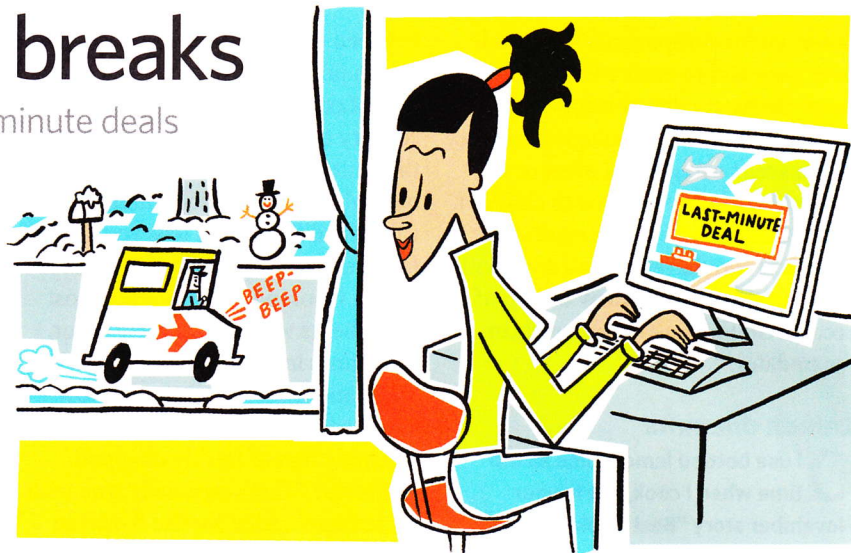


# Spring price breaks

New ways to nab juicy last-minute deals

There's still time to get great bargains on a springtime getaway. The Internet is loaded with tools to snag last-minute deals. Besides checking old standbys like Expedia and Orbitz, here are ways to find that perfect vacation for less. Before you book, go to user-review sites like TripAdvisor as well as the Better Business Bureau's, at [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org).



**1. Click here.** Start with search engines like Kayak.com and Bing, discounters Priceline and Hotwire, and other sites specializing in cheap travel deals, such as Cheaptickets.com, LastMinuteTravel.com, and Travelocity's new last-minute travel section. LastMinuteTravel.com now lets you compare up to five hotels side by side. But there, as at Priceline or Hotwire, you won't learn your hotel's or airline's name until after you book. If you're looking to go somewhere that feels more like home, check out PackLate.com, which lists last-minute bargains on vacation condo and home rentals. The closer to the check-in date you book, the better the deal. We found a five-bedroom home with a pool 5 miles from Disney World for just \$77.22 per night. Prefer slopes to sand? At Expedia's new Ski Store ([www.expedia.com/ski](http://www.expedia.com/ski)) you can book ski trips and get snowfall reports, slope maps, and live webcams for a real-time picture of conditions. Try the Deals & Offers ticker, which lets you scroll through the travel site's best bargains.

**2. Sign up for alerts.** Chances are you already get e-mail notices about last-minute deals from your

favorite airlines and hotel chains, especially if you belong to their loyalty programs. But lots of other sites can help. Type in your itinerary at FareCompare.com and it will e-mail you if a flight price drops. A new tool at the site is the Where-to-go Getaway Map for finding bargain fares worldwide. Subscribers to FareCompare—and other online travel sites like TravelZoo, CheapOair, BudgetTravel, and BookIt—can get weekly lists of new package deals. For getaways close to home, try Travelzoo's new Deal Locator. Type in a ZIP code to find offers within, say, a 2-hour drive.

**3. Use social networks.** Many travel providers tweet deals. Some examples: @IHG\_Deals, @ThriftyCars, @FrontierSale or @TheBestWestern and @JetBlueCheeps, where we spotted a \$10 one-way fare from San Francisco to Long Beach, Calif. But act fast. Rooms and seats are limited; JetBlue has only 25 special-fare seats per flight. By some estimates @UnitedAirlines' Tware fares usually sell out within 2 hours. It's also worth checking if your preferred airlines and hotels have Facebook pages;

some are starting to post deals there, too. Group-buying travel sites are also popping up. Recently launched TripAlertz doesn't have much of a track record yet but it posts deals every Tuesday. Packages start at 30 percent off, and if enough people sign up, the price drops another 10 to 20 percent.

**4. Hop on flash sales.** Another new way to find last-minute deals is to check invitation-only travel sites. Like sample-sale sites with limited-time bargains on designer clothing, they sell discounted luxury travel packages. Each week, Voyage Privé e-mails subscribers 10 to 15 new travel offers with discounts of up to 75 percent. SniqueAway says it will save you 30 to 65 percent at four- and five-star hotels. We found a deluxe suite at AAA Four Diamond Sivory Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic for \$135 per night (discounted from \$275), including tax and service charges. To get on the mailing list of those sites if you don't know anyone to "invite" you, use our special ShopSmart links. Sign up at [www.sniqueaway.com/invite/ShopSmart](http://www.sniqueaway.com/invite/ShopSmart) or [www.voyageprive.com/invitation/ShopSmart251191](http://www.voyageprive.com/invitation/ShopSmart251191).

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