

# Fully Leveraged Options: How to Score Better Seats, Lower Prices, AND Companion Kisses

November 2025

**Part 3 in the Options Intelligence Series: Using airline hold mechanisms to control premium travel – and how being fully leveraged upgrades other areas of life**

**“I always say don’t make plans, make options.”  
– *Jennifer Aniston***

**CONTEXT:** We’re talking about a purchase – \$1,000 to \$10,000+ depending on who you are and what you’re working with. That’s not trivial. But here’s the thing: **it’s actually the *least* of what’s at stake.**

**Your vacation doesn’t start when you arrive.** It starts when you walk into the airport. And if you land beaten up from a cramped seat, bad timing, and too many layovers, that **energy carries forward.** Combined with jetlag, a rough flight can set a sour tone for the first **couple of days** of your trip.

The return works the same way – **maybe worse**. A brutal flight home doesn't just exhaust you. It dampens the memories. **It flattens the vibe** you spent a week or more building.

**Your flight frames the experience.** And how you *book* that flight – the attention you give it while you're still on the ground – determines whether you'll spend 20 hours in the sky with regret or relief.

Let's be real.



*Singapore Airlines - Unforgettable*

## 9:43 PM – THE TEXT THREAD

**Sarah (6:32 PM):** Hey babe! I booked the hotel in Paris! The one we talked about!

**You (6:45 PM):** That's great! I'm wrapping up this project deadline, will look for flights as promised

**Sarah (7:18 PM):** Did you book the flights yet?

**You (7:22 PM):** Still working, will check before long

**Sarah (8:41 PM):** Honey, our friends already booked their tickets at lunch. Do we have tickets?

**You (8:43 PM):** Looking now

**Sarah (9:43 PM):** I BOOKED THE HOTEL. I need to know we can GET THERE. Why don't you have tickets yet??

## **SOUND FAMILIAR?**

You are at work. Project deadline. It is 9:43 PM.

Your companion booked the hotel this morning. Her friends bought airline tickets at lunch.

And you? You have got nothing.

Not because you are lazy. Because you are SMART.

**You're a life-experience, bang-for-buck kind of guy.**

You know that the easiest ticket to book right this second probably isn't the best-quality seat at the best price. That would be pure luck.

Just like any purchase in life you might make.

**And you do not operate on luck.**

But now she is freaking out. The pressure is mounting. And you are about to cave and book whatever mediocre option is in front of you just to get her off your back.

**What if there was a better way?**

## **GET YOUR COMPANION OFF YOUR BACK IN 10 MINUTES (THEN UPGRADE EVERYTHING LATER)**

Here is what you do RIGHT NOW:

Take 10 minutes. **Lock in** SOMETHING. Cash hold or award booking. Does not matter if it is perfect.

**Text her back: "Yes, dear. We have tickets."**

She is happy. You are off the hook. Crisis averted.

**But here is the magic: You do not actually LIKE those flights.** They are not a great seat at a great price. You have long legs. You take flying seriously.

Those flights are just your insurance policy.

Now, instead of watching the news tonight, you spend an hour hunting. Comparing schedules. Seats. Checking award space.

Finding the REAL opportunity.

Tomorrow morning, you walk into the kitchen and say:

“Honey, remember those flights I told you about last night? Would you give me a big hug and a kiss if I told you I UPGRADED them? Better seats. LOWER price.

I got us a double upgrade.

I want a double kiss right now!”

**That is The Hat Trick (i.e. Three Scores): Better seat + Lower price + Companion kisses.**

“I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best.”  
– *Oscar Wilde*

## WHAT DOES “FULLY LEVERAGED” MEAN HERE?

**Most people** think travel booking is binary:

Cash fare OR award booking. This airline OR that one. Book now OR wait.

**Intelligent travelers ask:** Why not LOCK IN Multiple Options?

Lock in Multiple Options – without commitment – and play them off each other.

You are not choosing between options. You are CONTROLLING multiple options at the same time, then deciding from a position of strength.

> **Last month**, we covered [Options Intelligence Applied to Mileage Award Tickets](#).

> In September, we covered The Option Optimizer's Secret: How to [Turn Published Fare Tickets Into Infinite Possibilities](#).

> This special report is all about using both of them, together – and how lucrative it can be.

**“Information can bring you choices and choices bring power – educate yourself about your options and choices.”**  
**– Joy Page**

The Basic Strategy:  
Your Three-Step Portfolio

STEP	ACTION	WHAT YOU GET	COST
#1: Lock It	See good cash fare OR award space: Lock it in IMMEDIATELY. <a href="#">Cash: Book with FareLock</a> , airline hold, cancellable booking. <a href="#">Award: Book with free/cheap cancellation</a>	3-14 days with ZERO pressure. Your companion is happy. You have backup	\$0-\$50ish
#2: Optimize It	Now you have time to hunt better awards (cash is backup). Watch for fare drops (award is backup). Coordinate with companions.	Strategic clarity. No panic decisions. Multiple options controlled	\$0-\$50ish more (additional holds)
#3: Execute It	Before expiration: Compare all options. Commit to best one. Cancel the losers. You have won (or just repeat the process).	Best seat / best price. Zero regret. <b>Companion kisses.</b>	Total: \$0-\$100ish

**YOU ARE ALREADY SPENDING THE TIME.  
ARE YOU GETTING THE RIGHT RETURN?**

Let us kill the objection right now.

**“This sounds like too much work.”**

Does it?

According to Expedia, travelers conduct 50+ searches on average 45 days before booking.

Priceline says travelers spend “Two Full Work Days to Plan and Book Trips.”

Sabre claims “Europeans Spend Longer Searching for Flights than Flying.”

**Keep It Real:** You are ALREADY spending the time.

The question is: What are you getting for it?

## REALITY’S COST / BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Before you scan the table below, close your eyes for 30 seconds and imagine sitting for 20+ hours at 35,000 feet round-trip, in a sub-optimal airline seat.

Okay, open your eyes now:

SCENARIO	APPROX EXTRA TIME (ASSUMING ANY)	POTENTIAL SAVINGS	RETURN ON TIME POTENTIAL	PLUS EXPERIENCE UPGRADE	RISK
Basic					
Economy Hunter	3 hours – or maybe	\$50-\$200	\$10-\$40/hour	None (similar seat)	
Premium Economy Optimizer	less than one – as you're	\$500-\$1,500	\$100-\$300/hour	From a 2- to 3-Star PE Seat	\$0 to \$100ish on holds
Business Class Strategist	just holding things as you	\$3,000-\$6,000	\$1,000-\$2,000/hour	From a 3- to 5-Star Biz Class Seat	
First Class Master	do your normal searches	\$10,000-\$25,000	\$3,000-\$8,000/hour	From a 4- to 5-Star First Class Seat	

**The Bottom Line:** You are potentially making thousands of dollars per hour in savings. And getting a 5-star seat at a 5-star price – for the 20+ hours round-trip in the sky.

**Risk vs. Upside:** Worst case you are out \$0-\$50. Best case you control a \$15,000-\$30,000 ticket. This is exponential upside.

**“I like having options, alternate lives unlived but always possible.”**  
**– Abigail Padgett**



*Etihad First Apartment - Unforgettable*

## **TRAVEL PLANNING'S REALITY SPECTRUM**

How are you at navigating uncertainty?



Research Paralysis	Anxiety Booking	Strategic Patience	Options Leveraged
Comparing endlessly. Waiting for the perfect options before confirming anything. Still anxious. Might miss better deal tomorrow.	Decisions made from fear. Partner pressure. Book NOW or we will never go! Overpaying because urgency replaced strategy.	Knows how to hunt deals. But only uses ONE mechanism (cash OR awards). Leaving half the chessboard unused.	Controls MULTIPLE mechanisms simultaneously. Portfolio approach. Downside eliminated. Upside maximized. Zero anxiety. <b>Get flights you'll think and talk about for the rest of your life.</b>

***The Pattern:** First Zone operates from fear. Second Zone gets stuck in research. Third uses one mechanism sequentially. Fourth Zone stacks mechanisms in parallel. Portfolio thinking beats single-path thinking every time.*

**“Wealth is not about having a lot of money;  
it’s about having a lot of options.”  
– Chris Rock**

**WHO  
WANTS TO BE FULLY LEVERAGED?**

TRAVELER TYPE	WHY THIS WORKS FOR YOU	SUCCESS FACTOR
<b>Solo Travelers</b>	Award space opens for single seats 5X more than pairs. No companion coordination needed.	EASIEST scenario. Highest success rate. Maximum flexibility.
<b>Business Travelers</b>	Already flying on short notice. Already making changes. No brainer.	You're productive in the air. Highest tangible ROI.
<b>The Thrifty Analyzer</b>	You love analyzing options. For \$0 to \$50ish you can analyze all you want without pressure.	Turns your analytical nature into an asset. Finally, your research pays off.



<b>Analysis Paralysis People</b>	You are stuck comparing endlessly. This forces a decision (lock something) while preserving optionality.	<u>Breaks the paralysis cycle. Action creates clarity.</u>
<b>Freedom Seekers</b>	You hate pressure from airlines OR companions. This eliminates both.	You control the timeline, not them. Freedom through structure.
<b>Bang-for-Buck Maximizers</b>	You want the MOST value per dollar. This delivers 10-30x returns.	High ROI strategy. \$3,000-\$8,000/hour effective rate.
<b>Experience Collectors</b>	You want the 5-star seat, the memorable flight, the story you will remember and tell for 20 years.	Upgrades your life, not just your seat. Memories over money.
<b>The Relationship Preserver</b>	Your companion is anxious. You need to keep the peace AND get a good deal.	Solves both problems simultaneously. Happy companion equals happy life.
<b>The Optimizer Freak</b>	You want to optimize all the way to departure. You can daisy chain (see below) holds and keep upgrading.	Unlimited optimization potential. Keep current booking. Monitor for better space. When it appears, book it (free/cheap cancel). Repeat. Upgraded 3 times before departure. Started with okay fare  and seat. Ended with best seat and fare. The REALLY big fish surface at the end. Memory of the flight lasts 20 years.
<b>The First Class Hunter</b>	Want \$30K First Class for \$3K. Will accept \$4K Business. First award space is hit-or-miss. Okay Business fare available NOW.	Lock Business cash fare. Book ANY First award immediately. Hunt aggressively for more First space over next week. First clears - cancel Business, fly First. First does not clear - use Business. Either way:  downside eliminated, upside preserved.

<b>The Flexible Explorer</b>	Want Europe in summer but have not decided which city. Multiple options under consideration. Partner keeps changing mind.	Book Business to London 40K miles, free cancel). Hold Business to Paris (cash, \$20). Book Business to Frankfurt (award, free cancel). Realize: Fly Frankfurt, train to Paris, return from London. Multi-city adventure designed around opportunities. Cancel unused bookings.
<b>The Airline Loyalty Player</b>	Have status on two airlines. Primary carrier's price is higher, holding but hope it goes down. Book back-up on second-choice airline at best price/seat.	If a better deal comes with your primary carrier, grab it. If not, you have a solid Plan B.

**We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.”**  
**– Dolly Parton**

**ADVANCED MOVE:  
DAISYCHAIN YOUR HOLDS WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES  
ALLOW & FAVOR IT**

What happens when your hold is about to expire?

Can you extend the deal if it is still available?

**What if fares go down during your hold period?**

Think of this like buying stocks with options to purchase if the price goes down

**DECISION TABLE:  
WHAT TO DO AS YOUR HOLD EXPIRES?**

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IF...	AND...	THEN...	BECAUSE...
Your hold is about to expire	You found a BETTER option	Hold the better option. Cancel the first hold.	You upgraded + you're positioned to upgrade again.
	Your HOLD is better than the latest new fares/awards.	Commit to the hold. Pay for it.	With a published fare, you can generally exchange for a new ticket on the same airline for

			<p>up to a year (read your fare rules to be sure). With an award ticket, you can cancel for little or no fee. You controlled the best</p> <p>option for a win. Plus, you have future options.</p>
	The SAME fare/award is still available for a hold.	EXTEND by booking a new hold. Cancel the first one.	Daisy chain as long as you want/can.

**The key insight:** You can REPEAT this process multiple times if you are ambitious.

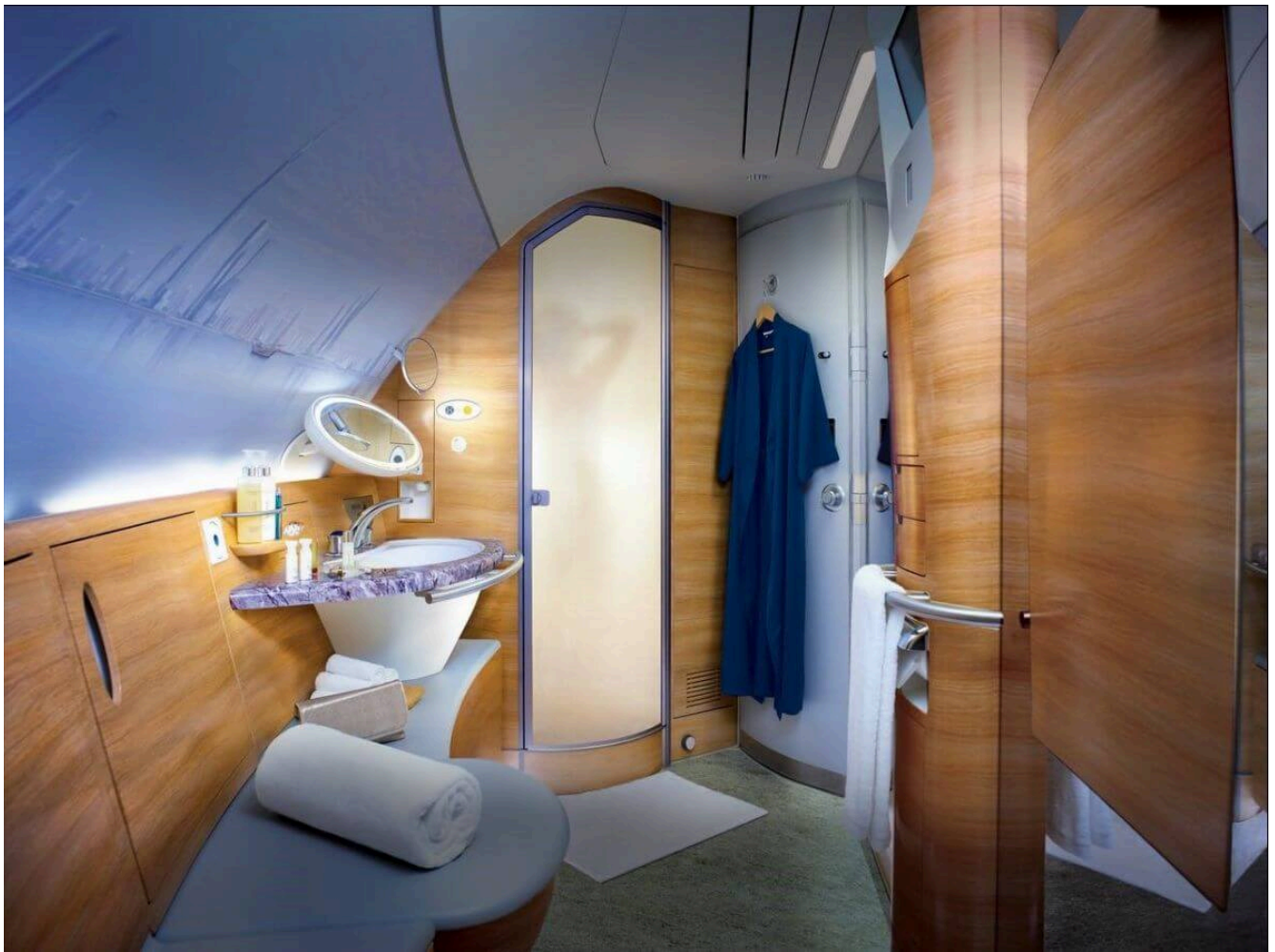
“I always want my options to be open.”  
– *Clive Owen*

UPGRADE OPTIONALITY INTELLIGENCE

**This applies to any area of life:** Under-leveraged people expand options through research (passive). Life Optimizers expand options through zero-cost portfolio construction (active).

Passive Research	Single Path	Strategic Holds	Portfolio Control
Expanding options through information gathering. Still no CONTROL over inventory.	One option. All-or-nothing. If it does not work, start over. High vulnerability.	Using holds/cancellations. But only ONE mechanism. Missing compound effects.	Multiple mechanisms are stacked. Each one makes the others more powerful. <b>Exponential optionality.</b>

**“Acting is like any other art form, in that you have the option to go very big or go very small.”  
– Nicolas Cage**



*Emirates Shower Flight – Unforgettable*

## **HOW OPTIONS LEVERAGE INTELLIGENCE LOOKS IN OTHER DOMAINS**

Domain	Paralysis	Anxiety	Single Path	Options Leveraged
<b>Legal: Choosing Attorney</b>	Know you need legal help. Avoid it for months because it's overwhelming.	Hire first lawyer Google shows. Hope they're competent.	Call one attorney referral. Go with whoever answers.	Have conversations with 3+ attorneys. Prepare relevant open-ended questions related to desires and decision criteria. <b>Test beats hope.</b>
<b>Marketing</b>	Research ad platforms	Run one ad. Hope it works.	Run Facebook	Test Facebook, Google, LinkedIn ads simultaneously.

	endlessly. Never launch because need more data.	Panic if it does not.	ads. Wait for results. Then try Google.	See which performs best. Scale winner. <b>Parallel testing wins.</b>
<b>Hiring</b>	Interview 47 candidates. Cannot decide. Position stays open for months.	Hire first candidate who seems good. Pray it works out.	Hire one person. See how they perform. Hire another if needed.	Give 3 candidates paid trial projects. See who delivers. Hire the winner. <b>Test beats theory.</b>
<b>Vendor Selection</b>	Research vendors for months. Cannot decide.	Pick vendor based on website. Hope they deliver.	Get proposal from one vendor. Negotiate.	Get proposals from 3 vendors. Run pilot projects with top 2. Choose based on performance. Leverage competition.
<b>Career Moves</b>	Apply to jobs for months. Never commit.	Accept first job offer. Hope it is good.	Negotiate with one company.	Get offers from 3 companies. Negotiate simultaneously. Leverage competition. <b>Choose the best total package.</b>
<b>Relationships: Finding Therapist</b>	Research therapists for months. Read reviews endlessly. Never book.	Pick first therapist insurance covers. Hope they're good.	Book with one therapist. See how it goes for 3 months.	Schedule intro calls with 3 therapists. Do one paid session with top 2. Choose who you connect with best. <b>Portfolio beats guessing.</b>
<b>Major Purchase: Vehicle</b>	Research for 6 months. Spreadsheet 27 options. Never buy. Keep old car.	Buy first car you test drive. Emotional decision. Regret later.	Test drive one model. Negotiate with one dealer. Take whatever they have and offer.	Test drive 3+ vehicles. Get quotes from 5 dealers (email). Play them against each other. Take best total package. <b>Leverage competition.</b>
<b>Healthcare: Finding Doctor</b>	Read online reviews for months. Avoid going to doctor. Health suffers.	Go to closest doctor in network. Hope they're good.	Book with one doctor. Stick with them even if not great.	Schedule new patient visits with 3 doctors. Ask same questions. See who listens, explains well, and problem-solves. Choose best fit. <b>Your health is worth it.</b>

**“The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.”  
– *Albert Einstein***

## **THE REAL QUESTION**

**This special report is NOT really about travel.**

It is about a way of thinking.

Most people see binary choices: This OR that. Now OR later. Certainty OR flexibility.

**Intelligent people ask: Why not BOTH?**

They do not choose between options. They CONTROL multiple options simultaneously. Then they decide from a position of strength.

Travel is just the laboratory where this intelligence is easy to see.

But once you develop it?

You start seeing it everywhere.

**The pattern is always the same.**

AVERAGE APPROACH	LIFE EXPERIENCE MAXIMIZERS
Expand options through research only(passive)	Expand options through portfolio construction (active)
Decide from pressure	Decide from strength
Choose one, between options	Control multiple options simultaneously
Use one mechanism sequentially	Stack mechanisms in parallel

**“You have as many options as you give yourself.”  
– *Kasie West***

**TRAVEL EXPERIENCE  
MASTERY**

[Options Intelligence Applied to Mileage Award Tickets.](#)

How to [Turn Published Fare Tickets Into Infinite Possibilities.](#)

**WHAT’S NEXT?**

**Where else in your life are you choosing not to leverage?**

Unforgettable Life Experiences (ULEs) are there for the taking.

Where are you using one mechanism when you could be stacking three?

Where are you deciding from pressure or impatience when you could be deciding from strength?

That is Upgrade Intelligence.

And once you see it, you cannot unsee it.

Welcome to being fully leveraged.

Because the best upgrade is not just to First Class.

It is to a *way of thinking* that works *everywhere*.

See you there.





# Leverage the “Cheaper than Free Upgrade” Play at The Luxury Collection

November 2025

**From Manhattan suites that cost LESS than regular rooms to the leverage framework that makes it possible, and savings up to 66% on regular rooms**

**The Impossible Number:** Start with math that shouldn't exist.

The Luxury Collection Hotel Manhattan Midtown. December high-season Christmas festivity rates. Regular Deluxe Queen Guest Room (without ABA membership): \$1,418/night.

One-Bedroom Suite (with ABA): \$727/night

That's not a typo. That's not a glitch.

The suite costs \$691 LESS than the regular room.

Or said another way: For the price of ONE regular room, you can book TWO suites.

Hers.

And his.

This is what we call a “cheaper than free upgrade.”

## THE “CHEAPER THAN FREE” UPGRADE

Let’s define terms.

Edward goes on Expedia. Pays normal price. Books a regular room. Let’s say \$1,418 when everyone is going to New York.

ABA-Member Albert uses the \$150/year American Bar Association membership – which [ANYONE can join](#). Enters the promo code. Gets a SUITE for \$727.

Albert didn’t just get a free upgrade. He got an upgrade that cost \$691 LESS than Edward paid for a regular room.

**The Price to Upgrade?** “Cheaper than Free.”

The better product costs less than the worse product. This isn’t a discount. This is inverted pricing reality.

This reveals exactly where leverage works.

## TWO THEMES IN THIS INTELLIGENCE REPORT

**Theme 1:** The Leverage Framework

How institutional buying power (the lever) applied to select properties (the object) during specific circumstances creates access most travelers never see.

**Theme 2:** The “Cheaper Than Free” Upgrade

Where the math becomes so absurd that suites cost LESS than regular rooms without the leverage. This is Upgrade Intelligence at scale.

Both themes work together. Leverage gets you access. “Cheaper than free” shows you where to use it.

## THE LEVERAGE FRAMEWORK

The smartest travelers don’t work harder. They work smarter.

They understand the three dimensions of leverage: the lever (**your tool**), the object (**what you’re moving**), and the circumstance (**when it works**).

Here’s what that means for some of [The Luxury Collection](#) hotels:

**The Lever:** Your \$150 ABA membership fee – collective buying power borrowed from 400,000+ members.

**The Object:** The pricing barrier between “regular room” and “suite I actually want.”

**The Circumstance:** Select Luxury Collection properties across four continents where institutional negotiating leverage creates math that makes no sense for the traveler.

This isn’t about finding “deals.” It’s about applying force to actual leverage points, not imaginary ones.

## THE ABA REMINDER

In our previous intel reports on the ABA hotel strategy, we’ve examined how this works:

- [Up to 56% Off at 25 Ritz-Carlton Hotels](#)
- [Up to 75% and free suite upgrades at eight St. Regis](#)
- [Up to 54% and free suite upgrades at 11 Four Seasons](#)
- [Up to 59% Off at five Hilton Hotels \(including the Waldorf New York\)](#)

The pattern holds: For \$150/year, you access pre-negotiated institutional rates at Luxury Collection properties. No law degree required. No objections sustained.

The American Bar Association negotiated these rates using leverage you don’t have individually. You’re renting that leverage for the price of a nice dinner.

Smart? Very.

## WHAT IS THE LUXURY COLLECTION?

The Luxury Collection isn't a standardized chain. It's a curated portfolio of independent heritage properties owned or managed by Marriott – often converted palaces, historic landmarks, or architectural gems – each with its own unique positioning.

Convention city locations. Marriott Bonvoy points eligibility. And most importantly: upgrade math that reveals exactly where “cheaper than free” works.

## THE GLOBAL REACH

We surveyed over 100 properties and discovered the 14 with the ABA deals at the moment. Here's what we found:

Prince de Galles, Paris: Suite with ABA costs \$258 less than regular room without ABA.

The St. Anthony, San Antonio: Suite with ABA costs \$75 less than regular room without ABA

Vienna – Hotel Imperial: Regular room without ABA = \$731. Suite with ABA = \$792. That's a \$61 suite upgrade.

Buenos Aires – Park Tower: Regular room without ABA = \$338. Suite with ABA = \$441. That's a \$103 suite upgrade.

These aren't anomalies. These are leverage points where institutional negotiation changed reality.

Edward pays \$1,418 for a regular room. Albert pays \$727 for a suite. Who has higher Upgrade IQ?

The pattern crosses continents. When leverage works, it works globally with Marriott's The Luxury Collection.

## THE REALITY CHECK

Now let's be clear about limitations.

This is a survey of rates we found at various dates – not a promise of universal availability. ABA rates are volatile. They change based on occupancy, season, and property-specific yield management.

The Luxury Collection has over 120 properties worldwide. ABA has negotiated relationships with select ones – 14 properties in our current survey. This isn't comprehensive coverage.

Your dates will differ. Your results will differ.

But the pattern is what matters: Where ABA leverage exists, “cheaper than free” math can appear. Suite premiums compress. Sometimes they invert entirely.

The tables below show you where we found the fulcrum.

## REGULAR ROOM SAVINGS

Your baseline value – what ABA membership does to normal room pricing.

Hotel	Regular Price	ABA Price	Savings \$	Savings %
The Whitley, Atlanta Buckhead	\$930	\$319	\$611	66%
Prince de Galles, Paris	\$1,693	\$736	\$957	57%
Manhattan Midtown	\$1,418	\$727	\$691	49%
The Ballantyne, Charlotte	\$579	\$310	\$269	46%
The Phoenician, Scottsdale	\$979	\$632	\$347	35%
The Gwen, Chicago	\$429	\$277	\$152	35%
The Nines, Portland	\$400	\$267	\$133	33%

## WHEN YOU WANT THE SUITE, NOT JUST THE ROOM, HERE’S WHAT ABA LEVERAGE CAN DELIVER.

Hotel	Regular Price	ABA Price	Savings \$	Savings %
Manhattan Midtown	\$1,527	\$727	\$800	52%
Prince de Galles, Paris	\$2,275	\$1,435	\$840	37%
The Ballantyne, Charlotte	\$1,006	\$655	\$351	35%

The Phoenician, Scottsdale	\$436	\$294	\$142	33%
The St. Anthony, San Antonio	\$1,828	\$1,412	\$416	23%
Park Tower, Buenos Aires	\$568	\$441	\$127	22%
The Nines, Portland	\$692	\$583	\$109	16%
The US Grant, San Diego	\$517	\$435	\$82	16%
Hotel Imperial, Vienna	\$925	\$792	\$133	14%

## THE “CHEAPER THAN FREE” MATRIX

The comparison that matters: Regular room WITHOUT ABA vs. Suite WITH ABA.

Negative numbers = The suite costs LESS than the regular room.

**You save money by upgrading!**

Hotel	Regular Room (No ABA)	Suite (With ABA)	Upgrade Cost
Manhattan Midtown	\$1,418	\$727	-\$691
Prince de Galles, Paris	\$1,693	\$1,435	-\$258
The St. Anthony, San Antonio	\$369	\$294	-\$75
The US Grant, San Diego	\$385	\$435	+\$50
Hotel Imperial, Vienna	\$731	\$792	+\$61
The Ballantyne, Charlotte	\$579	\$655	+\$76
Park Tower, Buenos Aires	\$338	\$441	+\$103
The Nines, Portland	\$400	\$583	+\$183

The Phoenician, Scottsdale	\$979	\$1,412	+\$433
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## THE UPGRADE INTELLIGENCE INSIGHT

Look at that third table. That's not pricing. That's a reality check.

Most people FANTASIZE that upgrades are expensive splurges. The REALITY is that leverage can make upgrades CHEAPER than downgrades.

## WHY MR. UPGRADE LOVES "CHEAPER THAN FREE"

You might think Mr. Upgrade would focus on expensive upgrades – the biggest, most premium experiences.

Actually, he loves "cheaper than free" because it reveals REALITY vs. FANTASY.

**Fantasy:** Upgrades are expensive. You have to pay more for more.

**Reality:** With leverage, upgrades can cost LESS than downgrades.

This connects to The Upgrade Formula:

- Reality vs. Fantasy: Most people chase "good deals" on regular rooms while suites can cost less.
- Leverage Intelligence: Small input (\$150 membership) creates massive output (\$691 savings + suite upgrade).
- Baseline Reality: Edward doesn't know he is uninformed. Albert knows exactly where he stands.

## WHAT YOU CONTROL (AND WHAT YOU DON'T)

You don't control:

- Whether these rates exist when you search
- What dates have availability
- How long the ABA relationship lasts
- Which properties get added or removed

You do control:

- Whether you have the \$150 membership tool
- Whether you search for these properties



- Whether you compare the RIGHT numbers (regular vs. suite)
- Whether you book the suite when the math is obvious

Upgrade Intelligence is knowing the difference.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

You won't get these rates at every Luxury Collection property. You won't get them on every date.

This isn't magic. This isn't luck.

It's Leverage Intelligence.

Use it when the risk / reward equation makes sense.

A photograph of two women in the foreground, both with their mouths covered by their hands as if they are sharing a secret. The woman on the left has dark hair and is wearing a blue denim shirt. The woman on the right has light brown hair and is wearing a dark top. The background is blurred, showing other people and what appears to be an outdoor event.

# 19 Secret United Business Class Upgrade Sweet Spots Across Four Continents

November 2025

## From Tahiti to Tokyo, Paris to Sao Paulo: How to fly Business Class for up to 61% off when “free” award space has vanished and dynamic pricing has killed the old game

**Bad News First:** Business Class fares on many long-haul routes are as high as ever, at \$4,000 to \$8,000+. “Saver” Business Class award space to Asia, Europe, South America, and the South Pacific has essentially vanished on United. Everybody knows that.

Saver awards that used to cost 100,000 miles round-trip now run 180,000 to 400,000+. The increasing supply of miles in the market has turned what was once a reliable redemption into a moving target that rarely moves in your favor.

Most travelers are still playing a game that no longer exists – while a small group who understand what actually works are flying Business Class to Tahiti, Paris, Brazil, and China.

Especially on short notice for spontaneous bags-packed travelers and [relentless upgraders](#).

They're using a strategy the masses have overlooked: mileage upgrades on routes where availability is real and accessible even for families of four or more.

## WHY THIS MATTERS RIGHT NOW

**Baseline Reality:** The old strategy of finding free award space at reasonable prices is functionally dead with United.

**Mileage upgrades**, however, remain viable on specific routes with availability – sometimes for **up to four or more seats at a time**.

## TWO AUDIENCES, ONE SOLUTION

**If you hold Chase Rewards points** that transfer instantly to United, or if you are **sitting on United miles** wondering how to use them without getting fleeced by dynamic pricing, this is your play.

**United MileagePlus Elite status seekers benefit doubly:** You earn elite qualifying credit and miles on the paid economy ticket when you [use miles to upgrade to Business Class](#).

Non-elites and families benefit from dramatically improved availability compared to free award space – and the ability to book four or more seats on the same flight, something nearly impossible with traditional awards on United.

## TWO STRATEGIES, ONE PRINCIPLE: WORK WITH WHAT ACTUALLY EXISTS

**Upgrade Mindset:** The distinction between fantasy and reality separates travelers who fly Business Class regularly at handsome savings from those who wait indefinitely for “perfect” redemptions that never materialize.

Or just accept what most do:

Fly Premium Economy.

Or pay through the nose for Business.

## STRATEGY #1: AVAILABILITY-FIRST BOOKING

For travelers who have **not booked yet**. Instead of deciding on dates first and then searching for award space ([the “booking backwards” trap](#)), reverse the process: Check where upgrade availability actually exists on these 19 routes – or leverage the routes to travel beyond – then choose your dates based on that reality.

Book an economy ticket and upgrade to Business Class at the time of ticketing – **NOT as a waitlist**, not as a hope, but as a confirmed upgrade the moment you book.

**Options Generation:** When availability drives the decision instead of arbitrary date preferences, the number of viable travel options expands exponentially.

## STRATEGY #2: UPGRADE ARBITRAGE

For travelers who **already have a ticket** in hand. Perhaps you booked Premium Economy six months ago when you needed certainty, or you overpaid for Business Class nine months ago because you did not know these sweet spots existed. Cancel that ticket and book one of these opportunities now – either at a better price, in a better seat, or both.

**Important:** Wait to cancel your existing ticket until you have ticket numbers for the new booking.

**Reality vs. Fantasy:** Fantasy travelers wait for “someday” when availability magically appears at the price they want. Reality-based travelers book what exists now and iterate when better opportunities surface.

Get a deeper exploration of the [iterative upgrade strategy here](#).

## THE ECONOMICS: WHY MILEAGE UPGRADES OFTEN BEAT FREE AWARDS

**Upgrade Leverage:** Mileage upgrades create a force multiplier effect. You are not just saving money, you are accessing **inventory that does not exist as free award space**, earning elite credit, and preserving miles for future travel.

**The math is straightforward.** A typical transatlantic route requires 80,000 miles for a mileage upgrade, plus the economy fare and co-pay, totaling about \$2,000 for Business Class, for example.

Compare this to published Business Class fares typically \$3,500 to \$6,500, and the **savings range from 43% to 69%**.

Compare it to dynamic award pricing of 200,000-400,000 miles round-trip and the **mileage upgrade uses only a fraction of your miles** while providing the same seat, the same service, and – for elite status seekers – credit toward status qualification.

## EXAMPLE MILEAGE UPGRADE ECONOMICS FARES ARE VOLATILE; THESE ARE JUST EXAMPLES

Route	Economy Fare	Miles Required (RT)	Co-Pay Cost R/T	Total Cash Cost	Business Fare	Cash \$ Savings	% Savings
Chicago - London	\$548	40000	\$950	\$2,050	\$4,650	\$2,600	56%
Boise - São Paulo	\$1,463	50000	\$950	\$2,225	\$5,700	\$3,475	61%
Los Angeles - Tokyo	\$906	60000	\$1,200	\$2,106	\$5,180	\$3,074	59%
Houston - Tahiti	\$1,450	60000	\$1,200	\$2,650	\$4,880	\$2,230	46%

## THE CONNECTION MULTIPLIER: BEYOND THE 19 ROUTES

**Decision Framework:** These 19 routes represent the long-haul segments with intermittent upgrade availability, but the actual **origin-destination possibilities number in the thousands**.

With mileage upgrade awards, you are buying an economy class fare, so unless the flight is sold out, you can generally find a fare that gets you from your departure to your destination city, all on one ticket, even if you're flying from Boise to Budapest.

## NOT FLYING TO LONDON, PARIS, SAO PAULO, TAHITI, OR TOKYO?

**No problem** – connect to Budapest, Prague, or Barcelona. Or to Rio or Seoul. You get the idea.

**Not departing from Los Angeles or Newark?** No problem.

Book from Boise, Minneapolis, or Tampa with connections through United's domestic hubs.

**Quick example:** Say you live in San Antonio and want to fly to Stockholm. You see availability for the mileage upgrade from Chicago to Paris. With a free award, you would have to get lucky in finding award space on both the San Antonio-Chicago segment and the Paris-Stockholm segment. With a mileage upgrade, you are buying an everyday economy fare from San Antonio to Stockholm via Chicago and Paris.

The long-haul Chicago-Paris segment is where the Business Class upgrade matters most. Worst-case scenario: you waitlist the short San Antonio-Chicago segment for an upgrade. The Paris-Stockholm segment is part of the economy ticket on a Star Alliance partner, so upgrade availability does not apply. Economy for 90 minutes to reach your final destination is manageable when everything else works in your favor – and you have saved \$3,000 per ticket in the process.

**Upgrade Leverage:** The connection strategy transforms 19 routes into **thousands of viable origin-destination pairs** across the United and Star Alliance networks.

## **THE 19 ROUTES: WHERE AVAILABILITY ACTUALLY LIVES**

Baseline Gratitude: Rather than complaining about what does not exist, recognize and utilize what does. Availability is volatile and always changing so use this as a general guide.

### **To/From Europe**

From close in to three months out, New York/Newark and Chicago to/from Dublin can be ideal options for Ireland as a gateway to the UK and Scandinavia with scattered availability.

Newark-Venice shows good availability close-in for Iterative Upgraders.

Newark- and Washington, DC-Geneva provide Swiss access with connections throughout Central Europe, with scattered availability of up to four seats. **It's especially good on the return segment.**

Chicago and Newark to Frankfurt and Amsterdam, and from Washington, DC, offer intermittent availability, and are much better on the return segment.

Close-in for bags-packed travelers and iterative upgraders, Newark and Washington, DC-Paris round out the continent with decent availability of up to four seats.

### **To/From Asia**

LAX-Shanghai (February) and LAX-Tokyo (close-in) demonstrate a rarity for transpacific premium travel nowadays.

SFO-Beijing offers similar reliability for February travel and close-in upgrading.

The Asia routes represent some of the highest-value redemptions given the distance, flight duration, and typical Business Class fares of \$5,000 to \$9,000 round-trip. Free award space to Asia is notoriously difficult these days; upgrade space on these routes is the practical alternative.

## **South America**

Chicago-Sao Paulo (close-in) provide Brazilian access availability for one to four seats. Sao Paulo serves as the gateway to the entire continent with connections to Buenos Aires, Santiago, and beyond. Most travelers overlook South America entirely in their award search strategies, making these routes valuable not just for availability but for accessing an underutilized opportunity.

## **Oceania**

Are your bags packed? Tahiti is great for spontaneous travelers and close-in upgraders. SFO-Tahiti can't really be unlocked with free award space, where the only alternative is \$4,500-\$6,000 Business Class fares. Mileage upgrades make this destination accessible at \$2,400-\$2,800 total cost available for up to four seats.

# **HOW TO ACTUALLY BOOK MILEAGE UPGRADES**

## **For Chase Points Holders:**

- Transfer Chase Ultimate Rewards points to United (instant transfer) AFTER you find dates you can work with
- Go to United.com and use the Advanced Search tool and select economy class
- Select "MileagePlus Upgrade Awards" in the Upgrade Type dropdown
- Search your dates on the routes with known availability
- Green checkmark indicates upgrade is available – book immediately

## **For United MileagePlus Members:**

- Follow the same Advanced Search process on United.com
- If short on miles, purchase them directly (United frequently runs sales)
- Book the upgrade at time of ticketing for instant confirmation

*What Mileage Upgrades Look Like*

*When You Know Where to Look*



	Economy	Upgrade to Premium Economy	Upgrade to Business	Upgrade to Business
		Buy Economy	Buy Economy	Buy Premium Economy
<b>NONSTOP</b> <b>4:15 PM</b> <b>7:00 AM</b> <b>EW</b> <b>8H, 45M</b> <b>NAP</b> <small>UA 964 (Boeing 767-300)</small> <small>1025 kg CO<sub>2</sub></small>	Roundtrip <b>\$1,244</b> United Economy (T)	Roundtrip <b>\$1,244</b> + 20k miles, each way <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Upgrade available	Roundtrip <b>\$1,244</b> + \$550 service fees, each way + 20k miles, each way <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Upgrade available	Roundtrip <b>\$2,114</b> + \$425 service fees, each way + 20k miles, each way <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Upgrade available

*Don't live in New York?*

*Live in Chicago?*

*Waitlist the two-hour flight if you have to  
and confirm the nine-hour flight...*

	Economy	Upgrade to Premium Economy	Upgrade to Business	Upgrade to Business
		Buy Economy	Buy Economy	Buy Premium Economy
<b>1STOP</b> <b>11:46 AM</b> <b>7:00 AM</b> <b>ORD</b> <b>12H, 14M</b> <b>NAP</b> <small>EW - 1H, 3M</small> <small>1249 kg CO<sub>2</sub></small>	Roundtrip <b>\$1,172</b> United Economy (T)	Roundtrip <b>\$1,172</b> + 20k miles, each way <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed upgrade	Roundtrip <b>\$1,172</b> + \$550 service fees, each way + 20k miles, each way <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed upgrade	Roundtrip <b>\$2,038</b> + \$425 service fees, each way + 20k miles, each way <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed upgrade
<b>1STOP</b> <b>3:40 PM</b> <b>11:40 AM</b> <b>ORD</b> <b>13H</b> <b>NAP</b> <small>EW - 1H, 3M</small>	Roundtrip <b>\$1,172</b>	Roundtrip <b>\$1,172</b> + 20k miles, each way	<div> <b>ORD - EWR</b>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Upgrade waitlist  <b>EWR - NAP</b>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Upgrade available         </div>	

## THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1 – Check one-way availability first to see which dates have what; it's just easier this way.

2 – Consider open-jaws (return from a different city) when outbound and return flights don't align for a single route.

3 – You're saving \$2,000 to \$3,000 a ticket – and de-risking sitting in coach or sweating it out on a waitlist – so you don't lose heart.

## THE CHOICE

The old game is dead. Free award space at reasonable prices has vanished. Book these 19 routes where availability can be **confirmed at time of ticketing**. Fly Business Class to Tahiti, Paris, Brazil, Tokyo, and

beyond. Bring the family in many cases.

Earn elite credit if that matters to you. Spend 40,000-60,000 miles round-trip instead of 200,000-400,000+, stretching your mileage resources. Save 46%-69% off published Business Class fares.

See you up front.



# November's Top 61 Mileage Awards & Special Fares Greatest Hits (Still Available)

November 2025

## Cool November 2025 Deals

There are lots of oohs and ahhs this month that can save you a load of miles, points, and dollars. As we always say, however, don't delay, because some will be out-of-date fast!

## Sweet Redeems

### EUROPE

[Miles & Cash > United Upgrade > Four Seat Opportunities > Chicago to Brussels](#)

[Miles / Points > 2+ Seats > Austrian Airlines > Business Class > Montreal to Vienna](#)

[Miles & Cash > United Upgrade > Four Seat Opportunities > Washington DC to Barcelona](#)

[Miles / Points > 2+ Seats > SWISS > Business Class > Boston to Zurich](#)

[Miles / Points > 4+ Seats > Lufthansa > Business Class > San Francisco to Munich](#)

[Miles / Points > 4+ Seats > Lufthansa > Business Class > Houston to Frankfurt](#)

[Miles or \\$ > Lufthansa > Business Class > Charlotte to Munich > 4+ Seats](#)

[Miles / Points > 4+ Seats > Lufthansa > Business Class > Boston to Frankfurt](#)

[American Airlines > Close In> Business Class With Miles > from New York to London > 4+ Seats](#)

[Miles / Points > 4+ Seats > Lufthansa > Business Class > Chicago to Munich](#)

[Miles / Points > 4+ Seats > Lufthansa > Business Class > Washington, DC to Frankfurt](#)

[Miles / Points > 4+ Seats > Lufthansa > Business Class > Detroit to Frankfurt](#)

[Miles or \\$ > Lufthansa > Business Class > Boston to Munich > 4+ Seats](#)

## **ASIA**

[Tokyo: Japan Airlines Discounted Business Class Availability from San Diego and Many Other Cities](#)

[Tokyo: Japan Airlines Discounted Business Class Availability from Chicago and Many Other Cities](#)

[Tokyo: Japan Airlines Discounted Business Class Availability from Los Angeles and Many Other Cities > All Year](#)

[All Year > Japan Business Class Opportunities to Tokyo from San Francisco with Miles / Points > 4+ Seats](#)

[Japan Airlines > Handful of Discounted Business Class Seats from Seattle to Tokyo](#)

## **MIDDLE EAST**

[First Apartment > World's Best > Close In > Etihad First Class from Paris to Abu Dhabi](#)

## **SOUTH AMERICA**

[Miles > Cheap LATAM Business Class from Mexico City to Santiago > 4+ seats](#)

[Miles & Cash > United Upgrade > Two Seat Opportunities > Houston to Buenos Aires](#)

[Miles > Cheap LATAM Business Class from New York to São Paulo > 2+ Seats](#)

## **SOUTH PACIFIC**

[American Airlines > Business Class With Miles > from Dallas to Brisbane > 4+ Seats](#)

## **Special Published Fares**



## **AFRICA**

[Money > Nairobi > All Year > Biz Class > \\$3,476 to \\$4,157 R/T](#)

[Money > Morocco > Fall/Winter > Biz Class > \\$2,677 to \\$3,324 R/T](#)

[Money > from New York and Boston to Casablanca > All Year > Premium Economy > from \\$995 R/T](#)

[Money > Cairo > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,680 to \\$3,382 R/T](#)

## ASIA

[Money > Seoul > All Year > Biz Class > \\$3,448 to \\$4,314 R/T](#)

[Money > China > All Year > Biz Class > \\$3,686 to \\$4,158 R/T](#)

[Money > Manila > All Year > Biz Class > \\$3,228 to \\$4,314 R/T](#)

## EUROPE

[Money > Switzerland > Winter > First Class > \\$3,897 to \\$5,418 R/T](#)

[Money > Venice > Spring/Summer > Biz Class > \\$2,784 to \\$3,218 R/T](#)

[Money > Dublin > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,626 to \\$3,268 R/T](#)

[Money > Budapest > Spring/Summer > Biz Class > \\$2,847 to \\$3,246 R/T](#)

[Money > Austria > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,580 to \\$3,307 R/T](#)

[Money > Switzerland > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,549 to \\$3,303 R/T](#)

[Money > Spain > Winter > First Class > \\$3,993 to \\$5,208 R/T](#)

[Money > Italy > All Year > First Class > \\$3,903 to \\$5,656 R/T](#)

[Money > France > Winter > First Class > \\$4,003 to \\$5,799 R/T](#)

[Money > Europe > All Year > Premium Economy > \\$701 to \\$1,033 R/T](#)

[Money > Milan > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,784 to \\$3,324 R/T](#)

[Money > Rome > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,523 to \\$3,300 R/T](#)

[Money > Paris > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,493 to \\$3,211 R/T](#)

[Money > Europe > All Year > Biz Class with TAP Portugal > \\$2,342 to \\$2,794 R/T](#)



[Money > Frankfurt > Fall/Winter > Biz Class > \\$2,664 to \\$3,302 R/T](#)

[Money > Austria > Winter > Biz Class > \\$2,757 to \\$3,208 R/T](#)

[Money > Amsterdam > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,295 to \\$3,264 R/T](#)

## **HAWAII**

[Money > Kona > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > \\$1,257 to \\$1,643 R/T](#)

[Money > Honolulu > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > \\$1,096 to \\$1,521 R/T](#)

[Money > Kauai > Winter > Biz Class > \\$1,117 to \\$1,672 R/T](#)

[Money > Maui > Fall > Biz Class > \\$1,137 to \\$1,653 R/T](#)



## **INDIA**

[Money > New Delhi > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,863 to \\$3,729 R/T](#)

[Money > Mumbai > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,402 to \\$3,936 R/T](#)



## **MEXICO**

[Money > Puerto Vallarta > All Year > Biz Class > \\$629 to \\$998 R/T](#)

[Money > Cabo San Lucas > Fall/Winter > Biz Class > \\$710 to \\$1,018 R/T](#)

[Money > Cozumel > All Year > Biz Class > \\$675 to \\$1,029 R/T](#)

[Money > Cancun > All Year > Biz Class > \\$531 to \\$836 R/T](#)

## **MIDDLE EAST**

[Money > Istanbul > Winter > Biz Class > \\$2,942 to \\$3,373 R/T](#)


## **NORTH AMERICA**

[Money > Domestic Transcon > All Year > Business Class > \\$796 to \\$1,347 R/T](#)

[Money > Barcelona to U.S. > Winter/Spring > Premium Economy > \\$630 to \\$863 USD R/T](#)

## **SOUTH AMERICA**

[Money > Buenos Aires > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,265 to \\$3,324 R/T](#)



# International First Class \$1,722, Oneworld, Star Alliance, Alaska, Hyatt Discounts + More

November 2025

## On Sale Now: Airline Miles and Hotel Points, Save Up to 88% on Premium Flights and Hotels...

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