



Budget airlines: Cheap but not cheerful

London 6th July 2009 Cramped seats, hidden costs and bad mannered passengers are amongst the main complaints from travellers on budget airlines. Survey data from Continental Research suggests that budget airlines are failing to measure up to passengers' expectations.

Although Ryanair counts Spanish Royalty amongst its customers, 32% of travellers surveyed said they were deterred from using a budget airline as such carriers attract bad mannered and loud passengers. Screaming kids put off 28% of travellers. By contrast, scheduled airlines fare much better – 11% of travellers are deterred from scheduled airlines by bad mannered passengers and 15% by noisy children.

Factors that put people off using airlines for their holiday		
	Budget airline	Schedule airline
Cramped seats/uncomfortable	53%	23%
Too many extras included in the ticket price	44%	16%
Poor in-flight food/entertainment	37%	12%
Delays/unreliable	37%	18%
Too much queuing at check-in/security	35%	26%
Attracts bad mannered/loud passengers	32%	11%
Expensive/not that cheap	31%	41%
Problems with no designated seat	29%	N/A
Too many screaming kids	28%	15%
Unhealthy cabin environment eg poor air, lack of mobility	26%	12%
Luggage problems	26%	13%
Poor information/ unhelpful when problems arise	23%	12%
Rude/unhelpful check in/ground staff	18%	8%

Source: Continental Research

The survey results suggest that the magic of air travel has been replaced by travellers' desire to reach destinations at the most economical price. When asked whether their flight added to the enjoyment of their holiday by scoring airlines on a scale of 1-5 where 5 is "very good" and 1 is "very poor", just 15% of budget airline travellers gave the top score of 5. However with 21% of passengers giving a rating of 5, scheduled airlines performed only slightly better.

Budget airlines do however still score much better on the price perceptions of their tickets, compared to schedule airlines. Nearly a half (45%) of passengers rate the cost of budget airline tickets as being "very good" compared with just 17% of those using scheduled airlines. But close to a third of budget airline passengers (31%) said that flights were actually more expensive than expected and 44% said that they were deterred from using budget airlines due to the number of extras added onto the ticket price. These results suggest that new ticket pricing structures have created confusion with consumers and are fuelling feelings of discontent.

Colin Shaddick, Director of Travel Research at Continental Research says "Although most budget airline travellers still think that they are getting a good deal, these results show that there is growing confusion in the air travel market between the prices charged and the level of comfort expected. More needs to be done to manage air passengers' expectations about the service they will receive and to address those issues that are causing discontentment.

The challenge for airlines is to close the gap between passenger expectations and service delivery without compromising the low ticket prices that are synonymous with budget airlines. Finding new ways to add a little more excitement or comfort to the journey may be a solution for budget airlines as they seek to improve the passenger experience and create brand loyalty in an increasingly undifferentiated marketplace."

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Note to editors

Continental Research interviewed online a representative sample of 750 UK Internet users aged 20 to 74. Quotas were applied at the interviewing stage to ensure the sample reflected the actual profile of UK Internet users by gender, age, social class and region of the 30 million UK Internet users aged 20 to 74 years.

About Continental Research

Founded in 1989, Continental Research is a leading market research agency based in London specialising in transport, public sector, business-to-business, finance, media and advertising and internet and telecoms research. The company prides itself on its in-house IQCS approved fieldwork teams who can provide consumer and business research of the highest quality using a number of proven methodologies. In 2008, Continental Research became part of the BDRC Group. For more information please see www.continentalresearch.co.uk