

Travel Trends That Will Shape 2010

by [Sarah Pascarella](#), SmarterTravel.com Staff - January 9, 2010



As we round the corner into a new year, it's a good opportunity to reflect upon the big trends and behaviors likely to shape the year ahead. While there's no such thing as a crystal ball, I did speak with fellow industry experts to collect their thoughts on what to expect in the world of travel. Will good deals be plentiful in the coming year? Which destinations will offer good values for your vacation dollars? Wonder no more, dear travelers. Read on for a look at the most significant trends likely to affect your travels in 2010.

Air Travel

"When it comes to airfare, 2010 will not be as good a year for last-minute deals as 2009 was," says Clem Bason, president of the [Hotwire Group](#). "Given the signs of price stability that we're starting to see, last-minute fare sales will become less frequent. When they do occur, they will likely last for shorter periods, and there will be some risk involved in waiting. The best strategy for 2010 is to book immediately when you see a good deal, and there will be good deals."

"I recommend that people start their shopping in advance," says Joel Grus, fareologist, [Bing Travel](#). "Buying early is typically the right way to go."

If you're planning to visit Europe in 2010, booking when you find a fare that's right for your budget is essential for saving money. Gabriel Leung, fare analyst manager for SmarterTravel's sister site, [Airfarewatchdog](#), observes that Europe flights have been more expensive than usual. "Fares to Europe, especially to London and Paris, have been pretty expensive lately compared to the same time last year ... The airlines [may be] waiting to see if they fill seats at this early point. They might drop spring/summer fares lower as they realize the public is holding out and won't buy at current rates." If travelers don't purchase these higher-priced Europe fares, Leung predicts we might see lower fares starting in late winter.

So, in the coming year, advance planning will be the key to saving money on airfare. But you should also be aware that post-ticket purchase fees won't be going away, either. [Baggage fees](#)

brought in much-needed revenue for the airlines in 2009, and you can believe that any practice that increases the bottom line will be championed again in 2010, despite how unpopular it may be with consumers. So while you should definitely expect the additional fees for air travel, know that with some savvy planning, you may not necessarily be beholden to them. Check out Airfare Editor Patricia Magana's tips for [fee-free flying](#) to find out the best ways to avoid those extra surcharges the next time you fly.

Overall, though, you should be able to find a deal (albeit with plenty of advance planning). "Airfare has already begun to stabilize, and that trend should continue," says Bason. "The latest rounds of capacity cuts by national carriers appear to be compensating for the slow recovery in business travel. It's also becoming noticeable that many airlines are cutting back more flights from point-to-point airports and routing them through main hubs. Price stability means that once travel recovery begins to set in, airfare could rise, but this doesn't look like it will be substantial yet."

Hotels

For hotel deals in 2010, the mantra is "ask and you shall receive." The hotel industry is hurting, and that means great perks and prices for travelers, especially in destinations where developers were hit hard by the recession. Want an upgrade, a discount, or some extra perks folded into your room rate? Be sure to call and ask the management what they can do for you. This year, you're likely to get it.

"Trading up for luxury should be easier than ever," says Bason. "High-end hotels have experienced some of the highest vacancy rates, resulting in considerable price reductions. In fact, 4.5-star [properties'] rates were down 17 percent and five-star rates were down an amazing 32 percent in 2009. As a result, the price levels of five- and four-star hotels have become increasingly compressed. Consumers will be able to trade up across the board to luxury rooms without breaking the bank, especially in the first half of the year."


Look for great hotel deals all around California and Florida, as well as more specifically in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, and San Francisco—places where there are a glut of hotel rooms for tourism and convention visitors that may not be filled due to reduced activity for both sectors.

"The overabundance of hotels means that many of these rooms will go unsold, and properties will know that well in advance of stay dates," says Bason. "As a result, we're seeing great discounts offered further and further out. Travelers won't have to wait until last-minute hotel deals this year. They should feel free to book when they want, and when it suits them."

Popular spring break destinations will also have extra hotel and vacation package deals this year, and previously discerning destinations (read: those less hospitable to spring breakers) may be more willing to accept spring break revenue in 2010. Students can expect to find great deals at hotels in Panama City, Florida; Miami; Orlando; Las Vegas; San Diego; Scottsdale, Arizona; and South Padre Island, Texas.

Destinations to Watch

If you're undecided about where to go in 2010, first take a look at Senior Editor Christine Sarkis' [destinations to watch](#) for the coming year. Additionally, Grus recommends looking for places where low-cost carriers have expanded or added routes, as deals will follow. "In terms of airfare, Milwaukee [has] gotten expanded service from Southwest and AirTran, so fares are down to that city. Boston is also down a fair amount compared to last year," he says.



Of course, with the Winter Olympics rapidly approaching, Vancouver has been thrust onto the world stage. Canadian ski destinations are looking to capitalize on that extra publicity, and have put together deals to entice winter sports athletes and spectators. Check out [Ski Canada](#) for the latest deals and promotions, and be creative with your destination picks. While you may not find too many deals in Vancouver, there are plenty of alternatives in Alberta (Banff, Lake Louise), Quebec (Mont Tremblant), and British Columbia (Whistler), among others.

Adventure travelers will want to book early to reserve a space for this year's most popular active destinations. Cynthia Dunbar, REI Adventures program manager, reports that its family-oriented trips to the Galapagos Islands are almost sold out, and there's also strong interest for excursions to Croatia, Italy, and Peru. If you're planning adventure-themed trips to these destinations, it's wise to book early to get the best prices and availability.

Finally, SmarterTravel's sister site [TripAdvisor](#) has put together a list of the top five international and top five domestic [destinations to watch](#) in 2010, based on increased searches and postings on the site over 2009. Hotspots include Troncones, Mexico; Patara, Turkey; Hyannis, Massachusetts; Waimea, Hawaii; and Seward, Alaska.

Your Turn

What trends have you been seeing regarding 2010 travel? Share your knowledge by submitting a comment below!

(Editor's Note: SmarterTravel.com is a member of the TripAdvisor Media Network, an operating company of Expedia, Inc. Expedia, Inc. also owns Hotwire.)