

PERSONAL FINANCE

Vacation Deals Abound. Just Don't Wait Until Travel Tuesday to Book.

Our columnist sifted the sales, and found some of the best bargains she has seen in years on airfares, lodging, tours and cruises.

Frugal Traveler

By ELAINE GLUSAC

As a sales season, Black Friday long ago turned the weekend corner to extend to Cyber Monday. And it's still growing as Travel Tuesday — this year falling on Dec. 3 — gains traction.

In a recent report, the consultancy McKinsey & Company found that bookings for hotels, cruises and airlines spiked on Travel Tuesday 2023. Airline purchases soared, beating the average for sales over two weeks on either side of the date by more than 60 percent. Cruise bookings jumped 50 percent.

"More people are investing in travel and experiences than ever before," said Hayley Berg, the lead economist at the travel booking app Hopper. "On the flip side, we've seen more marketing and more providers participating, so it's really snowballing."

But don't wait for Travel Tuesday to book a deal. Companies now introduce bargains as early as late October.

In addition to offering an escape, Black Friday travel deals arrive just before the early December lull in travel.

"Black Friday weekend represents a last-ditch effort to gain significant sales until traffic picks back up in January," said Sean Finelli, the chief executive and co-founder of the Tour Guy, a tour operator that will offer a 10 percent markdown on its guided day trips — such as walking tours of London and food tours of Paris — between Nov. 26 and Dec. 2 (use the code BLACKFRIDAY10).

This year, after wading through hundreds of sales, I found some of the best deals I've seen since the pandemic. Consider the following offers the tip of the iceberg; chances are if you want to book a hotel, airline ticket, rental car, tour or cruise for 2025, you'll find a sale on it between Nov. 29 and Dec. 8.

As always, caveat emptor. Among pitfalls, many sales will be prepaid and nonrefundable, be subject to blackout dates and hew to off-season or first-quarter travel, so read the terms and conditions carefully.

Flight deals

Through Nov. 30, Cathay Pacific will offer fares from \$694 round trip for travel in 2025 between its U.S. gateways, including New York's Kennedy International Airport, and Asian destinations such as Hong Kong, Bangkok and Singapore. By comparison, a January round trip between New York and Hong Kong was recently priced from about \$1,600.

Operating in 30 states, the low-cost airline Breeze will have one-way fares starting at \$29 through Dec. 1 for travel from Dec. 4 to May 13. The New York-area \$29 fares include Westchester County Airport to Charleston, S.C., and Long Island MacArthur Airport in Islip to Sarasota, Fla.

Through Dec. 4, TAP Air Portugal is offering round-trip flights starting at \$379 to Lisbon, Madrid, Dublin and other European destinations from its U.S. airports, including Newark Liberty International Airport, for travel from mid-January to mid-May.

Travel Tuesday is an especially good time to book airline tickets, according to Hopper, which found more than 3,300 routes from U.S. airports on sale last



Travel Tuesday, and nearly twice the deals compared to Black Friday 2023.

Half of its customers booked flights and hotels in the next year and the other half took advantage of last-minute trips in November and December.

Global tours for less

Group tour operators are expanding their sales this year.

The adventure travel company Geographic Expeditions (known as GeoEx) will hold its first Travel Tuesday sale from Dec. 3 to 6, taking \$1,000 off a selection of 2025 trips, including 10 days in Patagonia, Argentina, and 14 days in Mongolia (trips normally range from \$11,250 to \$12,650 a person).

The tour operator Collette has increased its annual seasonal sale, offering up to 25 percent off 2025 bookings made from Nov. 25 to Dec. 4. Trips range from 16 days in Japan and South Korea, marked down 15 percent to \$6,034 a person, to 10 days in Portugal, down 25 percent at \$1,499 a person.

CIE Tours has extended its sale from a week in 2023 to four weeks. Running through Dec. 7, the sale — up to 15 percent off — applies to all trips. Before the discount, six days based in Glasgow, with excursions to nearby castles, Loch Lomond and the Isle of Arran, costs \$1,845 a person.

Through Dec. 3, the small-group tour specialist Explore Worldwide is offering discounts of up to 20 percent on more

than 1,500 departures in 2025. Deals include \$400 off an eight-day walking trip on Italy's Amalfi Coast in March and April (normally \$1,990 a person); and \$1,280 off a 14-day trip in Japan during spring's cherry blossom season (normally \$6,390 a person).

Cruise offers

Cruise lines have long embraced Black Friday with promotions announced by major operators, including the trans-Atlantic specialist Cunard, family-friendly Norwegian Cruise Line and high-end Silversea.

Among cruise companies offering first-time sales, the small-ship line St. Hilda Sea Adventures, which specializes in the Scottish islands, will take up to 20 percent off departures in April and May when booked Nov. 25 to Dec. 20 (code: SPRING25). Six- to 10-night trips start at \$2,630 before the discount.

On the Great Lakes, Victory Cruise Lines will launch a pair of boats operating between Chicago and Toronto in spring. During its sale, running to Dec. 4, nine-night trips will start at \$5,799 a person, which is \$1,000 less than normal for a shared double-occupancy cabin. The deal also includes a complimentary shore excursion.

If swimming with sea lions off the Galapagos Islands is on your wish list, check out Eventour's sale Nov. 29 to Dec. 6. Eight-day sailings on ships accommodating 20 passengers normally cost \$10,500 a person, but during

the sale will drop to \$8,400.

The expedition line HX will offer a number of its cruises at 40 to 50 percent off until Dec. 9, including a nine-day trip to the Galapagos (sale priced from \$6,774 a person); some sailings will partner with the National Audubon Society to seek out the islands' avian stars. Twelve-day HX trips to Antarctica start at \$8,596 a person during the sale.

AdventureSmith Explorations, an agency that specializes in small-ship cruising, is a good place to look for expedition cruise sales, including a web page devoted to Antarctica deals.

New lodging discounts

Hotel deals litter the Black Friday landscape. This year major brands such as Marriott, IHG and Hyatt are tying their sales to loyalty program membership with earlier or exclusive access or bigger discounts. Fortunately, joining is free.

A number of new hotels are offering their first Black Friday discounts. Urban options include the 33 Hotel, New York City, Seaport at 40 percent off Nov. 23 to Dec. 3; discounted rates start at \$159.

In Chicago, the new Korean-owned L7 Chicago by LOTTE has rooms discounted 30 percent through Dec. 8 for 2025 travel (normally from \$135). And the Hotel Saint Augustine in Houston, which is expected to open soon, will offer 25 percent off stays booked

through Dec. 2 (normally from \$379; code: TOYOUFROMUS).

Resort newcomers include the 10-villa Trobbu Tulum in Mexico, which is opening in January. During the sale, Nov. 28 through Dec. 3, its three-bedroom homes will start at \$630 a night, reflecting a 30 percent discount.

Near Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California, Homestead Modern will hold its first Black Friday sale on its collection of vacation rentals. On Nov. 29, its homes and suites will be marked down 20 percent for stays over the next 12 months; rates normally start at \$299 a night (booking code: HMBF24).

Opening in the Grand Canyon region of northern Arizona in January, the outdoor-themed hotel Trailborn Grand Canyon will offer rooms at 30 percent off for stays through April when booked Nov. 29 to Dec. 2 (code: CYBER24). Pre-discount, rooms start at \$143.

In Hawaii, new hotels with Black Friday deals range high to low. A luxury newcomer near Hilo on the Big Island, the adults-only, all-inclusive Hamakua Hotel will offer seven nights for the price of four from Nov. 29 through Dec. 3 (from \$699 a night; code: Cyber).

The more affordable Romer House Waikiki in Honolulu is offering 40 percent off rates that start at \$119 a night after the discount through Dec. 6 (code: BFCM24).

Among first-time deals for campers, Blacksford Premium RV is taking \$200 off its rental fleet based in Phoenix, Las Vegas and near Bozeman, Mont., booked from Nov. 25 until Dec. 2. Two-to-six-passenger vehicles start at \$250 a day and include unlimited mileage and generator use, bedding and kitchenware.

The French-owned glamping company Huttopia will hold its first Black Friday sale Nov. 27 to Dec. 2 for stays at its six North American properties (code: BLACKFRIDAY2025). Its furnished tents normally start at \$118 a night.

Experiences on sale

Attractions and day-trip operators are increasingly offering sales that can help you plan activities at a discount.

For example, Traveling Spoon, an Airbnb-style platform that connects travelers with local food experiences in 70 countries, will offer its first Travel Tuesday sale. Use the code TRAVEL24 to get 15 percent off experiences such as a meal in a host's home in Kyoto, Japan (normally \$56), a mixology class in Barbados (\$56) and a pasta-making session in Tuscany (\$224).

Get some exercise while speed-touring Rome with ArchoRunning, offering running tours of the Eternal City. During its sale, from Nov. 27 to Dec. 3, private groups of up to four travelers can get a 75-minute running tour and a four-hour walking tour for 390 euros (about \$415), or 35 percent off (code: ARFriday2024).

In southwest Colorado, the Springs Resort in Pagosa will sell two-day passes for the price of one at \$67 from Nov. 29 through Dec. 3 (code: TRAVEL).

For more deals on attractions as well as hotels and rental cars, check Booking.com during its sale, which runs through Dec. 4.