

Trend Watch: Already Booked? Great! Here's 23 Options to Leverage Big Upgrades to Europe, Part I: Star Alliance

February 2025

Close-in availability trends: How opportunity travelers can save up to 70%+ in miles or cash to Europe

At the moment, scoring a great deal far in advance—**whether with miles or cash**—is not easy. Long-haul Business Class fares can easily be between \$4,000 and \$7,000 to Europe, while mileage redemptions are often in the brutal 150,000 to 400,000-mile range *each way*. Yikes.

If you're holding a ticket right now, and purchased it under pressure, perhaps from a significant other to book *right now*, and unwilling to fly economy, you likely **paid through the nose** for that premium seat.

GOT A BLOODY NOSE?

Yep. There's something about getting financially walloped by airlines that stings—no matter your age, gender, or frequent flyer status. But all is not lost. Enter the “[Iterative Upgrade Strategy and Mindset](#)”—a **must-know** for the airficianado.

Think of it like training for a boxing match: Just because you got knocked down doesn't mean you don't get back up. Time to lace up and step back into the ring.

ESCAPE HATCH: KNOWING YOUR CANCELLATION OPTIONS

A lot of travelers feel stuck or helpless with **whatever ticket they booked first—whether it was with miles or cash**—but that's far from the truth.

Post-lockdown, most airlines offer flexible options that allow for **cancellations or changes without a charge**. This is a huge opportunity *if you know how to use it*.

Most major airlines have adopted policies that allow you to **cancel a cash ticket** and retain the value for up to a year. This means that instead of being locked into your original itinerary, you can **exchange** your ticket for a better one—often with little to **no penalty**.

If a better deal emerges, you can even switch airlines altogether and hold onto the original ticket's value for future travel up to a year. Of course, **always check the fare rules before making any moves**.

Don't cancel the ticket you have until you have a better one secured.

Similarly, **mileage-based tickets** are far more flexible than many travelers realize. Airlines have increasingly dropped change and cancellation fees on award bookings, or charge relatively little. This means you can often redeposit your miles for free or at a minimal cost if any. Here are a few examples:

[American](#): No changes allowed. Cancellation and redeposit of miles are free.

[Delta](#): Changes, cancellations, and redeposits are free.

[United](#): Changes, cancellations, and redeposits are free.

[British Airways](#): Changes to date, time, and cabin cost \$55; cancellation and redeposit cost \$55; additional service center fee for date or time changes, cancellation, and Avios redeposit costs \$25. No charge for Gold Members.

[Emirates](#): Changes to travel date: Saver award is \$25; Flex and Flex Plus are free. Cancellation and redeposit: Saver award is \$75; Flex and Flex Plus are free.

[Lufthansa](#): Changes allowed to date and time, but not the route for \$50 or 10,000 miles. Cancellation or rebooking: in both cases a fee of 50€ per ticket; this amount may vary or there may be no fee with some awards.

[Singapore](#): Changes to travel date: Saver award is \$25 / Advantage award is free; change of route, cabin class or award type on Singapore Airlines is \$25; change of date, route, flight or carrier on partner airlines is \$50; redeposit of miles for award tickets / upgrades on Saver award are \$75 / Advantage is \$50.

A well-timed cancellation can open the door to a *much* better seat—often at little or no extra cost.

THE SECRET LAST-MINUTE UPGRADE SAUCE: CLOSE-IN AVAILABILITY TRENDS

Now that you know how to escape a bad ticket, it's time to understand how to land a far better one.

Airlines often release premium cabin award seats when they see that they won't sell for cash. The closer you get to departure, the more likely they are to open up those seats for mileage redemptions if the premium cabin is empty or close to it. The airlines think charging something is better than nothing.

They don't always do it.

But when they do—and you know about it—Upgrade-o-rama.

ALSO: This is where the [Buy Miles to Fly in Style](#) strategy becomes a game changer. **If you already have miles or transferable points, you're in a great position.** But even if you don't, you can **buy miles cheaply and redeem them for last-minute upgrade opportunities.**

You might be wondering: *Aren't award seats nearly impossible to find these days?* **It's true that availability has tightened, but close-in availability can be there and offer some of the best opportunities.**

Our daily tracking at FCF uncovers **which airlines and routes** have long-haul Business and First-Class seats that open up just days, a week, or two weeks before departure to Europe.

This means your *already-booked economy or overpriced premium ticket* might just be a placeholder for something *far better*.

FCF Cheat Sheet:

23 Options to Upgrade Your Trip to Europe

For those willing to play the last-minute game, here are some of the **best mileage sweet spots** right now.

Remember, these are just the long-haul routes. [Most mileage programs offer free connections to the U.S. hub and from the European hubs.](#) See Boise to Budapest example **below**.

AUSTRIAN AIRLINES – BUSINESS CLASS REG. \$4,000+ TO \$7,000+ ROUND-TRIP

If you have Air Canada Aeroplan miles (an Amex points partner), United MileagePlus miles (a Chase partner), or All Nippon Airways (Amex partner) miles to a lesser extent, it's worth checking out if your trip might be aligned with these **routes FCF has noticed close-in availability lately**:

- **Montreal – Vienna:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,828 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Chicago – Vienna:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Washington D.C. – Vienna:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,816 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **New York – Vienna:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)

Chicago (ORD) - Vienna, All airports (VIE) | Wednesday March 5, 2025

Fares displayed are per person, one way, and include all taxes, fees and charges. Fare features listed apply to flights operated by Air Canada, Air Canada Express and Air Canada Rouge. Policies and rules may differ for flights operated by other carriers.

Filter by cabin **Business Class**

<	Mon Mar 3 70K + CA \$80	Tue Mar 4 70K + CA \$115	Wed Mar 5 70K + CA \$80	Thu Mar 6 380.2K + CA \$89	Fri Mar 7 -	>
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Non-stop x Include: AUSTRIAN AIRLINES x Connection airports eUpgrade More options Sort by: Recommended

Flight results: 1 of 75 flights found (filtered)

		Economy Class	Premium Economy	Business Class
Lowest price				
16:20	Non-stop 8hr45m +1	08:05		
Chicago		Vienna		
Operated by Austrian Airlines		40K + CA \$80	—	4 seats left 70K + CA \$80

[Preview seats](#) | [Details](#)

LUFTHANSA – BUSINESS CLASS REG. \$4,000+ TO \$7,000+ ROUND-TRIP

- **Chicago – Frankfurt:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Washington D.C. – Munich:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Washington D.C. – Frankfurt:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **New York – Frankfurt:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Chicago – Munich:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Boston – Munich:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,598 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)

New York, All airports (NYC) - Frankfurt, All airports (FRA) | Saturday March 1, 2025

Fares displayed are per person, one way, and include all taxes, fees and charges. Fare features listed apply to flights operated by Air Canada, Air Canada Express and Air Canada Rouge. Policies and rules may differ for flights operated by other carriers.

Filter by cabin **Business Class** ▾

<	Thu Feb 27 60K + CA \$111	Fri Feb 28 60K + CA \$106	Sat Mar 1 60K + CA \$80	Sun Mar 2 60K + CA \$80	Mon Mar 3 60K + CA \$80	>
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Non-stop ✕ **Include: LUFTHANSA** ✕ **Connection airports** ▾ **eUpgrade** **More options** ▾ **Sort by: Recommended** ▾

Flight results: 2 of 30 flights found (filtered)	Economy Class ▾	Premium Economy ▾	Business Class ▾
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Lowest price	15:45 Non-stop 7hr40m +1 05:25		
New York (JFK)	Frankfurt	35K + CA \$80	60K + CA \$80
Operated by Lufthansa Preview seats Details			7 seats left

SINGAPORE AIRLINES – BUSINESS CLASS REG. \$3,000+ ROUND-TRIP

- **New York – Frankfurt:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,708 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Houston – Manchester:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)

New York (JFK) - Frankfurt, All airports (FRA) | Monday March 3, 2025

Fares displayed are per person, one way, and include all taxes, fees and charges. Fare features listed apply to flights operated by Air Canada, Air Canada Express and Air Canada Rouge. Policies and rules may differ for flights operated by other carriers.

Filter by cabin **Business Class** ▾

<	Sat Mar 1 60K + CA \$80	Sun Mar 2 60K + CA \$80	Mon Mar 3 45.3K + CA \$117	Tue Mar 4 45.3K + CA \$117	Wed Mar 5 45.3K + CA \$117	>
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Non-stop ✕ **Include: SINGAPORE AIRLINES** ✕ **Connection airports** ▾ **eUpgrade** **More options** ▾ **Sort by: Recommended** ▾

Flight results: 1 of 121 flights found (filtered)	Economy Class ▾	Premium Economy ▾	Business Class ▾
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✈ Did you know we fly to and from La Guardia (LGA) and Newark (EWR)? Consider changing your airport if it's more convenient for you. [Update your search](#)

20:15 Non-stop 7hr35m +1 09:50		
New York	Frankfurt	60K + CA \$80
Operated by Singapore Airlines Preview seats Details		

SWISS – BUSINESS CLASS REG. \$4,000+ TO \$7,000+ ROUND-TRIP

- **Boston – Zurich:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Chicago – Zurich:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **New York – Geneva:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Montreal – Zurich:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,617 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)

New York, All airports (NYC) - Geneva, All airports (GVA) | Tuesday March 4, 2025

Fares displayed are per person, one way, and include all taxes, fees and charges. Fare features listed apply to flights operated by Air Canada, Air Canada Express and Air Canada Rouge. Policies and rules may differ for flights operated by other carriers.

Filter by cabin **Business Class**

<	Sun Mar 2 60K + CA \$106	Mon Mar 3 58.9K + CA \$106	Tue Mar 4 58.9K + CA \$106	Wed Mar 5 60K + CA \$115	Thu Mar 6 60K + CA \$115	>
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[Non-stop](#) [Include: SWISS INTERNATIONAL AIR LINES](#) [Connection airports](#) [eUpgrade](#) Sort by: **Recommended**

[More options](#)

Flight results: 1 of 94 flights found (filtered)

[Economy Class](#) [Premium Economy](#) **[Business Class](#)**

Lowest price	19:45	Non-stop 7hr35m +1	09:20			2 seats left
	New York (JFK)		Geneva	35K + CA \$80	—	60K + CA \$80
	Operated by Swiss International Air Lines			Preview seats Details		

UNITED – BUSINESS CLASS REG. \$4,000+ TO \$7,000+ ROUND-TRIP

- **Chicago – Amsterdam:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **New York/Newark – London:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Chicago – London:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Houston – Amsterdam:** 140,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,788 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **New York/Newark – Geneva:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)
- **Washington, DC – London:** 120,000 Air Canada miles (\$1,544 R/T if you bought the miles on sale)

Houston (IAH) - Amsterdam (AMS) | Friday February 28, 2025

Fares displayed are per person, one way, and include all taxes, fees and charges. Fare features listed apply to flights operated by Air Canada, Air Canada Express and Air Canada Rouge. Policies and rules may differ for flights operated by other carriers.

Filter by cabin **Business Class**

<	Wed Feb 26 70K + CA \$80	Thu Feb 27 70K + CA \$80	Fri Feb 28 70K + CA \$80	Sat Mar 1 70K + CA \$108	Sun Mar 2 70K + CA \$138	>
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[Non-stop](#) [Include: UNITED AIRLINES](#) [Connection airports](#) [eUpgrade](#) [More options](#) Sort by: **Recommended**

Flight results: 1 of 21 flights found (filtered)

[Economy Class](#) [Premium Economy](#) **[Business Class](#)**

Lowest price	15:55	Non-stop 9hr40m +1	08:35			2 seats left
	Houston		Amsterdam	40K + CA \$80	—	70K + CA \$80
	Operated by United Airlines			Preview seats Details		

EXAMPLE WITH CONNECTIONS: BOISE TO BUDAPEST

Boise (BOI) - Budapest (BUD) | Monday March 3, 2025

Fares displayed are per person, one way, and include all taxes, fees and charges. Fare features listed apply to flights operated by Air Canada, Air Canada Express and Air Canada Rouge. Policies and rules may differ for flights operated by other carriers.

Filter by cabin **All cabins** ▾

< Sat Mar 1 55K + CA \$108 Sun Mar 2 55K + CA \$108 **Mon Mar 3 55K + CA \$108** Tue Mar 4 55K + CA \$108 Wed Mar 5 55K + CA \$108 >

Stops ▾ Airlines ▾ Connection airports ▾ eUpgrade More options ▾ Sort by: **Recommended** ▾

Flight results: 4 flights found

	Economy Class ▾	Business Class ▾
Lowest price 17:30 2 stops 14hr45m +1 16:15 Boise — DEN + 50m — MUC + 55m — Budapest Includes travel operated by United Airlines, Lufthansa Preview seats Details	55K + CA \$108	4 seats left 90K + CA \$108 Mixed cabin
14:03 2 stops 18hr12m +1 16:15 Boise — LAX + 2h05m — MUC + 1h15m — Budapest Includes travel operated by Skywest Dba United Express, Lufthansa Preview seats Details	55K + CA \$108	Select seats from 90K + CA \$108 90% in Business Class

FINAL THOUGHTS: FLY SMARTER, NOT POORER

If you've already paid a premium for your flight, **never accept it as the final outcome**. With [the right strategy](#), an economy seat can become a premium economy seat, a premium economy seat can become Business, and Business can become First Class.


Or, what if you got a new ticket *in the same class of service* but for **half of what you originally paid**?

The key is to:

- **Check your ticket's cancellation policy.** Many tickets are fully refundable or changeable.
- **Monitor last-minute award space.** Airlines often release premium seats just before departure.
- **Leverage points and miles.** Buying or transferring miles can unlock incredible value.

With a little flexibility and the right approach, you can score *huge* upgrades without breaking the bank.

See you up front.



Unlocking My Favorite First Class Seat for a Fraction of the Price, and The Upgrade Mindset

February 2025

Pairing the world's best airline seat with exclusive shopping & sports

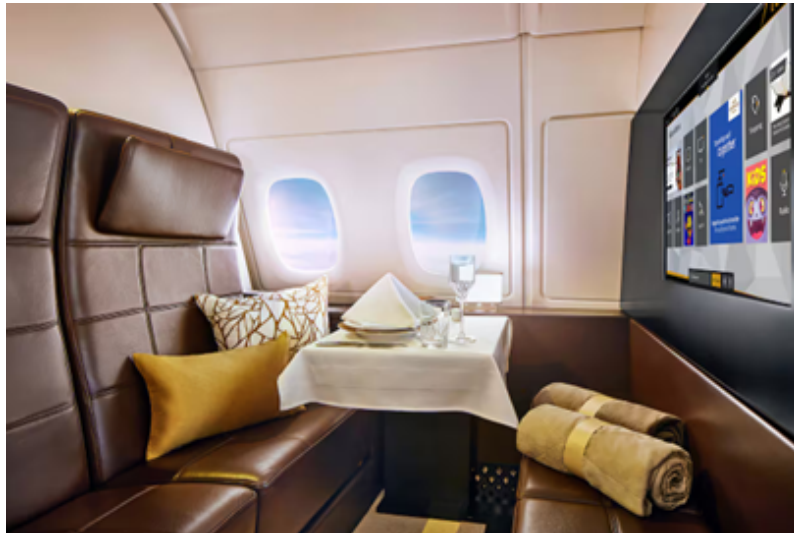
Much of life's confusion—especially when making choices—comes from mixing up the “**what**” and the “**how**.” It's an easy trap to fall into, like mistaking the gas pedal for the brake in a moment of panic.

For most people, flying is a “how” to achieve a “what.”

What do I mean? Well, let's say someone wants a vacation. That's their **what**. But a vacation isn't an end in itself—it's just a **how** to reach something deeper: rest, relaxation, escape, adventure, learning, growth, or a much-needed break from Karen in accounting. Travel, in this case, is just the vehicle (sometimes literally) for achieving that goal.

But sometimes—for a select few—a flight IS the what. Call it the “priority what.”

Take me, for example. Not long ago, I found myself deep in the rabbit hole of flight options, laser-focused on one specific (primary) goal: flying Etihad’s [First Apartment](#) on its A380. If I was forced to pick a favorite First Class seat, this would be it. For me, *this* flight wasn’t just a means to an end. It was the end in itself.



So, while most people see **flying as a how**, I sometimes see it as a **what**. And when life gets confusing, The Upgrade Process and its *five immutable steps* are the perfect way to cut through the clutter. **Clarity** is a rare bird, but this process is like a well-trained falcon that snatches clarity right out of the sky.

1. **Baseline:** Where you are.
2. **Desire:** What you want.
3. **Options:** How you might achieve it.
4. **Decisions:** Making the choice.
5. **Implementation:** Making it real.

No more ambiguity, just clean, structured thinking. It’s like having a mental GPS for decision-making.

INSIDE MY ETIHAD FIRST APARTMENT THOUGHT PROCESS

Goals—whether you call them upgrades, improvements, desires, or wants—are really just puzzles waiting to be solved. And like any puzzle, the key is figuring out the how.

Here’s how I cracked the code on how you can land my favorite First Class seat, plus a **fistful of once-in-a-lifetime experiences**.

If you're after a long-haul, international First Class experience (which usually comes with a price tag that makes your wallet cry), the cheapest possible option is using miles—if availability aligns. Now, let's talk about:

How #1: If you're flying Etihad's First Apartment (only found on its A380) from the U.S. to Abu Dhabi, there's only one direct option from the U.S.—from New York.

How #2 Is the mileage currency to pay for the flight. Etihad's mileage program is the worst. It doesn't allow for cancellations or refunds close in. (Last year, I lost 140,000 miles when I had to make a last-minute change to my First Apartment flight. Brutal.) American Airlines miles, an Etihad redemption partner, is the best How #2, at 80,000 miles between the U.S. and Abu Dhabi for the First Apartment.

How #3 If you don't have any American Airlines miles, [just buy them](#), which *anyone* can do.

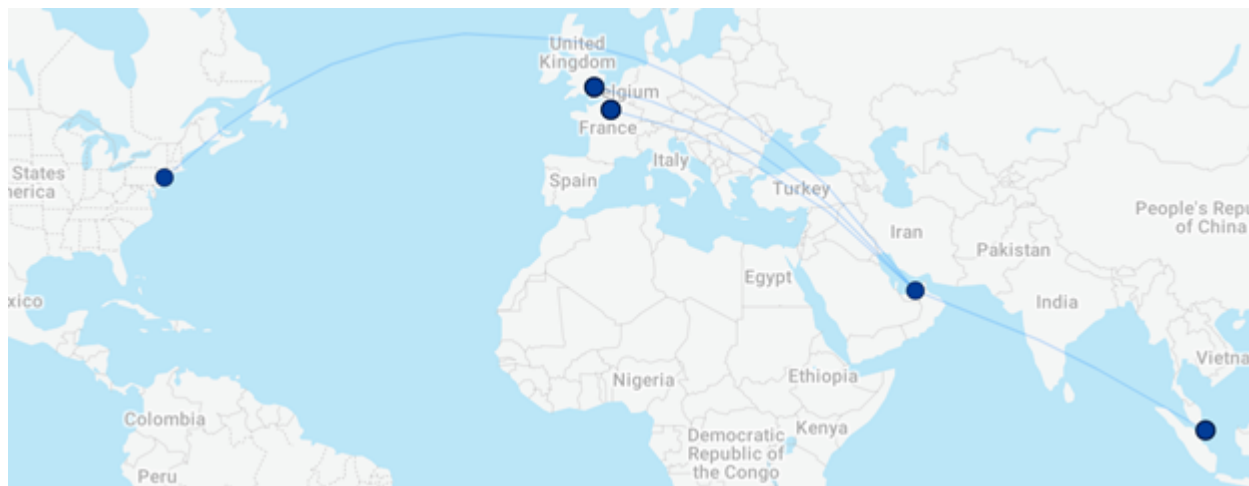
Only one problem: There was no availability through American Airlines to book Etihad's First Class from New York on the A380. My primary goal—securing the First Apartment—was suddenly out of reach.

But giving up wasn't an option. When a door closes, find the window—preferably one with a First Class seat attached. Determined to uncover the best possible way to get what I wanted, I turned to FlightConnections.com and filtered my search by:

- ✓ Etihad
- ✓ First Class
- ✓ A380 (because that's where the First Apartment is found)

That's when I was reminded of a critical detail: Etihad's legendary First Apartment isn't just available from New York—it also flies from London and Paris to Abu Dhabi.

Sometimes, the solution isn't where you first looked—it's where the system allows you to go. And with two new departure points in play, the game just got a whole lot more interesting.



My goal was clear: fly Etihad's First Apartment without paying anywhere near full price. And with New York off the table, the next logical step was to explore the two other options—London and Paris to/from Abu Dhabi.

This wasn't just about finding an alternative route; it was about maximizing the opportunity in general, as it usually is. Could I find better availability? Lower mileage costs? A positioning flight that made the whole itinerary even more seamless?

The key to upgrading travel isn't just about having a Plan B—it's about turning Plan B into perhaps a better-than-expected Plan A.

UPGRADING INCONVENIENCES

An inconvenience in the travel world is often just an opportunity in disguise—the trick is figuring out how to flip it.

In this case, availability for booking Etihad's First Apartment with American Airlines miles is almost impossible from New York at the moment. The best option? A U.S. departure with a stop in London before continuing to Abu Dhabi. While not ideal, it's a real, viable option—especially if experiencing the First Apartment is the ultimate goal this time.

So, how do you turn this forced connection in London—otherwise a lemon—into lemonade?

Simple: make London part of the adventure. Whether it's indulging in world-class shopping, catching an iconic event, or even just enjoying an elevated layover experience, this "inconvenience" *can* suddenly become a strategically planned stopover.

By **reframing** it as an opportunity.

Instead of seeing it as a hassle, lean into the experience—turn your layover into an excuse for adventure.

At the moment, we're seeing better availability on Etihad's A380 in the First Apartment from London than Paris. Two to three weeks out, up to four seats are showing available.

This will change; keep an eye out for FCF Sweet Redeem Alerts for the latest opportunities.

Time it right, and your layover in London transforms into a world-class experience. Go during:

- F1's British Grand Prix (for high-speed thrills)
- The Chelsea Flower Show (for botanical beauty)
- The British Open (for golf's elite showdown)
- Wimbledon (for strawberries, cream, and tennis perfection)
- Royal Ascot (for horse racing and hats so extravagant they deserve their own luggage)

I love big events. That's how you turn a layover into lemonade. In other words, you might never think to book a trip just to go to Wimbledon, but if you can make an excuse to go, go. [I went to the Australian Open this way!](#) And, **American and British Airways from/to London from all over the U.S.**

So if you were able to get the Etihad flight cheap from Europe to Abu Dhabi, all you need is some Paris or London lemonade imagination and the extraordinary, best-in-the-world flight experience is all yours. And cheaply. A layover is only an inconvenience if you let it be one. With the right approach, it's just another upgrade opportunity.

UPGRADING DESTINATIONS

Abu Dhabi isn't exactly overflowing with must-see attractions, and while I personally enjoy the UAE, I get that it's not for everyone. That's why having a compelling reason to go is key.

A caveat: Avoid summer. Unless you enjoy the feeling of stepping into a 1,000-degree blast furnace, steer clear. The best time? In December—Formula 1 season—the weather is lovely. If you're an F1 fanatic, staying at the W Hotel in Abu Dhabi, right inside the Yas Marina Circuit, is the ultimate move. Not going during the F1 race? You can walk, bike, or even ride around the track, when the engines are off.

The real trick to upgrading any destination? Align your visit with a world-class event or an extraordinary landmark. If Formula 1 isn't your thing, consider the Dubai World Cup in April—the richest horse race purse in the world, just a short drive from Abu Dhabi.

SIDE NOTE #1: MAXIMIZING YOUR FLIGHTS & STOPOVERS

If you're considering a stop in Europe, here's how to strategically break up your trip:

- **Free stopovers:** A 24-hour stopover won't cost more—perfect for a quick city exploration.

- **Split your ticket:** Booking two one-way tickets lets you stay as long as you want in Europe, giving you full control over your itinerary.
- **Choose your timing:** Stop in Europe on your outbound, return, or both.
- **Alternate F1 option:** If December in Abu Dhabi doesn't fit, Qatar hosts its own Formula 1 race in November—an easy alternative.
- **Save On Taxes:** Avoid British Airways flights if possible, as American flights can save you \$1,100+ in taxes.
- **No AA miles? No problem!** You can now [buy them for as low as 1.88 cents each](#), netting you **First Class to Europe AND First Class on Etihad to Abu Dhabi** for \$2,208 each way – normally \$10,000+.

AMERICAN FIRST CLASS US - LONDON AND ETIHAD FIRST APARTMENT TO ABU DHABI 115,000 AA MILES + \$46 IN TAXES - NORMALLY \$8,000 - \$12,000 -

Depart	Arrive	Duration	Main	Premium Economy	Business	First
JFK 8:35 PM	AUH 7:45 AM ⁺²	26h 10m 1 stop	Not available	Not available	One way 70K + \$46.40	One way 115K + \$46.40 1 seat left
JFK - LHR = AA 106 = 77W-Boeing 777 LHR - AUH = EY 68 = 388-Airbus A380 Operated by Etihad Airways Overnight flight or connection. Change terminals						
Details Seats						

BRITISH AIRWAYS FIRST CLASS US - LONDON AND ETIHAD FIRST APARTMENT TO ABU DHABI 115,000 AA MILES + \$1,224 IN TAXES - NORMALLY \$8,000 - \$12,000 -

Depart	Arrive	Duration	Main	Premium Economy	Business	First
JFK 8:40 PM	AUH 7:45 AM ⁺²	26h 5m 1 stop	One way 40K + \$264.30 1 seat left	One way 62.5K + \$264.30 1 seat left	One way 70K + \$1,099.30 3 seats left	One way 115K + \$1,224.30 1 seat left
JFK - LHR = BA 172 = 777-Boeing 777 LHR - AUH = EY 68 = 388-Airbus A380 Operated by British Airways Operated by Etihad Airways Overnight flight or connection. Change terminals. The class of service you searched may not be available on one or more flights						
Details						

SIDE NOTE #2: THE MOST PEACEFUL COUNTRY ON EARTH, AND EMIRATES FIRST CLASS

Visit most major U.S. cities, and let's be real—it's a game of "Where's my phone?" and "Is my bag still here?" You clutch your valuables, side-eye strangers, and keep your guard up.

Now, contrast that with the UAE. When I spent time there last year, the safety was unbelievable. People leave their phones at the gym entrance without a second thought. Women walk away from their purses and phones at restaurants while they step out—because theft isn't a concern. If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't believe it.

And if you like to visit modern cities, Dubai is it. Just an hour from Abu Dhabi by car, it boasts:

- ✓ The world's tallest building (a sight that never gets old)
- ✓ A parade of man-made wonders that feels like something out of sci-fi
- ✓ Emirates First Class—arguably the best everyday First Class experience in the world for your flight to/from Dubai

The ultimate move? Mix and match. Fly Etihad's First Apartment to/from Abu Dhabi, explore, then hop over to Dubai via Emirates First Class, or vice versa.

Talk about hitting multiple First Class birds with one stone.

NOT WHERE YOU START – BUT WHERE YOU FINISH

Most people plan their travel the same way—destination AND dates first. Boring. Predictable.


I often flip the script. Instead of starting with a place and a time, I start with an extraordinary flight experience. Think 20 to 30 hours in the air if you're going somewhere exotic, wrapped in opulence, indulging in a true first-class adventure.

And here's the kicker: I found it relatively cheaply.

Why? Because instead of locking myself into fixed dates and destinations, I chased high-end opportunities and built the perfect trip around them.

The result? A bushel of opportunities, each one better than the last. Often better than what I would have thought of any other way.

See you up front—and at the races.



Little-Known First Class Strategy to Asia Nets \$29,972 Ticket for \$4,004 / 87% Off

February 2025

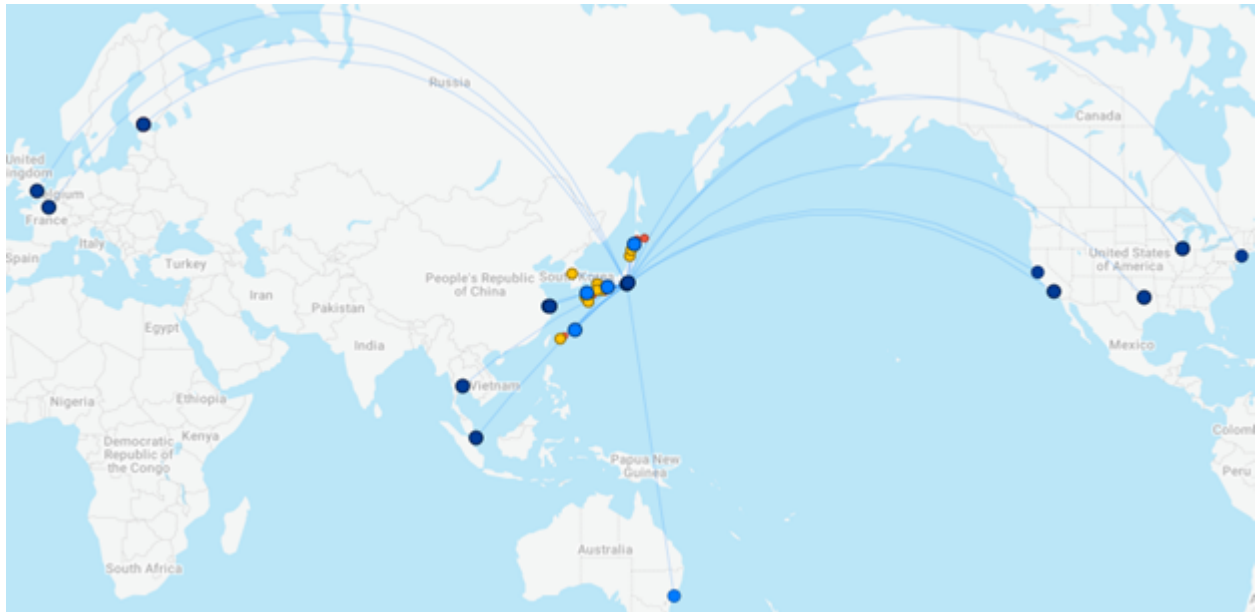
The best possible for the best possible?

Everyone knows that you can buy miles and points these days. Some travelers even understand that using them wisely can lead to substantial savings on premium cabin seats. But few have mastered these strategies and miss out on great opportunities.

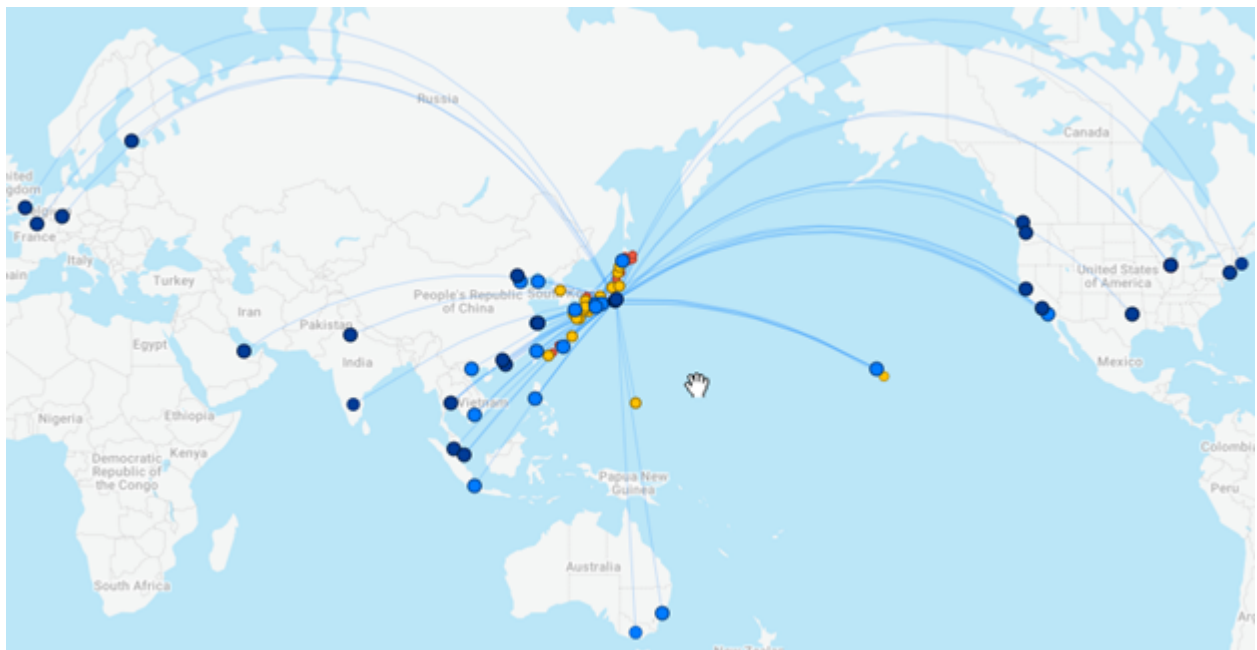
JAPAN AIRLINES FIRST CLASS: A HIDDEN GEM

JAL is one of the few airlines still offering First Class cabins. If you're departing **from/to the U.S.**, you can typically find First Class seats on select flights from Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco to Tokyo. If you're **based in Europe**, options to/from Asia include Helsinki, London, and Paris to Tokyo.

*Japan Airlines routes with **First Class** according to [flightconnections.com](https://www.flightconnections.com)*



Japan Airlines routes with according to flightconnections.com



Booking one of these First Class tickets outright can set you back a staggering **\$29,972 round-trip**. But what if you could book the exact same seat for just a fraction of the price?

NOT FLYING TO TOKYO – OR FROM ONE OF ITS U.S. OR EUROPEAN HUBS? NO PROBLEM

The airline flies to different cities across Asia, and [connections can be added for little or no extra cost](#). Depending on availability, connections on its partner American Airlines, could be possible to JAL's U.S. hubs. Similarly, you can get connections in Europe through its Star Alliance partners like British Airways.

WHY JAL MILES ARE HARD TO GET — AND HOW TO WORK AROUND IT

Unlike most airlines, Japan Airlines **doesn't have any direct points-transfer partnerships** with major U.S. credit card programs, meaning you can't simply transfer Chase, Amex, or Citi points to JAL Mileage Bank.

They also **don't sell miles directly**, unlike most airlines, making it difficult for most travelers to accumulate them outside of flying JAL regularly.

Occasionally, you can book JAL First Class using **American Airlines miles**, since AA is a partner airline. [It's a good option](#), but you can't book as far out with AA miles, and there's less availability.

So what's the alternative?

THE SECRET: BUYING MARRIOTT BONVOY POINTS & CONVERTING TO JAL MILES

Right now, Marriott Bonvoy is running a **45% bonus sale on points purchases**, available through **March 9th**. Why does this matter? Because Marriott Bonvoy points can be transferred to JAL Mileage Bank at a **3:1 ratio**.

Here's how it works:

- Marriott is allowing travelers to buy up to **217,500 Bonvoy points** for **\$1,875** (at **0.86 cents per point – which amounts to 2.58 cents per JAL mile**).
- When transferred to Japan Airlines, this results in **72,500 JAL miles**—enough for a First Class ticket!
- Marriott Bonvoy members can transfer up to 100,000 points per year to another member, allowing friends or family to pool points and buy even more miles.
- **Need more points?** [Do this.](#)

Now let's break down the numbers further...

FIRST CLASS: THE MATH THAT MAKES IT WORK

Japan Airlines typically charges **70,000 miles one way (low season)** for a First Class ticket between the U.S. and Tokyo, plus around \$196 in taxes and fees.

With this method, a First Class ticket that normally costs as much as **\$29,972 round-trip** can be booked for just **\$2,002 including taxes each way**. One-way might be enough indulgence.

If you're flying between **Tokyo and Europe**, the First Class redemption costs around **80,000 (low season) JAL miles**, which, through the Marriott transfer method, can be obtained for about **\$2,260 each way**—for a ticket that can cost \$10,000+.

BUSINESS CLASS: AN EVEN BETTER DEAL?

If you can't find dates that work for you in First Class, Business Class on Japan Airlines is the next best ticket and the same strategy applies. Where the airline typically charges **50,000 miles one-way** plus about

\$196 in taxes for travel between Asia and the U.S. In other words, by leveraging the Marriott Bonvoy points purchase strategy, you can get a Business Class ticket to Tokyo for just **\$1,486 each way**, compared to the usual **\$7,000+ price tag round-trip**.

For travelers **flying between Tokyo and Europe**, Business Class costs **55,000 Japan Airlines miles each way**, which, with the Marriott method, translates to just **\$1,615**.

WHAT ABOUT ACTUAL AVAILABILITY?

In two words, it varies. At time of publication, here's what we found:

TO/FROM THE U.S. AND TOKYO BUSINESS CLASS

Boston to/from Tokyo: Both directions scattered availability 11 to 12 months out for up to two seats.

San Francisco to/from Tokyo: Both directions decent availability 11 to 12 months out for one seat; a bit less scattered availability for two seats.

Los Angeles to/from Tokyo: Both directions scattered availability 11 to 12 months out for up to two seats.

Chicago to/from Tokyo: Both directions scattered availability 10 to 11 out; more 11 to 12 months out; a bit less on the inbound flight.

Dallas to/from Tokyo: Both directions scattered availability 11 to 12 months out for up to two seats.

TO/FROM EUROPE AND TOKYO FIRST CLASS

Paris to/from Tokyo: At the moment, only close-in availability for one seat. Both directions scattered availability 11 to 12 months out for up to two seats.

TO/FROM EUROPE AND TOKYO BUSINESS CLASS

London to/from Tokyo: Both directions scattered availability 10 to 11 out; more 11 to 12 months out; a bit less on the inbound flight.

FINE PRINT & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As with any points strategy, there are various things to keep in mind:

1. **Availability is unpredictable.** JAL's award availability fluctuates, so flexibility is key. This strategy works best for opportunity travelers who are willing to plan ahead or book last minute or wait for flash availability flights.
2. **Marriott Bonvoy points expire after 24 months of inactivity.** However, you can reset the expiration by making a small points purchase or other qualifying activity.
3. **Marriott typically runs sales on points every two to three months,** with bonuses ranging from 40% to 50%. So if you miss this sale, another opportunity will likely come around.
4. **If you struggle to find JAL award availability,** your Marriott points are still useful. You can redeem them for hotel stays, which sometimes provide solid value. So there's nothing major to lose.
5. **Normally, Marriott allows you to purchase up to 100,000 points per year,** but this promotion temporarily increases that cap.
6. **Japan Airlines allows bookings 12 months out,** compared to the typical 11-month window most airlines offer. If you're an early planner, this gives you an edge over those relying on American Airlines miles to book JAL flights..
7. **New Marriott Bonvoy members must wait 30 days after enrollment (with qualifying activity) or one year (without activity) to purchase points.** If you're new to the program, plan ahead to take advantage of future sales.
8. **Don't forget, if you need more miles or points,** that's not a problem with [FCF's Unlimited Strategy](#).

FINAL THOUGHTS: A RARE BIRD WORTH CHASING

This Japan Airlines strategy isn't for the casual traveler. It's for those who love the thrill of flying **the Best Possible—for the Lowest Possible**—and are willing to do what it takes to **make it possible**.

For those who know how to play the game, **\$29,972 First Class seats for around \$4,004** round-trip are not just possible—they're well within reach.

See you up front.



Opportunity Travelers Enjoy Business Class & Premium Economy for Up to 62% Off with Air France, KLM

February 2025

Leverage savings opportunities with Air France, KLM, Japan, and SkyTeam Airlines—no matter where you live

THE SECRET SAUCE: BEING AN "OPPORTUNITY TRAVELER"

What's an [opportunity traveler](#)? It's someone who flips the script on traditional booking. Instead of picking rigid dates AND a particular destination—and being **at the mercy of sky-high fares**—this traveler starts with the opportunity first and plans the trip around it. This strategy, also known as "[Not Booking Backwards](#)," puts the traveler in the driver's seat rather than playing the sucker to airline pricing algorithms.

Think of it like hunting for **buried treasure**—only instead of a map leading to gold coins, it leads to jaw-dropping flight deals. You're not shackled to a predetermined itinerary; you're the savvy adventurer who lets the best opportunity determine where (and how luxuriously) you fly.

FLY IN COMFORT WITHOUT THE HEFTY PRICE TAG

For those who refuse to go on the long-haul trip in economy class AND also refuse to shell out retail for Business Class, there's a window of opportunity right now: Air France is offering a **bonus up to 80%** on purchased miles through March 9th, which means Premium Economy and Business Class tickets can be snagged for up to 62% off.

This isn't just a "nice-to-have" deal—it can be a game changer. Why? Because it's part of Air France's Flying Blue loyalty program, which gives you access to flights around the world, including those operated by its close partner, KLM. That means you're not just limited to Air France routes.

Air France and KLM route map, according to flightconnections.com



MORE PARTNERS, MORE POSSIBILITIES

The potential magic doesn't stop at Air France and KLM. Thanks to their SkyTeam Alliance, you can also use these discounted miles with Delta, Kenya Airways, Korean Air, SAS, Vietnam Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, and more, although **availability will be more limited**. Oh, and for the Japan-bound travelers—yes, they even partner with **Japan Airlines**. While availability might be tighter with these partners, they're often doable if you're very flexible.

NOT IN A MAJOR HUB? NO PROBLEM

Good news for travelers outside Air France and KLM's hub cities. Even if you're not in Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Calgary, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Edmonton, Houston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, Montreal, New York/JFK, New York/Newark, Orlando, Ottawa, Phoenix, Portland, Raleigh/Durham, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, Vancouver, or Washington, DC, you're not out of luck. Delta, their SkyTeam partner, allows seamless domestic connections based on availability to the airline's hubs.

At the same time, Air France and KLM *can* make it effortless to connect throughout Europe and beyond, based on availability. Plus, **Air France allows you a stopover**, even on one-way tickets, so you can get multiple destinations for the price of one.

WHY THIS PROMO IS NEXT-LEVEL

Air France frequently runs mileage sales, usually offering discounts between 30% and 50%—but 80% is as good as it gets with this program. Here's what this means in real terms:

- Regular cost per mile: **3.05 cents**
- Discounted price per mile (with promo when you max it out): **1.69 cents**
- Maximum miles you can buy per year: **100,000 miles**
- With this promo, you can get up to **180,000 miles**

Now, let's take it up a notch. If you leverage **FCF's [Unlimited Miles Strategy](#)**, there's literally no cap on how many miles you can buy—unlocking even more premium travel for less.

AirFrance.com Offer

Limited time offer – receive up to 80% bonus Miles until 9 March!

Not enough Miles for the reward of your choice? Take advantage of this exclusive offer by 9 March 2025!

How many Miles do you want to buy?

Short on Miles for a reward or an upgrade? You can buy the extra Miles you need.

100,000 + 80,000 Bonus Miles: \$3,050.00

THE CATCH? (THERE'S ALWAYS ONE...BUT IT'S MANAGEABLE FOR OPPORTUNITY TRAVELERS)

Here's the reality: Award availability is a challenge at the moment. You either need to **be flexible** with your dates or be a frequent traveler who knows you'll eventually use the miles. Keep an eye out for FCF Sweet Redeems as availability opens.

HOW SWEET IS THIS DEAL? LET'S CRUNCH THE NUMBERS...

US & European Residents Save up to 62% in Premium Economy and Business Class - Sample Savings -

Route	Budapest - Los Angele	Class	Normal Fare R/T	Miles Required R/T	Cost to Buy (During this Sale) Miles R/T	Total Cash Cost RT Incl. Taxes	Strategy Savings / Dollars	Strategy Savings / Percentage
New York / JFK - Paris	Air France	Business Class	\$4,080	120,000	\$2,028	\$2,468	\$1,612	40%
New York / JFK - Paris	Air France	Premium Economy	\$1,910	80,000	\$1,352	\$1,648	\$262	14%
Los Angeles - Amsterdam	KLM	Business Class	\$6,470	120,000	\$2,028	\$2,470	\$4,000	62%
Los Angeles - Amsterdam	KLM	Premium Economy	\$2,510	80,000	\$1,352	\$1,516	\$994	40%
New York / JFK - Budapest	Air France	Business Class	\$5,660	120,000	\$2,028	\$2,270	\$3,390	60%
San Diego - Zurich	KLM	Premium Economy	\$2,860	80,000	\$1,352	\$1,530	\$1,330	47%
Boston - Cape Town	Air France	Business Class	\$5,630	120,000	\$2,028	\$2,265	\$3,365	60%
Paris - Tokyo	Air France	Premium Economy	\$2,610	100,000	\$1,690	\$1,910	\$700	27%
Budapest - Los Angeles	KLM	Premium Economy	\$3,460	80,000	\$1,352	\$1,581	\$1,879	54%



February's Top 97 Mileage Awards & Special Fares Greatest Hits (Still Available)

February 2025

Cool 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

ASIA

[Cash OR Miles > *First Class* > 2 Seats > All Nippon Airways > Chicago to Tokyo](#)

[All Nippon Airways > Business Class > Close In > From Seattle to Tokyo > 4+ Seats](#)

[All Nippon Airways > Business Class > Close In > From Chicago to Tokyo > 4+ Seats](#)

[All Nippon Airways > Business Class > Close In > Handful > From San Francisco to Tokyo > 4+ Seats](#)

EUROPE



[85,000 Miles / Points R/T > Biz Class > 2+ Travelers > Iberia > Florida to Madrid](#)

[From 68,000 Miles / Points R/T > Biz Class > 2+ Travelers > Iberia > New York to Spain](#)

[From 68,000 Miles / Points R/T > Biz Class > 2+ Travelers > Iberia > Chicago to Spain](#)

[*First Class* With Cash OR Miles > Lufthansa > Boston to Frankfurt & Beyond > 2+ Travelers](#)

[Cheap Business Class Seats from Boston to Madrid for 68,000 Amex Points R/T](#)

[Miles / Points > First Class > Single Seat > Emirates > Newark to Athens](#)

[*First Class* With Cash OR Miles > Lufthansa > Washington, DC to Frankfurt > 2+ Travelers](#)

MIDDLE EAST

[Turkish Airlines > Discount Business Class > Boston to Istanbul > With Miles & Points > 2 seats](#)

[Emirates First Class Opportunities from Seattle to Dubai with Miles / Points](#)

NORTH AMERICA

[*First Class* With Cash OR Miles > Lufthansa > Munich to Washington, DC > 2+ Travelers](#)

Special Published Fares

AFRICA

[Money > Nairobi > All Year > Biz Class > \\$3,286 to \\$4,004 R/T](#)

[Money > Morocco > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$1,938 to \\$3,088 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Kilimanjaro > Fall/Winter > Biz Class > from New York and Miami from \\$3,277 to \\$4,074 R/T](#)

[Money > Nairobi > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,759 to \\$3,725 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Johannesburg and Cape Town > Spring > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$3,216 to \\$3,973 USD R/T](#)

ASIA

[Money > Maldives > Summer/Fall > Biz Class > from Vancouver and Toronto from \\$3,235 to \\$3,891 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Seoul > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$3,278 to \\$3,571 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Asia > All Year > Biz Class > \\$3,234 to \\$4,212 R/T](#)

[Money > Taiwan > All Year > Biz Class > from Vancouver and Calgary from \\$3,125 to \\$3,935 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Southeast Asia > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,954 to \\$4,112 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Singapore > Fall/Winter > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$3,209 to \\$4,182 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Thailand > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$3,344 to \\$4,178 USD R/T](#)

[Money > China > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$3,137 to \\$3,996 USD R/T](#)



CARIBBEAN

[Money > St. Thomas > All Year > Biz Class > \\$717 to \\$1,079 R/T](#)

[Money > St. Lucia > All Year > Biz Class > \\$978 to \\$1,163 R/T](#)

[Money > Aruba > All Year > Biz Class > \\$842 to \\$1,168 R/T](#)

[Money > Grand Cayman > All Year > Biz Class > \\$644 to \\$1,160 R/T](#)

[Money > Saint Kitts > All Year > Biz Class > \\$835 to \\$1,188 R/T](#)

[Money > Puerto Rico > All Year > Biz Class > \\$636 to \\$785 R/T](#)

[Money > St. Maarten > All Year > Biz Class > \\$799 to \\$1,133 R/T](#)

[Money > The Bahamas > All Year > Biz Class > \\$501 to \\$787 R/T](#)

[Money > Antigua > All Year > Biz Class > \\$863 to \\$1,185 R/T](#)

[Money > Bridgetown > Spring/Summer > Biz Class > \\$860 to \\$1,190 R/T](#)

EUROPE

[Money > Nice > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,065 to \\$2,805 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Poland > All Year > First Class > \\$4,023 to \\$5,474 R/T](#)

[Money > Malta > All Year > Biz Class > from Toronto and Montreal from \\$2,067 to \\$2,759 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Spain > All Year > First Class > \\$4,011 to \\$5,470 R/T](#)

[Money > Helsinki > Spring > First Class > \\$4,141 to \\$5,591 R/T](#)

[Money > Stockholm > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,400 to \\$3,212 R/T](#)

[Money > Oslo > Summer/Fall > First Class > \\$4,389 to \\$5,495 R/T](#)

[Money > Copenhagen > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,728 to \\$3,202 R/T](#)

[Money > Budapest > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,721 to \\$3,151 R/T](#)

[Money > Prague > Summer/Fall > Biz Class > \\$2,578 to \\$3,198 R/T](#)

[Money > Greece > Summer > First Class > \\$4,031 to \\$5,504 R/T](#)

[Money > Stockholm > Spring/Summer > First Class > \\$4,015 to \\$5,665 R/T](#)

[Money > Germany > All Year > First Class > \\$4,093 to \\$5,556 R/T](#)

[Money > Brussels > Spring > First Class > \\$4,040 to \\$5,163 R/T](#)

[Money > London > Summer > Biz Class > \\$2,563 to \\$3,054 R/T](#)

[Money > London > Fall/Winter > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,256 to \\$2,859 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Frankfurt > Spring/Summer > Biz Class > \\$2,503 to \\$3,179 R/T](#)

[Money > Vienna > Summer/Fall > First Class > \\$4,047 to \\$5,749 R/T](#)

[Money > Copenhagen > All Year > First Class > \\$4,015 to \\$5,338 R/T](#)

[Money > Greece > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,639 to \\$2,907 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Oslo > Spring > Biz Class > \\$2,798 to \\$3,108 R/T](#)

[Money > Amsterdam > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,320 to \\$2,597 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Venice > Summer > Biz Class > \\$2,753 to \\$3,066 R/T](#)

[Money > Poland > Summer/Fall > Biz Class > \\$2,785 to \\$3,156 R/T](#)

[Money > Lisbon > Summer > First Class > \\$4,040 to \\$5,540 R/T](#)

[Money > France > All Year > First Class > \\$4,079 to \\$5,475 R/T](#)

[Money > Geneva > Spring > Biz Class > \\$2,764 to \\$3,035 R/T](#)

[Money > Milan > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,782 to \\$3,145 R/T](#)

[Money > Dublin > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,798 to \\$3,023 R/T](#)

[Money > Prague > Summer/Fall > First Class > \\$4,028 to \\$5,553 R/T](#)

[Money > Los Angeles to Europe > Spring > Biz Class > \\$2,632 to \\$3,137 R/T](#)

[Money > Croatia > Summer > First Class > \\$4,378 to \\$5,544 R/T](#)

[Money > Greece > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,772 to 3,150 R/T](#)

[Money > Prague > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,418 to \\$2,724 USD R/T](#)

[Money > United Kingdom > All Year > First Class > \\$4,221 to \\$5,664 R/T](#)

[Money > Spain > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,256 to \\$2,861 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Budapest > All Year > First Class > \\$3,905 to \\$5,612 R/T](#)

[Money > Amsterdam > All Year > First Class > \\$4,056 to \\$4,958 R/T](#)

HAWAII

[Money > Kona > Spring > Biz Class > \\$1,111 to \\$1,519 R/T](#)

[Money > Honolulu > All Year > Biz Class > \\$1,157 to \\$1,455 R/T](#)

[Money > Maui > Spring > Biz Class > \\$1,121 to \\$1,493 R/T](#)

[Money > Kauai > Spring > Biz Class > \\$921 to \\$1,466 R/T](#)



INDIA

[Money > India > Fall > Biz Class > \\$3,255 to \\$3,874 R/T](#)

[Money > Mumbai > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,857 to \\$3,895 R/T](#)

[Money > Kolkata > Fall > Biz Class > \\$2,994 to \\$3,603 R/T](#)

[Money > New Delhi > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,659 to \\$3,901 R/T](#)

[Money > Chennai > Fall > Biz Class > from Chicago and New York from \\$3,314 to \\$3,420 R/T](#)

[Money > Bengaluru > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,845 to \\$3,843 R/T](#)

MEXICO

[Money > Cabo San Lucas > Spring/Summer > Biz Class > \\$686 to \\$807 R/T](#)

[Money > Puerto Vallarta > Summer > Biz Class > \\$732 to \\$895 R/T](#)

[Money > Cancun > All Year > Biz Class > \\$528 to \\$917 R/T](#)

[Money > Cozumel > All Year > Biz Class > \\$747 to \\$915 R/T](#)

MIDDLE EAST

[Money > India > Fall > Biz Class > \\$3,255 to \\$3,874 R/T](#)

[Money > Dubai > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,751 to \\$3,251 R/T](#)

NORTH AMERICA

[Money > Domestic Transcon > All Year > Biz Class > \\$866 to \\$1,237 R/T](#)

[Money > Europe to U.S. > All Year > Biz Class > \\$1,748 to \\$2,458 USD R/T](#)

SOUTH AMERICA

[Money > Santiago > All Year > Biz Class > from Toronto and Montreal from \\$2,397 USD R/T](#)

[Money > Santiago > All Year > Biz Class > \\$1,913 to 3,354 R/T](#)

[Money > Buenos Aires > All Year > Biz Class > \\$2,164 to \\$3,211 R/T](#)

[Money > Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro > Spring > Biz Class > from Canada from \\$2,323 to \\$2,699 USD R/T](#)