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## Airline Fees: Who's the Stingiest?

By Richard Zoglin and Deirdre Van Dyk

Curse you, JetBlue. That, at least, has been the flying public's response to news that the airline has found another long-taken-for-granted amenity and started charging for it. Passengers who want to curl up with a blanket and pillow on their cross-country JetBlue flight now have to pay \$7 for them.

But it's hardly a surprising move. All the airlines are struggling under soaring fuel costs (United alone says it will pay an extra \$3.5 billion for gas this year) and looking for other places to make up the revenue so they won't have to raise fares any higher. Free meals have largely become a relic of flying's more glamorous past; most of the airlines now charge for checked luggage; and many of them have, more quietly, raised the fees they charge for making a change to your nonrefundable ticket.

USAirways, which just last Friday became the first airline to start charging for soft drinks, says such fees will bring in \$400 million to \$500 million a year. "Customers understand the cost of doing business with these fuel prices," says USAirways spokeswoman Michelle Mohr. "They don't expect a free hot dog at the ballpark."

But what can they expect? It's hard to say, since the fees vary from airline to airline and are changing almost weekly. TIME.com has done a survey to see who is charging for what. With the caution that things could change even before your next trip to the airport, here's a run-down of the current status of passenger fees on nine major carriers, ranked from the friendliest to the stingiest:

### 1. Southwest

The one major airline that is bucking the trend of increasing fees, Southwest still doesn't charge for checked bags (up to two), nonalcoholic drinks, blankets or making a change to your flight. The

discount airline has even launched an ad campaign to brag about that fact. Its new slogan: "Fees don't fly with us."

## 2. **Virgin America**

In these straitened times, a pretty good deal: your first checked bag is free (the second is \$25), drinks and pillows are free too, and the fee for changing flights is a relatively nominal \$75.

## 3. **Delta**

Among the major carriers, Delta has done the best job of holding the line on fees: no charge for the first checked bag (\$25 to \$50 for the second), free drinks and blankets, and a flight-change fee that hasn't increased from \$100.

## 4. **JetBlue**

If it doesn't turn up the air-conditioning and force you to buy that blanket and pillow, the airline is still relatively flyer-friendly: no charge for the first checked bag, free soft drinks and unlimited snacks, and a \$100 change fee.

## 5. **Continental**

No charge for the first checked bag (\$25 for the second), and it's holding the line on the other freebies, like drinks and blankets, as well as still offering free meals like sandwiches, burgers and pizza. But it recently raised its change fee from \$100 to \$150.

## 6. **Northwest**

Recently increased the fee for making flight changes to \$150, to go along with a \$15 charge for the first checked bag (\$25 for the second). Nonalcoholic drinks and blankets are still free.

## 7. **American**

Also hitting you up for \$150 to make flight changes, and charging \$15 to \$25 for the first and second checked bags, with soft drinks and bedding still gratis.

## 8. **United**

A similar package: \$15 to \$25 for checked-bag fees; \$150 to make flight changes. Plus an extra wrinkle: if you get to the airport early and want a confirmed seat on an earlier flight, United will charge you \$75 — better than the \$150 change fee, but higher than the \$50 most other airlines

charge.

### 9. USAirways

Broke new ground last week by starting to charge for all beverages: \$2 for a soft drink (or even a bottle of water); \$1 for coffee or tea. Checked bags cost \$15 and \$25; flight changes are \$150.

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