

[Airline travel](#)

If you're flying over the holidays, you might end up unwrapping some unexpected items, but they're not anything you'd ever put on a wish list. Rather, these "presents" are the add-on fees that airlines charge for all kinds of things that used to be free, including choosing your seat and checking a bag. The fees can seriously jack up the cost of tickets.

What the airline industry euphemistically calls “ancillary revenue” is expected to [add \\$36.1 billion](#) (PDF) to their coffers worldwide this year, so you can probably expect more—and higher—fees ahead. Last year as part of our [review of the best and worst airlines](#), 40 percent of nearly 15,000 Consumer Reports readers cited fees as the major reason they're flying less.

As annoying as the fees are, what makes the situation unacceptable is that airlines have made it hard—and sometimes practically impossible—for you to add up all these charges before you make a reservation, in the way you can tally all the options when buying a car.

This problem is especially bad when you book through a travel site or travel agency, since you typically can't see unlisted fees in an apples-to-apples fashion, preventing you from doing true comparison shopping.

Consumers Union believes that the U.S. Department of Transportation should require airlines to be more transparent about fees. We're pushing for rules to ensure that you can see and compare the real costs of airline tickets before you buy.

In the meantime, make sure you never book a flight—through any channel—until you're satisfied that you've obtained the bottom-line fare, including all taxes, surcharges, and fees. If you're unsure, contact the airline or your travel agent directly.

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