

Q+A

I TEND TO BOOK AT THE LAST MINUTE. HOW DO I STAY SPONTANEOUS, BUT SKIP CRAZY COSTS AND STILL TRAVEL IN COMFORT?

Thanks to the ability to plan a trip with a few clicks, many travelers are taking your approach. Luckily, companies are making it cheaper than ever to let your free-spirit fly.



Mobilize discounts

If you're looking to organize a spur-of-the-moment getaway, the odds are that most of the tools you need are already in the palm of your hand. According to ITB Berlin's 2014 data, travelers are most likely to make spontaneous trip decisions via smartphones or tablets: a full 70 percent of hotel bookings made on mobile devices are for reservations beginning a mere 24 hours or less in advance.

That may well be because there are a plenty of apps and websites that cater specifically to capricious globetrotters. The pioneer of the genre is **HotelTonight**, an easy-to-navigate app that got its start by offering steep discounts on same-day hotel reservations, though it recently increased its booking window to up to seven days out. Unfortunately, although the app has some steals in Europe and North America, it has yet to conquer Asia. If you're staying within the region, you're better off going with the similar app **HotelQuickly**, which has savings on same-day bookings in Australia, New Zealand and most of Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the mobile-only **CheckInTonight.asia**, which claims to save customers up to 70 percent, offers discounts on same-day bookings in 18 locations throughout seven Southeast Asian countries. The website **LateStays** (latestays.com) also specializes in Asia and allows you to screen results by neighborhoods within cities. In other words, if you'd rather steer clear of Bangkok's notorious backpacker-land, Khao San Road, the site will guide you to less flip-flop-friendly parts of town.

You probably know about **Travelzoo** (travelzoo.com), which

showcases time-sensitive deals on hotels and tours around the world. A recent search netted bargains including a five-star Bangkok hotel at nearly half price, more than 60 percent off of a luxury Shanghai stay, and a pool villa in Ubud, for 40 percent of its original rate. The savings can be significant, but it may require some patience to sift through it all.

Get flexible with flights

If you can afford to pick up and go at a moment's notice, you can land unbelievable discounts on the flight, as well. The new app **Hitlist** (hitlistapp.com), from TripCommon, lets you enter the places on your wanderlust wishlist and then sends you push alerts when there are ticket deals there—which they break into the categories of “good,” “great” and “spectacular.” Classic sites **LMT** (lastminutetravel.com) and **lastminute.com** also have discounted options in Asia. One of the best tools to use though is that oldie-but-goodie **Priceline** (priceline.com), which can save you up to 40 percent. Our favorite feature is the website's Name Your Own Price section, which lets you do just that: you pick your dates, departure and destination, and say how much you'd be willing to shell out for a ticket. If an airline agrees to your price, the website will automatically book the tickets for you. The catch is that you won't know your exact travel times until the *very* last minute... but for some that might just add to the adventure.

Cut your losses

Let's say you were planning to island hop from Koh Phi Phi to Phuket, but are having so much fun at your first destination that you can't bear to leave. Even if you've

already pre-paid for your presumed next hotel and it's non-refundable, there's still a chance that you can get some of your money back. **Cancelon** (cancelon.com) will let you sell your booking for a reduced rate. The site takes a 10 percent cut, but you'll still avoid losing everything.

If you need to ditch a non-refundable plane ticket, first make sure you read the fine print; “non-refundable” doesn't always mean “immutable.” Consider whether you'll be able to travel to that original destination at any point in the future, because many airlines allow you to change your flights dates—for a fee—on even the lowest fare classes. Or, you might want to phone a friend: budget Thai carrier **Nok Air** (nokair.com), for example, allows you to change the passenger's name on a ticket for minimal cost. But if you just want to bail and move on, **ChangeYourFlight** (changeyourflight.com) lets you request a partial refund from your airline, which will then try to resell the ticket at a reduced rate. Unfortunately, it only works with a relatively short list of partner airlines—for now, their Asian carriers include the Singapore-based Scoot Airlines and Malaysia Airlines' low-cost subsidiary Firefly, though they hope to add others in the near future.

Reach out

Finally, never be shy to reach out directly to hotels and see if there's anything available. Follow your favorite brands or boutiques on social media networks and drop them a polite tweet before you're planning to be in their extended neighborhood. If it's off-peak season and there are extra rooms to fill, you never know what savings they might be able to offer. +