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New Branson Airport offers deals to Dallas travelers

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By **CHRISTINE NEGRONI** / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

BRANSON, Mo. – Texans arriving at the new airport here won't be greeted as enthusiastically as those on the inaugural flight last Monday. The first passenger-carrying airliner taxied through a ceremonial blast of water from an airport firetruck while photographers lined the tarmac. But future air travelers will be warmly received nonetheless.

"The more people that come in, the better it is," said Jeff Mullens, owner of Avis Rent-A-Car in nearby Hollister. "When there's an avenue for more people to come into town, it's revenue potential for all of us," he said.

Mullens' rental car company isn't at the new airport. As an entirely private business, the Branson airport is offering exclusive contracts to airport concessionaires, something prohibited at public airports. So it's Enterprise Rent-A-Car that travelers will find at Branson Airport, and Sun Country and [AirTran](#) are the only airlines operating here.

Steve Peet, the Connecticut man behind this new private enterprise, says that to participate in these competition-free arrangements, the airlines had to make certain commitments.

"It comes with strings. You can only keep it if fares are reasonable and if you put on enough capacity to meet the demand."

From D/FW International Airport, Sun Country's first flights to Branson were priced at \$29 each way. The regular one-way fare is \$69. Special three-day, two-night package deals with airfare and hotel start at \$129 through [Hobbit Travel.com](#).

"Consumers are being very picky as far as where they go and how they pay for it," said George Wozniak president of Hobbit Travel in Minnesota. "They want value, and value is going to determine where the consumer travels this year."

With 8.5 million visitors annually, Branson is hardly a secret. A survey of members of the American Society of Travel Agents found Branson to be one of the nation's top five budget-friendly destinations. The majority of these visitors arrive by car or bus.

"They're not flying now, and flying would be more convenient," Peet said. "We have to create not just convenient service, but we have to create an environment where the consumer will have low fares."



ANTONIO SCHEMBARI/Special Contributor

Officials greeted some of the first passengers to arrive at the new airport in Branson, Mo. Sun Country provides service between D/FW and Branson three times a week.

"This is not an attempt to pull people off buses and put them on airplanes," said Wozniak, the travel agency operator. "The intent is to offer it to a whole group of people who don't have the time to be on the bus or in the car. It's a quicker vacation. It's going to be a vacation that will appeal to a whole different traveler."

Even tourists arriving by air will soon see that getting to Branson's far-flung attractions requires wheels.

Enterprise Rent-A-Car in the terminal is closest, but savings can be found five miles away at Avis, where Mullens promises that if a customer takes a cab to his off-site location, they can save as much as 20 percent and he'll refund their taxi fare.

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When you go

Details of deal

Minneapolis-based Hobbit Travel is offering a Branson package from D/FW International Airport that includes three days and two nights through June 1 at Days Inn, Red Roof Inn, [Howard Johnson](#) or Ramada Inn for \$129 per person. The price includes round-trip airfare. Add \$18 per person for each additional night. June 1-20, the cost is \$149; add \$25 for extra nights. June 20 through December, the deal is \$179; \$25 for extra nights. Details at www.hobbittravel.com/

detail.asp?xmlfile=Dallas

_Branson&OAC=&pl

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Resources

- [Sun Country Airlines](#), www.suncountry.com
- AirTran Airways, www.airtran.com