

## Why Settle for Leftovers?

What are travel leftovers? Perhaps you know this term by its more commonly used name “last minute deal”. These words have become more commonplace over the past few years. We as consumers have been trained to expect attractive discounts at the eleventh hour because travel retailers have been steadily supplying them since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. We’ve been bombarded with the seven-night cruise for \$499 and the three-night trip to Cancun for \$299 almost to the point where we think these prices are normal. We’ve arrived at cruise ships and hotels to find that we were generously upgraded to more luxurious accommodations and thought to ourselves “what a deal I got”.

The reality, however is that no company can afford to offer these low prices and upgrades forever and stay in business and remain competitive in the marketplace. With that in mind, we’re seeing many of these “last minute deals” coming to an end. Sure, there are still some out there if you’re flexible with your travel dates and there probably always will be. Many of these “deals” however are now being replaced by the more traditional “early booking discount”. As consumers are beginning to plan further in advance, hotels, resorts, and cruise ships are seeing their occupancy levels return to a point where the last-minute give-away is less of a necessity. In fact the cruise industry has seen such resurgence this year, that some lines have already released itineraries into early 2006 for bookings.

These are all good signs of recovery in the travel industry. It doesn’t mean that you can’t get your dream vacation at a good price any more. What it does mean is that you are probably going to have to do a little more advance planning in order to get it. Are you still toying with the idea of cruising in Alaska this summer? I hope you didn’t want a stateroom with a balcony because you’ll likely have to throw one of your fellow cruisers overboard to get one (I don’t recommend this.). Perhaps you’re thinking that a trip to Europe this summer would be a good idea because no one is traveling to Europe due to the strength of the Euro. Think again, everyone who has been putting off his or her trips to Europe for the past few years due to world events is going this year. Cruise ships are sailing full and many tour dates are sold out. What about the holidays? If you’re still just looking at that 10-night Disney Cruise Line sailing for your family over Christmas, don’t look too long. It’s already booked at 90% occupancy.

The moral of the story is that current trends in the industry are rewarding those who book early. Moving forward, you may want to think about “best value” instead of waiting and getting the leftovers. If you’re planning your dream vacation, book early and get the best room categories, the best resorts, the best ships, the best flight times and get them at the best value. When you book early, you get what you want and not what someone else didn’t want. You’ll alleviate the stress of higher prices and sold out conditions and you won’t be settling for everyone else’s leftovers.

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