



Low cost & charter airlines

Low cost airlines make up an ever-growing share of the global airline market.

Low cost airlines (also known as no-frills, discount and budget airlines due to the low ticket prices they offer) are now a mainstay of domestic and international air travel. Low cost airlines took-off in 1978 with aviation deregulation and now account for 30% of the global airline market in terms of seat volume and as much as 50% of the market in Europe.

Charter airlines are contracted by tour operators to fly their passengers to their holiday destinations. Charter flights will typically operate one or two days a week and destinations will change with the seasons. Many of the features of their service will be similar to those of low cost airlines. Charter flights can be found not only to the popular European holiday spots such as Spain and Greece but also further a field to the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and even North America.

What can I expect when flying with a low cost or charter airline?

Low cost airlines offer a similar service to other airlines but with no frills, so you need to add the cost of any amenities you want to the airfare price. Low cost airlines also rarely offer frequent flyer or loyalty programs.

What hidden costs can there be?

Low cost and charter airlines boost their airfare income by selling food and drinks on board and charging for all check-in baggage, with strict carry-on luggage restrictions. Most tickets are non-refundable and non-changeable. Flights are tightly scheduled with check-in deadlines strictly enforced: show up 10 minutes late and you've just missed your flight – you'll have to buy a new ticket for the next flight. Low cost airlines also often use inconveniently located airports: Ryanair's Frankfurt flights use Hahn Airport, 120 km away requiring a lengthy transfer to Frankfurt city centre.

What can I pre-purchase?

Generally, you can pre-purchase meals, entertainment, comfort packs (blankets and neck supports), checked baggage and a single entry pass to the airline's lounge. Often pre-purchase benefits include a discount.

Do low cost and charter airlines offer child's fares?

Some airlines offer discounts for children aged 2–11. However this can vary between airlines and some infant fares may apply for children under 2.

Do low cost and charter airlines offer return airfares?

This varies depending on the airline, some do, some don't, however in all cases you are essentially paying two one-way fares.

Do I have to fly Economy?

No, some low cost and charter airlines offer Premium Economy Class.

Do I have to be on a package holiday to fly with a charter airline?

No, charter airlines will often sell their excess seats on a seat only basis.

Can I book through Flight Centre?

Yes, your Flight Centre consultant can book your low cost airline flights and this is a great way to ensure that you have all the information you might need on extra costs you may incur.

What are the other advantages to booking through Flight Centre?

We can help you find the best options to suit your travel plans. Flight Centre Airfare Experts are familiar with low cost and charter airlines and can ensure you are booking the right airport and airline connections to suit your itinerary. Our consultants can compare low cost, charter and scheduled airlines to find the best option for your travel needs. They can also help you organise travel insurance, which is particularly important if you are planning to fly with a low cost airline.