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Take The Scenic Route And Save

Deal of the Day by [Kelli B. Grant](#)

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The nasty fees and rampant delays at the airport are enough to make any traveler think twice about flying the not-so-friendly skies. While some are cutting travel altogether, others are hitting the road, opting instead to take a train or bus.

In the past year, nearly one-third of travelers bowed out of taking a flight due to baggage and [other fees](#), [flight delays](#) and security restrictions, according to the Travel Industry Association, a trade group. "The fees are the straw that broke the camel's back," says Anne Banas, executive editor for [SmarterTravel.com](#), a travel advice site. Among the latest hits: Delta ([DAL](#): 6.81*, -0.19, -2.71%) announced earlier this month it would begin charging \$15 for a first checked bag, while U.S. Airways ([LCC](#): 4.66*, -0.24, -4.89%) plans to sell pillows and blankets for \$7.

Those airsick travelers have been a boon for bus services and train lines. A recent report from AAA predicts that while air travel over Thanksgiving [holiday](#) will be down by some 7%, train and bus travel will climb almost 6%. **For 2008 overall, the American Bus Association predicts that scheduled bus trips will be up 13% to 16% year over year. Meanwhile, Amtrak says its ridership jumped 11% during the 12 months ending Sept. 30, with nearly 2.8 million more passengers riding the rails.**

This boost in ridership can't be wholly attributed to the disgruntled air traveler runoff. A slew of new discount bus services serving the Midwest and East Coast, such as [BoltBus](#), [MegaBus](#) and [NeOn](#), has breathed new life into budget travel just when consumers are feeling especially budget-crunched, says Joseph P. Schwieterman, a transportation expert and professor of public service management at DePaul University. Tickets start at \$1 each way, but riders don't have to skimp. The buses offer perks like free wireless Internet and extra legroom.

Even when the cost of a ticket is comparable to that of a flight (as is sometimes the case with Amtrak's Acela express train), the reduced-hassle factor of taking a bus or train can more than make up for any added costs. Bus and train stations tend to be centrally located, eliminating the need for a lengthy (and pricey) cab or shuttle ride from the airport, says David Lytle, editorial director for [Frommers.com](#). Luggage limitations are lax as well, and delays (while common) are rarely crippling. "It's a question of: 'Do I want to grab an hour-long flight and add on the cost of a cab and luggage fees and allow extra time for delays and to get through security? Or do I want to sit on the bus and read?'" says Lytle.

Feel like hitting the road on your next vacation? Use these four tips to ensure you're getting the best deal on your next bus or train trip:

Book early

Don't think you can just show up at the gate expecting to purchase a ticket for the next bus to leave the station -- all the new discount lines require advance [reservations](#). "The sooner you book, the lower your cost will be," says Lytle. BoltBus, MegaBus and NeOn, for example, all offer fares of \$1 to the first passenger to book a given trip. As seats fill up, prices increase, up to \$25 maximum on both routes.

It also helps to be firm in your travel plans. Like airlines, many services charge a change fee to swap departure times. (It's nominal, however -- on Megabus it's \$1.)

Dig up discounts

Train and bus operators are more apt than airlines to offer sales and online discount codes, says Banas, so search the service's web site, as well as [coupon code sites](#) like [RetailMeNot.com](#) and [CouponCabin.com](#) before you book. Megabus recently announced it would give away 100,000 free seats to consumers who use coupon code "greenbus" at checkout for travel, between January 14 through March 18. Also, seek out discounts associated with certain memberships or special groups. Amtrak, for example, offers 10% off to members of AAA and military personnel, 15% off for students and half-price fares for children age 15 and younger.

Join the (loyalty) club

Join free loyalty programs, which offer perks even if you're not a [frequent traveler](#). Just signing up for Greyhound's Road Rewards gets you a 10% discount on your next ticket, and the opportunity to earn points toward free trips. Amtrak extends 500 bonus points for registering, plus two points per dollar spent on fares -- redeemable for everything from free trips (5,000 points and up) to movie tickets (2,500 points).

Assess amenities

Forget spending hours watching the scenery through the train window. The latest buses and trains offer consumers the chance to stay wired and entertained throughout the entire ride, says Schwieterman.

BoltBus, MegaBus and NeOn offer [free wireless Internet](#). "It's literally the first new bus amenity for travelers in 40 years ... since the introduction of lights over seats," he says. Amtrak, NeOn and BoltBus also have electric outlets to plug in gadgets and laptops.

If you forgot to pack a bag launch, Amtrak hosts snack cars with takeaway and sit-down fare. And, on many routes, there are quiet cars for passengers who want to avoid

overhearing people's cellphone conversations and other noise. (On some of its scenic routes, Amtrak also hosts [National Park Service](#)

volunteers who can offer commentary on the passing scenery.) Most bus services offer movies, and some even let you vote on which one to watch.

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