

AVEL

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Odds & Ends

The boss isn't the only one who gets better travel perks than underlings. So

does the boss's spouse. A Runzheimer International survey of 385 U.S. companies found that 61% of top executives' spouses get their travel expenses paid for by the company. Only 36% of upper managers' spouses and 8% of middle managers' spouses get the same treatment. . . . El Al is giving "changing planes" a new meaning: Travelers can now change money on flights from Tel Aviv to Paris, London, Frankfurt or Zurich. Flight attendants offer passengers the money-changing machines—which take cash or credit cards, and there's no commission fee—when they walk the aisles selling duty-free

merchandise. The airline said it will charge rates that are "competitive" with banks at international airports, though lower rates may be available elsewhere. Travel-gear stores are cropping up on the Web. Walkabout Travel Gear's site (www.walkabouttravel.com) sells "adventure" travel gear such as a mosquito "head net." **Christine Columbus** (www.christinecolumbus.com) sells travel equipment for women, including a cordless, illuminated makeup mirror for \$70. And for victims of stale airplane air, there's always www.breathefree.com, which sells personal air purifiers for travelers.

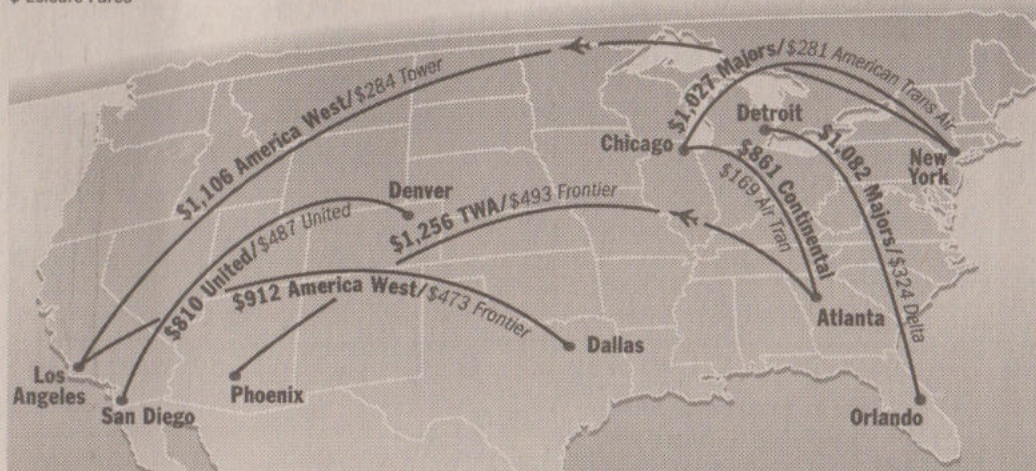
The Dow Jones Travel Index

Lowest Round-Trip Air Fares Next Week

Fares are up for business and leisure fliers from last week. Business travelers will pay more to travel between Atlanta and Chicago (up 26% from last week), New York-Chicago (+2%) and Detroit-Orlando (+4%). And leisure travelers will find it hard to find cheap tickets on major airlines to popular winter-vacation spots.

\$ Business Fares

\$ Leisure Fares



TRAVEL

TAKEOFFS & LANDINGS

By DANIELLE REED

Delta's Refund Proves Costly

PROMISES, PROMISES. Here's another one the airlines won't keep.

Remember the \$1 each-way surcharge that Delta tried to slap on tickets that weren't purchased over the Internet? The airline dropped the surcharge last week in the wake of angry responses from passengers and travel agents. Delta has been telling people it would refund the fee "under normal fare rules"—which means the refund doesn't apply to everyone. In fact, **if you have a nonrefundable ticket, you won't get the \$1 refund, unless you're willing to pay the regular \$75 fee for changing a ticket.**

"That's cheap," says Mike Pingrey, general manager of ACT Travel, a travel agency in Washington, D.C. "What they should do is give those people a credit or send them a check."

A Delta spokeswoman confirms the policy, but points out it's not all bad. For people who bought full-fare coach or first-class tickets, which are fully refundable, getting the \$2 back for a round trip isn't a problem since there's no fee for changing those tickets.

Bumpy Road

MEMBERS OF NATIONAL Rent a Car's Emerald Club are seeing red over changes in the frequent-renter program.

Emerald Club members who joined before 1991 earn points for every rental

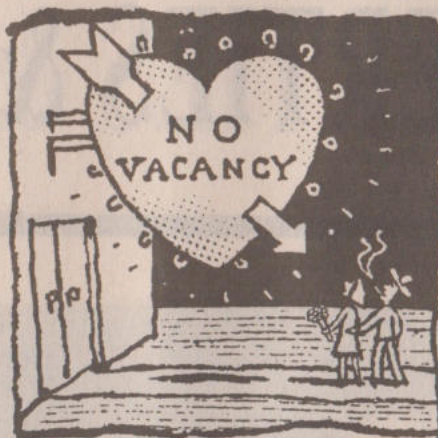
and can redeem the points for rewards. **But now National has declared that the points will expire after three years, starting next year.** The change "just isn't customer friendly," says Randy Petersen, a frequent-flyer consultant and an Emerald Club member for 10 years. The new rule comes at a time when some airlines are getting more liberal with their frequent-flier programs, scrapping rules under which miles had to be used within a certain number of years—Northwest just made that switch, and United and American recently gave some elite fliers the privilege of nonexpiring miles.

A spokesman for National says the company is changing the rules because it "has to stay competitive." He notes that since National also is eliminating rewards that cost the most points, renters should find it easier to use up their points within three years. There have only been a few complaints, he says, noting that members are getting a whole year's notice though National is only required to tell them 90 days in advance.

Heartache For Deal Seekers

YOU GUESSED IT: The latest round of airfare increases were just in time to make last-minute trips for the upcoming Valentine's Day weekend even more expensive.

The major carriers raised leisure fares over the past week, as much as 28%



Daniel Baxter

in some markets. For example, a round trip between Detroit and Orlando, Fla., is up 19% to \$326 from \$274 a week ago. Between Atlanta and New Orleans, the round-trip fare more than doubled to \$258 from \$124.

On the ground, the news doesn't get much better. Since Feb. 14 falls on a Sunday this year, many couples planning a Valentine's getaway will be booking Friday and Saturday night stays at hotels. Unfortunately, hotels at many getaway spots are fully booked.

Couples planning to spend the weekend at a luxury ski resort or casino, for instance, may be out of luck. "We tend to sell out on weekends" in January, February and March, says a spokeswoman for the Stein Eriksen lodge in Deer Valley, Utah. And Atlantic City, N.J., and Las Vegas have been extremely full on weekends lately, says Bob Diener, president of hotel consolidator Hotel Reservations Network. The Bellagio, which recently opened in Las Vegas, for example, said it was already sold out for Valentine's Day weekend in late January.

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though, in some popular cities where it is the slow season. In San Francisco, the Hilton San Francisco & Towers says it has "plenty of availability" and is selling its view rooms at \$169 a night (the regular rate is about \$315). And in Washington, D.C., the Renaissance Mayflower also has rooms for Valentine's, at \$125 to \$150 a night (regular rate is \$239), despite publicity generated by Monica Lewinsky's recent stay there.

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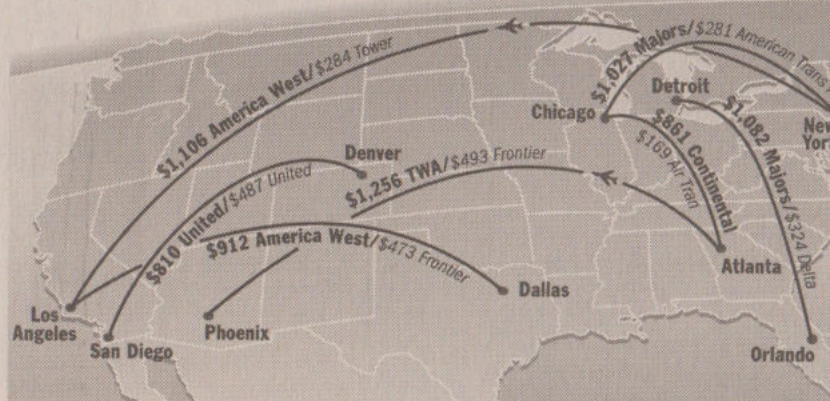
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Business Fare Index based on refundable air fares on 20 major routes; leisure index based on advance midweek departures during the week of Feb. 7. Fares are lowest available, but not all small carriers are