

Free airfare The misleading concept

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There is nothing like free airfare. It is the most misleading concept because no airline can afford to fly travelers free. The airlines, as special cases, may carry troops in a national emergency or ferry emergency personnel as a goodwill gesture but they don't hand out tickets free of cost.

There are some travelers who have found some loopholes in airline rules which they exploit to force airlines to give them a free passage. One is overbooked flights. These travelers avoid checking in till the flight is full. They then insist that they should be booked on the next available flight, and allowed to travel free. The flights, where it happens most, are the international flights that use multiple travel agents to book tickets.

Some travelers also demand free passage in case of missed connections. But once again it is on account of an operational problem that an airline awards a free passage. A passenger cannot, as a right, demand that the airlines sell free tickets.

Another way of getting a free passage is to use your flying miles. But once again these flying miles are not free; they are bonuses that you have earned over a period of time. Such tickets can at best be described as a benefit or a perk that is used by airlines to build customer loyalty.

Interestingly, luxury cruise services bundle free air ticket as part of their fares. This is a promotional tactic used by luxury passenger liners to promote their tour packages. The value of the ticket depends on the kind of cruise package that the passenger buys.

Similarly, some hotels and tour operators are ready to absorb the cost of air ticket if you buy a holiday package from them. But once again these cannot be called free tickets.