

MORE THAN YOU BARGAINED FOR

Don't give up hope for winter fun in the sun — there's actually a travel upswing to that nasty market downturn. On the misery-loves-company front, there are so many people reluctant to travel right now that hotels and resorts are altering policies to make getting out of town more desirable. Look for cash-back rebates, the waiving of cancellation fees, discounts for longer stays and best-price guarantees being offered by travel operators. Plus, some single supplements are disappearing, providing even more incentive for solo travel.

Another element of a buyer's market is the ability to make deals. If you find it tacky to ask a hotel or cruise line whether it has given you its best offer, you may want to get over that concern, or end up paying full fare. Sharpen your bartering skills and don't be afraid to inquire, "Is that your best price?" As with all bargaining, you have to be willing to walk away. You can always inquire elsewhere if you can get a better price, and then ask your preferred hotel to match it. You might be pleasantly surprised.



DEAL OR NO DEAL



Has this happened to you? While chatting with your airplane seat-mate, you discover she actually paid half as much as you for the same seat. Those days may be over. Check out **Orbitz.com**, for example, which employs an airfare savings tracker called Orbitz Price Assurance. What this means: If you book a ticket on the site and someone else books the same airline ticket on Orbitz.com for less, you're automatically refunded the fare difference. **Yapta.com** does basically the same thing: It tracks prices and lets travellers know about fare drops even if the ticket has already been purchased. To claim the difference, travellers can either call the airline themselves to ask for a travel credit or, for \$19, Yapta will do the footwork. Beat that, Howie!



CYBER STEALS

When two fiftysomething Canadian women decided to launch a travel website over seven years ago, they had lots of print competition. But today, the duo is viewed as among the country's pre-eminent travel insiders. Suzanne Christie and Nina Slawek cut their web teeth with **Open Jaw: The Travel Industry's Biggest Mouthpiece** (openjaw.com).

Their other site, **Take Off Eh! Non-Stop Travel Intelligence** (takeoffeh.com), launched a year ago, is more consumer-focused. For example, on the week we logged on we discovered a 33 per cent discount deal on one of the Caribbean's most exclusive beach resorts. You'll also find à la minute travel news, info on the latest trends, "Off the Record"

insights, travel tips galore, and scoops such as "It's time to get real about bargain basement travel." Christie says she's not afraid to tell it like it is. "If a place or product doesn't measure up, we want to be able to say so. But if it's wonderful, we want to tell people about that too. Lying around on a beach is great, as long as it's the right beach."