



Forward Thinking: What FCF Is Doing For You Now In These Uncertain Times

May 2020

First of all, I hope you're all doing okay during this uncertain time and that you and your family are well. Here at FCF, we've been hard at work (remotely) planning a strategy for our members by looking ahead toward their future travels and what we can do to help right now. Here's a quick reminder of highlights from last month: We explained [why I just booked a round-the-world ticket](#) and the [risk and reward factors of booking](#) with cash and miles right now.

WHAT IS FCF DOING FOR MEMBERS DURING COVID-19?

For FCF members in crisis, **we are offering free personal emergency phone consulting**. It works like this: If you or a family member is ill and needs an urgent flight, we'll do everything we can to help you. While flights are limited, we are offering free personal phone consultations with myself and my staff on how to implement our ticketing strategies for emergency travel needs.

That could be to visit a family member who's sick or even to fly someone out to visit you. The offer applies for both domestic and international travel.

Simply email us with details on how we can help you use your miles or book a cash ticket. We are here to offer our expertise to help our members as much as we can during this challenging time.

HEY FCF, I'M NOT IN CRISIS PERSONALLY, BUT I COULD SURE USE SOME GOOD NEWS!

For 24 years, we've been sharing the best deals, discounts, and strategies that the airline industry has to offer and now is no different. But unfortunately, the bad news stories are outnumbering the good right now.

So we're going to balance up the ledger. From what we're seeing, there *is* good news to be found, it's just getting drowned out by louder voices.

To combat this news imbalance we've created a [Coronavirus Response Page](#), with headlines about both the airline industry and about the health crisis that you may have missed.

So if you need some [positive, put-a-smile-on-your-dial stories](#) to inspire you to feel good (or at least feel better), we think you're going to love what we've curated.

FCF'S NEW NO-WORRIES WIDGET FOR MILES AND CASH

Our research team has been working around the clock on our awesome new [No Worries Widget](#). It's designed to provide you with the information you need to make informed decisions about travel. It covers the airlines that FCF predominantly examines for fare and mileage deals. In just a click or two you can see the risk of buying a ticket—with miles or cash—for the foreseeable future. You might think there's no way you'd buy a ticket now, but I encourage you to look at the widget. Once you see the data, you might start to think differently.

The screenshot shows the First Class Flyer website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Dashboard, Flash Fares, Sweet Redemps, Exclusive Strategies, Upgrade Search, and My Account. Below the navigation, there are two prominent buttons: "Compare Cash Ticket Risk" and "Compare Miles Ticket Risk". Underneath these buttons, there are dropdown menus for "Select airlines to compare" and "Select columns to display". A table then displays information for American Airlines. The table columns include "Airline" (with a logo for American), "Risk of Buying with Cash and Paying Change/Cancel Fees" (labeled "Low Risk"), "Current Policy for New Bookings Applies Until" (labeled "April 30, 2020"), "Cancellation Restrictions" (labeled "AA will waive the change fee only on published non-refundable fare tickets. There is no cash refund."), and "Change Restrictions" (labeled "You can change your flight once without paying a change fee. You need to start all travel within 1 year of original ticket issue date").

We've calculated the risk for low, average, and high based on a range of factors. The [No Worries Widget](#) provides a slew of important booking information such as the date that current airline policies expire, cancellation and change restrictions, the pros and cons involved, and links straight to the airlines' websites. It's a tool for the times—and we're updating it often with the latest information.

BOOK YOUR DREAM TRIPS NOW WITH FCF'S UNPRECEDENTED MILEAGE AVAILABILITY

In short, we've never seen availability like this. There are unprecedented miles and points opportunities available for premium cabins with [American](#), [Delta](#), and [United](#), and in First Class with notable airlines on routes such as [Singapore Airlines to Tokyo](#); [Emirates to Athens](#), [Milan](#), and the [Middle East](#); [All Nippon](#) and [Japan Airlines](#) to Tokyo; and [Qantas to Australia](#). Fare deals? Not so much right now, although there have been [a few awesome deals](#).

WHY DOES FCF ONLY SHOW CERTAIN TRAVEL MONTHS FOR FARE AND MILEAGE DEALS?

FCF is focusing on deals for travel further in the future, namely **domestic travel for June onwards** and **international travel for September onwards**. This is for both fare and mileage deals in our newsroom.

We think that when you're ready to travel again, many of you might prefer to stay closer to home, to destinations such as Hawaii or the Caribbean. With that in mind, we're posting deals for travel starting in the summer months—June and beyond.

For international travel, many of you might be thinking further out: to fall, winter, and 2021. That's why we're posting deals from September onwards.

Again, our **Widget** (see above) outlines the risk factors involved for all of these bookings, and we're linking back to it in all of our alerts.

Domestic example to Hawaii: There's incredible discount Business Class availability with American Airlines from Los Angeles to Hawaii for travel later this year. You can book now, and if you change your mind, you can **redeposit your miles with American for free**. That's because AA is waiving award reinstatement fees for awards booked by May 31, 2020, for travel through September 30, 2020. [More here.](#)

Just last month we were talking about cancellation fees of \$150 on American. Now cancellation is free. Yes, things are certainly moving fast.

International example to London: Again, there's unbelievable United MileagePlus Business Class availability to [London](#), for travel later this year and 2021. You can book now, and if you have a change of heart, **you can redeposit your miles with United for free**. United is waiving all redeposit fees for award ticket cancellations made more than 30 days before departure for the remainder of 2020. More on unprecedented opportunities to [Lisbon](#), [First Class to Tokyo in 2021](#), [Munich](#), [Hawaii](#), and [South America](#).

WHAT NEXT?

We're living in unfamiliar times, but from everything our research team is seeing, future travel isn't the scary monster the current news cycle makes it out to be. In fact, this is a time for "opportunity travelers" to shine. First, opportunities are everywhere. **Certainly we don't recommend traveling right now unless you must.** But the opportunities available for travel later this year and into 2021 will most likely not be bookable in three or six months from now when you go back to paying 640,000 miles for a Delta ticket to Paris, instead of the current opportunity to [save 75% off](#). And second, the airlines are often making it safe to book with miles by allowing you to cancel or rebook later without penalty.

Suddenly, many have a bit of time on their hands. Use it to dream, plan, search, and learn about new places to explore. Your next great adventure could start today—in the calm isolation of your living room. Don't let the opportunity slip by.

Let's not forget that planning travel makes you happy, even the promise of travel has a profound effect on our well-being. The happiest part of the whole vacation process happens well before you actually arrive at your destination.

Thinking about the trip you just booked will make you feel good. Okay, so you don't take off on the trip for six months or more. But during that time, you're going to have hundreds or thousands of pleasant thoughts about the trip. **That's happiness you can't buy anywhere else.**

We'd love to hear from you. If there's anything you'd like to share, suggest, or comment on, shout out to us.

Take care and stay safe.

Best FCF Fare & Miles Alerts Still Available

May 2020

We've put together a survey of the best airfares and unprecedented mileage availability (or "Sweet Redemeems") that we've published in the last month—on major airlines—that are still live today and are valid for travel later this year and/or into 2021. So in case you missed them the first time, here they are in all their glory.

Don't see your origin and/or destination in an alert below? [This report was made for you.](#)

FCF Sweet Redemeems

Asia:

[Wow Upgrade Availability with American to Tokyo](#)

[First Class with Japan Airlines from Chicago and New York to Asia](#)

[First Class with All Nippon from Houston and Washington D.C. to Asia](#)

[First Class to Asia from Los Angeles and San Francisco \(and Many Other U.S. Connecting Cities\) —for Only 110,000 Amex Points!](#)

[Japan Airlines Business Class Deals from Dallas to Asia](#)

[First Class with Japan Airlines to Asia from San Francisco and Los Angeles](#)

[First Class with ANA from Chicago and New York to Asia \(Just 120k Miles R/T\)](#)

[Wide Open Discount Japan Airlines Business Class from Los Angeles to Tokyo](#)

[Wide Open Japan Airlines Business Class from San Francisco to Tokyo](#)

[Wide Open Japan Airlines Business Class to Tokyo from Chicago and New York](#)

Europe:

[Paris Unprecedented Delta SkyMiles Discount Business Class Opportunities from the Northeast](#)

[London Unprecedented United MileagePlus Discount Business Class Opportunities from the East Coast](#)

[Unprecedented Delta SkyMiles Business Class Opportunities to Lisbon](#)

[Unprecedented Discount United Business Class from Houston to London](#)

[Paris Unprecedented Deeply Discount Delta Business Class from Atlanta](#)

[Unprecedented United Discount Business Class MileagePlus Availability to Germany](#)

[Unprecedented United Discount Business Class Availability from Newark to Berlin and Frankfurt](#)

[Unprecedented Discount United Business Class Availability from Houston to Frankfurt](#)

[Wide Open United Discount Business Class Availability from Washington D.C. to Frankfurt](#)

Hawaii:

[Hawaii Unprecedented American Business Class Discount Availability from Los Angeles to Honolulu & Lihue \(Just 56,000 Miles Round-Trip!\)](#)

South America:

[American Business Class from Washington, D.C. and Numerous Other U.S. Cities via Dallas and Miami to Brazil \(Just 84,000 Miles Round-Trip\)](#)

[American Business Class from Dallas and Many Connecting U.S. Cities via Miami to Chile \(Just 84,000 Miles Round-Trip\)](#)

[American Business Class from Denver and Many Other U.S. Connecting Cities via Miami and More to São Paulo \(Just 84,000 Miles Round-Trip\)](#)

[Wide Open American Business Class Upgrades to Brazil](#)

[American Business Class to Rio de Janeiro \(Just 84,000 Miles Round-Trip\)](#)

FCF Rare Fares

[Hawaii Business Class Fares Slashed By Alaska Airlines to \\$697 R/T from the West Coast](#)

[Casablanca Biz Class \\$2,329 from Many U.S. Cities](#)

[Amsterdam Business Class Fares of \\$1,954 from All Over the U.S. \(6+ Major Airlines\)](#)

[\\$1,267 R/T Brazil Business Class Fares from Miami, \\$1,943 to Argentina](#)

[New 36% Off Australia Business Class Fares With Delta, Qantas, and United](#)

[Hawaii Biz Class Fares Now at \\$829 R/T from Canada](#)

[Grand Cayman Business Class for \\$505 to \\$767 R/T from Many U.S. Cities](#)

[Aruba \\$545 R/T from Many U.S. Cities in Business Class \(American and Delta\)](#)

Pro Tips and Tricks on Booking Mileage Tickets Way in Advance and How to Strike While the Iron is Hot

May 2020

Due to Covid-19, most of our travel plans have been pushed out later this year and into 2021. However, that doesn't mean you should wait to book airline tickets. In fact, FCF recommends booking your future travel now, and using miles to do it.

You might be wondering *why* this is the case and *how* to take advantage of it. And we're glad you asked – those are just the right questions.

So let's have a good old FCF Q&A session.

Question 1:

Why should I book now for travel further out?

There are three reasons to do so.

#1: You need to satisfy your travel bug.

Times like these undoubtedly make you realize how good we had it before. And while travel in the very near future may not be feasible, it might not be long before you're ready to set your sights on your next adventure.

#2: Once-in-a-lifetime Return on Investment (ROI) from miles/points.

Now is a unique time in the world of travel opportunities. If you book now, you can lock in some [unprecedented mileage award space](#) on many airlines all the way into 2021.

#3: There is ZERO risk to booking now.

The great thing about booking with miles now is that you're well protected by airlines if you decide to cancel. We advise you to confirm the award space as soon as you have an idea of your travel dates. **Don't wait.** In fact, why not make two bookings, or 10? If you have any preferred dates or destination, book them now.

You can always cancel the ticket(s) if better ones appear later, but you can't make award availability appear out of nowhere. In general, you can redeposit your mileage ticket for as little as \$30 to \$150 (worst case) for a deal booked now. That will most likely *not* be available at a later date. Some airlines (Delta for example) are waiving the mile redeposit fee for tickets purchased up to May 31, 2020. [See FCF's Risk of Booking Tickets Now with Miles widget here](#) for details on many airlines.

Question 2:

How far out do airlines allow you to book?

Each airline has its own policy regarding how far in advance you can book flights. It ranges from 328 to 365 days in advance (see our chart below). That **knowledge** can help you score award availability **before it's gone**.

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Question #3 How do I snag those seats before everyone else does?

Knowing the earliest time you can book award flights with a specific airline is the best way to increase your chances of getting those seats, as you can check for award space as soon as it becomes available to book.

While there's no guarantee that an airline will release award seats when the booking window opens, many airlines release at least *some* seats on some routes. More on this in a minute. The secret is striking while the iron is hot.

Insider tip: There are free countdown apps for smartphones such as "[Event Countdown](#)" where you can set a reminder in days relative to the booking-ahead date. Or you could work it out on your laptop using a site like [this](#).

Question #4 What about booking mileage partner space?

You won't be able to book flights using miles for partner flights on American, Delta, or United until both the airline you are booking *with* (using American, Delta, or United miles) and the airline you are flying *on* have opened bookings for your travel date. That's important because there's sometimes a difference between the two.

American Airlines example: Both Cathay Pacific and Japan Airlines open bookings for award travel 360 days out, but American only opens bookings 331 days out. So if the flight and travel date is on June 1, 2021, Cathay and JAL mileage members can book as early as June 6, 2020, while AA members have to wait until July 5, 29 days later, to get their chance at the seats.

Delta example: Air France opens bookings for award travel 361 days out, but Delta opens bookings for award travel 331 days out. It means that Air France mileage members get first dibs at the seats when they open up 361 days out, while Delta members have to wait an extra 30 days to get their turn to book partner space.

United example: Both All Nippon and Singapore open bookings for award travel 355 days out, but United only opens bookings 337 days out. So, All Nippon and Singapore mileage members have 18 more days than United members to grab those partner space seats.

Question #5 How do I book the outbound day when it becomes available and the return when it becomes available? How does it all work together?

This only applies to airlines that only offer **round-trip awards** and not one-way awards. So first, try to book airlines that allow [one-way awards](#). You could even return with another mileage program and transfer your miles over.

Pro Tip: Consider booking your departure with American 331 days out, and your return on Cathay Pacific 360 days out.

If only round-trip awards are offered, like All Nippon for example, book any return date as a placeholder date, and keep checking each day for the return date you want. Good News: All Nippon date changes are free.

For more on award change and cancellation fees see FCF's [No Worries Widget](#).

A Qool Hack

Booking Qatar Airways QSuites using Cathay Pacific Asia Miles instead of American AAdvantage. Qatar Airways' QSuites is one of the most popular Business Class cabins in the world. These seats get booked very quickly, even though Qatar Airways releases lots of award space. American members can only book 331 days in advance, however by using Cathay Pacific Asia Miles (a credit card transfer partner with Amex, Chase, Citi, and Marriott), you can book 360 days in advance. That gives you a **29-day head start** to score one of these lucrative seats.

Elite, Yet Still Losing

Unfortunately, the three major U.S. airlines – American, Delta, and United – have the shortest booking advance windows when compared to other international airlines. That's the price you pay for being locked in with these airlines, as it's possible to end up with a lot of missed opportunities when you can only book 331 to 337 days in advance versus weeks earlier for other airlines.

The lesson? It's better to be a loyalty-free traveler who isn't married to one needy mileage/elite program. That way you'll have the flexibility to earn points with Amex Rewards or Chase, and then transfer them to a mileage program that allows you to book further out.

Early Bird Catches the Flight

Understanding each airline's award calendar can have a huge effect on your ability to book First and Business Class mileage award flights. In many cases, you can book an entire month before others when using the right airline loyalty programs. As they say, first in, best dressed.

Below are some examples of FCF Sweet Redemptions alerts that are bookable now for travel far out; February through April 2021.

[First Class with All Nippon to Asia](#)

[More First Class to Asia with All Nippon—for Only 110,000 Amex Points!](#)

[Even More First Class to Asia with All Nippon](#)

[First Class with Japan Airlines to Asia](#)

[More First Class With Japan Airlines](#)

Remember to think about striking while the iron is hot.





["Alliance","Airline","Days Out You Can Book","Credit Card Transfer Partners","One-Way or Round-trip Mileage Program"],["Oneworld","American","331","Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"British Airways","354","Amex; Chase; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Cathay Pacific","360","Amex; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Iberia","361","Amex; Chase; Marriott","One-Way (Round-trips have to be booked for AA flights)"],[#rowspan#,"Japan Airlines","360","Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Qantas","353","Amex; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Qatar","361","Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Star","Air Canada","355","Amex; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"All Nippon","355","Amex; Marriott","Round-Trip"],[#rowspan#,"Avianca (LifeMiles)","365","Amex; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"United","337","Chase; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Singapore","355","Amex; Chase; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],["SkyTeam","Air France","361","Amex; Chase; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Alitalia","331","Amex; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Delta","331","Amex; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"KLM","359","Amex; Chase; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"No Alliance","Alaska","331","Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Emirates","328","Amex; Chase; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Etihad","331","Amex; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"],[#rowspan#,"Virgin Atlantic","330","Amex; Chase; Citi; Marriott","One-Way"]]]

American's "New" Hidden Award Calendar Quietly Crushes Misconceptions—and Pricing and Availability—With 20% to 35% Savings

May 2020

American's "new" award pricing calendar is not nearly as bad as you think—and offers prices much lower than its "old" pricing calendar, and even cheaper for non-loyalists

We're happy to relay some good news: American Airlines is offering some very good deals on mileage award redemptions for travel later this year and into 2021, when compared to 2019.

We've been closely watching this trend. In March [we reported on the new Hawaii opportunities](#) where Business Class awards from Los Angeles are down 49% over last year.

This comes on the heels of AA virtually throwing out their charts in favor of dynamic pricing and charging whatever they wanted (case in point: a Los Angeles-Sydney round-trip ticket for 960,000 miles in Business!).

But with those stings come some cuddles, and we don't think it's a Covid-induced move either.

Concealed Miles Weapon. Are You Still Using AA's Old Miles Chart (and Paying Through the Nose?)

Consider AA's price drops from last year in the following chart.

American's New 2020 Round-Trip Biz Class Lowest-Cost Awards

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Although everything is up for grabs at the moment (to some extent), we think this is likely a new way of airline thinking. Airline yield management seems to be selling mileage award seats to the [opportunity traveler](#) more than ever before. That means you'll reap giant rewards for traveling when an airline entices you to book the dates and destinations they want you to book.

Spotted: An AA search Page Discrepancy. Are You Looking at Their Old Calendar Online?

Are you searching for AA mileage award space using their old calendar? I'm sure a lot of people simply have the AA search page bookmarked and click on that link whenever they want to check award space. But here's the thing, it's been revamped—and in a different location! And they've left the old page where it's always been.

Importantly, there are differences between the two search engine calendars in the mileage requirements for trips.

AND from the research we've done so far at least, using the old calendar mileage requirements means you're paying more of your precious miles than you need to.

The newer rate calendar is right there in plain sight, but being creatures of habit, we humans tend to always return to the places we've frequented before, and that includes booking sites.

Their new calendar has actually been live for a while now, which is why we're saying "newer" and not "new." To be fair, AA's site does say (in small print), "Try our new award booking search, including Premium Economy." This takes you to the new search tool, but there's no mention of lower rates to be found when you do.

And yes, it can make a *big* difference.

A U.S.-to-Europe trip at the still-available "old" saver rate is 115,000 miles round-trip. But if you click on the page with the newer saver rate, that same trip is **84,000 miles round-trip**. That's a 31,000 miles savings by simply clicking on the newer page.

Here are the results we found when using the still-available "old" calendar for a New York-London trip in October:

October 2020							Requested: Thu Oct 1	<input type="button" value="Close Full Calendar"/>
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT		
				1 17K	2 17K	3 17K		
4 17K	5 57.5K	6 57.5K	7 17K	8 17K	9 17K	10 17K		
11 17K	12 57.5K	13 57.5K	14 17K	15 17K	16 17K	17 17K		
18 17K	19 57.5K	20 57.5K	21 17K	22 17K	23 17K	24 30K		
25 17K	26 17K	27 17K	28 17K	29 17K				

And below are the search results for that same route on the newer search page [link here](#):

October 2020						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 42K	2 57.5K	3 42K
4 57.5K	5 42K	6 42K	7 42K	8 42K	9 57.5K	10 42K
11 57.5K	12 42K	13 42K	14 42K	15 42K	16 57.5K	17 42K
18 57.5K	19 42K	20 42K	21 42K	22 42K	23 57.5K	24 42K
25 57.5K	26 42K	27 42K	28 42K	29 42K	30 110K	31 42K

Out With the Old, In With the New!

If you look closely at the first screenshot above, the “old” (and yet still available) calendar and link—which many AA members still use—shows only six dates with SAAver award level pricing. (Note: All the other dates display pricing for coach travel.) However, use the newer [award pricing search page](#) and the volume of lowest-priced awards is radically better—22 days instead of six, almost four times the space.

What if You’re Not Flexible?

Nowadays, with the new search engine, if you want more options for travel dates, you often only have to pay a bit more because AA has many different prices. Even when the lowest price isn’t available, some prices are not much more than the lowest one. Just look closely at the screenshot above, at the days in white / not green? See how most of them are not substantially more miles? Even if you’re not getting the best rates, you can still win much more often when you’re less flexible.

Concealed Savings

The other difference is in savings. One-way Business Class flights are 42,000 miles on the newer chart, compared to the old chart's pricing of 57,500. That's 15,500 miles, or 27% less.

Business Class on Transcons 35% Lower With the Newer Calendar

In 2019, a 65,000-miles round-trip was the lowest saver award rate. Now, in 2020, with the newer search calendar, the lowest rate has quietly dropped down to [42,000 miles round-trip](#); that's a 23,000-mile fall in just a year.

Business Class to the Caribbean 20% Lower With Newer Calendar

In 2019, the lowest saver award rate to the Caribbean was 50,000 miles round-trip. Now, in 2020, with the newer search calendar, the lowest rate starts at 40,000 miles round-trip; a 10,000-mile drop.

Business Class to Mexico 20% Lower With the Newer Calendar

In 2019, 50,000 miles round-trip was the lowest saver award rate. Now it starts at 40,000 miles with the hidden search calendar; a 10,000-mile drop in just a year.

Business Class to Europe 27% Lower With the Newer Calendar

In 2019, 115,000 miles round-trip was the lowest saver award rate to Europe. This year, the lowest rate is 84,000 miles round-trip with AA's newer search calendar; a 31,000-mile discount. See FCF's recent American Airlines alerts [here](#) and [here](#).

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Beware of a one-way rate discrepancies. One-way trips to Europe are no longer 50% of the round-trip rate with AA. So if you only need a one-way to Europe, the rate is 50,000 miles—about 60% of the round-trip cost. [/aside]

Business Class to South America up to 30% Lower With the Newer Calendar

In 2019, the lowest saver rate to South America was 115,000 miles. This year it's just 80,000 to 84,000 miles round-trip with the newer search calendar; up to a 35,000-mile drop.

Get Premium Economy for Less Than Economy for Travel to Europe

In 2019, the lowest saver rate to Europe in economy was 60,000 miles. This year, it's just 54,000 miles round-trip in Premium Economy with the newer search calendar; a free upgrade to Premium Economy.

Don't See Your Town Mentioned?

Connecting flights to the hub cities in this report are free in most cases with American Airlines, apart from Hawaii originations, as its mileage plan is zone-based. Here's an example:

New York to London in Business Class on American costs 84,000 miles round-trip. But if you live in St. Louis, you can add a flight to New York to hook up with that deal from St. Louis (or your departure city) for no additional miles.

ITINERARIES WITH Connecting Flights ARE OFTEN LESS MILES and MORE PLENTIFUL, BOTH!

FCF research has found that at times, itineraries that include [connecting flights](#) can have **more discount award availability than the non-stop flight from a hub city, plus at a lower rate**. Can you image that?

Take, for example, Atlanta to Santiago, connecting via Miami for travel in September. At the time of writing, this route had 23 days of discounted award space for two travelers at a cost of 40,000 miles one-way (the lowest rate for southern South America is usually 42,000 miles one-way on non-stop flights). The non-stop Miami to Santiago, on the other hand, didn't even have one day available at the discounted rate.

Many airlines take a complex approach to inventory management. One such approach is “married segment” availability. This means that they’re willing to make different mileage award seats available on a flight based on whether you’re connecting or not. In this case, AA’s best customers, based out of its Miami hub, can’t use their miles at low-cost mileage rates on the non-stop Miami-to-Santiago route. But any Joe, who originates in, say Denver, can fly via Miami to Santiago at lower mileage award rates.

There’s a lot more that goes into this, but in short, American is using married segment logic for saver level award seats, meaning that they’re only making low-cost award seats available as part of a connecting itinerary and not as a non-stop, if nothing else.

Or take Chicago to Tokyo in First Class connecting via Dallas for travel in February 2021. At the time of writing, this route had 12 days of discounted award space for two travelers at a cost of 55,000 miles one-way. (The lowest rate for the non-stop Dallas-Tokyo service is 80,000 miles one-way, if you could find space, which you almost can’t.)

Hold availability With American

If you want to grab an opportunity but haven’t sorted out your kids’ vacation times, hotel bookings, meeting dates, and the like, you can hold the award seat for five days at no additional charge. You can also get more than one date, and then cancel the ones you don’t need. There’s no charge for the mileage award hold. For more details go [here](#).

Current American Buy Miles Deal

AA is currently running a deal whereby you can buy miles for as [low as 1.86¢ each](#) (includes taxes and processing fee), through a new, up-to-100,000-bonus-miles buy promo + save 3%.

Who is buying miles for? In general FCF wouldn’t recommend buying miles right now unless you have a planned trip, or if you don’t have any miles in your kitty, or don’t have a credit card that allows you to buy points.

A Bit of Good News Just In

American Airlines 

Media Relations, American Airlines Wed, Apr 29, 11:21 AM
to me ▾

American is not aware of any pilot deaths due to COVID-19.

[{"U.S. To/From:","2019 Cost","2020 Cost","Cost Difference"],["Transcon (LAX/SFO-JFK)","65,000","42,000","23,000 V 35% fewer miles"],["Caribbean","50,000","40,000","10,000 V 20% fewer miles"],["Mexico","50,000","40,000","10,000 V 20% fewer miles"],["Europe","115,000","84,000","31,000 V 27% fewer miles"],["South America","115,000","80,000 to 84,000","Up to 35,000 V 30% fewer miles"]]

Brief Upgrade Bites: No-Risk Mileage Award Space, New Lower South Pacific Fares, and Buy Miles Deal for 1.72 Cents Each

May 2020

Update: No-Risk Mileage Award Space for American, Delta & United

[American, Delta, and United](#) all now have an award waiver in place, meaning it costs nothing to redeposit miles if you make a booking now and change your mind later. Only last month, fees were imposed to do this (albeit low fees). So, depending on your dates (see below), the risk of booking has been lowered.

American Airlines: waived award reinstatement and change fees for awards booked by **May 31, 2020**, for travel through **September 30, 2020**.

Delta: already had the waiver in place last month. Delta's current "travel waiver" is offered for all new bookings until **May 31, 2020**, including award flights. This means that all fees will be waived for changes or redepositing miles for one year based on the ticket issue date.

United: is waiving all redeposit fees for award ticket cancellations made more than **30 days before departure for the remainder of 2020**.

Our [No Worries Widget](#) outlines airline policies as well as our opinion on risk, plus pros and cons for each airline. It's updated daily and reflects the news above.

South Pacific Fare Update

Delta, Qantas, and United are offering [36 to 42% off travel to Australia](#) for Business Class fares from September through March 2021. (Note: This depends, of course, on the ban on foreign visitors to Australia being lifted by September.) **This is the only region for which we're currently seeing a fare drop.** In the past, fares have run \$6,000 to \$8,000 on these major airlines from the U.S. to Australia.

Sample Savings for Business Class: Newark to Melbourne on United costs \$4,598 round-trip, compared to the normal fare of between \$7,000 and \$8,000, that's a savings of up to \$3,402 (42%).

Sample Savings with Amex's International Airline Program (IAP): You can drop the price even further if you're a member of the program. New York to Sydney with the IAP discount for **Delta is \$3,941**.

Stopover Loophole Strategy (SLS) to Australia: Delta and United allow a stopover in their hub city on published Business Class fares to Australia. So let's say you want to travel from New York to Melbourne on United and currently the lowest Business Class fare is \$4,598 round-trip. Now, you can make a stopover in San Francisco and the cost will stay the same. So you can fly New York to Melbourne, but stop in San Francisco, and spend a few days exploring the city when it opens up later this year, for no additional cost.

U.S. transcontinental tickets easily cost \$1,300 to \$1,400, so if you can combine that into a trip to Australia, *you're laughing* (as the Aussies say).

Or, to look at it another way: if you're in New York and going to Los Angeles, you can tack on Sydney for only \$2,500!

If you'd like to learn more about this, we've written about the SLS a number of times over the last few months:

- [FCF's Secret Portugal Side Hustle: Two European Destinations for the Price of One](#)
- [British Airways with a London stopover](#)
- [Germany and Switzerland with Lufthansa](#)
- [SWISS, Austrian Airlines, Brussels Airlines](#)
- [SAS, to Vienna, Brussels, and Copenhagen](#)

Alaska Miles On Sale for 1.72 Cents Each

Through May 31, 2020, Alaska Airlines is offering a targeted buy-miles deal for up to a 60% bonus on purchased miles. Prior to this, the biggest bonus you'd typically see was 50%. You'll have to log into your Mileage Plan account to see your bonus

level.

You can purchase up to 150,000 miles per calendar year. Based on a 60% bonus on purchased miles, you could buy 100,000, and receive 160,000 (100,000 + 60,000 bonus) miles at a cost of \$2,750, which is just 1.72 cents per mile.

Use those purchased miles on Alaska's numerous partners: American, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Japan Airlines, Qantas, Singapore, and 11 other carriers—for up to 76% off normal fares. For more information see FCF's report [here](#).

Who should buy miles? In general, FCF wouldn't recommend buying miles right now unless you have a planned trip, you don't have any miles in your account and have played this game before, or you don't have a [credit card that allows you to buy points](#). But in any case, this is a really good price on Alaska miles.

Opportunity example: Around the world in Business Class for 132,500 miles: Alaska's awards allow you to book a different partner in each direction and/or to book one-way awards. Plus, Alaska's awards program is especially high value because it allows one stopover on each one-way ticket.

So, you could fly with Alaska Airline's partner Cathay Pacific to Johannesburg from the U.S. and get a free stopover in Hong Kong. From there, you could return by flying on their partner British Airways and stopover in London, all for [132,500](#) miles. For more information see FCF's report [here](#).

A Bit Of Good News:

I confirm you there's no death of Korean Air crew from COVID-19. There have been only a couple of infections of Korean flight attendants, and none of them were in any serious condition.



Safety of our crew and employees are always our top priority, and the company will continue its best effort to protect them from the virus.

Thank you.

Best regards,



Why I Could Care Less About Elite Status Covid Promotions

May 2020

Status Seeker, Status Quo, or Status Pro: Where Do You Stand With Airline's Covid Elite Lasso?

The airlines are in crisis right now and one of their ploys has been to appease nervous loyalists with a slew of elite status earning promotions. That's all well and good, but the fact remains that **elite status is still overpriced and underwhelming, for most travelers.**

Covid-19 has led to big moves for [American](#), [Delta](#), and [United](#), who've reduced their services by up to 90+%. These are radical and remarkable steps. With so much uncertainty in the air, it's no wonder airlines are looking at how they can stem the bleeding when it comes to a fearful traveling public. This includes

overhauling their elite system for elite status seekers, status quo, and status pros. More on that in a moment, but first, my unchanged take on elite status.

MR. UPGRADE'S TAKE

For a decade (and most recently in [November](#)), I have been telling you to forget about chasing elite status, arguing that nowadays it is little more than a con game. We think airlines are taking their loyal customers for granted. That's because those seeking elite status have to meet increasingly higher spending requirements to hold onto increasingly valueless perks. And on top of that, elites often end up paying more for their Business and First Class tickets to earn elite credit.

We've written about it recently in these two special reports:

[Hub Capped? Don't Fall for the Allure of Elite \(it'll Cost You Much More\)](#).

[It's Not Too Late to Excommunicate Yourself from 'the Elite Class'](#)

The sentiments outlined in those reports have not changed. Even now, in the midst of coronavirus, I couldn't care less about elite status.

HANG ON A SEC, BENNETT, MY STATUS JUST GOT EXTENDED

True. The three major U.S. carriers just extended status membership to the beginning of 2022 (an extra year), and they're making it easier to reach a higher (or maintain current) level of elite status.

So let me be clear, I'm not against elite status per se. I just believe that for a long time now (and even in the current crisis) **elite status is way overpriced**.

I really have a problem when people "fly out of their way," or "pay higher fares," just to keep or earn elite status. Talk about diminishing returns! Because like any broken relationship, you're giving way more than you're getting.

In our [March issue](#), we wrote about how the airlines are always focused on the bottom line. And if you live in an airline hub city they can (and do) charge you higher fares. For example, **it often costs 37% more** on flights to Europe for Delta loyalists, **often \$1,300 more** on flights to Europe for American loyalists, and **often \$2,001 more** on flights to Asia for United loyalists.

DOES BENNETT PRACTICE WHAT HE PREACHES?

In 2019, I earned United Silver status by accident (mostly on domestic flights). I earned it without flying out of my way or paying higher fares. That's because I fly whatever schedule is most convenient and competitively

priced. Simple formula. Value based. In fact, in December I had 44,519 Premier Qualifying Miles (most of my flying is international and ~80% of that is on miles) and I only needed 5,481 more to achieve Gold status.



Now most members at that point would have gone on a “mileage run” (taking a flight to “wherever” just to earn the status requirements and flying right home) to reach the Gold status. Not me. I reached Silver status incidentally—it just happened.

I am a **Loyalty-Free Traveler**, which means that I’m not shackled to one elite program. As a result, **I have the opportunity to go with the best fare, schedule, airline, or whatever I’m feeling like for that particular trip**. AKA freedom—something easy to underrate. If, by chance, I reach elite status, that’s fine, but I certainly don’t chase it. I am Gold on American too. No big deal.

CORONA ELITE PROMOTIONS SUMMARY

Here is a high level summary of what some of the major airlines are doing to make their elite programs interesting at the moment:

In a nutshell they want to be thinking like this:

Status Seekers to become elites in the first place.

Status Quos to stay happy at the elite level they’re at.

Status Pros to move their current elite status up to the next level.



American Airlines: Their current 2020 elite status has been extended until January 31, 2022, and new elite requirements are being reduced across the board by 33% to 50% (accounts will be updated by May 15, 2020). Members who reach the lower thresholds during 2020 will receive their status immediately upon qualifying, valid through January 31, 2022.

- **Status Seekers:** New low elite requirements (up to 50%) will enable you to get your foot in the door as you'll be able to qualify for entry level (Gold) status with new lower Elite Qualifying Dollars (EQD): \$1,500 instead of \$3,000, 15,000 instead of 25,000 Elite Qualifying Miles (EQM), or 15 Elite Qualifying Segment (EQS) instead of 30.
- **Status Quos:** If you're happy with your current elite status, and you just want to stay where you're at, the news is good. You can still take advantage of the new lower elite requirements. For example, if you are currently a Platinum elite and used to spending \$6,000 EQDs, now you only need to spend \$4,000 EQDs (33% less). It's also now 30,000 EQMs instead of 50,000 (40% less), or 30 EQSs instead of 60 EQS (50% less).
- **Status Pros:** If you want to get to a higher elite level, this is your chance as it will be much easier to move up with the new lower status requirements. For example, are you currently a Platinum and want to move up to Platinum Pro Elite? Under the old rates you would have needed to spend \$9,000 EQDs, but now you only need to spend \$6,000 EQDs (33% less). It's also now 45,000 EQMs instead of 75,000 (40% less), or 45 EQSs instead of 90 (50% less). Another way to look at it: You can spend the same or less now than you would have spent for Platinum, but get bumped to Platinum Pro Elite status.

Delta: Current 2020 elite status has been extended until January 31, 2022, and all 2020 MQMs (qualifying miles) will be rolled over to 2021 for qualification towards 2022. For Medallion status, however, Delta has not lowered their elite qualifying dollar amounts.

- **Status Seekers:** If you always wanted elite status with Delta but came up short on qualifying miles, now is your chance. Now you can earn elite qualifying miles over a two-year period with 2020 earnings being rolled over to 2021 to qualify for 2022 status.

- **Status Quos:** If you are happy with your current status, and you just want to stay where you're at, you can still take advantage of the new lower elite requirements. For example, if you are currently a Gold elite and are used to having to earn 50,000 MQMs in one year, you now have two years to earn them.
- **Status Pros:** If you want to get to a higher status, it will be much easier to move up with the new lower requirements. For example, if you're currently Gold and want to move up to Platinum elite, you will be able to earn status qualifying miles (75,000 MQMs) over a two-year period.

United: Current 2020 elite status has been extended until January 31, 2022. They've also reduced the amount of Premier Qualifying Points (PQP) and Premier Qualifying Flights (PQF) needed to earn status for the 2021 program year by 50% (a minimum of four flights must still be flown on United).

- **Status Seekers:** New lower (50%) elite requirements enable you to get your foot in the door as you'll be able to qualify for entry level (Silver) elite status with new lower elite qualifying flights (PQF): 6 instead of 12, and qualifying points (PQP): 2,000 instead of 4,000.
- **Status Quos:** If you're happy with your current elite status, and you just want to stay where you're at, you can still take advantage of the new lower elite requirements. For example, if you're currently a Gold elite and are looking at flying 24 elite qualifying flights (PQF), now you only need 12, and instead of 8,000 qualifying points (PQP), now you only need 4,000.
- **Status Pros:** If you want to get to a higher status, it's now a lot easier to move up with the new lower status requirements. Say you're currently Gold and want to move up to Platinum elite. Under the old rates you would have needed to spend 12,000 PQPs, whereas now you only need to spend 6,000 PQPs (50% less), and 18 PQFs instead of 36 (50% less).

Alaska: Current 2020 elite status has been extended to December 31, 2021. Currently they have not announced any adjustments to elite status qualification criteria.

Air Canada: Current 2020 elite status has been extended until the end of 2021. On top of that, Air Canada elites who requalify for elite status in 2020 can gift elite status to a friend or family member for free.

**Perhaps not immediately obvious,
with everyone being elite again
no one will be elite again.
There are only so many upgrades to be had.
The more elites the longer the elite line.**

The longer the elite line, the lower the odds of getting to the front, right?



COVID-2019 HOTEL ELITE PROGRAM UPDATE SUMMARY

Airlines are not the only ones hurting right now and wanting business to pick up again. Here's a summary of what some of the major hotels are doing to get you to think about their programs.

Marriott: Current 2020 elite status is extended through February 2022, regardless of how many nights you stay in 2020.

Hilton: It has extended expiring elite status on March 31, 2020, to March 31, 2021, and members who have status expiring on March 31, 2021, now have it through March 31, 2022.

Hyatt: Current elite status as of March 31, 2020, will be extended to February 28, 2022.

ELITE PERSPECTIVE

I urge you not be blinded by all the cheery airline “goodwill” and backpatting going on. **Now that the shoe is on the other foot and airlines need you again**, they are pulling all the strings to entice members to stay and fly with them.

I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth, who would? I'll take the offered status for two years, but I will continue to stay a **Loyalty-Free Traveler**, and shop around for **the best schedule, fare, airline, or whatever my priority is for that particular trip**. If, by chance, I reach status again, or earn higher status, or gain status with multiple airlines, then fine, I'll take it. But I won't chase status. With few exceptions, neither should most of you.

See you up front.



American and Delta's Domestic First Class Fares Are Now Often Much Lower Than United's

May 2020

And the implications for loyalty-shackled travelers

The battle for low First Class fares on the big three U.S. airlines reminds me of the big three men's tennis players because they're all constantly swapping and competing with each other for top spot.

We've never had three players dominate the landscape so effortlessly at the same time (the tennis players, I mean).

Since 2004, here's how the men's Number 1 ranked tennis player has changed over time:

Federer-Nadal-Federer-Nadal-Djokovic-Federer-Djokovic-Nadal-Djokovic-Murray-Nadal-Federer-Nadal-Federer-Nadal-Federer-Nadal-Djokovic-Nadal-Djokovic.

Murray is the outlier of course and congratulations to him for somehow squeezing in amongst that trio.

The reason I bring this up is because the big three airlines also chop and change their rankings.

As [we reported](#) in November last year, Delta was the low-fare leader. In our previous report, American and United were lower than Delta. Just like tennis rankings, their positions change all the time.

We're avid tennis fans AND fare watchers here at FCF, both domestically and internationally. As soon as we see a significant change, we report on it.

Which brings us to an unlikely doubles pairing that is smashing their competitor.

Back in November, Delta was the champion domestic First Class fare leader, offering up to 52% lower fares than United and 31% lower than American.

But now, American joins Delta in offering lower fares than United. We don't believe this is Covid-19 related. Instead, we think it's just the ongoing bounce of the ball.

Let's check the video on this latest rally. We'll look at routes where non-stops are offered so it's as close to an apples to apples comparison as possible.

SAMPLE SAVINGS WITH AA AND DELTA OVER UNITED, BASED ON NON-STOP ROUTES ALL THREE AIRLINES FLY:

New York to/from Chicago First Class on AA and Delta is \$305 round-trip. United, on the other hand, charges \$535, a difference of **\$230/43%**.

New York to/from Orlando First Class on AA is \$405 and Delta is \$445 round-trip. Meanwhile, United charges \$625, a difference of up to **\$220/35%**.

Chicago to/from Atlanta First Class on both AA and Delta is \$425 round-trip. United charges \$651, a difference of **\$226/35%**.

Chicago to/from Boston First Class on AA and Delta is \$325 round-trip. On United it's \$575, a difference of **\$250/43%**.

Chicago to/from Seattle First Class on AA and Delta is \$555 round-trip. United charges \$857, a difference of **\$302/35%**.

Game. Set. Match.

THE GAME CHANGES WHEN YOU'RE AN "ELITE"

At times, we are even seeing AA undercutting Delta in Delta's own major hub cities, such as Atlanta. An example is the New York-Atlanta First Class fare on AA is available for \$329, while Delta is \$525 round-trip, and United, \$535. **It's a difference of up to \$206/38%**, and in this case AA is the price leader. **That's the cost of being an elite-focused traveler who's tied to a single airline.**

Or take United. Chicago is a major United hub, and for New York to Chicago, you're paying for it dearly, as United charges 43% (\$535) more than AA and Delta. And here's another way to look at it: You can pay \$305 on AA and Delta and fly First Class, which is **only \$54 one-way more than what United charges for economy (\$197)**.

Ah, the elites... Also in this May issue, we talk about [why I could care less about being an elite](#), even at this time when airlines are offering many elites bonuses.

For more on the hidden cost of being an elite, check out these two recent reports:

[Hub Capped? Don't Fall for the Allure of Elite \(It'll Cost You Much More\)](#)

[It's Not Too Late to Excommunicate Yourself from 'the Elite Class'](#)



Airlines know you want their elite cards. They also know that a lot of people seem to value them more than a significantly discounted fare. But it's the elites themselves who end up bearing that extra cost

The lesson? It's much better to be a loyalty-free traveler who isn't shackled to one elite program. That way you'll give yourself the flexibility to shop around. Right now, AA and Delta have the lowest fares, but that can change at any time. Who knows, next month or next week, United may have the lowest fares.

In any case, not being focused on elite status means you can ace the best deal on any airline, at any time. When you don't tie yourself down to one elite program you'll have so many more schedule options to choose from. And that's a guaranteed win for you.