblue Airways**
Flight 1631
Eqpt type: Airbus A320-100/200 | departs SLC **4:20p**
Sun Apr 9, 2017 | arrives LGB **5:10p**
Sun Apr 9, 2017 | 1h 50m

If I were to book one way flights instead of a round trip flight from Los Angeles, CA to Salt Lake City, UT I would save $15.47 if I went with the Southwest flight that has the layover. If I opted to go with the non stop JetBlue flight instead, I would save a mere $1.21. Although going with the non stop route obviously does not save much money, it just shows why there should never be a need to book round trip in the first place. As I mentioned earlier, it is essentially the same price, but booking a round trip ticket restricts your airline choices. When looking for a return flight on Monday instead, there is not much of a difference.

$69 | jetBlue | **Salt Lake City (SLC) to Long Beach (LGB) — Mon, Apr 10**
JetBlue 1631 | Dep: 4:20 pm | Arr: 5:10 pm | 1h 50m

The results are essentially the same, in that the only way you would save money is if you decided to go with the Southwest flight that has the layover. Otherwise, there would be no price difference between booking round trip and booking one ways. The only other difference is that the Southwest flight departs from LAX, while the JetBlue flights depart from LGB. So it is up to you if it is worth saving $14.26 for an hour and 20 minutes in Phoenix, AZ.

1. Booking round trip Friday-Sunday $203.40

2. Booking round trip Friday-Monday $166.40

3. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Sunday $187.93 (Southwest on Friday and JetBlue on Monday) OR $202.19 (JetBlue for both departing and returning flight)

4. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Monday $152.14

(Southwest on Friday and JetBlue on Monday) OR $166.40 (JetBlue for both departing and returning flight)

5. Price I payed when I booked my flight a few months ago $148.20 (Friday-Monday)

Example #4: Seattle Regionals May 27th and 28th

Kayak.com had the cheaper round trip price for flying Friday to Sunday, $226.40 and Matrix.itasoftware.com had the cheaper price for flying Friday to Monday, $217.60. So based on my guidelines, let us see if we can get there and back for cheaper. StudentUniverse.com has a slightly cheaper ticket than booking directly with JetBlue.com at $120.97, booking directly with JetBlue is $123.40.

$121   Jetblue Airways   LGB 5:33p - SEA 8:08p   2h 35m   0

Select

Flight Details ⌄

	Jetblue Airways	departs LGB **5:33p**	arrives SEA **8:08p**	🕐
jetBlue	Flight 206	Fri May 26, 2017	Fri May 26, 2017	2h 35m
	Eqpt type: Airbus A320-100/200			

We just need our return ticket now for Sunday, and Matrix.itasoftware.com found the cheapest price at $89.20 when booking directly Delta.com.

| **$90** | ▲ | **Seattle (SEA) to Los Angeles (LAX) — Sun, May 28** | | |
| | | Delta 874 | Dep: 8:15 pm   Arr: 11:05 pm   2h 50m |

This flight is actually the same one as the one in the Friday to Sunday round trip ticket, except that the departing flight is now from LGB and not LAX. So booking one ways would save $16.23 over the round trip price. Not a big difference, but I mean saving $16.23 for a little bit more research and time is worth it in my opinion. How about flying out on Monday, would that save even more money? It would seem so, as a return flight from Seattle to Los Angeles on Monday is $73.20.

| **$74** | | **Seattle (SEA) to Los Angeles (LAX) — Mon, May 29** | | |
| | | Alaska 286 | Dep: 5:00 am   Arr: 7:36 am   2h 36m |

So through using my different recommended websites and booking one ways, we would save $23.43 over booking a round trip ticket directly through JetBlue.com. While you would be saving a bit extra money, you have to take into consideration hotels, because they are extremely expensive in Seattle. Down below is the recap for the differences in prices.

1. Booking round trip Friday-Sunday $226.40

2. Booking round trip Friday-Monday $217.60

3. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Sunday $210.70

4. Booking one ways and using my four recommended websites Friday-Monday $194.17

5. Price I payed when I booked my flight a few months ago $142.20 (Friday-Sunday)

Conclusion

As you can see, we saved money on every flight (even if it was only a few dollars) when using alternative websites to Kayak.com, and booking one ways. I hope that you learned something, as I put a ton of time and effort into it. I also do not really benefit from spreading this information, except maybe facing more competitors now at regionals. If you have any questions, need flight advice or need help trying to book a flight you can message me on Twitter [@Alberto310](#). I am always happy to help, and I genuinely enjoy researching, booking, and helping people with finding flights.