

Flight Booking Secrets: Unlocking the Best Deals with Michelle Chang | Episode 94

UK travel Planning podcast helps you plan your perfect UK vacation

intro: Welcome to the UK travel Planning podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel. To help you plan your perfect UK vacation, join us as we explore the UK. From cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands, and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

UK travel planning podcast with Michelle Chang on how to book better flights

Tracy: Hello and welcome to this week's episode of the UK travel Planning podcast. One question we receive fairly consistently in our UK and London travel planning Facebook group and via email is when should I book my flights to the UK? Which airline should I choose? Which route should I choose? Which is the best budget friendly option? Should I fly into one airport and out of another? How do I book better flights? So who better to chat to in this podcast than an expert in this area? This week's guest has years of experience planning trips around the world and has plenty of tips to share in this episode. So let's discover how to book better flights with Michelle Chang.

Michelle shares tips on how to save money on travel with this podcast

I started by asking Michelle to introduce herself and tell us a little bit about her background.

Michelle: Hi everyone, my name is Michelle. Planning trips is one of my favorite things to do. I love the research part of it, but I'm picky about what I spend my money on. About me I was fortunate to catch the travel bug early in life, and after getting married about four years into our careers, my husband and I decided to join the US Peace Corps. I don't know if you're familiar with that, Tracy.

Tracy: No, I'm not, Michelle.

Michelle: So the Peace Corps is like a 27 month volunteer program in other countries. Uh-huh so we did that back in 2012 to 2014. We served in rural Jamaica for 27 months. And that was kind of the start of this location independence lifestyle. We thought it was going to be a sabbatical that 27 months, but we just loved living abroad and the cultural exchange. So we tried out working online and we found ways to keep our expenses really low. So that way we were able to make travel a part of our lifestyle by just being resourceful, despite a really limited budget at the time. And that's also when I started our travel blog, which is called intentional travelers. Now, let's see, ten years later, I guess we are. We live abroad roughly half the year. We base ourselves in my home state of Oregon during the summers, which is the best time to be there. My husband and I have been to five continents together, some places where we stay for months at a time. Right now we're in Hoi an in central Vietnam, Cuenca, in the Andes mountains of Ecuador, is another favorite where we have a friend who teaches italian cooking classes, and so we've been able to help her for a few months. Other things about me I

think a lot of people are surprised to learn how little we actually spend on travel, even though we're doing it all the time. So for most travelers, like flights, and then accommodations are usually the biggest expenses. So to make this lifestyle work for us, we really think outside the box and have learned how to be resourceful and save money, especially on those two items. And over the years, we've honed some different strategies and found tools to help make it, possible for us to travel a lot more than I ever thought possible back when I was working the nine to five job. So part of what I do now is teach travelers what I've learned, especially when it comes to utilizing the power of the Internet and smartphone apps. So I realized that these things are still a little more foreign, especially to the generation ahead of me. I kept hearing from friends, of ours who felt like they were missing out when they traveled because new apps and online resources are constantly coming out and it's hard to keep up. So these are things that are, I don't know if I'd say second nature to me, but I use them all the time. I'm, planning trips all the time. And I did grow up in a generation that kind of learned the Internet, not when I was younger, but in high school, I guess. So that has helped me. And I know folks don't necessarily know what they don't know.

Tracy: That's true.

Tracy: And, I mean, I'm in my late fifties, and I must admit there are times where I just put things in the too hard basket. And I know we're gonna do, another podcast talking about using Google maps. And I've done your course this morning, and my goodness, it was absolutely fantastic what I learned, because I had kind of put that in the too hard basket for me. But this episode, I thought, because we get a lot of questions on our, UK travel planning Facebook group, and I get via email for people planning the trips to the UK, about flights. When's the best time to book flights? How can we save money with flights? There's always kind of lots of discussions about that. So I thought this would be

a perfect topic for this episode of the podcast, michelle, to talk about your flight booking tips.

Michelle: The biggest thing you can do to find cheap flights is flexibility

Michelle: Like you said, a lot of people do put it into the too hard category, but these really are things that you can get familiar with. It just takes a little bit of time and guidance, I think.

Tracy: So what is the biggest thing you can do to find cheap flights? Michelle?

Michelle: The biggest thing, is flexibility. Flexibility with your destination and with your dates. And I know that that's not always possible. For example, if you are planning a trip to a wedding, you have a set destination and you have the dates already set. That doesn't actually mean that you don't have flexibility. It's really a spectrum. So you could explore alternative airports, adjusting the dates even by a day or two. And then a big one is searching all the possible routes so that you can find that best deal. And fortunately, we have resources like Google flights, where you can search all those different variables at one without having to start new searches over and over again. So it's a lot more efficient. Now, I guess the other thing I would say is searching several, months in advance instead of last minute can really help. And when you're doing that, then you have an option to track prices, which is another feature of Google flights, so that you're not stuck with higher prices at the last minute.

Tracy: So you mentioned Google flights a couple of times.

Tracy: There is that search aggregator, that's right.

Michelle: That is always my first step in flight research to see what's available and what the prices are. It is an aggregator, meaning that they take the airline prices from every airline in the world, well, almost every airline in the world, so that you can see them in one place. And there are other tools like kayak and Expedia. those are also booking platforms, whereas Google flights will give you the information and then send you off to the airline or another site where you can find the best price.

Google Flights is your flight search tool of choice

Tracy: Okay, so Google flights is your flight search tool of choice. That's who you like to use.

Tracy: I was working through your book better flights course this morning, which was absolutely fantastic. And that's about how to use Google flights, which I have to put my hand up and said that I hadn't used before. I now have to say, I thought while I was learning about how to use it, why had I not used it before? There's so much information available in it.

Tracy: And your course goes through it so well. The tutorials are excellent, so I was able to follow along and try some things out with that. So what are some functions of Google flights that, travelers might not know about if they've not used it before, or even maybe just dabbled with it, but not actually learned how to use it effectively?

Michelle: Yeah, I do find that a lot of people think that they're familiar with it, they've

used it, but they're not really getting the full potential. So one thing is instead of searching from my airport to this specific airport, I can search for the whole country or region. So I want to find the cheapest flight to, the UK. I can actually put that whole category and it will test flights to all the different airports in that region. Searching multiple airports at once is kind of a similar feature, but you can really reduce the cost, especially if ground transportation isn't too expensive. And then price history and tracking tools, those are really helpful to get a better idea of when to pull the trigger, right? A lot of people are like, I did my research, but how do I know if the cost is going to go up or down? Well, Google Flights has a, tracking and price history, so you can kind of see and it'll tell you, well, usually the flights are within this average range. It's kind of high right now. So you can use that to help you choose when to book.

On flights, one thing to consider is not defaulting to book a round trip

Tracy: What other tips would you suggest when it comes to finding the best deals.

Michelle: On flights, one thing to consider is the option of not defaulting to book a round trip ticket, because sometimes airlines two one ways can be even cheaper. It depends, though, whether it's international or domestic. So for your us listeners, airlines within the states typically price one way flights at, roughly half the cost of a round trip. So that means the cheapest outbound flight could be on a different airline than the cheapest return flight that's within the US. And there are exceptions like flights out of smaller regional airports. Round trips may be cheaper in that case, but for international flights it's generally the opposite. So many international one way tickets are more like 70% of the cost of a round trip ticket. So sometimes one ways even cost more than a round trip ticket, even though you're flying half the amount. So the exception with that on

international flights would be a budget airline. Something like Ryanair in Europe or AirAsia, for example, are typically more like half the cost, when they do one ways instead of round trips. But the other thing we've learned is round trips originating in Europe are, almost always cheaper than a round trip to Europe originating in the states. If you're going back and forth to the UK or Europe or other regions, take a look if there's a pricing difference based on where the round trip originates, you know, if you're flying back and forth anyways, let's say, for example, you have a trip in February and the second trip is in November, you could potentially book a, one way outgoing flight, then a round trip reservation that flies you home in February and back in November. Even if it's two different cities that you're visiting, it can still be cheaper that way. Another thing I think is useful to know for the UK is all long haul departures from all UK airports other than Inverness will have what's called a UK APD air passenger duty charged against them. Which means any ticket departing from London or other UK airport that goes to the US or to Australia, it's going to see taxes of \$200 for an economy ticket, or around 340 for the premium economy business first class tickets. However, there are no taxes for arrivals at UK airport. And the other thing to note on top of the airport fee is British Airway has its own surcharges, which are really big for long haul flights. So British Airway charges any flight operated by British Airways, even if it's booked through a, ah, partner airlines like American Airlines.

Tracy: Wow.

Tracy: I didn't know that, I have to say.

What are the most common mistakes people make when booking flights

So what do you think, Michelle, are the most common mistakes that people make when it comes to booking flights?

Michelle: I hear from a lot of people who are upset that they thought that they found a good deal, but they didn't realize that checked luggage and all these other fees were included. That's tricky these days because checked luggage especially is kind of a hidden fee that they don't tell you upfront. but I would say just not comparing all the options. A lot of people may be familiar with a specific airline website and so that's the only place that they check. But with Google flights, there's so many different variables you can tweak. It makes it really easy to check a wide range of options and to narrow down those options based on the things that you care about, whether it's how long the flight takes or the price, or how comfortable the seats are. And then, especially for long flights, not doing a little extra research to check and compare the comfort and experience that's outside of Google flights for the most part. But there's ways to check the seat maps and look at reviews and, make sure that you're getting the best option, not just the best price.

Tracy: So I have to say, Michelle, I spent this morning working through your book better flights course, which was excellent. And I've learned all about how to find the best flight options using Google flights, which was amazing. Honestly, I have not used it before. And actually following your course was so, so helpful. I'm sure our listeners will want to know more about your course, Michelle, so could you just talk a little bit more in detail about it?

Michelle: Yeah. The course is called book Better flights. It's an on demand course, so there's just bite sized video lessons as well as I have what I call my flight booking roadmap, which is a step by step checklist that you can keep for yourself, make notes

on, and that will help you remember all the steps that you want to make sure to go through to avoid making the mistakes that we've talked about. Yeah, most people can get through it in a day, which is nice, but if you want to do a little at a time, that's fine too. Tracy, we're going to set up a discount code for your listeners, so I believe we'll have a specific link. So make sure that you use Tracy's link so you can get that discount.

Tracy: And that link will be in the show notes for this episode. [Uktravelplanning.com](https://uktravelplanning.com) episode 93. So through that link, you can book Michelle's course and, get the discount. I highly recommend it.

Tracy: I'm a, pretty experienced traveler and I've been travelling for, I don't know, 50 odd years. That sounds a bit scary when I say that, but there's always things to.

Tracy: Learn and I say there are times.

Tracy: Where you kind of go, it just feels a bit too hard. But actually it was a really good, easy course to follow. The videos are really good, Michelle's explanations are, ah, excellent. And you've got transcripts as well, if you want to read those. And there's lots of different pointers to get you through and who doesn't want to save money, right?

What is the number one tip you would give to someone planning flights to UK

So, Michelle, the last question I always.

Tracy: Ask everybody who is on the podcast.

Tracy: Is, what is the number one tip you would give to someone planning flights to the UK?

Michelle: Yeah, well, we kind of started to touch on this, but if mainland Europe is also included in your travel plans, I would consider starting your itinerary in the UK first and then flying out from the continent so you don't have to pay those departure fees. And then start looking at flights as soon as you can, especially for peak times like summer. The prices are only going to go up, so try to plan months in advance whenever possible, not weeks, and you'll have more options at better prices.

Tracy: Oh, perfect. Well, thanks so much, Michelle, for coming.

Tracy: On the podcast this week.

Tracy: It's been an absolute pleasure to chat to you.

Michelle: Yeah, my pleasure.

Tracy: That's all for this week's episode. But don't forget to pop over to the show notes at uktravelplanet.com episode 93, where you will find the discounted link to Michelle's excellent book, better flights course. That just leaves me to say, until next week. As always, happy UK travel planning.