



# Chasing the Best Airfares

By Péter Jacsó

*Frustrated by the high-cost of air travel?  
Let the Web help.*

Honolulu, Oahu, HI to San Francisco, CA  
 No. of Tickets: 1 Aircraft Type: Jet or Propeller  
 Connections: 0-1 Red-Eye Flights? Not OK

Item Reference No.: CB2MVPBE71  
 Departure Airport: Honolulu Intl. (HNL) Arrival Airport: Oakland Intl. (OAK) Price/Ticket\*: \$493.00  
 Departure Date: Thur, Jun 14, 2001 Return Date: Tue, Jun 19, 2001  
 Time Search Started: Apr 14, 2001/10:39pm PT **Select**

Item Reference No.: CB2TVPBI7F  
 Departure Airport: Honolulu Intl. (HNL) Arrival Airport: San Francisco Intl. (SFO) Price/Ticket\*: \$512.00  
 Departure Date: Thur, Jun 14, 2001 Return Date: Tue, Jun 19, 2001  
 Time Search Started: Apr 14, 2001/10:39pm PT **Select**

HotWire [http://www.hotwire.com]

Summary of 216 results: Honolulu, HI (HNL) to New York, NY round trip coach

Carrier	Class	Fares	From	From	From	From
United	Y	\$812	HNL	EWR	5/12/01	12:10p - 6:21a
United	Y	\$812	HNL	JFK	5/12/01	12:10p - 6:19a
United	Y	\$812	HNL	JFK	5/12/01	12:10p - 6:19a
United	Y	\$812	HNL	JFK	5/12/01	12:10p - 6:19a
United	Y	\$812	HNL	EWR	5/12/01	12:10p - 6:21a
United	Y	\$812	EWR	HNL	5/12/01	10:00a - 6:57p

Orbitz [http://www.orbitz.com]

Logged in as bipeter  
 ITA Software Plan Trip Edit Profile Send Comments Get Help Log out

One Way Round Trip Multi Segment

Flight Planning:  
 From: hnl To: slo  
 Depart: Jun 14 Leave: Before noon  
 Return: Jun 19 Leave: After noon  
 Add airports within 25 miles  
 Alternate dates: none

Passengers:  
 Adults: 1 Seniors: 0 Youths: 0 Children: 0  
 Infants in seat: 0 Infants on lap: 0  
 View results using: Trip Finder (try this first) Flight Chooser (Java)

Service class: Cheapest available

ITA [http://beta.itssoftware.com]

Options from \$622\*

Options from	Detailed	Multiple
Nonstop	\$691	\$1,332
One stop	\$622	\$722
Two stops	\$642	\$951

\*Options as low as \$550 are available for the same dates if you travel times are flexible

Details	Carrier	Route	Class	Time	Stop	Time	Class
11	United	HNL to SFO	LAX	Thu, June 14 7:00a-7:05p	9h 5m	Tue, June 19 4:45p-9:51p	Coach
12	United	HNL to SFO	LAX	Thu, June 14 7:00a-7:49p	9h 49m	Tue, June 19 4:45p-9:51p	Coach
13	United	HNL to SFO	LAX	Thu, June 14 7:00a-8:20p	10h 20m	Tue, June 19 4:45p-9:51p	Coach
14	United	HNL to SFO	nonstop	Thu, June 14 9:30a-5:35p	5h 5m	Tue, June 19 7:25p-9:41p	Coach
15	United	HNL to SFO	nonstop	Thu, June 14 noon-7:58p	4h 58m	Tue, June 19 7:25p-9:41p	Coach

ITA's Honolulu routes

Many of you who are reading this are planning a trip that involves air travel. Many of you may also cringe at the idea—summer strikes and airport jams are likely to give you headaches.

And let's not forget increasing airfares, a maddening reality, considering the declining reliability and level of service that you get for your money.

Maybe the Web can help.

Just as there has been much consolidation in the airline industry, the Web travel reservation business has gone through a similar process. PreView Travel was bought by Travelocity, Flifo by SunFinder, and the fare reservation subsystem of TravelWeb links you directly and unceremoniously to Expedia.

At the same time, new services were being born. Last fall saw a flurry of announcements of new Web ventures that promise help in finding better airfares. Some of them are still in the beta test phase but at least offer fare information (if not reservations) for domestic (U.S. and Canadian) flights, and by the time you read this, they may have extended their services to international routes.

I have been testing these services since the beginning of this year, and for this piece I searched for two routes—Honolulu-New York and Honolulu-San Francisco in mid-April. Obviously, this is not a comprehensive test, but appropriate for gauging the possibilities offered. Most of the sites also have deals for hotels and car rentals. But I will discuss only the air travel offerings.

**HotWire**  
http://www.hotwire.com

HotWire (not to be confused with *Hot-wired*), which debuted last October, offers an interesting alternative that may seem similar to what the much criticized PriceLine service introduced. But it's different and better. With PriceLine, you make a price offer for a route and whichever service matches it, you must accept it—while knowing nothing about the carrier, the stops, or the night flights until the deal is sealed.

HotWire does not leave you in the dark this much, although it certainly does not disclose the usual details. You don't know the carrier or the time of the flights, but there are some assurances for the former, clues for the latter, and you can exclude red-eye flights and flights with two or more stops.

In the case of multi-airport cities like New York, you may also exclude some airports at the point of departure and/or arrival that are notoriously messy (like LaGuardia) or unappealing to you for other reasons.

You may also rest assured that you are not flying some bottom-of-the-pack airlines to Asia or Europe because the international partner airlines of HotWire, such as KLM, Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa, and Swissair, are really excellent. (The domestic partners are the ones that used to be good too, but these days good is not the word that you associate with U.S. airlines.)

As opposed to traditional travel agencies that can offer their best deals only if you purchase your tickets 21 days before departure, HotWire can have good prices even a week before departure because partner airlines release their empty seats to HotWire at a good discount. The anonymity allows airlines to let down their hair and to offer private (undisclosed) deals that are usually better than through Sabre or Apollo, which use the published airfares of the airlines, which in turn form the database of most travel services.

The drawback is that you can't use these tickets for your frequent flyer miles, and there are no upgrades. For me, being 250 pounds and 6'5" is an additional drawback—seats are assigned at boarding and this can be quite inconvenient as all the flights I take are at least 5 hours in one stretch.

There is also good news beyond the price. HotWire offers airports convenient for your destination city that you may not have thought of, like Oakland for San Francisco. You may also exclude red-eye flights (although not for Honolulu-New York). You may also define that you don't want to have more than one connection, a pretty important criterion considering that each connection increases the chances to be delayed.

HotWire had two good deals, one for Newark, the other for JFK at \$755 and \$759, and a person plus a dog for \$1,654 to LaGuardia. The other agencies best fares were between \$814 and \$856. For San Francisco it had the best price at \$493, while the majority of the traditional Web agencies averaged around \$570 with an overnight flight segment. The Oakland destination also gave a clue that the carrier is most likely to be Aloha Airlines, with a morning departure and possibly a stopover in Kona—not known for bad weather, traffic jams, and delays.

**Orbitz**  
http://www.orbitz.com

Orbitz was right on the heel of HotWire, with fewer partners but clearly disclosing all



the details of the flights in a very impressive format by using a new travel software, ITA. (The best implementation is made by ITA, the company itself, on its own site as discussed below. Although it is still in beta version, it provided excellent results).

With Orbitz, you can specify the radius in miles from your preferred airports and you can choose the time of day for your departure and arrival right on the first screen that is still uncluttered.

**ITA is a Boston-based company with MIT graduates working as system developers—and it clearly shows.**

The result grid provides a perfect at-a-glance look for the combination of three parameters (price, airline, stops). Below the grid, the details of the flights of your chosen matrix point (e.g., United one-stop flights) are listed in an easy-to-scan, compact format with the essential details, such as the airline, price, stop(s), airport codes, date, departure and arrival times, flying times, and any special notes such as overnight flight. For the Honolulu-New York trip, Orbitz came up with 216 flight combinations, 47 for one-stop United flights alone, it had the lowest price at \$812, the second best price for flights that met all my requirements. The fares and schedules for the San Francisco trip, however, were not really good.

**ITA**  
<http://beta.itasoftware.com>

ITA is a Boston-based company with MIT graduates working as system developers—and it clearly shows.

It is by far the best and smartest software, the one that is licensed by Orbitz. On the ITA site, it has the perfect implementation. Although it is a beta product, it already runs circles around the competition of traditional Web travel services in terms of the clarity, simplicity, and efficiency of presenting results, and most often yields the second best price after HotWire. It also reveals all the details and provides very useful advisories, such as long layovers and other inconveniences (like connecting through another terminal, which is a nightmare in Chicago, or another airport, a nightmare anywhere) that are easy to overlook in other systems.

Not everyone will agree with what ITA considers a long layover. A 130-minute layover may be okay when changing planes at Fort Worth, where getting from one terminal to the other may take quite some time. Such a layover on a Honolulu-New York route is not that bad. I am sure ITA will offer the users the option to customize their own thresholds for triggering warnings.

Beyond the options described under Orbitz, you may also specify alternate dates (one day earlier, one day later) to let the system find better prices. The query form is attractive and offers the easiest multi-segment data entry for sit-

uations when you want to break your trip with a stopover.

ITA had the best (though still very high) price for the San Francisco trip for non-stop flights both ways, and no red-eye segment, at \$691. A one-stop daytime flight (on the way back) would cut the price to \$622 with a reasonable layover in LA. ITA also reminded me that a \$550 fare is available for the same date if my travel times are flexible. For that king of savings, my travel times definitely could be flexible, but at that price

there would have been really long layovers, stops both ways, and a red-eye flight to Oakland—too many negatives for the savings.

It will be interesting to see how many travel agencies will license the ITA software. It really breaks new ground, and it is commended for its success in advising the customer of all relevant aspects of a fare, and doing so in a way that makes it unusually easy to compare the options and to make an educated decision, pondering your preferences.

The new entrants enhance the options offered by the two biggest players, Expedia and Travelocity, who still could come up with good alternatives. You can only gain by exploring them when chasing for the best fares. Another fairly new service, FareChase, which I wanted to cover here, did not make it into my review because it had so many elementary problems, inconvenient schedules, and high prices that in my opinion it should be grounded until significant improvements are made.

**Published By Information Today, Inc.**

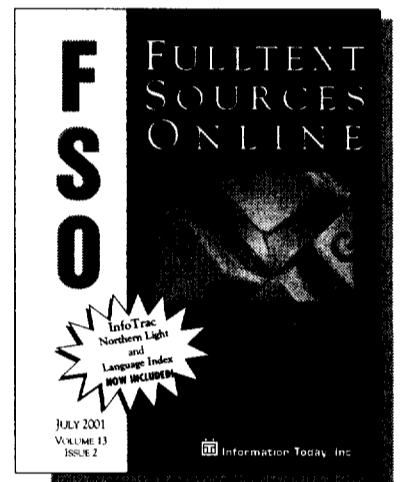
**F  
S  
O**

**FULLTEXT  
SOURCES  
ONLINE**

Fulltext Sources Online is a directory of publications that can be found online in full text through an aggregator or content provider. FSO is published biannually in January and July and lists over 16,000 newspapers, journals, magazines, newsletters, newswires, and transcripts.

The following aggregator products are included in FSO:

- ◆ Nekkei Net Interactive
- ◆ Dow Jones Interactive/Factiva
- ◆ eShaman.com
- ◆ InfoTrac (Gale)
- ◆ OCLC's FirstSearch
- ◆ InSite (Intelligence Data)
- ◆ ProQuest (Bell & Howell)
- ◆ Reuters Business Briefing/Factiva
- ◆ GBI (ComputerSelect Web)
- ◆ DataStar
- ◆ EBSCOhost
- ◆ Genios
- ◆ LEXIS-NEXIS
- ◆ Ovid
- ◆ Quicklaw
- ◆ Wilson Web
- ◆ Burrelle's
- ◆ DIALOG
- ◆ EDD
- ◆ Infomart
- ◆ Northern Light
- ◆ Profound
- ◆ STN International
- ◆ Westlaw
- ◆ Questel



Fulltext Sources Online  
ISSN 1040-8258  
July 2001 issue  
\$125.00 + shipping

**ORDER FORM**

To place an order or to receive additional information, contact:

Information Today, Inc.

Express Order Service: 1-800-300-9868, (609) 654-6266, fax: (609) 654-4309  
e-mail: [custserv@infotoday.com](mailto:custserv@infotoday.com),  
or write to the Order Department,  
**Information Today, Inc.,**  
143 Old Marlton Pike, Medford, NJ 08055.

- JULY 2001 SINGLE ISSUE \$125.00
- ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTION (2 ISSUES: JANUARY/JULY) \$199.50
- STANDING ORDER-YEARLY SUB. PRICE INCLUDES 10% DISCOUNT \$179.55

PRICE INCLUDES PASSWORD TO PRIVATE ZONE WEB SITE.

SHIPPING CHARGES	USA	CANADA	ALL OTHERS
SINGLE ISSUE	\$8	\$14	\$30
1-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION	\$16	\$28	\$60

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \_\_\_\_\_  
PLEASE ADD SHIPPING CHARGES.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Method of Payment:**

- Cash.  Check enclosed.
- Bill me. (Volume(s) will be sent upon payment.)
- Charge my:  MasterCard  Visa  AMEX

Account # \_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_