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Budget travel tips and advice from a pro

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Mark Drusch is the new chief supplier relations officer for CheapOair, one of the top 10 largest online booking sites for airfares, hotels, car rentals, and vacation packages. As a 20-year travel industry veteran, with former executive roles at Continental Airlines, Delta Airlines, and Lufthansa, Drusch was happy to share general travel advice, budget travel forecasts, and tips.

Q. What are some strategies that people can use to get the best deals for travel throughout the year?

A. Some strategies haven't changed. Number one is to always book as far in advance as possible. If you're booking leisure flights, try to avoid peak business travel days Monday and Friday. For a three-day weekend, try and leave before Friday or after Monday.

Q. What strategies have changed?

A. One major change, a good one, is that airline loyalty alliance programs are becoming more integrated. It's easier to travel anywhere across the globe with upgrades and preferred seats.

Also, it's always good to check online travel agencies, like CheapOair and others, because they have access to all the inventory that's out there, and show a better selection of deals.

Q. Can social media be used to find competitive fares?

A. A lot of companies use social media sites like Twitter and Facebook to alert people to good deals that they then can share. Remember, special deals go quickly. Inventory disappears quickly so if you see a good deal, jump on it.

Q. Any tips for how best to navigate through security with carry-on items?

A. Simple tips. Wear shoes you don't lace. Don't wear a belt. Take an iPad rather than a laptop, as it doesn't have to come out of your bag. Women in heels may want to bring socks so they don't have to walk around barefoot. And always remember to double



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check to make sure you pick up everything you put in the bins. I often hear the TSA agent calling out, "Who left a cellphone?"

Q. Any idea about what destinations will be this winter's travel hot spots?

A. Latin American countries continue to show growth. Central America is a very attractive destination, developing eco-centric travel in places like Costa Rica and Panama. We're also seeing increased bookings for Greece, Italy, and Spain, in that order.

Q. Any undervalued locations?

A. Colombian cities like Medellin and Cartagena are considered safe again, and cheap. Cartagena has UNESCO sites and wonderful beaches. Also places like Peru and Ecuador are overlooked. You can have a vacation that's

experimental and educational.

Q. Do you have any recommendations for a budget vacation?

A. Aside from Latin and Central America? The euro is down 10 to 12 percent from last year at this time. If you consider Europe, October and November are the perfect times to travel, even better than in spring when it can rain.

Q. What's the forecast for the airline industry as 2012 turns into 2013?

A. Airline seats correlate to oil prices. As oil prices go up, airfares go up. I can't predict the price of oil. I can say the industry will continue to exercise discipline and constraint in terms of capacity.

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