

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

This week's best travel bargains around the globe.

Land

• **EF Go Ahead Tours** wants you to enjoy your tax return with **savings of up to \$300** on all 2018 trips around the world. For example, the 10-day **Alaska's National Parks**: Denali & the Kenai Fjords tour departing July 20 costs \$2,999 per person double, down from \$3,299. The tour includes eight nights in hotels; daily breakfasts, one lunch and three dinners; four guided tours; motor coach transportation; and taxes. Book by April 23 by calling 877-620-7785 and request promo code April2018. Info: goaheadtours.com.

• **Kenwood Inn & Spa in Sonoma Valley** has a reopening special following the devastating wildfires in California Wine Country. The Passport to Spring package starts at \$311 per night and includes two **\$50 spa treatment credits, bottle of wine** and Sonoma Passport for two, with deals at more than 60 wineries (\$59 value). Add 14 percent tax and \$35 resort fee. Stay Sunday to Thursday, through June 28. Info: 800-353-6966, kenwoodinn.com.

• **Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach on Florida's West Coast** is offering a Tax Day deal with **savings of up to 30 percent**. Rates vary. For example, a two-night midweek stay in late April starts at about \$536 per couple, including taxes, a savings of \$287. The Escape Tax-tics promo also includes a 20 percent discount on spa services, plus a free drink and appetizer at the hotel's lobby bar. Stay April 17 (Tax Day) till June 30, except May 25-27 blackout dates. Book by May 25. Info: 727-281-9500, wyndhamgrandclearwater.com/offers.



MICHAEL ABID/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Hotel lights illuminate the coast of Barcelona. Save on flights there with sale fares on Turkish Airlines.

Sea

• **Seabourn** is offering a sale with **upgrades and shipboard credits**. For example, on the 10-night **Canadian Maritimes & New England** cruise departing Boston on Oct. 11, book an ocean-view suite for \$4,999 per person double, plus \$385 in taxes, and receive an upgrade to a veranda suite — a savings of about \$500. Also, receive a \$300 shipboard credit per suite. Book the Extraordinary Opportunity Event by June 12. The deal applies to 24 voyages in 2018 and 2019. Info: 866-755-5619, seabourn.com.

Air

• **Virgin Atlantic** has a sale on flights from Washington **Dulles**

to London Heathrow. Round-trip fare starts at **\$680**, including taxes, for Economy Light (some restrictions apply, such as no free checked bag) and \$770 for Economy Classic. Depart June 23-Aug. 21 and return Aug. 8-Sept. 9. Book by April 26; minimum Sunday night stay required. Other airlines are matching, but summer travel to London can often cost more than \$1,000. Info: virginatlantic.com/us/en.

• **Turkish Airlines** has **sale fares** from Washington Dulles to 10 cities in **Europe, Africa and the Middle East**. For example, the round-trip fare to Barcelona starts at \$781, including taxes; the fare on other airlines starts at about \$950. Restrictions include three-day advance purchase. Book by April 26 at turkishairlines.com. Travel by May 15.

Package

• **Save \$520** on Gate 1 Travel's **Romantic Italy** tour. The 11-night package starts at \$3,309 per person double for the July 2 departure. Tour includes round-trip air from New York to Milan, with return from Naples; 11 nights' lodging; 18 meals; guided tours; airport transfers; and taxes. Book by April 15. Use promo code WPECTY520. Info: 800-682-333, gate1travel.com/europe/italy/2018/escorted/italy-tours-13dromit18.aspx. *Carol Sottili, Andrea Sachs*

Prices were verified at press time Thursday, but deals sell out and availability is not guaranteed. Some restrictions may apply.

BREAKFAST-LUNCH-DINNER

Cuisine-hopping in 'Beer Town'

BY DINA MISHEV

Locals have dubbed Bend "Beer Town USA" and "Beervana." There are more than 20 craft breweries in this high desert town of 91,000 in central Oregon. But man cannot subsist on beer alone, even if it's some of the best beer in the country. Whether the city's brewers have set a high bar for quality or because Bend producers and growers benefit from the highest average number of sunny days in the state — 158, with an additional 105 days that are "mostly sunny" — restaurants here innovate and execute far above what you'd expect for a former mill town. Work up your appetite by walking along the Deschutes River, which flows through downtown, hiking a nearby volcano or mountain biking.

BREAKFAST



MCKAY COTTAGE

Try not to stuff yourself with the samples of baked goods that are often out near the pastry case just inside the entrance of **McKay Cottage** (themckaycottage.com; 62910 O.B. Riley Rd.; 541-383-2697) . . . even if you're here at 9 a.m. on the weekend and there's a 45-minute wait for a table. You'll want the room to eat every last bite of Carlton's Benny (\$13.50), which tweaks the traditional dish by using a rosemary English muffin and Dijon hollandaise. If you prefer your breakfast sweet, go ahead and get a pecan sticky bun, or go big with the French toast (\$10.95), which doesn't bother with standard bread: McKay Cottage uses croissants. Order the whole plate topped with bananas (\$1.95) or strawberries (\$2.25). When is it okay to sample the sweets here? I allow myself a bite when the wait for a shaded table on the cottage's lawn is twice as long as for an inside table. The inside of this historic Craftsman bungalow is grandmotherly cute, but there's no beating an alfresco breakfast here.

LUNCH



JAMES FINK / WILD OREGON FOODS

Yes, it's worth the drive south of downtown to the land of such chains as Subway and KFC and the Bend Factory Stores for lunch at **Wild Oregon Foods** (wildoregonfoods.com; 61334 S. Highway 97, Suite 360; 541-668-6344). Owners Sarah and James Fink were fine being sandwiched between the Columbia and Nike outlets if it meant they could serve locally sourced foods at a modest price point. The same thinking went into the decor — "The minute you start doing something fancy, you have to recoup those costs," Sarah says. One bite of the Rachel (roasted turkey) and Reuben (braised corned beef) sliders (mix and match three for \$12), served with house-made smoked aioli, pickled cabbage and Havarti on marble rye buns, and you won't care that the tables, chairs and carpet are left over from the previous restaurant in the space. James's brother Michael manages the bar, which has a lunch-friendly cocktail program with "medicinal elixirs" such as the Beet Gingeration (\$9, Cascade Potato Vodka, beet and ginger juice, ginger beer, and lemon) and the Golden Temple (\$9, Sailor Jerry Spiced Rum, carrot/turmeric juice, turmeric and ginger water kefir, and coconut milk).

DINNER



ZYDECO KITCHEN AND COCKTAILS

Zydeco Kitchen and Cocktails (zydecokitchen.com; 919 NW Bond St.; 541-312-2899) has an expansive wine list highlighting Northwest wineries, bottles of beer from some of Bend's most interesting craft breweries, such as Ale Apothecary, and its cocktails sometimes feature such local distilleries as Crater Lake Spirits (in the Tree Hugger, \$11, Crater Lake Gin, Clear Creek Douglas Fir Liqueur, lime). So arrive before your reservation and enjoy a drink at the bar, which has a casually sophisticated vibe, before moving on to dinner. When it's time to eat, dive right into Zydeco's Creole- and Cajun-inspired menu with artichoke and corn fritters (\$10) and barbecue shrimp served with a Southern grit cake (\$14). You might be able to persuade your dining partner to go halves on entrees so you don't have to choose between the shrimp etouffee with basmati rice (\$23) and the blackened redfish (\$27), topped with a house-made sauce.

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TRAVEL

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Top-shelf advice on 'top-floor' surcharges



The Navigator
CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Travel fees are getting more creative than ever — and so should you.

When it comes to new travel fees, the sky's the limit. Or, in Liz Pollock's case, the fourth floor of her hotel. Pollock recently checked out of the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Golf Resort Palm Springs Area in Cathedral City, Calif., and discovered a mysterious fee on her hotel bill: a "top-floor" surcharge of \$7 per night.

"I didn't request a room on the fourth floor," says Pollock, a benefits manager for a clothing company in San Francisco. "And I didn't find out about the fee until after I'd checked out." Here's the thing about the top-floor rooms at the DoubleTree: They're more or less the same as the rooms on the third floor, except that they "allow for the best view of the surrounding area," according to Robert Hatfield, the hotel's director of sales.

A "top-floor" charge? Why not? To squeeze a little more revenue from their guests, travel companies are getting creative. The only way to fight back is to become just as creative about fighting them.

"Hidden fees are taking advantage of consumers across the country," says Bret Bonnet, co-founder of People for Honest Pricing, an organization that lobbies for fair pricing and certifies businesses that practice honest pricing. "While they're definitely not a new phenomenon, they seem to be getting worse."

Pollock, who was in Cathedral City for just a few days, the "top-floor" fee was particularly annoying.

The DoubleTree had already billed her a mandatory \$25-per-night resort fee, which covered on-site self-parking and Internet "even though Hilton Honors members are supposed to receive free Internet if they book through Hilton." But it really topped itself with the top-floor charge. Hilton hadn't warned her about the fee before the reservation and didn't inform her about it until long after she'd left the property.

That's not how it's supposed to work, Hatfield says.

"A guest will receive a pre-arrival email with the upgrade options available to them and what the additional charge for those items are," he explains. "Once the guest chooses the upgrade option, the resort is notified. Once we make the upgrades, the guest is then notified via email. This all happens before arrival."

Pollock solved the mystery when she asked her husband about the charge.

"Apparently, sometime after the reservation was made back in October, he went on the Hilton website and noticed there was an 'upgrade' option at the bottom of the page. He clicked 'yes' to upgrade to the fourth floor," she says, without noticing that he would incur an additional charge. "He's a huge golfer and wanted as big a view of the golf course as he could get."

Sometimes, old fees hide under new names. For example, the \$20-a-day resort fee is called a "guest amenity fee" at the Le Meridien Delfina Santa Monica. In San Francisco, you're more

likely to find an "urban fee" or "facility fee" on your bill. It's all the same thing — just don't use the "R" word.

Not to be outdone, American Airlines and United Airlines last year quietly implemented "gate handling" and "gate service" fees of \$25 to check your bag when you board if there's no room on the plane for your carry-on and you're flying on a "basic" economy class ticket. Wouldn't want to call these luggage fees, since passengers will do almost anything to avoid those.

Michael McCall, a professor of hospitality business at Michigan State University, says travelers knew about the old fees, thanks to press accounts and word of mouth. The workaround: rename them. "The concept often works," he says.

If you're on a cruise, look out for one of the newest "gotchas" — if one person buys an alcohol package, the cruise line requires every adult in the same cabin to buy one.

For example, Royal Caribbean's "deluxe drink package" lets you choose between unlimited cocktails, beer, wine, nonalcoholic beverages, premium coffee, tea and bottled water, for a flat fee of \$55 per person, per day. "So if a husband wants to get a package because he likes to have drinks on the ship and a wife doesn't want a drop of alcohol, too bad," says Tanner Callais, founder of the cruise site Cruzely.com.

Fees are a big deal in travel, at least to the companies that charge them.

Domestic airlines collected \$4.6 billion in baggage fees in 2016, the last year for which numbers are available. Hotels collected \$2.7 billion in fees last year. To extract them from guests, travel companies often fail to adequately disclose them or don't reveal them until you receive a bill, which can retroactively take the fun out of any trip.

What's the antidote to these fees? Assume you'll get a creative surcharge the next time you travel.

Use all of the proven tactics and look for new ways around them. Those include reading the fine print on every purchase, questioning any fees you don't recognize and taking aggressive measures to remove them from your bill.

"You should always demand to know what exactly you're paying for," Bonnet says. "If it seems fraudulent, sometimes even refusing to pay the fee is warranted."

If you can prove a hotel or airline failed to disclose a mandatory fee, you have a reasonably good case. I've seen credit cards side with consumers when they disputed the charges.

But perhaps the best way to avoid creative new fees is to never do business with an airline, car rental company, hotel, or cruise line that imposes them.

If you encounter a problematic fee, tell everyone. If you see that a company charges a creative fee, avoid it.

If enough travelers do the same, these new junk fees may end up in the trash.

Elliott is a consumer advocate, journalist and co-founder of the advocacy group Travelers United. Email him at chris@elliott.org.

SIGN LANGUAGE



GARY ARLEN

Spotted in Tucson by Gary Arlen of Bethesda, Md.

Have you seen an amusing sign in your travels? Read on.

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