

# BUDGET FLIGHTS STRUGGLE

New routes, cheaper prices not enough to keep airlines from folding

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When West Village resident Aleksandra Kantorowska, wanted to go to Poland this summer, she couldn't afford the direct route.

At about \$1,000, it was out of her budget. Kantorowska instead booked a budget airline to Stockholm for about a third of the price before finally heading farther east.

Kantorowska, who flew on Norwegian Air for only \$360 round trip in April, simply took advantage of the ever-expanding availability of budget airfare to Europe, valuing price over amenities.

"I'm open to whatever gets me to my destination," said Kantorowska, 25. "At the end of the

day, it's really just a vessel you're in for a couple hours getting you to your destination."

But while airlines such as Norwegian Air have been consistently offering New Yorkers an inexpensive, or less expensive, option to get from the city — a major international takeoff point — across the Atlantic, some budget carriers are struggling to survive.

In October, low-cost carrier Primera Air suddenly folded just weeks after announcing new routes. The airline cited problems with aircraft and delays of aircraft deliveries as a reason for its shuttering, according to a statement. And budget carrier WOW Air has also been struggling, according to published reports.

"International flights have

never been as cheap in the history of flying as they are today," said Scott Keyes, the founder of Scott's Cheap Flights, adding we are living in the "golden age" of flying, but added: "I wouldn't assume that just because they're flying new routes and people are flying them that they're making money. It seems to be the contrary."

Norwegian Air first started offering flights from JFK to Oslo and Stockholm in 2013, and later added destinations like London and Paris. In 2017, the budget airline started flying to more cities, including Dublin and Edinburgh, out of Stewart International Airport in Newburgh. This year, it added Amsterdam and Madrid.

In an effort to save WOW Air, founded in 2011, Indigo

Partners has agreed to invest in the struggling carrier, according to a spokeswoman. The terms of the investment, however, were not disclosed. The firm has previously invested in Spirit Airlines and holds a stake in Frontier Airlines.

Perhaps hoping to buck the trend, JetBlue has said it's exploring the possibility of expanding to serve the transatlantic market and under a purchase agreement the company made with Airbus, JetBlue can opt to purchase the Airbus A321LR (the LR stands for long range). Currently, the airline only flies to a few international destinations like Colombia and Peru.

With lower fares often come upcharges for things like checked bags — and carry-on

luggage in some cases — seat selection, food and even water.

"There's nothing more appealing than being able to go [from] New York to the Amalfi Coast via Rome than getting a \$150 flight one way," said Emily McNutt, news editor at The Points Guy. But she cautioned buyers to know what they're getting into. "They're all going to nickel and dime you as much as they can."

"For most consumers, they don't know the nuances between various airlines . . . Price is by far the most important factor for flyers," Keyes said.

He added: "I think in general the trend is going in the direction of flying becoming cheaper and cheaper rather than it reverting to the fares we were seeing 20 or 30 years ago."



Norwegian Air is one of the budget airlines offering cheaper flights from New York to Europe.

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## Witness' bugged call played at corruption trial

BY JOHN RILEY  
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Talk about being wrong.

Near the end of a 17-minute 2015 conversation with his father and a lawyer giving some free advice, a panicked Jona Rechnitz — who eventually became a star federal witness in New York City corruption scandals — worried about probes of two Ponzi schemes for which he raised money.

"And last thing for you please, sorry," Rechnitz asked on a tape introduced Monday during his cross-examination at

a Manhattan federal court corruption trial. "... If they're on my bank, does that mean they're reading my emails or reading my texts — they're tapping my phone?"

"No," answered the lawyer, a friend of Rechnitz's father, on the bugged conversation.

"Are you sure?" Rechnitz asked.

"Yeah, I'm not positive, but that is extremely unlikely," said the lawyer, who nonetheless advised Rechnitz to be careful.

The wiretapped exchange produced smiles among jurors and laughter from spectators

during daylong questioning Monday by a lawyer for Jeremy Reichberg, the former Rechnitz partner accused of paying off cops for favors, including co-defendant James Grant, an ex-NYPD deputy inspector.

Former Deputy Chief Michael Harrington has pleaded guilty. Rechnitz has also accused several uncharged NYPD officers — including former Inspector Stephen McAllister, now the police chief in Floral Park — of helping with tickets, gun permits, escorts and private disputes in return for perks including meals, gifts, plane

rides and access to prostitutes.

McAllister's lawyer Joel Weiss, has called Rechnitz's accusations "replete with falsehoods."

Reichberg lawyer Susan Necheles, on her third day of cross-examination, used the phone recording as part of an effort to show that Rechnitz lied about her client and the cops because he was frightened about his role in the Ponzi scheme.

Rechnitz, a real estate investor, raised money for both Hamlet Peralta, a restaurateur with police contacts who was promoting a liquor wholesaling

business, and Jason Nissen, a former teacher from Long Island who needed money for his ticket-resale business.

Both men eventually pleaded guilty to fraud charges. Rechnitz, who says he was seeking influence in circles of power, pleaded guilty to bribery and corruption scandals involving the NYPD, City Hall and former prison union leader Norman Seabrook, but was never charged in either of the Ponzi scheme cases.

The trial began last month. Testimony is scheduled to resume Tuesday.