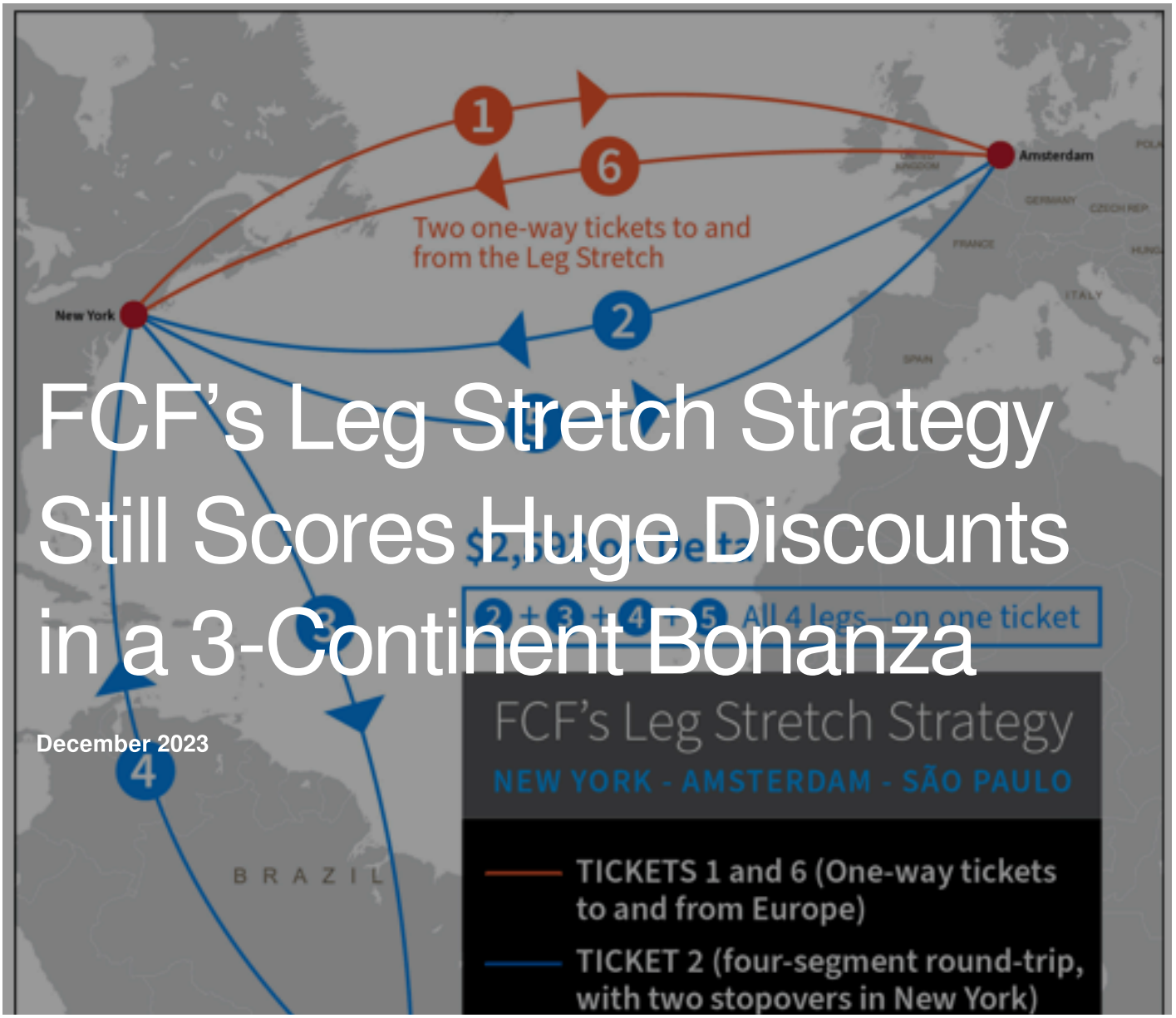


FCF's Leg Stretch Strategy Still Scores Huge Discounts in a 3-Continent Bonanza

December 2023

Since we first drew your attention to the Leg Stretch Strategy in May 2017, it has continued to deliver great travel deals, literally, all over the world.

And here today, we show you the latest super stretchy example that our team has found.

THE LUCRATIVE LEG STRETCH

If you're new to this idea, or you need a refresher, here's a quick rundown.

The Leg Stretch Strategy makes use of round-trip itineraries between two continents with free stopovers each way on a third continent. The map below will help to illustrate this.

This third continent is the “connecting continent” between the other two. In all our examples, it’s the United States. Simple so far. But remember, the U.S. stopovers are free each way. It means if you intend to go to those other continents, you can **use the Leg Stretch Strategy to fly in Business Class *on one ticket* for LESS than what you would pay in Premium Economy *on multiple tickets*. That’s where the savings come in.**

GO FETCH A LEG STRETCH

Let’s look at an example of this strategy with Kevin, a chef based in the U.S who’s planning to visit restaurants in Europe and South America.

Now, most people would fly to Europe, do their thing, return, and that’s that. Then, they would fly to South America, do their thing, and return. But what most people don’t know is that you can combine these trips into one ticket and save a Michelin Star-restaurant-price amount of money. Way more, actually. You just have to think a little laterally about it.

HOW IT WORKS

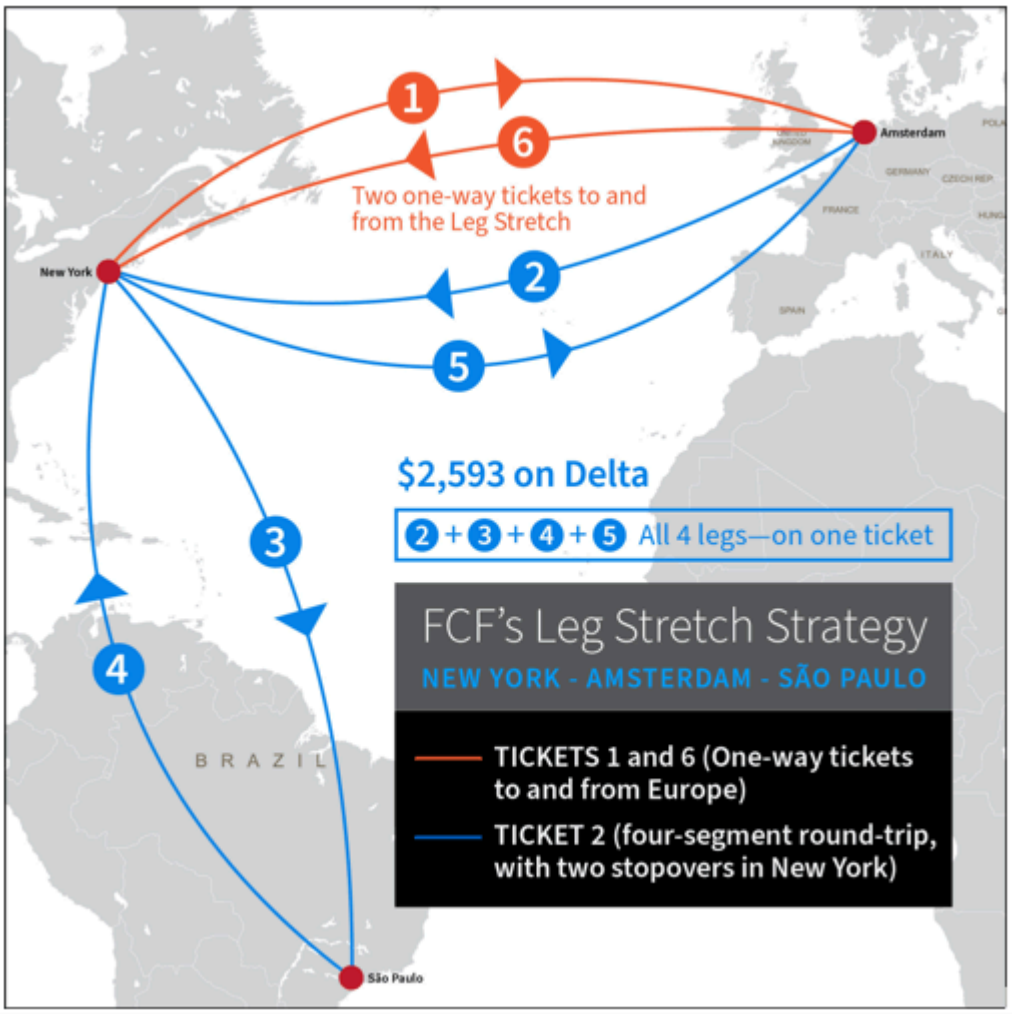
First, and this is important, the Leg Stretch starts and finishes in Europe. But before you say, “What the heck Bennett?!”, that doesn’t mean it’s out of play for U.S.-based flyers. You can still do it and save a truffle-worthy amount of money.

You have to get to Europe to start it, and then get home at the end, either with two one-way flights or an overarching round trip. OR you can start another Leg Stretch because you’re already in Europe. It’s pretty easy, and you still save money, even with those “start” and “end” flights.

The Leg Stretch (this version, as there are many) goes from Europe to South America, and back, via free stopovers in the U.S. in both directions. So, if you live in New York, those free stopovers are essentially free flights home! You can hang out at home for months if you like. Fares have many different rules so make sure to check them, but in this case, he just has to complete the entire trip within 12 months of his last stopover.

Let’s get stretching with an example for travel to Europe and South America.

A LEG STRETCH THAT COMBINES NEW YORK, AMSTERDAM, AND SÃO PAULO



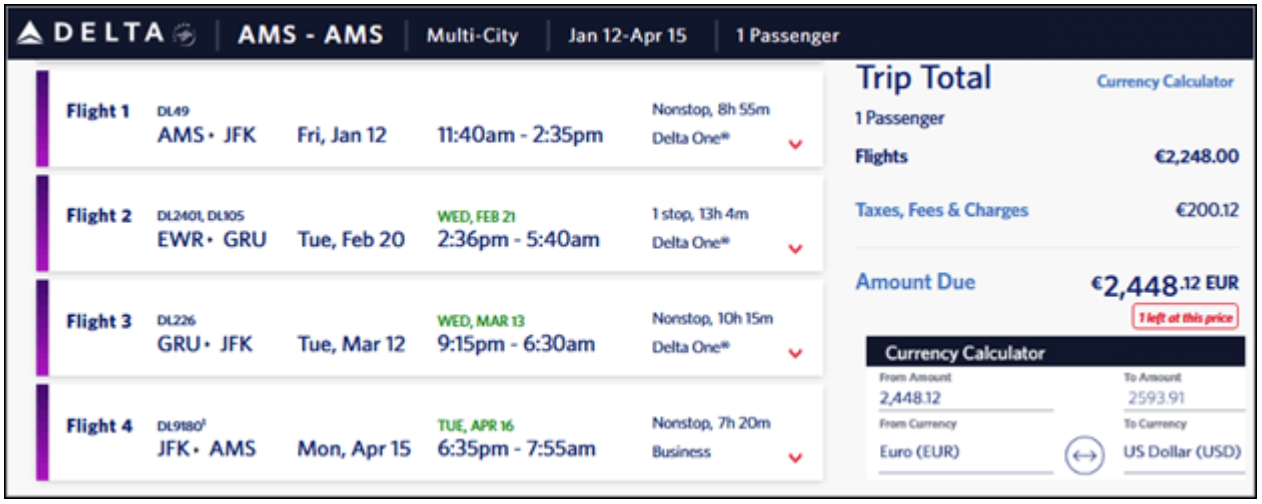
YES, CHEF! SAMPLE THIS TASTY LEG STRETCH

Here's how it works: Kevin flies to Amsterdam on a one-way flight (or a round-trip of which the return flight is completed at the end of the Leg Stretch).

Then the Leg Stretch starts:

1. Amsterdam to New York (the stopover/home).
2. New York to São Paulo (your vacation or business destination).
3. São Paulo to New York (the second stopover/ home).
4. New York to Amsterdam (the end OR the start of your *next* Leg Stretch).

Kevin can do all that starting at $2,593 in Business Class on Delta. The screenshot below is the evidence, Your Honor.



Remember, all of that is on a single Business Class ticket. Please note that you can sometimes substitute Rio de Janeiro for São Paulo, often for a similar price, or Santiago for a little more.

HOW MUCH DO YOU SAVE?

Let's compare this to a Business Class trip on Delta where the same destinations are broken down into separate trips. Two roundtrips from the U.S. to Europe and South America in Business Class would cost Kevin around $5,687 at the time of publication. But combining them into one LSS Business Class ticket costs $2,593. That's a savings of **$3,094, or 54%**. As spectacular as a traditional feijoada.

Here are some other Leg Stretch options that start in Europe and visit South America, with two U.S. stopovers.

SAMPLE LSS FARES ON DELTA AIR LINES

Amsterdam – New York – São Paulo – New York – Amsterdam
The Equivalent of Two Roundtrips
on Delta in Business Class for $2,593

Europe > U.S. > South America > U.S. > Europe

Start Your LSS Ticket In:	Your U.S. Stop (Both Coming and Going)	Your South American Destination:	LSS Fare for Four Legs in Business Class (in Effect, Two Roundtrips)	Regular Fare for Two Roundtrips in Business Class	Savings
Amsterdam	Chicago	São Paulo	$2,594	$7,472	$4,878 / 65%
Amsterdam	Minneapolis	São Paulo	$2,664	$7,272	$4,608 / 63%
Milan	Chicago	São Paulo	$2,725	$6,940	$4,215 / 61%

Start Your LSS Ticket In:	Your U.S. Stop (Both Coming and Going)	Your South American Destination:	LSS Fare for Four Legs in Business Class (in Effect, Two Roundtrips)	Regular Fare for Two Roundtrips in Business Class	Savings
Rome	Chicago	São Paulo	$2,792	$7,041	$4,249 / 60%
Amsterdam	Detroit	São Paulo	$2,594	$6,528	$3,934 / 60%
Frankfurt	Boston	São Paulo	$2,864	$7,119	$4,255 / 60%
Copenhagen	Atlanta	São Paulo	$2,799	$6,511	$3,712 / 57%
Frankfurt	Memphis	São Paulo	$2,824	$6,451	$3,627 / 56%
Amsterdam	Cincinnati	Rio de Janeiro	$2,989	$6,792	$3,803 / 56%
Munich	Chicago	Rio de Janeiro	$2,979	$6,738	$3,759 / 56%
Copenhagen	Washington, DC	São Paulo	$2,799	$6,023	$3,224 / 54%
Frankfurt	New York	São Paulo	$2,743	$5,830	$3,087 / 53%
Munich	Cincinnati	São Paulo	$2,832	$5,938	$3,106 / 52%
Zurich	New York	Rio de Janeiro	$2,709	$5,519	$2,810 / 51%
Frankfurt	Atlanta	Rio de Janeiro	$2,927	$5,417	$2,490 / 46%

I FEEL SO LIMBER, I'M GONNA DO IT AGAIN

At the end of his Leg Stretch journey, Kevin has two options. He can embark on ANOTHER Leg Stretch ticket, or just get a ticket that takes him back home. Let's break this down.

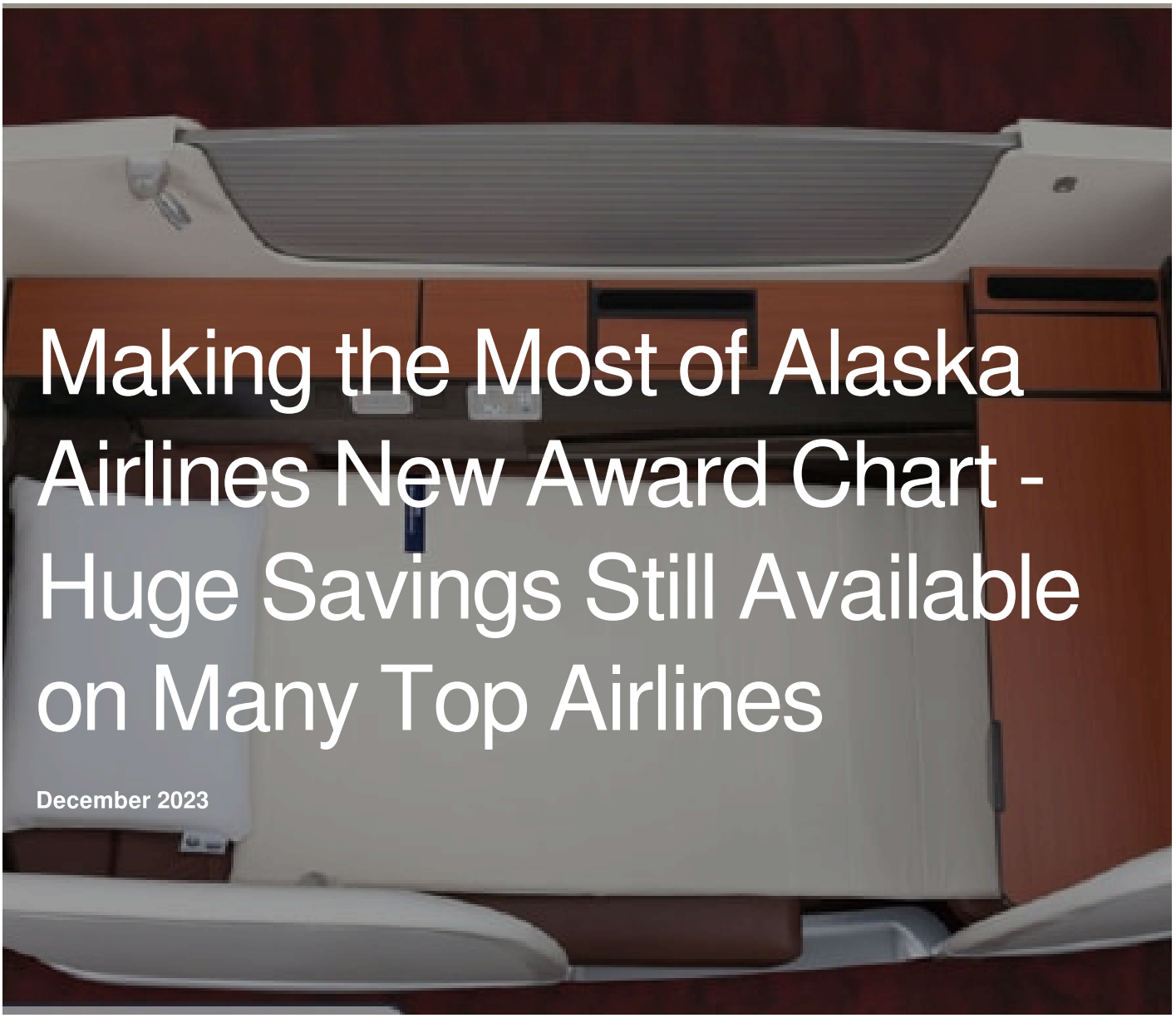
Option #1: Book another LSS Ticket. Remember, once in Europe Kevin is already at the starting point of *another* LSS. Since he can control the timing of that final flight from the U.S. to complete an LSS, he can tie it right into his next multi-continent ticket. Two Leg Stretches back-to-back will save a banquet load of bucks.

Option #2: Head Home. If Kevin's a one-and-done leg stretcher, he can buy a round-trip ticket to/from the starting point (Europe) and return destination (the U.S.), or even two one-way tickets between those two cities.

Remember, you still need to get to and from the start of the Leg Stretch, but those savings more than cover the cost of doing that. And hey, consider using your miles to slingshot your trip, too.

FCF has also examined many other Leg Stretches including Asia and the South Pacific.

See you up front.



Making the Most of Alaska Airlines New Award Chart - Huge Savings Still Available on Many Top Airlines

December 2023

These days airlines use different types of award charts such as distance-based, zone-based, and dynamic. With their big computers crunching numbers like ice on the Iditarod.

But it’s not all bad news. Let’s take Alaska Airlines, for example. In March 2024, they’re switching from zone to distance charts, creating some big change in the process. Simply put, some prices will be higher, and some will be lower.

ALASKA’S CHART FLIP: THE HIGHLIGHTS

At first glance, the signs are positive. Alaska said that beginning next March (no specific date), 64% of their Business Class routes will be at a lower price point.

Also announced:

- There will be no penalties for changing or canceling flights (thank you, Lockdown hangover). If you cancel your ticket, your miles will go back into your account and any taxes paid will be refunded.
- The airline has pledged to open up more partner availability on 10% of its routes. A small give but we'll take it.
- Awards will continue to include a free international stopover.
- Starting in March 2024 the new Alaska Airlines award chart shows that (and note that the fine print says, "Awards starting at"), all partner awards will start at the same level. That's a welcome change considering current prices for some partner airlines are much higher than others.

SOME SAMPLE COST CHANGES BY AIRLINE/REGION PLUS WINS AND LOSSES

Flying American using Alaska miles

To Asia: Business Class from Dallas to Shanghai is about 70% more. So that's a LOSS. **American may be as much as 29% less**.

To Europe: First Class from New York to London is about 22% less, that's a WIN (for you). **Alaska looks to be 11% less** than what American charges for its own flights.

To Europe: Business Class from Dallas to London is about 4% less, while flying Los Angeles to London is about 22% more. That's a WIN and a LOSS, respectively. Comparing that to American's pricing from Dallas, **Alaska is 32% less,** and from Los Angeles, **Alaska is 26% less**.

To South America: First Class Miami to São Paulo on American is about 12% less. That's a WIN. Compare that to American's pricing and **Alaska is just a bit less.** However, we have seen AA previously offer award seats to South America in First Class for as low as 56,000 one-way and 113,000 round-trip.

To South Pacific: First Class from Los Angeles to Sydney on American is about 86% more. That's a BIG LOSS. Compare that to American's pricing, American is 42% less with this strategy.

To South Pacific: Business Class from Los Angeles to Sydney on American is about 55% more. That's a BIG LOSS. Compare that to American's pricing, **American is 24% less**.

Flying British Airways using Alaska miles

To Europe: First Class from Los Angeles to London is about 50% more. That's a BIG LOSS. British Airways, **an Amex, Capital One, and Chase points-to-miles transfer partner is 19% less**.

To Europe: Business Class from Chicago to London is about 4% less. That's a small WIN. Compared to British Airways' cost, **Alaska is 39% less**.

Flying Cathay Pacific using Alaska miles

To Asia: First Class from Los Angeles to Hong Kong is about 86% more, it's a BIG LOSS. **Cathay Pacific, Amex, Capital One, and Citi points-to-miles transfer partner is about 4% less**.

To Asia: Business Class Chicago to Hong Kong is about 70% more. That's a BIG LOSS. **Alaska is about 23% less** than Cathay's own cost.

Flying Iberia using Alaska miles

To Europe: Business Class from Boston to Madrid is about 22% less, while flying from Los Angeles to Madrid is about 22% more. That's a WIN-LOSS. Compare that to Iberia's special deal, an Amex and Chase points-to-miles transfer partner, from Boston is **32% less,** and from Los Angeles is **37% less**.

Flying Japan Airlines using Alaska miles

To Asia: First Class from Los Angeles to Tokyo is about 57% more. That's a BIG LOSS for travelers. Japan Airlines using American special strategy, the cost is 28% less.

To Asia: Business Class from Dallas to Tokyo is about 40% more. That's a LOSS (cue sad-faced emoji). Japan Airlines **Using American miles, the cost is 14% less**.

Flying Qatar Airways using Alaska miles

To the Middle East: Business Class from Boston to Doha may be about 20% less, while flying from San Francisco to Doha is about 2% less. That's WIN-WIN. Compare that to Qatar's cost from both Boston and San Francisco, Boston is the same cost as Alaska and San Francisco and is **21% less using Qatar miles, an Amex and Citi points-to-miles transfer partner**.

CHARTS ABOUT AWARD CHARTS

ROUTES THAT WILL COST THE SAME OR LESS – BURN YOUR MILES NOW OR LATER

Round-Trip Mileage			First Class		
Region	Airline	Sample Route	Old Cost	New Cost	Difference
Europe	American	New York - London	140,000	135,000	-5,000
South America	American	Miami - Sao Paulo	170,000	150,000	-20,000

Round-Trip Mileage			Business Class		
Region	Airline	Sample Route	Old Cost	New Cost	Difference
Europe	British Airways	Chicago - London	115,000	110,000	-5,000
	American	Dallas - London			-5,000
		New York - London		90,000	-25,000
	Finnair	Chicago - Helsinki	140,000	110,000	-30,000
	Iberia	Boston - Madrid	115,000	90,000	-25,000

Round-Trip Mileage			Premium Economy		
Region	Airline	Sample Route	Old Cost	New Cost	Difference
Europe	American	New York - London	85,000	60,000	-25,000
	Finnair	Chicago - Helsinki		70,000	-15,000
	Iberia	Miami - Madrid			
Middle East	El Al	New York - Tel Aviv	110,000	90,000	-20,000
South Pacific	Air Tahiti Nui	Los Angeles - Papeete	90,000	80,000	-10,000

ROUTES THAT WILL COST MORE – BURN YOUR MILES NOW

Round-Trip Mileage			First Class		
Region	Airline	Sample Route	Old Cost	New Cost	Difference
Asia	Cathay Pacific	Los Angeles-Hong Kong	140,000	260,000	120,000
	Japan	Los Angeles-Tokyo		220,000	80,000
Europe	British Airways	Los Angeles - London		210,000	70,000
South Pacific	American	Los Angeles - Sydney		260,000	120,000

Round-Trip Mileage			Business Class		
Region	Airline	Sample Route	Old Cost	New Cost	Difference
Asia	American	Dallas - Shanghai	100,000	170,000	70,000
	Cathay Pacific	Chicago - Hong Kong			
	Japan	Dallas - Tokyo		140,000	40,000

Round-Trip Mileage			Business Class		
Domestic	American	New York - Los Angeles	60,000	70,000	10,000
Europe		Los Angeles - London	115,000	140,000	25,000
	Iberia	Los Angeles - Madrid			
MIddle East	El Al	New York - Tel Aviv	130,000		10,000
South Pacific	American	Los Angeles - Sydney	110,000	170,000	60,000
	Fiji Airways	Los Angeles - Nadi		150,000	40,000
	Air Tahiti Nui	Los Angeles - Papeete		120,000	10,000

Round-Trip Mileage			Premium Economy		
Region	Airline	Sample Route	Old Cost	New Cost	Difference
Asia	American	Los Angeles - Tokyo	80,000	100,000	20,000
	Cathay Pacific	Los Angeles-Hong Kong		110,000	30,000
	Japan	Los Angeles-Tokyo		100,000	20,000
	Singapore				
Europe	British Airways	Los Angeles - London	85,000	90,000	5,000
South Pacific	American	Los Angeles - Sydney	90,000	110,000	20,000

YOU CAN STILL FIND VALUE

When should you buy miles?

In short: when published premium fares are high, say $3,500+ for Business and $4,500+ for First Class international tickets. Published international First and Business Class fares are often at their highest when booked inside the 50-day advance-purchase window, when you don't have the minimum-stay requirement, or when special fares are not offered on your route.

Still Save Up to 93% Off Premium Flights

Alaska Airlines loves a mileage sale. Whether you have the miles or need to buy them, that's the time to buy them. Alaska frequently has mileage sales at 1.8 cents each. Until the new chart takes effect in March 2024, you can typically save 45% to 89% during these sale periods, which occur every couple of months or so.

Insider tip: Alaska Airlines often offers close-in First Class availability for Japan Airlines flights. We've seen as many as three First Class seats available within seven days of departure using Alaska miles. It's easy to book online with Alaska Airlines and if you're looking to book close in, you can score big.

Make sure that award space is available before committing to the purchase. With Alaska you can buy miles on the phone while making the reservation online.

EXAMPLES OF HIGH-VALUE FIRST CLASS FLIGHTS

Region	Operating Airline	Route	Current Alaska Miles Required Round-Trip	Typical Published Fare R/T	Cost of Miles R/T at 1.8¢ Each Including Approximate Taxes	Savings	
Asia	Cathay Pacific	Los Angeles - Hong Kong	140,000	$20,061	$2,686	$17,375	87%
	Japan	Los Angeles - Tokyo		$20,344	$2,825	$17,519	86%
		New York - Tokyo		$24,219	$2,686	$21,533	89%
South Pacific	American	Los Angeles - Sydney		$19,693	$2,736	$16,957	86%

EXAMPLES OF HIGH-VALUE BUSINESS CLASS FLIGHTS

Region	Operating Airline	Route	Current Alaska Miles Required Round-Trip	Typical Published Fare R/T	Cost of Miles R/T at 1.8¢ Each Including Approximate Taxes	Savings	
Asia	Cathay Pacific	Los Angeles - Hong Kong	100,000	$6,074	$1,947	$4,127	68%
	Japan	Los Angeles - Tokyo		$5,710	$2,086	$3,624	63%
		New York - Tokyo		$8,264	$1,947	$6,317	76%
South Pacific	American	Los Angeles - Sydney	110,000	$9,943	$2,182	$7,761	78%

EXAMPLES OF HIGH-VALUE PREMIUM ECONOMY FLIGHTS

Region	Operating Airline	Route	Current Alaska Miles Required Round-Trip	Typical Published Fare R/T	Cost of Miles R/T at 1.8¢ Each Including Approximate Taxes	Savings	
Asia	Cathay Pacific	Los Angeles - Hong Kong	80,000	$2,885	$1,578	$1,307	45%

Region	Operating Airline	Route	Current Alaska Miles Required Round-Trip	Typical Published Fare R/T	Cost of Miles R/T at 1.8¢ Each Including Approximate Taxes	Savings	
South Pacific	American	Los Angeles - Sydney	90,000	$4,502	$1,812	$2,690	93%

FCF'S BUSINESS CLASS TREASURE MAP WHERE YOU CAN SAVE TODAY

Region	Availability Using Alaska Miles	Operating Airline	Cost R/T	Outbound			Return		
				4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
Asia	Chicago - Tokyo	Japan	160,000	Feb.	Jan.		Jan.	Dec., Feb.	
Domestic	New York - Los Angeles	American	60,000	Jan., Feb., April, Aug.	Feb., April	Jan., Feb., March	Jan., Feb., March	Feb.	
Europe	Los Angeles - London		115,000	Dec., Feb.	Jan., Feb.	Jan.	Dec.	Jan., March	Feb.

Months in black at least one seat available; in blue at least two seats; in green at least four seats. Remember to use the data as a guide since availability can be volatile...

Things to consider:

- This strategy is not recommended for low-cost routes or on specific connections where there are a lot of miles involved.
- When Alaska does not show award space, the carrier may have it at a higher level due to dynamic pricing.

December's Top 52 Mileage Awards & Special Fares Greatest Hits (Still Available)

December 2023

Mr Upgrade's Deals of the Month

Santa's been busy, delivering a sleigh-full of great mile and fare deals for all over the world. Whether you've been naughty or nice, you'll find something to love, and say, "Oh you shouldn't have, FCF, but I'm so glad you did!"

Special Published Fares

AFRICA

Money > Nairobi > All Year > Biz Class > $3,249 to $3,814 R/T

Money > Cairo > All Year > Biz Class > $2,848 to $3,208 R/T

From Canada > Money > Nairobi > All Year > Biz Class > from $1,954 to $3,615 USD R/T

ASIA

Money > Seoul > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from $3,339 to $4,131 USD R/T

Money > Sri Lanka > Spring/Fall > Biz Class > $3,230 to $4,184 R/T

Money > Hong Kong > Fall > Biz Class > from Canada from $3,450 to $3,801 USD R/T

CARIBBEAN

Money > Grand Cayman > All Year > Biz Class > $774 to $1,159 R/T

Money > Barbados > All Year > Biz Class > $979 to $1,183 R/T

Money > St. Lucia > All Year > Biz Class > $979 to $1,190 R/T

Money > St. Thomas > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > $734 to $1,154 R/T

Money > Saint Kitts > Fall > Biz Class > $907 to $1,172 R/T

Money > Cancun > All Year > Biz Class > $658 to $884 R/T

Money > St. Croix > All Year > Biz Class > $738 to $1,095 R/T

Money > Aruba > All Year > Biz Class > $804 to $1,188 R/T

EUROPE

Money > London > All Year > First Class > $3,744 to $5,701 R/T

Money > Barcelona > Fall > Biz Class > $2,717 to $3,098 R/T

Money > Milan > Spring > Biz Class > $2,725 to $3,165 R/T

Money > Europe > All Year > Biz Class with TAP > $2,117 to $2,747 R/T

Money > Madrid > Spring > Biz Class > from New York and Atlanta from $2,721 to $3,061 R/T

Money > Paris > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > $2,192 to $3,219 R/T

Money > Dublin > Summer/Fall > Biz Class > $2,088 to $3,015 R/T

Money > Berlin > Spring > Biz Class > $2,770 to $3,213 R/T

Money > Milan > All Year > First Class > $4,124 to $5,625 R/T

Money > London > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > $1,832 to $3,063 R/T

Money > Amsterdam > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > $2,136 to $3,172 R/T

Money > Glasgow > All Year > First Class > $3,749 to $5,695 R/T

Money > Amsterdam > All Year > First Class > $3,952 to $5,349 R/T

Money > Europe > All Year > Biz Class with JetBlue > from New York and Philadelphia from $1,832 to $2,709 R/T

Money > Europe to U.S. > All Year > Biz Class > $1,639 to $2,282 USD R/T

HAWAII

Money > Honolulu > Winter/Spring > Biz Class > $888 to $1,519 R/T

Money > Kona > Winter > Biz Class > $888 to $1,476 R/T

MEXICO

Money > Cabo San Lucas > All Year > Biz Class > from $666 to $924 R/T

Money > Acapulco > Summer/Fall > Biz Class > $794 to $894 R/T

NORTH AMERICA

Money > Domestic Transcon > Winter/Spring > Business Class > from $767 to $1,198 R/T

SOUTH AMERICA

Money > Lima > All Year > Biz Class > from Orlando, Las Vegas, and Chicago from $1,088 to $1,551 R/T

Money > Rio de Janeiro > Winter > Biz Class > from New York and Los Angeles from $2,581 to $3,154 R/T

Money > Buenos Aires > All Year > Biz Class > from Miami, New York, and Orlando from $2,086 to $3,172 R/T

Money > Sao Paulo and Rio de Janiero > All Year > Biz Class > from Canada from $2,534 to $3,065 USD R/T

SOUTH PACIFIC

Money > Tahiti > All Year > Biz Class > from Los Angeles and Las Vegas from $3,130 to $4,198 R/T

Sweet Redeems

ASIA

Miles / Points > Singapore > Business Class > Handful > 4+ Travelers > Singapore Airlines from Los Angeles

EUROPE

Air France > BIZ Class > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from the East Coast to Paris > Easy to Book Now

Air France > BIZ Class > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from Texas to Paris > Easy to Book Now

KLM > Handful of BIZ Class > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from Chicago & Washington, DC > Easy to Book Now

Air France > Discount Premium Economy > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from Ottawa to Paris > Easy to Book Now

KLM > Discount BIZ Class > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from Toronto to Amsterdam > Easy to Book Now

Wide-Open > Cash OR Miles > First Class > Lufthansa > Washington, DC and Many Other Cities to Munich & Beyond > 4+ Travelers

Air France > Premium Economy > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from the West Coast > Easy to Book Now

KLM > Handful of BIZ Class > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from Georgia & Texas > Winter Travel

Air France > Premium Economy > 4+ Seats > for Less Miles than Coach > from Lower East Coast > Easy to Book Now

MIDDLE EAST

Cash OR Miles > Middle East > Qatar Airways Business Class From San Francisco / Handful of 2+ Seats

NORTH AMERICA

Miles / Points > Biz Class > 4+ Travelers > American > New York to/from Los Angeles

SOUTH PACIFIC

Cash OR Miles > Auckland > Handful of Close In Biz Class 2+ Seat Opportunities > from Houston and Many Other Cities

Upgrader's Block and How to Overcome It, Volume 1: When to Use Your Miles

December 2023

Author Charles Bukowski said that writing about writer's block is better than not writing at all. We think the same can be said of the upgrader's block, so that's exactly what we're going to do: write about it with an insight series that will get you to be an Upgrade Maestro.

We've often said that the art of upgrading is largely a mental thing–something we call "The Upgrade Mindset." Upgrader's block, therefore, just may be the lack of it. But happily, that can be fixed with a little focus.

It came to light in a recent chat with an FCF member. He said he couldn't understand why people hadn't come around to this way of thinking about booking premium flights.

So, we thought of providing some of our upgrade mentality and related information and motivation. In this first installment, we look at When to Use Your Miles—which you already have.

WHEN TO USE YOUR MILES?

Let's say you're looking at booking a trip to London and wondering, "mmm, should I buy the ticket with cash or use my miles?" That's a very good question, and the answer could save you a lot of money—and upgrader's remorse. Many travelers answer with, "Well, I have enough points, so I'll just use them." WAIT! You need to use your miles when they're good value because their value changes relative to the cash fare at hand. So how do you work out the value? It's really easy.

The value of a mile varies, but the method of calculating it doesn't. And once you know it, you'll know exactly what to do.

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF A MILE WHEN USING A FREE AWARD

Money Saved (cost of ticket or cash paid, minus award taxes) ÷ Award Miles Used = Value of a Mile

Just divide the amount of money you saved by the number of miles used to claim the award ticket. "Money saved" is simply the cost of your flight if you had paid for the ticket with cash, minus award ticket taxes.

For example, let's say the lowest premium fare—cash paid—is $2,200, and it takes 100,000 miles to get that ticket, plus $200 in award ticket taxes, thus on this flight the value of a mile is 2¢: $2,000 ÷ 100,000 miles = 2¢ per mile.

CALCULATING THE VALUE OF A MILE WHEN USING AN UPGRADE AWARD

When you're upgrading from a paid ticket, you calculate a little differently.

Savings ÷ Miles Required = Value of a Mile

Assume an economy ticket with American Airlines costs $500, plus it has a $700 co-pay. That's a total of $1,200. Say your Business Class ticket costs $3,000. It takes 50,000 miles round-trip to upgrade the paid economy ticket to Business Class.

To calculate the money saved, simply deduct the cost of the paid ticket from the value of the upgraded award ticket:

Business Class Fare – Upgradeable Economy Fare (including co-pay, if any) = Savings: $3,000 – $1,200 = $1,800.

So, the Savings ÷ Miles Required = Value of a Mile: $1,800 ÷ 50,000 miles = 3.6¢ per mile.

WHAT REPRESENTS GOOD MILE VALUE?

Everyone you talk to will give you a different answer. My answer: At least 3¢.

Why do we recommend at least 3¢? You must consider other aspects, such as credit cards that earn cash back at 2%: Some credit cards earn ~2% cash back. So, for every dollar spent, you get 2¢ back. So why play mileage games if your return on the effort spent is no more than an effortless cash-back card that allows you to do whatever you want whenever you want with the perks?

In other words, if you're only getting around 2¢ value for your miles, get a cash-back card and never think about miles again.

Don't you love the decisiveness of math?

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER AND KEEP IN MIND

You have a lot of miles: Be wary of that one. You most likely have a lot of miles because, thanks to terrible award space availability with your airline-specific program, you can't use them. Our advice is to have an Amex Rewards, Capital One, Chase, or Citi card because they give you a lot of flexibility; these credit card points accrued can be transferred to many different airlines.

Earning elite and award miles: When using award miles for tickets, you don't earn award miles OR elite status, so you want a good return.

EXAMPLES OF USING MILES WHEN VALUE IS HIGH

All Nippon Airways First Class: Chicago to Tokyo costs $21,273. It takes 150,000 miles (or similar with partners, see link below) to get that award. The math: $21,273 ÷ 150,000 miles = about 14¢ per mile. Great return! And again, here is a recent FCF Sweet Redeem find to that effect: Cash OR Miles > First Class > Single Seat > 2024 Travel> Handful of All Nippon Airways from Chicago to Tokyo.

Cathy Pacific First Class: Los Angeles-Hong Kong costs $20,061. It takes 250,000 miles (or FEWER with partners, see link below) to get that award. So, the chalkboard, please: $20,061 ÷ 250,000 miles = about 8¢ per mile. Ka-ching. And whaddaya know, here is a recent FCF Sweet Redeem find to that effect: Cash OR Miles > First Class > Cathay Pacific> Los Angeles and Many Other Cities to Hong Kong & Beyond > 2+ Travelers.

The High Business Class Fare: San Francisco to Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific is $7,259 in Business Class. It takes 168,000 miles (or FEWER with partners, see link below) to get that award, so for this flight, the value of a mile is: $7,259 ÷ 168,000 miles = about 4.3¢ per mile. Not bad. Here's a recent FCF Sweet Redeem to illuminate further: Cash OR Miles > Business Class > Cathay Pacific> San Francisco and Many Other Cities to Hong Kong & Beyond > 2+ Travelers.

The Short Notice Business Class fare: So, you book on shorter notice. Tch tch. Fares can be sky-high if you do not have a three- or four-month advance, so using miles can save you a small fortune. A two-week advance purchase fare in Business Class on American Airlines from Los Angeles to Paris is $6,296. It takes 115,000 miles (or less with partners) to get that award, so on this flight, the value of a mile is $6,296 ÷ 115,000 miles = about 5.5¢ per mile. Very good return.

Upgrading to Business Class on a Major International Airline: New York to Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific in Business Class costs $9,431, while the upgradeable fare costs $2,693 (Premium Economy; R). It takes 110,000 miles to get an upgrade, so on this flight, the value of a mile is $6,738 (money saved) ÷ 110,000 miles = 6.1¢ per mile.

Upgrading to Business Class on a Major U.S. Airline: Houston to Santiago on United costs $6,030 in Business Class, while the upgradeable fare costs $2,237 (economy ticket + co-pay cost). It takes 50,000 miles to get an upgrade round-trip, so on this flight, the value of a mile is $3,793 (money saved; $6,030 – $2,237) ÷ 50,000 miles = about 7.5¢ per mile.

ENOUGH MILE-MANIA. HERE'S WHEN NOT TO USE MILES:

Of course, it's when the calculator tells you so. That's liable to be the case when fares are low. If you're booking further in advance or you're flexible with dates or destinations, you can get great low fares for cash. So, save your miles for when they're worth more—or get a cash-back card and forget about all this miles shhtuff!

For example, the lowest fare we found for New York to Frankfurt on Delta in Business Class is $2,583. It takes 460,000 miles to get that award, so on this flight, the value of a mile is: $2,583 ÷ 460,000 miles = about .56¢ per mile. Mmm, that doesn't pass our 3-cent test. Scratch Delta credit cards?!

Or take New York to London in First Class on American. The lowest fare is $3,732. It takes 158,000 miles to get that award, so the value of a mile is: $3,732 ÷ 158,000 miles = about 2.3¢ per mile.

UPGRADER'S BLOCK SUMMARY

If your return on miles is less than 3¢, consider buying the ticket and saving your miles for another higher-value flight. Of course, sometimes you make decisions that go beyond the simple math, but it's good to have a ballpark method handy, ready for your smartphone calculator. Why? So, you don't get stymied or give up or avoid playing upgrade games when the opportunities are indeed often lucrative. That's all.

The JetBlue Deal via Amex-Avios Bonus

December 2023

WHEN JETBLUE FARES ARE HIGH, JUMP THE Q AND GET BUSINESS CLASS FOR 120,000 MILES

The Stoic philosophy posits that “the obstacle is the way,” meaning that life’s difficulties aren’t something to avoid, but rather to welcome as opportunities.

Well here at FCF, we say (respectfully) *to heck with that!* We’re taking the shortcut when it comes to those darn obstacles.

Mind you, fluctuating airline prices were something that Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius did *not* have to worry about.

But even he would be impressed with this workaround. Let's call it...

JUMPING THE Q

We recently learned that Qatar is publishing free award seats for travel — on JetBlue. There's nothing better than a healthy symbiotic relationship.

For example, Qatar's free award seats on JetBlue start at 78,000 miles each way, or 156,000 round-trip (120,000 if you use the frequent Amex 30%-40% points-to-miles transfer bonus), and taxes run from $55 (New York-Dublin) to $422 (Boston-London), depending on the route.

At that cost, it's not the best return on miles, but this Qatar-JetBlue workaround is well worth checking out when JetBlue and other carriers' published premium fares are high, say $3,500+ for Business international tickets. You'll find that published international Business Class fares are often at their highest when:

- booked close in
- you don't have the minimum-stay requirement
- flash or low-cost fares are not offered on your route

JETBLUE FARE TRENDS

JetBlue's New York-to-Edinburgh Business Class fares have quite a range from $2,993 to $5,937. In July, with less than a handful of dates offering the lowest fare of $2,993, the typical average fare for travel on most days is $3,818. Compare that to United whose fares are $3,853 to $6,028 with a typical average of about $5,078.

Here's a glimpse of JetBlue's current Business Class fare trends:

Route	Service Begins	Fare Range
Boston - Amsterdam	Currently Operating	$2,537 - $3,892
Boston - Dublin	March 14, 2024	$2,494 - $4,394
Boston - London	Currently Operating	$2,228 - $4,756
Boston - Paris	April 4, 2024	$2,593 - $5,168
New York - Dublin	March 14, 2024	$2,494 - $4,194
New York - Edinburgh	May 23, 2024	$2,987 - $5,437

JETBLUE SEATS

JetBlue is no slacker in the seat department, either. Let's take a closer look at its fuselage.

JetBlue's Mint Suite

JetBlue's Airbus A321 long-range aircraft offers fully enclosed Mint Suites. There are 24 available on international flights and each one includes a 6'8" lie-flat bed, a sliding door for privacy with direct aisle access, a 15-inch TV or larger, in-suite power, customizable lighting, and more. It's the perfect setup for a relaxing trip across the pond.

MILES INTO THE WILD BLUE YONDER

Although JetBlue is a transfer partner of Amex, Chase, and Citi, beware that cash, miles, and free awards in JetBlue's TrueBlue mileage program are not a deal. When you use JetBlue's TrueBlue points, just as regular fares vary, the points required for an award flight will also vary depending on the destination, day of the week, season, and advance booking window. The number of points required for a particular flight is based on the published base fare at the time of booking, which depends on various factors including the flight chosen and applicability of peak travel periods. Here are some details:

- Cash and miles options for both domestic and international flights can cost more than a regular published fare plus the value of the miles.
- Award ticket taxes to London are in line with American, Delta, and United – around $350 per round trip.

The "When Fares Are High" Workaround

With that said, we were happy to see an alternate way to get JetBlue award space using miles. If you have a ton of Amex (a transfer partner), transfer them to British Airways or Iberia, to get the frequent 30%-40% bonus, and combine them with your Qatar Airways Avios, it's still not a great deal when fares are at their lowest. If you're an inflexible traveler with firm dates, you might just have to grin and bear it.

FCF'S AVAILABILITY TREASURE MAP TRENDS

Note that the Qatar workaround doesn't help all the time. We checked several JetBlue routes and there are only a handful of routes to Europe with award space as shown in the chart below. We didn't find any award space using Qatar miles on JetBlue's New York-Paris, Amsterdam, and London (LHR & LGW) routes.

We also checked some Transcon routes where we found the lowest cost was 74,000 each way or 148,000 round-trip to include Boston to Los Angeles and San Francisco, Miami to Los Angeles, and New York to Los Angeles and San Francisco. Again, no deal.

Here are the routes with availability at time of publishing. Because these trends are constantly changing, be sure to check in advance to see how things are going.

FLYING ON JETBLUE USING QATAR AVIOS

Route	Cost R/T	Outbound			Return		
		4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
Boston - Amsterdam	156,000	June, Oct.	May	Jan. to April, May, June, July to Sept.	Oct.	April, June, July	Jan. to March, April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept.
Boston - Dublin			March, June	March, April, May, June, July to Sept.		March	March, April to Sept.
Boston - London		June	Jan., April, June, Oct.	Jan., Feb., March, April, May, July to Sept.		Jan., Oct.	Jan., Feb. to Sept.
Boston - Paris		May, Oct.	April, May, June	April, May, June, July to Sept.	July, Aug., Oct.	April to June, Aug.	April to June, Sept.
New York - Dublin				March to Sept.			March to Sept.
New York - Edinburgh		May		June to Sept.	May		June to Sept.

Months in black at least one seat available; in blue at least two seats; in green at least four seats. Remember to use the data

as a guide since availability can be volatile...

OUT OF THE BLUE COMES Q

We love finding creative ways to beat high fares, and this one works well when you’re faced with unwanted JetBlue fare peaks. Qatar to the rescue! Talk about an unexpected hero! Hey, we’ll take it.

JetBlue Business Class fares (including new upcoming routes) have quite a large range. For example, we’re seeing prices of $2,593-$5,168 for Boston-Paris coming in April next year. So keep your eye on them, and if any of those fares make you feel blue, take that opportunity to jump the Q. And I’ll see you up front.