

We're Upgrade Open-Minded. Are You?

October 2021

How you define the word ‘upgrade’ defines how you’ll travel for the rest of your life.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word “upgrade” was first used in 1873. It was a noun meaning an increase in grade, as in the grade of a road getting steeper. In 1901, it was first used for another meaning: as a verb, “to improve; to raise the quality of...”

Somewhere between 1901 and now, the word “upgrade” took on another meaning, once again as a noun: the move from economy to Business Class (or Business to First), usually on a particular flight that has already been booked. It has been effectively hijacked and taken on a whole new meaning to those that can’t escape CAIT (Conventional Airline Industry Think).



Here at FCF, we're on a crusade to correct that "undersight" because upgrading in its original form is what we're all about, that is, improving travel in ways that go beyond merely moving from one cabin to another on a particular flight that has already been booked.

Good luck if you're only playing in that limited lottery.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD, "UPGRADE"?

Do you think only the best dressed person gets those seats that become available in the front cabin? Or a benefit given as a bonus to an airline's frequent flyers (infrequently)? Or something you're offered for extra cash paid at the gate when groveling doesn't succeed? Or, in your mind are upgrades only anything else that moves you from one class to another on a particular flight that you've already booked?

You wouldn't be alone. That's what most people think. And when I tell them that there are SO MANY OTHER WAYS to improve their travel experience, to "upgrade," in other words, their eyes light up.

WHY THE DISPARITY (AND DESPAIR-ITY) AROUND THE WORD "UPGRADE"?

I'm putting it out there: Too many people are waiting around for things to happen to them, instead of making things happen for themselves. Settling for what's given is usually a choice. Most people don't come with The Upgrade Mindset. Governments, corporations, and cultures certainly don't foster it.

“Take what we give you and be happy,” they insist.

So most consumers see an “upgrade” as a pseudo-lucky break. “Isn’t Fly-High Airlines wonderful for upgrading me to Business Class?! But then again, I was wearing that A-line skirt I got at Saks, so it wasn’t like I had nothing to do with it.”

Er, no. Trust me, you had nothing to do with it.

Here’s the thing: The airlines (and almost every other monopoly) have conditioned people to have this mindset, even if indirectly. At the same time, the last thing they want is for people to actually consider all the different ways to score an upgrade. That’s not in their best interest.

They don’t call me “Mr. Upgrade” for nothing, so bear with me for a moment while I share my definition of “upgrade.” I’m going to do it with an example. Let’s say you’re thinking of paying **\$3,299 for a Business Class ticket** on Japan Airlines to Tokyo on a published fare. I would say, why don’t you “upgrade” to First Class — to a **\$21,334 ticket**, by the way — by buying American miles for **\$2,952, redeemable for that \$21,334 First Class ticket?** By any other name, that’s an upgrade, right!?

Of one class plus some cash.

And that, in a nutshell, is what we mean when we say there are *tons* of ways to upgrade.

If you were about to book a Virgin Atlantic Premium Economy ticket for \$2,000 Atlanta-London next June, and there was a Business Class fare sale on Delta for a day or two later for \$2,200 that works with your schedule, wouldn’t you “upgrade” to Business Class for a measly \$200?

What do you call that if it isn’t an upgrade? At the very least, it’s a significant improvement. Email me at with your ideas for a better, truer way to describe such things, as we’d love to hear them.

THE MANY WAYS TO UPGRADE

A better flight is a better flight by any other name, to paraphrase Mr. Shakespeare. That could result from a random lucky move from coach to Business at the royal behest of Queen Victoria (oh, I mean Vicky at the gate). But who wants to wait around for lucky breaks?

I’m all about upgrading whenever it makes sense. It might be getting a better deal on a car, a better cut of meat from the butcher, or a better TV for similar or little extra money. The key is to play a proactive part in helping them come about. It’s being engaged and aware, and not just sitting back and hoping good things will fall in my lap. That rarely happens, in life.

TRAVEL UPGRADES ARE EVERYWHERE

Things are always changing in travel — fares, rules, restrictions, competition, new routes, fashionable new destinations, discrepancies in loyalty programs, different ticketing strategies — and out of that comes opportunity.

But who keeps up with all that turbulence?

We do.

Everyone's so busy. No wonder people are happy to go with the default option. It's easier. Well, it *seems* easier. But I hope I'm starting to convince you that the opportunity to "upgrade," or improve your travel experience, is everywhere, and it's pretty easy too, once you know how.

BETTER EQUALS MORE \$, RIGHT?

Another default way of thinking is that quality costs a lot.

While that is true much of the time, it's not true all of the time. And in the gap between those two statements lies golden upgrade opportunities.

If you pay a little more for a lot more quality, that's a upgrade — in comfort or pleasure.

If you pay less than the standard price for something, that's an upgrade — in value.

MR. UPGRADE'S DEFINITION OF UPGRADE

Noun: An improvement to an existing option whereby the new option's benefit(s) exceeds the increase (if any) in cost(s).

Verb: The activities or processes related to improving an existing option.

The *penultimate* upgrade is coach to Business for just a bit more than the price of coach, the same price as coach, or sometimes even less than coach.

The *ultimate* upgrade is turning your coach ticket into a First Class experience. It's even possible that this upgrade ends up costing you less than the price of coach — although that is quite rare. Often it just costs a bit extra.

Each of these upgrades can be achieved through strategies that First Class Flyer invented or perfected over the last 25 years.

Let's take a look at some of those free and paid upgrades that the average traveler is not aware of.

EXAMPLES OF 10 GREAT UPGRADES

1. Round-the-World on ANA First Class for Price of Business on Delta to Asia

[This amazing Round-the-World](#) (RTW) deal is with All Nippon Airways—an Amex points-transfer partner—with tickets starting at 105,000 miles in Business Class or 160,000 in First Class, for **flying any Star Alliance airline(s)** for up to 18,000 flight miles for the entire itinerary.

Savings perspective: This is a staggering opportunity. Consider that Delta charges 160,000 miles (34% more) for a simple Business Class round-trip ticket between the U.S. and Europe, and 170,000 miles (38% more) from the U.S. to Asia.

Talk about a (free) Massize Trip Upgrade.

2. Upgrade from Business to First Class to Asia and pay \$347 LESS at the Same Time

You *could* pay cash for Business Class, Los Angeles-Tokyo on Japan Airlines for \$3,299 **or** you could buy 160,000 American miles at the cost of 1.8 cents each when on sale for \$2,880 plus \$55 taxes, **\$2,935 total for First Class**, which normally runs \$21,334. That's not only a one-class upgrade, but also [86% less than normal First Class fares](#) and \$347 less than the Business Class fare you were about to purchase. Boom!

3. Free Side Trips, AKA “Trip Upgrades”

We recently alerted you to [a free stop over in St. Croix](#), [in San Juan](#), Puerto Rico, and in [St. Thomas](#), as well as [The Over-the-Top_\(Under-the-Cost\) Way to Asia + Europe](#) and [Loop the loophole to India in Business Class via Europe or vice versa for less](#).

4. Get a Delta Business Class Ticket for Just 10,000 More Amex Points than Premium Economy

Most Delta travelers use Delta credit cards to earn Delta miles. Sounds obvious, but there's a more lucrative option that leads to, yes, you guessed it, a cheap “upgrade.”

You could fly Atlanta to Munich in Delta Premium Economy Class for 90,000 Delta SkyMiles round-trip. Or you could transfer points from Amex to Virgin Atlantic (a Delta partner) and still fly on Delta, **in Business Class**, for 100,000 miles.

[Get Business Class for just 10,000 miles more than coach](#) for 18 and a half hours flying at 40,000 feet?! Who wouldn't take that upgrade?

5. No-cost to Low-cost, One-way Paid Upgrades

A Dallas-Amsterdam round-trip ticket costs \$1,821 in Premium Economy on American. But if you fly in Business Class to Amsterdam (an overnight flight), and return in *Premium Economy* (day flight), the total cost is \$1,784—\$37 less. And you arrive in Amsterdam on the right foot, well rested and ready to go. More on that [here](#).

Premium Economy R/T on American to Amsterdam...

Your trip summary

Premium Economy
Round trip (Non-refundable)
\$1,821 per person
Total \$1,820.47 (all passengers)
[Price and tax information](#)

More room
■ No change fees (difference in ticket price may apply)
■ Wider seat with more legroom
■ 2 free checked bags
■ Priority security at participating airports
■ Priority boarding
Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.
[Bag and optional fees](#)

Depart Dallas/ Fort Worth, TX to Amsterdam, Netherlands
Thursday, December 23, 2021
6:25 PM → 10:55 AM 9h 30m Nonstop Premium Economy
AA 220 ■ 789-Boeing 787

⚠ Overnight flight or connection
[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Return Amsterdam, Netherlands to Dallas/ Fort Worth, TX
Wednesday, December 29, 2021
1:05 PM → 4:40 PM 10h 35m Nonstop Premium Economy
AA 221 ■ 789-Boeing 787

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Or Business Class on the Departure, Premium Economy on Return...

Your trip summary

Flagship® Business / Premium Economy

Round trip (Non-refundable)

\$1,784 per person

Total \$1,783.47 (all passengers)

[Price and tax information](#)

Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.

[Bag and optional fees](#)

Depart Dallas/ Fort Worth, TX to Amsterdam, Netherlands

Thursday, December 23, 2021

6:25 PM → 10:55 AM 9h 30m Nonstop Flagship® Business

AA 220 ■ 789-Boeing 787



[Overnight flight or connection](#)

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Return Amsterdam, Netherlands to Dallas/ Fort Worth, TX

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

1:05 PM → 4:40 PM 10h 35m Nonstop Premium Economy

AA 221 ■ 789-Boeing 787



[Details](#) | [Change](#)

6. Get an Iberia Business Class ticket for [just 8,000 to 15,000 more Amex or Chase Points](#) than many economy awards on American, Delta, and United. [just 8,000 to 15,000 more Amex or Chase Points](#) than many economy awards on American, Delta, and United.

New York John F Kenn... ✈ Madrid
 OUTBOUND: 03/11/2021 RETURN: 17/11/2021 | 1 x 1 | Change search

Your outbound flight 3 nov. 2021

01:15 — DIRECT 7h 15min. → 13:30
 Operated by: IBERIA Details Business
 From 34,000 Avios

Your return flight 17 nov. 2021

16:40 — DIRECT 8h 45min. → 19:25
 Operated by: IBERIA Details Business
 From 34,000 Avios

New York John F Ken... ✈ Madrid
 OUTBOUND: 03/11/2021 | RETURN: 17/11/2021

Avios & Money

68,000 Avios
 +
 240.56€

7. Use the Leg Stretch Strategy

Instead of buying one trip on one ticket, you can [buy two vacations' worth on a single ticket](#).

FCF's out-of-this-world Leg Stretch Strategy (where airlines connect three continents for an *extremely* low price) can string together flights in Business Class for the same price as coach, or just a bit more.

8. My Favorite Close-in Upgrade to First Class

Let's say you started out with a \$10,000 First Class ticket on Lufthansa. That's valuable property because you can cancel it to [fly in First Class for 200,000 Air Canada miles](#) a week or two prior to departure.

At a cost of [2.5 cents per Amex point](#), that same ticket is \$5,000—a saving of \$5,000. A big wallet upgrade. That price comes down even further with the current [Air Canada buy-miles promo](#), **for as little as \$2,600**, and a good chance LESS THAN what you paid for Business Class. More on that [here](#) and [here](#).

9. Free Vacation Upgrades

Stay at the Fairmont Orchid in Kona and fly economy class and you would pay \$8,522 if you booked them separately (as most do) for travel February 7 through 14, 2022. However, book as a package through [United Vacations](#) in Business Class and you pay just \$5,866, a \$2,656 / 31% savings. In my book, this is not only an upgrade but what I call a “cheaper-than-free” upgrade at that.

The screenshot shows a travel package on the United Vacations website. The package includes:

- Flights:**
 - Depart: Feb 17 from LAX (4:29 PM) to KOA (7:59 PM) via United First (Flight #1718).
 - Total travel time: 5hr 30min.
 - Return: Feb 24 (Next day arrival) from KOA (11:04 PM) to LAX (6:13 AM) via United First (Flight #1147).
 - Total travel time: 5hr 9min.
- Hotel:** Fairmont Orchid, Hawaii, booked from 2/17/2022 to 2/24/2022. The hotel has a Trip Advisor rating of 4.5 stars and a Traveler Rating of 5 stars.

Total Package Price: \$5,866.71 (or from \$285/mo) per person.

10. Free (Same Class) Seat Comfort Upgrades...

All routes are not created equal. Take American's Phoenix-Maui route, which flies on both A321s (narrow body) and B787s (wide body). The fares are exactly the same, but the seats are not. Business Class on the B787s recline to 180 degrees, but the A321s only recline a few inches. Or take United's Chicago-Denver route, which flies on both B737s and B777s, with the same fares. The Business Class seats on B777s recline to 180 degrees, but the B737s only recline a few inches. That's a big difference in comfort for no difference in price; more on that [here](#).



You won't find this on 737s.

I say don't wait for the airlines to upgrade you, when there are countless ways to upgrade.

Yourself.



First Class Drag Race to Asia: Amex vs Chase

October 2021

How do the big reward programs stack up when the rubber hits the road for premium travelers?

These days, most people are fans of either Amex Membership Rewards points or Chase Ultimate Rewards points, although many collect both with some percentage split between the two.

This reminds me of the age-old Ford vs Chevy debate. You're either a Ford person or you're a Chevy person. Most people tend to stay loyal to their side, but in the air mileage game, it's really good to be flexible.

So let's line 'em up at the starting line and play chicken for First Class travel to Asia.

UNDER THE HOOD: CHASE AND AMEX SIMILARITIES

Both programs' points can be transferred to the following airlines: Air Canada (a new development for Chase), British Airways, Iberia, Singapore, and Virgin Atlantic.

WHERE CHASE IS AHEAD (ON PAPER)

Chase gives you points-to-miles transfer **access to United miles**, whereas Amex does not. However, United miles don't net that much advantage for travel on United or other Star Alliance airlines to Asia compared to what miles with Amex partner ANA and Air Canada can get you. So, for free award travel, Amex travelers lose almost nothing by not having access to United miles. But there is one exception: United mileage upgrades to Business Class. That said, we found that 21 of 23 routes had almost no upgrade seat availability to Asia. So, while United may theoretically be a benefit of the Chase program, in reality there is no benefit for First Class travel to Asia.

WHERE AMEX IS AHEAD

Amex First Class Edge to Asia #1: Cathay Pacific 47% / 192,000 points less

Cathay Pacific has long been at the top of FCF's leaderboard when it comes to First Class comfort to Asia. Sure, Hong Kong isn't very high on everyone's list right now but their route network expands well beyond Hong Kong. Plus, anyone would be happy to fly Cathay Pacific First Class, as its hub airport has not had any issues or risks. Their U.S. hubs are Boston, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, with countless connections on partner American Airlines.

With Amex's partnership with Cathay you can get a First Class ticket for between 220,000 and 250,000 miles depending on the hub — **for a ticket that goes for as much as \$19,400**.

With Chase, your best bet costs you 162,000-192,000 more points for First Class on Cathay via transferring points to British Airways.

Amex First Class Edge to Asia #2: Japan Airlines Availability

Booking through Cathay Pacific (Amex partner) versus British Airways (Amex/Chase partner) for First Class travel on Japan Airlines gives you access to better availability (aka better odds of getting your desired dates).

Amex First Class Edge to Asia #3: Cathay Pacific Availability

Booking through Cathay Pacific (Amex partner) versus British Airways (Amex/Chase partner) for First Class travel on Cathay gives you access to better availability and the ability to book a little further out than British Airways.

Cathay Pacific Group Network



Amex First Class Edge to Asia #4: The Ultimate Mileage Award Ticket

Why just end your trip in Asia? If you're going that far, about halfway around the world, why not return home by circling the globe? How many times have you done that? You might as well pick a few more awesome spots while you're already on the road — **especially when you can do it for no additional cost, with Amex points.**

Amex's partner All Nippon Airways offers [The Ultimate Mileage Award Ticket](#). Imagine flying **First Class** to Asia and continuing around the world to a bunch of other inspiring or rejuvenating (or both) places for half the price Delta charges for Business Class. Or for the same price as United charges for Business Class. Wouldn't you call that the Ultimate Award Ticket? You simply can't do this — or anything remotely close to it — with Chase points.

AMEX BONUS ADVANTAGES

Transfer Bonuses

Amex often runs transfer bonus promotions, frequently offering up to a 40% bonus with British Airways, Iberia, and Virgin Atlantic. **This transfer bonus goes a long way to make up for any shortfall on the spend-bonus you might miss out on with Chase or other cards**, such as at supermarkets or gas stations, for example. So with Amex you make up for much of the bonuses you lose; more on that [here](#).

Access to 500,000 Discount Savings Miles Annually

If you're reading this it's because you know that the miles and points game can shave massive costs off your First Class travel, which can cost up to \$25,800 for a ticket (you could buy a Ford *and* a Chevy with that). Most people can never accrue enough points. This chart shows how you can you [buy Amex points](#)—a feature Chase doesn't offer—to get a \$25,800 ticket for just \$6,000.

Operating Airline	Route	Amex Partner	Amex Partner Cost	Cost To Buy Miles / Points at 2.5 Cents Each	Normal Fare	Amex Strategy Savings
American	Dallas - Hong Kong	Cathay Pacific	240,000	\$6,000	\$10,800	\$4,800 44%
All Nippon	Chicago - Tokyo	Virgin Atlantic	120,000	\$3,000	\$21,700	\$18,700 86%
	Los Angeles - Tokyo		110,000	\$2,750	\$17,800	\$15,050 85%
	New York - Tokyo		120,000	\$3,000	\$22,905	\$19,905 87%
	San Francisco - Tokyo		110,000	\$2,750	\$20,300	\$17,550 86%
Cathay	Boston - Hong Kong	Cathay Pacific	250,000	\$6,250	\$19,400	\$13,150 68%
	Los Angeles - Hong Kong		220,000	\$5,500	\$16,152	\$10,652 66%
	New York - Hong Kong		250,000	\$6,250	\$19,358	\$13,108 68%
	San Francisco - Hong Kong		222,000	\$5,550	\$16,152	\$10,602 66%
Japan Airlines	Chicago - Tokyo	British Airways/Iberia	240,000	\$6,000	\$23,500	\$17,500 74%
	Los Angeles - Tokyo		206,000	\$5,150	\$19,800	\$14,650 74%
	New York - Tokyo		240,000	\$6,000	\$25,800	\$19,800 77%
	San Francisco - Tokyo		206,000	\$5,150	\$20,100	\$14,950 74%

Conclusion

Feel free to get a Chase card as a backup — especially for making purchases with a merchant that doesn't accept Amex.

Or if you spend a zillion dollars at the gas pump and carrying an extra credit card in your wallet for that particular higher spend category bonus, or one like that, and you're happy to remember when and where to use that extra credit card in your wallet, to net perhaps another few thousand points a year, that might be worth ~\$100 to \$200 a year, then go for it! That's fine! but it's not the main game for First Class travelers to Asia.

That's why we're a big fan of Amex over Chase, especially for First Class to Asia.

It's the 80-20 rule in practice. With Amex Rewards you get 80% of the pie with only around 20% of the effort. Our recent [special report and its ramifications for other credit cards is here](#).





The Caribbean for Seat Snobs. Demand the Best Seat and Get It with Nice Savings

October 2021

How to save with wide-body flights to the Caribbean

I'm a snob. A seat snob. There, I said it.

Actually, I'm not just a seat snob, I'm a double snob. I'm a seat snob AND I'm a miles loophole snob.

Phew, that feels great to get off my chest.

Now, throw the Caribbean into that ultra-demanding mix and you've got yourself a *super-snobernova*. A rare event in the universe when you can go somewhere tropical in premium class comfort without spending much.

SNOB SNOOPER PART 1: IT'S A WIDE-BODY LOTTERY UP THERE

This has come to a head because airlines are currently shifting aircraft around from route to route, more than usual. Could be for cargo reasons, could be inventory management — who knows? But it now means getting the best **wide-body aircraft equipped with international lie-flat Business Class seats on routes to the Caribbean**, which can otherwise be difficult.

So let's attack the first item on our snobbish to-do list: Where, in fact, are those nice wide-bodied, internationally configured flights to the sunny Caribbean?

They're right here in this chart. Shhhh. Keep it to yourself. You don't want everyone to know about this.

Route	Operating Carrier	Aircraft	Flight Number/Dates of Service
Miami - Montego Bay	American	B787	Outbound AA2705 Nov. 2 through Nov. 30*, Jan. 4 through March 26; Return AA2706 Nov. 2 through Nov. 30*, Jan. 4 through March 26
Miami - San Juan		B777	Outbound AA967 Nov. 2 through Dec. 15; AA1570 Dec. 16 through March 26; Return AA1724 Nov. 2 through Dec. 15; AA1613 Nov. 1 through March 26
Dallas - Cancun		B777	Outbound AA1001 Nov. 18 through Nov. 30**; Return AA1030 Nov. 18 through Nov. 30**
Atlanta - Cancun		B787	Outbound AA1001 Nov. 1 through 17, Dec. 1 through Jan. 4; AA1507***, AA2207 Jan. 6 through March 26; Return AA1030 Nov. 1 through Nov. 17, Dec. 1 through Jan. 3; AA2874 Dec. 16 through Jan 4.; AA1507 Jan. 5 through March 26.
	Delta	A330	Outbound AA601 Nov. 1, Dec. 17 through March 12; Return AA591 Dec. 19 through March 12

Accurate as of Sept 2021. Aircraft and flight numbers subject to change. *Currently no 787 service through Nov. 1, no service on Mondays through Nov. 30.; **No service Nov. 25, 26; ***No service Jan. 18.



Vernon will meet me when the BOAC lands. Keys to the M.G. will be in his hands.

Adjust to the drivin' and I'm on my way. It's all on the right side in Montego Bay.

Montego Bay by Bobby Bloom

MIAMI - MONTEGO BAY ON AMERICAN AIRLINES (NOT BOAC)

Fares for this trip range from \$553 to \$1,011 in Business Class. There are between one and three flights daily, one of which uses the internationally configured B787 aircraft. If you plan to pay cash, you can generally (except on most Saturdays) find the B787 international lie-flat Business Class seat aircraft at a **lower fare** than the B737 with standard recline seats. This is music to snobbish ears. A lie-flat seat for less than a standard one — just for being a savvy (and perhaps snobby) FCF reader. Screenshots follow.

Round trip · 1 - Business Class
Miami Montego Bay

Total price from **\$641**

This airline may be offering additional flexibility for bookings. [More details](#)

Selected flights

Departing flight - Wed, Jan 12

12:05 PM - Miami International Airport (MIA)
Travel time: 1 hr 43 min
1:48 PM - Sangster International Airport (MBJ)

American - Business Class - Boeing 787 - AA 1501

Returning flight - Tue, Jan 18

4:06 PM - Sangster International Airport (MBJ)
Travel time: 1 hr 49 min
5:55 PM - Miami International Airport (MIA)

American - Business Class - Boeing 787 - AA 1501

Round trip · 1 - Business Class
Miami Montego Bay

Total price from **\$1,011**

This airline may be offering additional flexibility for bookings. [More details](#)

Selected flights

Departing flight - Wed, Jan 12

10:30 AM - Miami International Airport (MIA)
Travel time: 1 hr 43 min
12:13 PM - Sangster International Airport (MBJ)

American - Business Class - Boeing 737 - AA 2446

Returning flight - Tue, Jan 18

4:11 PM - Sangster International Airport (MBJ)
Travel time: 1 hr 49 min
6:00 PM - Miami International Airport (MIA)

American - Business Class - Boeing 737 - AA 2446
Often delayed by 30+ min

ATLANTA - CANCUN ON DELTA

Fares range from \$788 to \$2,380, round-trip, with the lowest fare days to travel being Tuesdays and Wednesdays. There are generally up to five flights daily, one of which uses the international A330 configuration with lie-flat seats. Again, pay cash and, if you know which flight to look for, you can score the international A330 lie-flat Business Class seat, sometimes at a lower fare than Delta's aircraft with standard recline seats.

Round trip · 1 - Business Class
Atlanta Cancún

Total price from **\$1,173**

This airline may be offering additional flexibility for bookings. [More details](#)

Selected flights

Departing flight - Sat, Dec 11

1:40 PM - Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)
Travel time: 2 hr 28 min
4:06 PM - Cancun International Airport (CUN)

Delta - Business Class - Airbus A330 - DL 592
Ticket also sold by Aeromexico

Returning flight - Sat, Dec 18

6:00 PM - Cancun International Airport (CUN)
Travel time: 2 hr 35 min
8:35 PM - Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)

Delta - Business Class - Airbus A330 - DL 591
Ticket also sold by Aeromexico

Round trip · 1 - Business Class
Atlanta Cancún

Total price from **\$2,380**

This airline may be offering additional flexibility for bookings. [More details](#)

Selected flights

Departing flight - Sat, Dec 11

9:45 AM - Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)
Travel time: 2 hr 40 min
12:25 PM - Cancun International Airport (CUN)

Delta - Business Class - Airbus A321 - DL 388
Ticket also sold by Aeromexico

Returning flight - Sat, Dec 18

3:10 PM - Cancun International Airport (CUN)
Travel time: 2 hr 35 min
5:45 PM - Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)

Delta - Business Class - Boeing 737 - DL 1962
Ticket also sold by Aeromexico

SNOB SNOOPER PART 2

Now let's get to the second snobby feature: getting these wide-bodied, comfy-seat flights for fewer miles.

The chart says it all. You could fly on American Airlines for the aforementioned Miami-Montego Bay trip and pay 40,000 miles round-trip. Or you can get smartly snobbish and pay just 25,000 miles with partner British Airways, which partners with Amex and Chase points.

The same applies to other routes as shown below.

Route	Operating Carrier	R/T Lowest Miles Found	Mileage Partner	R/T Cost Using Partner Miles
Miami - Montego Bay	American	40,000	British Airways	25,000
Miami - San Juan		40,000		33,000

Route	Operating Carrier	R/T Lowest Miles Found	Mileage Partner	R/T Cost Using Partner Miles
Dallas - Cancun		40,000		33,000
Atlanta - Cancun	Delta	72,000	Virgin	55,000

Ready to go? You'll want to know what's available. Here's a snobbish availability chart, sir/ma'am.

To/From	Availability Using Operating Airline	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
Miami - Montego Bay	American			Jan. to March			Jan. to March
Miami - San Juan				Jan. to March			Dec. to March
Dallas - Cancun		March		Jan., Feb.		March	Jan., Feb.
Atlanta - Cancun	Delta	Feb., March	Feb.	Jan.	March	Feb.	Jan.

*Months in blue at least two seats; in green at least four seats.



FCF Rare Fares™

Premium opportunities usually available nowhere else.

\$1,697

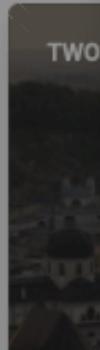
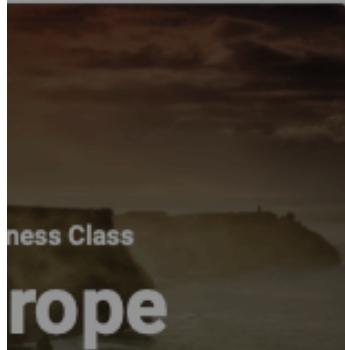
Boston

London

How to Leverage FCF's Special Fare Finder

True cognitive states, currently Alerts are indication of what's to come, delivered fresh.

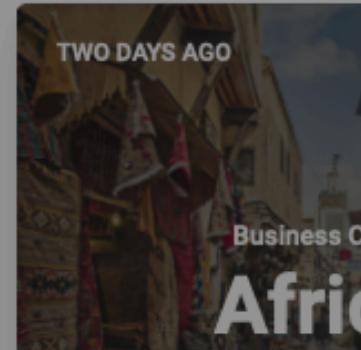
October 2021



- All Destinations
- All Airlines
- All Travel Months
- Star Alliance
- Air Canada
- Air New Zealand
- All Nippon Airways
- Asiana
- Austrian Airlines
- Brussels Airlines

short time. Jump on those that are active

indication of what's to come, delivered fresh.



7 ways to save money (and time) with FCF's wow-inspiring widget.

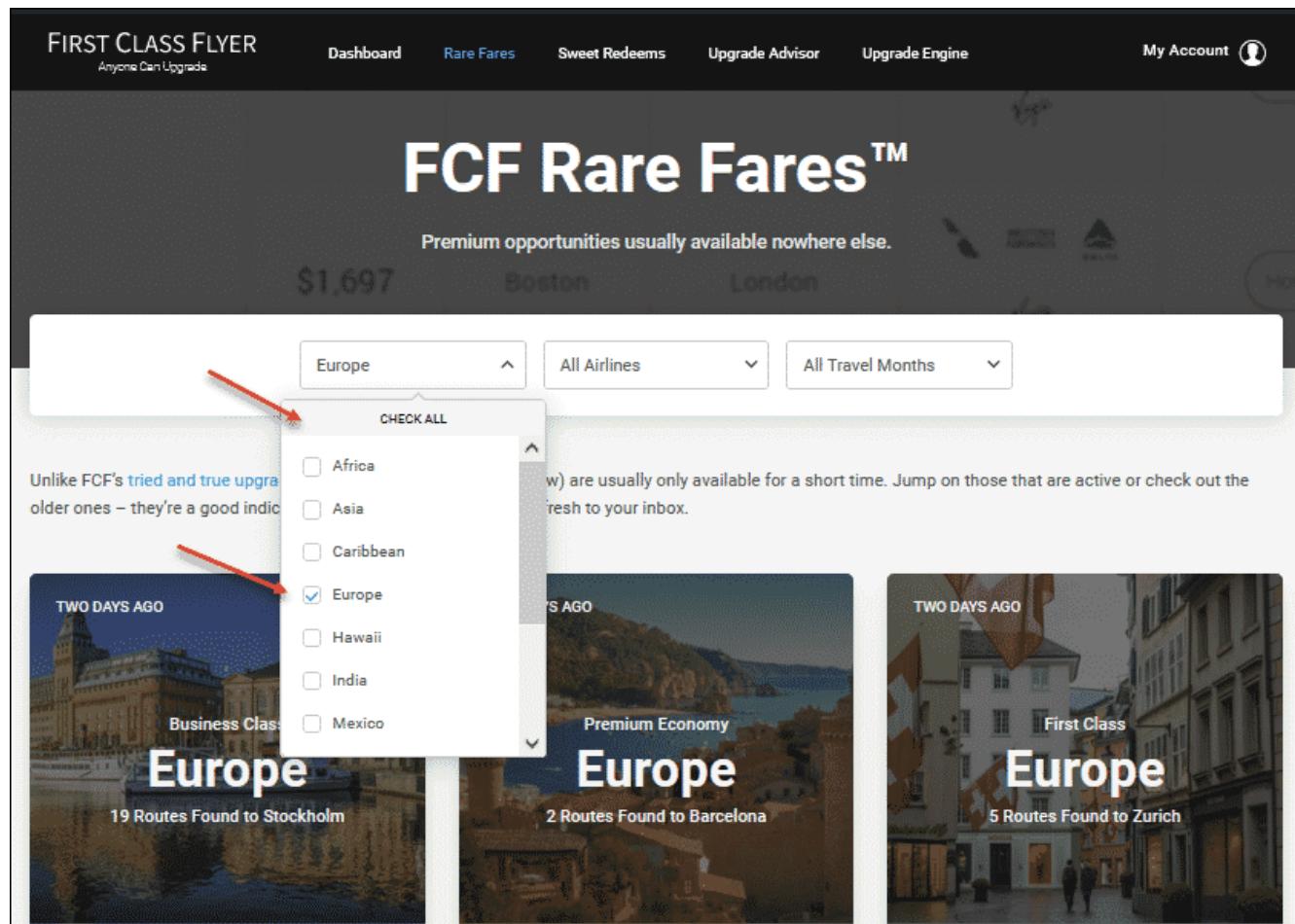
FCF's Special Fare Finder makes it easier to find extraordinary flash and anomaly fare deals.

Think of it like life before the air-bridge. To board a plane, folks used to have to run at it with a pole and vault in (remember that?). It was very difficult, and there were many failures. Then the air-bridge was invented and things got waaaay easier.

This is *not* an alternative to Expedia, Google, or Kayak, which will simply throw a smattering of premium fares or alerts at you only for very particular search parameters for the most part. FCF's Special Fare Finder gives you **only uniquely discounted flash and anomaly fare opportunities**.

DEAL FILTER SECTION

When you click on our [Special Fare Finder page](#), it looks like this. At the top of the page is the **Deal Filter Section** with three drop-down filter options: **All Destinations**, **All Airlines**, and **All Travel Months**.



FIRST CLASS FLYER
Anyone Can Upgrade

Dashboard Rare Fares Sweet Redemptions Upgrade Advisor Upgrade Engine My Account

FCF Rare Fares™

Premium opportunities usually available nowhere else.

\$1,697 Boston London

Unlike FCF's tried and true upgrades, these are usually only available for a short time. Jump on those that are active or check out the rest to your inbox.

Europe **All Airlines** **All Travel Months**

Africa Asia Caribbean Europe Hawaii India Mexico

Europe **Business Class** **Two Days Ago** **19 Routes Found to Stockholm**

Europe **Premium Economy** **Two Days Ago** **2 Routes Found to Barcelona**

Europe **First Class** **Two Days Ago** **5 Routes Found to Zurich**

Within each filter, you can check and uncheck all selections, or go through them individually. [Go on, give it a try.](#) I'll wait.

DEAL PREVIEW SECTION

FIRST CLASS FLYER
Anyone Can Upgrade

Dashboard Rare Fares Sweet Redems Upgrade Advisor Upgrade Engine My Account

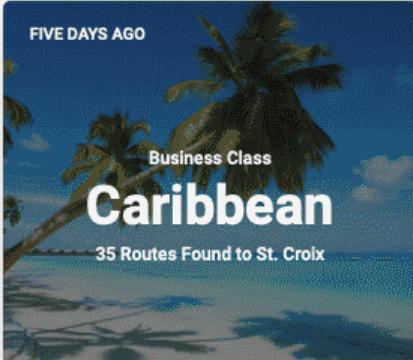
FCF Rare Fares™

Premium opportunities usually available nowhere else.

\$1,697 Boston London

All Destinations All Airlines All Travel Months

Unlike FCF's [tried and true upgrade strategies](#), our Daily Alerts (below) are usually only available for a short time. Jump on those that are active or check out the older ones – they're a good indication of what's to come, delivered fresh to your inbox.



FIVE DAYS AGO
Business Class
Caribbean
35 Routes Found to St. Croix

Airlines offering special fares:  

Travel on: Jan and Feb 2022 Starting Fare: **\$615**

[Deal Details](#)



SIX DAYS AGO
Business Class
South America
45 Routes Found to Rio de Janeiro

Airlines offering special fares:     

Travel on: Mar 2022 Starting Fare: **\$1,550**

[Deal Details](#)



SIX DAYS AGO
Business Class
Middle East
37 Routes Found to Dubai

Airlines offering special fares:      

Travel on: May, Jun, Jul and Aug 2022 Starting Fare: **\$2,226**

[Deal Details](#)

This is where you discover the latest special flash and anomaly fares our global team has discovered — or new fares at the very low end of where they normally hover — to destinations in the US and across the world.

At a glance you'll see:

- When each deal was posted. This “freshness factor” is important because some don't last long
- A red expiration indicator, which is our best guess for how long the deal will last
- The cabin class of the deal so you can quickly see what's relevant to you
- The deal region so you can quickly scan for areas you're thinking about going
- The number of routes found to the region or destination so you can get a feel for what your chances are.

Unless the deal is very targeted, there will often be more routes with special fares available, so just use this as a high-level indicator.

- Airline logos to give you an idea of the range of options
- “Travel on,” which gives you the months the deal is valid for
- “Starting Fare,” which shows the lowest fare within the deal

When you click on a deal that tickles your fancy, it opens up to more information, which is encapsulated in the:

FLASH DEAL SUMMARY & DETAILS

Sample Savings: Toronto to Rio de Janeiro goes for \$1,550 round-trip. Compared to regular published fares of about \$3,000 to \$4,000.

See [FCF's Risk of Booking Tickets Now widget](#) for more information on the risks of booking cash ticket.

Note: Short-haul connecting flights may not offer Business Class.

Upgrading on American: From Business to First Class takes 50,000 miles round-trip plus \$1,100 co-pay. For more information, [go here](#).

You can save on average an additional \$60 to \$440 about half the time with [Amex's International Airline Program \(IAP\) discount](#).

Remember that Flash Airfares—which can change any time and probably will, generally within a day or two, more or less—can be extended, see FCF's February report for details on Hold It Right There: [How to Lock in Amazing Premium Flash Fares Long Enough to Decide If They're Right for You](#).

For Travel Agents: If your travel agent or airline reservationist is having difficulty finding these fares, provide them the “Fare Basis Code(s)”, which they can use to pull up a “Fare List” in their computer, which will give them the fare’s “rules” to help navigate to the deal: **American Airlines, I; Delta Airlines, Z; LATAM, I/Z; United, P.**

Screenshot of sample fare on [united.com](#):

UNITED

Canada | English

Saved trips

Contact us

MyFlightPlus: Sign in or join

① Review ② Traveler ③ Seats ④ Payment

Roundtrip (1 traveler) Edit search

Fri, 14 Jan, 2022
YYZ - GIG 2:30 pm - 11:05 am

Mon, 24 Jan, 2022
GIG - YYZ 9:55 pm - 4:24 pm

Fare	CA \$1,828.00
Taxes and fees	CA \$137.51
TOTAL	CA \$1,965.51
or	
starting from CA \$176/month ②	

Review trip itinerary [Share](#)

Book now with flexibility
Book a flight today and change it with no change fee. Some Basic Economy exceptions apply.
[Learn more](#)

- The route/s

- Sample savings you get with this deal
- Our risk-of-booking widget, which readers have appreciated during lockdown. It shows any risks of booking tickets with airline policy details outlined in detail
- Information on which airlines might offer upgrades, how many miles it would cost to upgrade, and any co-pay amount involved
- Current discount information to see what you can save with current discounts or promo codes, as well as links to quickly take advantage of them
- Airline fare codes that you can give to your travel agent to make booking faster and easier including a screenshot of the sample fare – proof it exists for anyone else you are talking to.

SAMPLE DEAL ROUTES & AVAILABILITY

FIRST CLASS FLYER
Anyone Can Upgrade

Dashboard Rare Fares Sweet Redemeers Upgrade Advisor Upgrade Engine My Account

Rio: New Business Class Fares from Canada and the U.S. from \$1,550 R/T

September 30, 2021

Flash Deal Summary

Sample Savings: Toronto to Rio de Janeiro goes for \$1,550 round-trip. Compared to regular published fares of about \$3,000 to \$4,000.

[Show More](#)

Example Deal Routes

If you can, follow the deal...

From Nashville ▼ ↔ To Rio de Janeiro



Deal Availability

Fly at other times and pay double or triple.

OCT '21	✓
JAN '22	✓
FEB '22	✓
MAR '22	✓
APR '22	✓
MAY '22	✓
JUN '22	✓
JUL '22	✓
AUG '22	✓

- Select a U.S. departure city from the dropdown menu to drill further
- Check the map to see the routes. Hover over the dots to see the cities.

- The month and year indicator shows when the deal is available based on the route chosen from the drop-down menu.

SAMPLE BEST DEALS FOUND

Sample Best Deals Found	FARE ▾	ORIGIN ▾	DESTINATION ▾	AIRLINES	NEXT STEP
	\$1,502	Los Angeles	Santiago		How to Book Get Deal
Click the "get deal" button and you might find even more routes with special flash deals.	\$1,564	Vancouver	Santiago		How to Book Get Deal

Here's where the rubber hits the tarmac: how to make the deal your own.

- Click on the **Fare** arrow to sort by ascending or descending fare prices
- Origin** shows the U.S. departure cities involved in the deal, and next to them, the **Destination**
- See the **Airlines** involved – which is great for elite earners

EXPLORE DATES & BOOK

Sample Best Deals Found	FARE ▾	ORIGIN ▾	DESTINATION ▾	AIRLINES	NEXT STEP
Click the "get deal" button and you might find even more routes with special flash deals.	\$1,873	Boston	Rome		How to Book Get Deal
	\$1,877	Philadelphia	Rome		How to Book Get Deal

- How to Book**, which gives you a walkthrough of what to do on Google Flights. You choose your dates, departure, and return flights then click "Select." You'll be linked to the relevant airline or other booking sites such as Orbitz or Expedia for review and payment.
- Get Deal** takes you straight to Google Flights, a shortcut for savvy bookers.

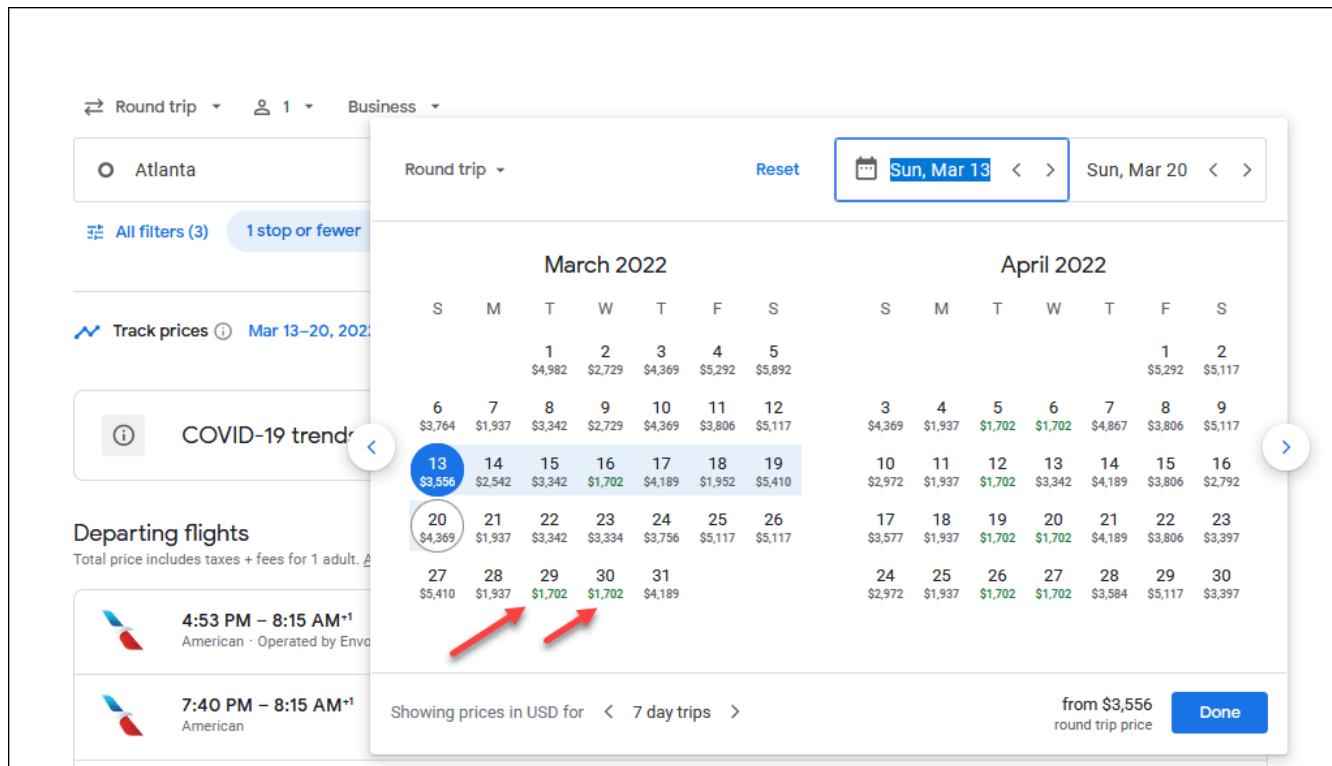
WORKING WITH GOOGLE

The Get Deal link sends you straight to an itinerary already priced on Google Flights, usually at the fare we posted.

What happens when I click "Get Deal" and Google flights does not show the same fare as shown in the daily alert?

This can happen because fares are based on inventory (and airline whims) so there's no guarantee the fare will still be there on the exact date in our alert. However, you can open the Google Flights calendar to see what

dates are available for the fare you are looking for.



Round trip 1 Business

Atlanta

All filters (3) 1 stop or fewer

Track prices Mar 13–20, 2022

COVID-19 trends

Departing flights

4:53 PM – 8:15 AM¹ American · Operated by Envoy

7:40 PM – 8:15 AM¹ American

March 2022

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5		
\$4,982	\$2,729	\$4,369	\$5,292	\$5,892		

April 2022

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2					
\$5,292	\$5,117					

Showing prices in USD for 7 day trips from \$3,556 round trip price Done

If you still don't see the fare, try changing your outbound or return date one day at a time, or even advance the calendar to the next or previous month if you are very flexible. If the fare is still not there, it may have been a flash fare and it's likely gone.

There you have it. Let us know how our Special Fare Finder can be better, and how you score!



Str-AA-ightjacket: Don't Get Tied Down by American's Credit Cards When Better Options Are Available

October 2021

16 ways AA credit cards stifle your premium travel opportunities and why Amex and Chase cards/points are the way to go.

All you readers with AA co-branded credit cards better sit down. If you're sitting down, it's time to lie down. And preferably in a premium cabin lie-flat seat — IF you're able to get one, which is MUCH less likely given the credit cards you keep in your wallet.

It's because of this simple, no-brainer fact: When you're not shackled to one airline loyalty program, be it AA or any other one, you gain the flexibility to shop around and fly the cheapest airline. Or better yet, to find the

ones with the best seats and/or schedule. You might even hit the trifecta: cheapest fare, best seats, *and* best schedule.

Here at FCF, we call them **Loyalty Free Agents** and despite advertising claims to the contrary, they are simply better off for scoring the best deals.

As we've said on these pages for many years, we're fans of Amex and Chase points, [in that order](#). They have the right connections, without the loyalty infections, to help you get ahead in the travel game.



Break the shackles and become a Loyalty Free Agent

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT LOYALTY FREEDOM?

Let's get bullet-pointy about this with each bullet aimed at your AA card like a BB gun at a tin can on a fence post.

- With [American Express Membership Rewards](#), you can transfer points to miles with three airline alliances and their partners — that's 89+ airlines — as opposed to AA's 19 partners.
- American's co-branded cards won't multiply your earnings like other cards will. For example, you can get 5X points for airline tickets and hotels with the American Express Platinum card and 4X points for dining or supermarkets with the American Express Gold card.
- You have buying power. [You can buy up to 500,000 Amex miles](#), but American Airlines only allows you to purchase 150,000, excluding any bonuses. You can then transfer all those points to any of Amex's partner's miles.
- Amex Rewards often runs [transfer bonus promotions](#) that frequently offer up to a 40% bonus with airlines that you can't fly with AA miles.

LOYALTY-FREE AGENTS SHINE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE TOO

- American Express Platinum and Centurion cardholders barely have to lift a finger to [knock off a hundreds of dollars \(and sometimes even thousands\)](#) on lots of premium fares on several airlines (26), thanks to **Amex's International Airline Program (IAP)**...



- You can fly Emirates, one of the world's great flying experiences. Sigh, you can't with an American Airlines co-branded card because American and Emirates are not partners. However, you can with Amex by simply transferring Amex Rewards points to Emirates, more on that [here](#).
- You gain peace of mind. Amex partners British Airways, Cathay Pacific, and Japan Airlines have locked-in zone-based price awards, not flakey fluctuating ones.
- Loyalty-free agents, *not* AA-straightjacketed flyers, have access to the lowest cost carrier awards to Europe — [just 68,000 miles round-trip with Iberia](#).
- British Airways (354 days out) and Cathay Pacific (360 days out) open award bookings for award travel earlier than American at 331 days out.

LOYALTY FREE AGENTS HAVE BETTER PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

- Access to twice as many Business Class routes to Asia on United and its partner using Amex partner Air Canada, than American and its partners have.
- Access to [First Class to Asia](#) on two more airlines, All Nippon and Singapore, skyrocketing your chances for the best experiences compared to just oneworld's American, Cathay Pacific, and Japan Airlines.
- Access to [cheap Delta flights to Europe for just 100,000 miles](#) round-trip using Amex partner Virgin Atlantic.
- Easier online booking options with Amex partner Cathay flights, instead of having to call AA when using American miles.
- Access to the same level of availability in [First Class on Japan Airlines](#) using Amex partner Cathay Pacific, so no loss where there might be some.

LOYALTY FREE AGENTS ALSO DO BETTER IN THE NORTH AMERICA AND SHORT HAUL

- Save up to 15,000 miles when booking [Caribbean](#) and Central American flights using Amex partner British Airways.
- Save 15,000 on some [short-haul domestic](#) routes where partners award prices are less than the U.S. operating carrier.

EXAMPLES OF HOW LOYALTY FREE AGENTS GET THE BEST PLAYS

Belize

You could fly Miami-Belize in Business Class and pay 40,000 miles with American Airlines. Or you could fly loyalty-unshackled using British Airways miles for 33,000 miles. It's a similar story for Miami-Nassau: 40,000 miles versus 25,000 if you don't use your AA card.

Sydney

The lowest miles award we found on an American Airlines nonstop flight from Los Angeles to Sydney was 350,000 miles. Cathay Pacific, an Amex partner charges 150,000 — a 200,000 mile savings!

Domestic Unshackling

On a nonstop short-haul flight, such as Dallas-Kansas City, British Airways (Amex & Chase points partner) charges only 25,000 miles round-trip for First Class for a flight operated by its partner American Airlines. On the other hand, American charges 32,000. For Chicago-Toronto on AA, BA charges 25,000 miles round-trip in Business Class, but AA charges 32,000. Another good example of a nonstop short-haul flight is New York-Toronto on AA. BA charges 25,000 miles round-trip in Business Class, while American charges 32,000 miles.

THE PRICE YOU PAY FOR AA AT A GLANCE...

Route	American Business Class Mileage Cost R/T	Partner	Partner Miles Cost R/T	Partner Transfer Partner	Cost Difference
Domestic Short Haul (under 650 miles, each way)	40,000	British Airways/Iberia	25,000	Amex/Chase	15,000
Los Angeles - Sydney	350,000	Cathay	150,000	Amex	200,000
Miami - Nassau	40,000	British Airways/Iberia	25,000	Amex/Chase	15,000
Miami - Belize	40,000	British Airways/Iberia	33,000	Amex/Chase	7,000



Don't default to a round-trip flight in the same cabin. Mixing them can save you up to \$2,286.

We love thoughtful travelers – those that don't just accept the default options the airlines throw at them. Instead, they use the "[Upgrade Mindset](#)" and related strategies to improve their travel experience, or **avoid paying for unnecessary extras**.

That's exactly what this special report is all about. Here's a smart tactic that will save you serious money: fly one leg of a long round trip in one cabin and return in another.

It's a very simple idea, but it makes a lot of sense especially for long-haul international flights: Maximize the cabin you're in, depending on the time of day you're in it, and save money in the process.

We have recently written about "cabin shuffling" – mixing [Business Class and Premium Economy](#) and [Business Class and Economy Extra](#).

This month we explore mixing First Class with Business Class (or Premium Economy if you really want to save on the day flight). Now *that's* a classy move to maximize the value of your ticket investment.

CLASSY MOVE #1: A GREEK-BEARING GIFT

Let's look at Emirates' Newark-Athens nonstop, flying First Class on the overnight flight and Business Class on the late-afternoon return flight. Or put another way... **saving \$2,286 for a seat you might not even sleep in.**

A Newark-Athens nonstop round-trip ticket costs \$7,502 in First Class on Emirates. But if you fly in First Class to Athens (the flight leaves at 11:55 pm), and return in *Business Class* (flight leaves at 4:20 PM so *seat recline* is not as critical), the total cost is \$5,216, **a savings of \$2,286**. Think about what you can do with \$2,286. A lot of damage in the Acropolis Museum gift shop, that's for sure.

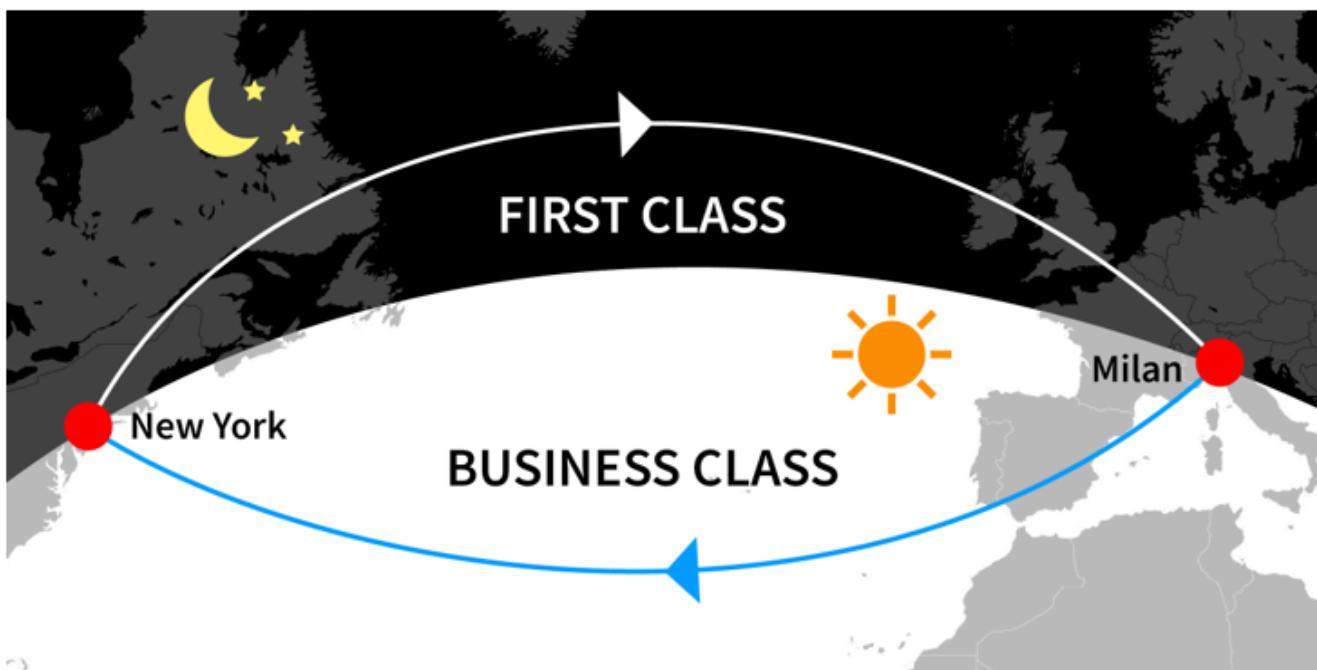


Emirates First Class

CLASSY MOVE #2: FASHIONISTA CASH-IN-ISTA

Again, we're talking Emirates, but this time for New York to Milan, First Class on the flight to Milan, and Business Class back. This booking combination will **save you \$1,938 for a seat you probably won't sleep in anyway**. Ever bought a bed you never planned to sleep in? Didn't think so.

A New York-Milan round-trip ticket costs \$6,215 in First Class on Emirates. But if you fly in First Class to Milan (the flight leaves at 10:20 pm – so yes, a bed please), and return in Business Class (flight leaves at 3:00 PM, so I won't need more than a little nap at the most; I'll get caught up on reading or my laptop instead), the total cost is \$4,277, **a savings of \$1,938**. That's enough to buy something off the rack, even in Milan.



CLASSY MOVE #3: LA LA LAND TO LONDON

Let's save \$1,500 to London for a lie-flat seat you will likely not sleep much in. A Los Angeles-London round-trip in First Class normally costs \$6,877 on American Airlines. But if you fly in First Class comfort to London (the earliest non-stop American flight leaves at 6:10 pm), and return in Business Class (flight leaves at 9:15 am, when you're wide awake), the total cost is \$5,377, a savings of \$1,500. Tally ho! This also works on AA's other non-stops and connections via Dallas, Miami, and New York.

Your trip summary

Flagship® First / Flagship® Business

Total trip (Non-refundable)

\$ 5,377 per person

Total \$5,376.77 (all passengers)

Price and tax information 

Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.

Bag and optional fees 

FLIGHT 1 OF 2

Los Angeles, CA to London, United Kingdom

Thursday, December 2, 2021

6:10 PM → 12:35 PM 10h 25m Nonstop Flagship® First

AA 134 77W-Boeing 777



 **Overnight flight or connection**

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

FLIGHT 2 OF 2

London, United Kingdom to Los Angeles, CA

Thursday, December 16, 2021

10:15 AM → 1:45 PM 11h 30m Nonstop Flagship® Business

AA 135 77W-Boeing 777



[Details](#) | [Change](#)

CLASSY MOVE #4: PRINCE & THE (PREMIUM) PAUPER

Finally, let's save \$1,725 to London for a lie-flat seat you will likely not lie back in. A New York-London round-trip in First Class normally costs \$5,285 on American Airlines. But if you fly in First Class comfort to London (the earliest flight leaves at 6:55 pm), and return in Premium Economy (flight leaves at 9:30 am, when you're wide awake), the total cost is \$3,560, a savings of \$1,725.

Your trip summary

First Flexible / Premium Economy
Flexible

Round trip (Flexible)

\$3,560 per person

Total \$3,569.95 (all passengers)

[Price and tax information](#)

Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.
[Bag and optional fees](#)

Depart New York, NY to London, United Kingdom
Wednesday, December 1, 2021

7:10 PM → 7:05 AM 6h 55m Nonstop First Flexible

AA 6937 ■ 777-Boeing 777

■ Operated by British Airways

⚠ Overnight flight or connection

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Return London, United Kingdom to New York, NY
Wednesday, December 8, 2021

9:30 AM → 12:35 PM 8h 5m Nonstop Premium Economy
Flexible



[Details](#) | [Change](#)

More on how to book [here](#).