

The Christmas rush is on already in air travel

by Cella Russell

Christmas flights from Halifax to Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver are virtually filled, despite the fact that all air fares have increased about 15 to 20 per cent in price over last year, according to the manager of the Canadian Universities Travel Service (CUTS) office in the Dalhousie Student Union.

Heather Crosbie said recently that it would be very difficult now to book a flight to these destinations leaving between Dec. 17 and 22, and returning between Jan. 2 and 4. In order to avoid disappointment, people should book in August or early September at the very latest.

"Short haul" Christmas flights to Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto are more open than those to the western destinations. Now that CP Air flies from Halifax, there is increased service and the demand is not so urgent, Crosbie explained.

Students find it risky to book too far in advance, because they may not know when they finish Christmas exams. If they book a flight out west later in the term, they may end up with an itinerary requiring them to change planes two or three times, she said.

"I don't want to encourage late booking, but airlines sometimes put on extra (direct) flights later on if there is a demand. But (waiting until the last minute) is not a wise thing to do," she added.

High-season rates run from Dec. 17 to Jan. 10 inclusive. Law students finish Dec. 11. If they fly before the 17th, they can pay a low-season outbound rate and a high-season return, bringing the total price down significantly, Crosbie explained.

Even so, air fares cost about 15 to 20 per cent more this year than last year. They go up every month. A lot of people who booked with CUTS last year are shocked at the difference, she noted.

As far as reductions go, travel at Christmas time is less of a good deal than at other times. Scheduled service charter class, the lowest priced fares, are only 20 to 30 per cent cheaper than regular fares. But charters are 50 per cent cheaper than regular fares from the end of October to early December, she added.

CUTS has its own cheap, set-price, charter flights which run year-round from Toronto to Edmonton or Vancouver return. There are eight departures during the Christmas period between Dec. 18 and 23, which return between Dec. 30 and Jan. 5. According to Crosbie, nobody can beat CUTS's prices for these flights.

Crosbie noted that although there is a demand for one or two flights of this sort from Halifax, airlines do not want to schedule this far east because they find it too expensive.

"However, we keep trying," she added.

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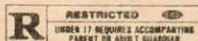
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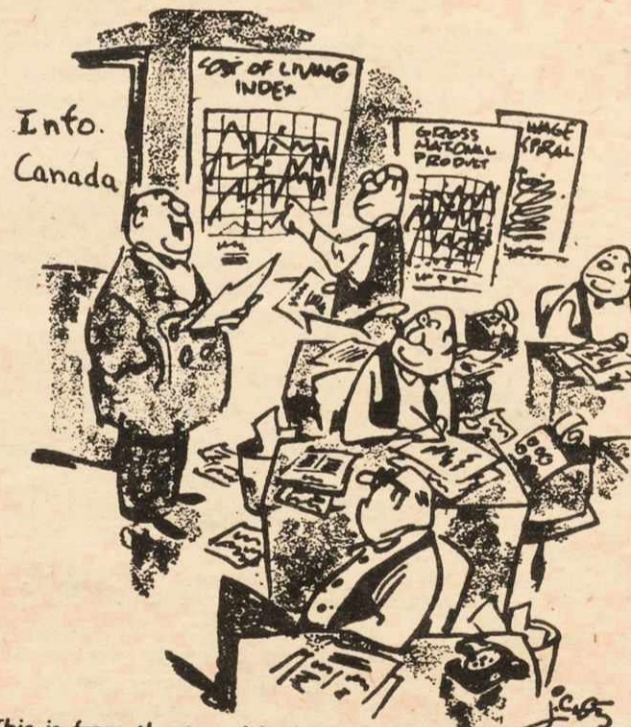
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For who can vote...

Dalhousie students will be voting this year in a referendum on membership in the recently formed Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).

The CFS was founded last October and combines the two student organizations, National Union of Students (NUS) and Association of Student Councils (AOSC). Dalhousie Student Council recently approved holding the referendum sometime this year, probably in January.

Membership in the CFS will mean a fee increase for Dalhousie students but Science Rep. Caroline Zayid pointed out that every student will automatically receive a student discount card, honored by businesses in North America and Europe.

St. Mary's approved membership in CFS last spring.