

How to Score a Paid First Class Vacation on Delta to the Caribbean, Costa Rica, or Mexico

May 2019

With This Strategy, You Could Land a Free (or Even Paid) Vacation

Time and time again, our **Stopover Loophole Strategy** has proven to be a game-changer when it comes to scoring a great deal. We've covered this topic previously for both [American](#) and [United](#), but now we want to highlight what's possible with Delta.

As always, we recommend a broad approach when planning your next trip. The more **open-minded** you are, the better deal you'll be able to find. With regards to Delta, our research shows that it's possible to **save hundreds of dollars on a round-trip Business Class ticket when you add a side destination to the Caribbean, Costa Rica, or Mexico.**

Yes, that means that in some cases, you're actually *getting paid* to take a vacation. And the best part is that this is possible with a number of common round-trip routes within the U.S. If you're interested in scoring a great deal on your next vacation, keep reading...

BUT FIRST, A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE STOPOVER LOOPHOLE STRATEGY

We call it the 'Stopover Loophole Strategy' but this idea certainly isn't unique to the FCF platform. Our research team just happens to be great at spotting these deals.

Many of the best airlines have something called a 'stopover allowance,' where a stopover is defined as a planned stop of more than 4 hours (domestic) or 24 hours (international) between flight segments on a trip. But here's the catch: these stopovers are sometimes allowed for free or a very small fee. And in some cases, your stopover could last for days—or *weeks*—if you wanted it to.

So, what does this mean? **It means that you can book a 'stopover' in an awesome destination like the Caribbean, Costa Rica, or Mexico and get a free flight there!** Or even better... sometimes it actually **costs less money to add in a stopover. That's when you're getting paid to take a free vacation.**

To recap, here's what's possible with this strategy:

- You can actually *get paid* to book a side trip to an awesome destination (i.e. the total booking **cost with the side trip added is cheaper** than your original round-trip booking), or
- You'll be able to book a side trip for free (**no additional cost** to original round-trip booking), or
- You pay a small fee to book the side trip (still considerably cheaper than booking a round-trip to the side trip destination by itself)

This strategy is ideal for:

1. **Leisure travelers** who have the flexibility to add in a side trip when visiting friends or family across North America.
2. **Business travelers** on a budget, but still want to sneak in a vacation on a business trip in North America.

HOW TO USE OUR STOPOVER LOOPHOLE STRATEGY TO GET AMAZING BUSINESS CLASS TRAVEL DEALS WITH DELTA

Alright, it's time to get into the specifics. Here are some examples of our Stopover Loophole Strategy in action:

EXAMPLE 1: NEW YORK (JFK) TO LOS ANGELES

The chart below shows what our research found for the New York (JFK) to Los Angeles round-trip route with Delta. Here are a few of the highlights:

Adding a stopover in Cancun drops the total Business Class trip price from \$1,669 to \$1,220. **That’s \$449 cheaper—all for going on a vacation.** Similar cost savings are possible throughout the Caribbean in places like Dominican Republic (\$366 cheaper), Bahamas (\$259 cheaper), Jamaica (\$239 cheaper), and Sint Maarten (\$211 cheaper).

In addition, you can get free side trips to San Jose del Cabo, Mexico City, and Puerto Vallarta.

Sample Savings With Delta Free Side Trips

Normal Trip	Normal Premium Fare R/T	Side Trip City	New Premium Fare w/Side Trip	Free Side-Trip Savings
New York (JFK) - Los Angeles	\$1,669	Nassau	\$1,410	\$259
		Santo Domingo	\$1,354	\$315
		Santiago (STI)	\$1,303	\$366
		Kingston	\$1,430	\$239
		Sint Maarten	\$1,458	\$211
		Cancun	\$1,220	\$449
		San Jose del Cabo	\$1,350	\$319
		Puerto Vallarta	\$1,510	\$159
		Punta Cana	\$1,480	\$189
		Mexico City	\$1,400	\$269

* Fare valid at time of publishing and will vary based on advance purchase and many other factors. Fares displayed are commonly seen when booking a month or so in advance, although the strategy can often work on short-notice.

EXAMPLE #2: SAN FRANCISCO TO NEW YORK (JFK)

Similar savings can be found on the San Francisco to New York round-trip route. Here, the best options for side trips are San Juan and Mexico City, where you’d save \$341 or \$388 respectively.

You can view our research results in the chart below:

Sample Savings With Delta Free Side Trips

Normal Trip	Normal Premium Fare R/T	Side Trip City	New Premium Fare w/Side Trip	Free Side-Trip Savings
San Francisco - New York (JFK)	\$1,717	San José del Cabo	\$1,488	\$229
		Mexico City	\$1,329	\$388
		San Jose Costa Rica	\$1,615	\$102
		San Juan	\$1,376	\$341
		Guadalajara	\$1,397	\$320
		Antigua	\$1,511	\$206
		Grand Cayman	\$1,521	\$196

* Fare valid at time of publishing and will vary based on advance purchase and many other factors. Fares displayed are commonly seen when booking a month or so in advance, although the strategy can often work on short-notice.

EXAMPLE #3: SEATTLE TO NEW YORK (JFK)

Another great round-trip route to consider for our Stopover Loophole Strategy is Seattle to New York. Here, the best options for side trips are San Jose, CR and Havana, where you'd save \$444 or \$287 respectively.

Sample Savings With Delta Free Side Trips

Normal Trip	Normal Premium Fare R/T	Side Trip City	New Premium Fare w/Side Trip	Free Side-Trip Savings
Seattle - New York (JFK)	\$1,607	Havana	\$1,320	\$287
		San Juan	\$1,322	\$285
		San Jose Cosa Rica	\$1,163	\$444
		Cancun	\$1,327	\$280
		San Jose del Cabo	\$1,462	\$145
		Mexico City	\$1,460	\$147
		Santo Domingo	\$1,518	\$89

Normal Trip	Normal Premium Fare R/T	Side Trip City	New Premium Fare w/Side Trip	Free Side-Trip Savings
		Kingston	\$1,582	\$25

* Fare valid at time of publishing and will vary based on advance purchase and many other factors. Fares displayed are commonly seen when booking a month or so in advance, although the strategy can often work on short-notice.

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Our research has found great side trip options for routes like New York to Portland, Seattle to Boston, Atlanta to Los Angeles, and much more.

The key thing to remember is that you should **always** check the stopover options if you want to book a round-trip flight within in the US, even if you weren't originally planning on taking a side trip. You never know what great deal is hiding right around the corner. This strategy makes it easier than ever to book your next vacation at a fraction of the cost.



New Delta-Virgin Amex-Chase Secret Savings on Short-Notice to Asia, 480,000 Miles Off or 73% With Cash

May 2019

Discover how to get five tickets for the price of one with miles or points—or 73% off with cash if you don't have any—and you'll never look at Delta miles the same way again or normal published fares.

In our last two Upgrade Advisor reports, FCF drilled deep down on what we call the Delta-Virgin Amex-Chase Loophole. It's all about using Virgin Atlantic miles for Delta flights (instead of Delta Miles) **because they open up low-cost award space not offered by Delta.**

WHY IT'S A GAME CHANGER

It's a game changer because using miles on Delta for low-cost awards was like winning a lottery, given they release so few low-cost mileage seats.

Sure, there are full price options using Delta miles between 300,000 and 600,000 miles in Business Class but that just goes against the grain here at FCF.

This month we look at the loophole from the perspective of short-notice travel to Asia, and how you can use Virgin Atlantic miles to get there.

WHEN BEING SHORT-SIGHTED IS ACTUALLY BEING LONG-SIGHTED

Retirees, business owners and other flexible travelers with their eye on the short-term have an advantage: they can move on a good deal fast. (We wrote about it in a previous report [here](#), including two travel paradoxes that have always fascinated me.) That's because very often, **the best free Business Class award availability often opens up a week or less before a departure date.**

In this report, we're talking close-in availability wins to Asia, and oh how the numbers stack up in your favor if your bags are waiting at the door and you're ready to fly.

If not, maybe they should be – read on...

EXAMPLE: ATLANTA – SHANGHAI

The savings you'll realize can be extraordinary as in this example that can save you 180,000 to 300,000 miles, each way.

The screenshot below from April 30 shows one-way space using Virgin Atlantic miles when traveling on short-notice from Atlanta to Shanghai.

There's a clump of great short-notice deals on offer that'll only cost you 60,000 miles one-way with Virgin Atlantic miles flying Delta.

Cabin:

Upper Class

Stops:

All flights
Direct only

Pricing:

\$ USD
Miles


Limited availability in Upper Class
Please try selecting a different cabin or alternative dates to find more flights.

< Previous Month
APR / MAY
Next Month >

Your Upper Class selection

Try to book the same flight using Delta miles and you'll pay between 240,000 and 360,000 miles as shown in this screenshot:

* FROM

ATL

* TO

PVG

* Earliest Travel Date

Wed, May 1

PASSENGERS

1

FLIGHTS

Calendar View

Show Best Fares For

SHOW ONLY

Round Trip

One Way

Flexible Days

5 Weeks

Delta One

Non Stop

All Flights

UPDATE RESULTS

Advanced Search

Show Flights Operated By

☒ Delta Only
 ☐ Delta & Partner Airlines

The prices shown are as per passenger. Tickets are nonrefundable unless otherwise stated. Some of the prices listed may be Basic Economy fares; these fares do not include a seat assignment until after check-in, are nonrefundable, do not permit ticket changes, and have [additional restrictions](#).

APR/MAY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
APR 21	APR 22	APR 23	APR 24	APR 25	APR 26	APR 27
NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE
APR 28	APR 29	APR 30	MAY 01	MAY 02	MAY 03	MAY 04
NOT AVAILABLE	NOT AVAILABLE	LOWEST FARE 360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60
MAY 05	MAY 06	MAY 07	MAY 08	MAY 09	MAY 10	MAY 11
360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60
MAY 12	MAY 13	MAY 14	MAY 15	MAY 16	MAY 17	MAY 18
360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	LOWEST FARE 240,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	LOWEST FARE 240,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60
MAY 19	MAY 20	MAY 21	MAY 22	MAY 23	MAY 24	MAY 25
LOWEST FARE 240,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	285,000 + \$5.60	LOWEST FARE 240,000 + \$5.60	LOWEST FARE 240,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60	360,000 + \$5.60

The next screenshot below was also taken on April 30. At a glance you can see lots of affordable availability for the near future when using Virgin Atlantic miles on Delta flights based on a round-trip ticket Atlanta–Shanghai.

But, push out further into the future and it all disappears for both departure and return trips. So, what does this tell us? To make the most of the loophole, we’ve got to have those bags packed and be ready to pounce when the opportunity is there.

As well as that short-notice availability, the cost is only 120,000 miles round-trip when booked using Virgin Atlantic miles, instead of booking with Delta miles (when, you’ll recall, you’re paying between 240,000 and 360,000 miles!) See why we called it a loophole?

It’s kinda loopy.

		< - 3 days		Return				+ 3 days >	
		Sun 05 May	Mon 06 May	Tue 07 May	Wed 08 May	Thu 09 May	Fri 10 May	Sat 11 May	
Depart	- 3 days >	Sun 28 Apr	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	
		Mon 29 Apr	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	
		Tue 30 Apr	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	120,000 miles +\$35.73	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	
		Wed 01 May	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	120,000 miles +\$35.73	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	
		Thu 02 May	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	120,000 miles +\$35.73	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	
		Fri 03 May	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	
	< + 3 days	Sat 04 May	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	120,000 miles +\$35.73	120,000 miles +\$35.73	No Upper Class seats available	No Upper Class seats available	

It's kinda loopy.

Happy recap: A round-trip short-notice ticket booked using Virgin Atlantic miles to fly Delta for Atlanta-Shanghai will cost you 120,000 miles, plus \$36 in taxes. That same ticket using Delta miles would be 600,000 miles for the same dates, plus \$36 in taxes. Calculator please: that's 5 times the cost.

I mean, would you rather pay this...

Depart Thu 2 May 2019

Atlanta (ATL), US to
Shanghai (PVG), CN

ATL

15:28

15h 42m Direct

Delta One®

Operated by Delta Air Lines

+1 day

19:10

Delta One®

Change Flight

Return Wed 8 May 2019

Shanghai (PVG), CN to
Atlanta (ATL), US

PVG

12:25

15h 19m Direct

Delta One®

Operated by Delta Air Lines

15:44

Delta One®

Change Flight

1 adult












Total 120,000 miles

+ \$35.73

Next step →

Price is for all passengers and includes taxes, fees, charges and carrier imposed surcharges

I mean, would you rather pay this...

		Flights		SKY PRIORITY			
THU 02 MAY	ATL → PVG	DL 185 15h 42m Nonstop	Delta One® (O) Changeable / Nonrefundable Delta Air Lines Baggage Information	CHANGE	Miles per Passenger	600,000 Miles	
	3:28 PM	7:10 PM ARRIVES NEXT DAY			Taxes, Fees and Charges (USD)	\$35.73	
	DETAILS ▾ SEATS			    			
WED 08 MAY	PVG → ATL	DL 186 15h 19m Nonstop	Delta One® (O) Changeable / Nonrefundable Delta Air Lines Baggage Information	CHANGE	Total Price (USD)	600,000 Miles + \$35.73	
	12:25 PM	3:44 PM					
	DETAILS ▾ SEATS			    			
Award Tickets cannot be redeposited or changed within 72 hours of scheduled flight departure time.							

Or this?

HOW TO LAND THIS AWESOME LOOPHOLE

Not all routes can be booked online with Virgin Atlantic because its booking engine doesn't have all Delta routes loaded (don't ask us why). So, you may need to call Virgin (800-365-9500) to check for Delta partner space on some routes.

Non-stop Delta routes that can be booked using Virgin Atlantic miles online for travel to Asia:

To/From Atlanta: Shanghai, Tokyo

To/From Detroit: Beijing, Nagoya, Shanghai, Tokyo

To/From Los Angeles: Shanghai, Tokyo

To/From Minneapolis: Tokyo

To/From Portland: Tokyo

To/From Seattle: Beijing, Shanghai, Tokyo

Non-stop Delta routes that can be booked using Virgin Atlantic miles by phone for travel to Asia:

To/From Atlanta: Seoul

To/From Detroit: Seoul

To/From Minneapolis: Seoul

To/From Seattle: Osaka, Seoul

KEEP IN MIND: the main downside to using Virgin Atlantic miles is that you can only use them for Delta's non-stop routes. All connecting flights would require you to purchase a second mileage ticket. In this case, it still might be a good idea to just buy a separate ticket to the gateway to be able to take advantage of the Virgin opportunity.

The math on that is pretty easy: pay 600,000 using Delta miles or 120,000 with Virgin Atlantic. It still gives you a ton of miles to get a second ticket, or depending how far your gateway from Delta's non-stop flight is, just buy a ticket with cash.

And the same also holds true if you're traveling beyond Delta's non-stop route to another destination in Asia—use the Virgin loophole to get to Asia, then plan to get a second mileage ticket or buy a ticket to get to your final destination.

GETTING VIRGIN ATLANTIC MILES FAST

Credit Card Partnerships: Virgin Atlantic has more credit card point transfer partners than Delta (Amex Rewards, Chase, Citi, and Starwood/Marriott). Delta only has two (Amex Rewards and Starwood/Marriott).

DON'T HAVE ANY AMEX POINTS? NO PROBLEM.

You can buy up to 500,000 points annually at a cost of 2.5¢ each. Using this approach, buying 120,000 Amex Rewards points and then transferring them to Virgin brings the ticket cost down to \$3,036 (including award taxes). To put this in perspective, a published Business Class ticket on Delta from Atlanta to Shanghai is \$7,000 to \$11,000 r/t; so even by purchasing the Amex Rewards points and transferring to Virgin Atlantic **you're saving between \$4,000 and \$8,000 (57% to 73%).**

For more on How to Buy American Express Membership Rewards Points, go [here](#), and for more on When to Buy Miles Instead of Purchasing a Normal Published Fare, go [here](#).

BE A LAST-MINUTE OPPORTUNIST

If you have something already booked with Delta or another airline at a much higher cost using miles, cancel your booking and redeposit your miles, even if you have to pay a few hundred dollars to do it (the cost varies by airline mileage program). It'll be well worth it, considering the savings short-notice opportunities can offer which were not available when you booked that original mileage ticket months in advance. Just check with the airline before you do so as restrictions on airline tickets vary.



If You're NOT Flexible: 11 Ways to Save on Premium Flights

While many of the best premium ticketing strategies require some flexibility with dates, there's many ticketing strategies you can check even if your dates are locked in.

When it comes to the Travel Lifecycle, people are usually in one of three stages: Trip Dreaming (no destination, no dates), Trip Planning (have destination, but no dates), and Trip Booking (have destination and dates, need to book tickets now!).

We recommend using FCF at the start—rather than at the end—of that Lifecycle, because you infinitely increase your opportunity for a great deal if you're thinking about tickets *while* choosing

a destination and/or dates.

BUT we know that's not always possible in reality. So if your destination and dates are etched in stone (cousin Clint's wedding in Paris on February 14, the old romantic) then we've got a list of things to try—**which often do NOT come with the otherwise common availability challenges that tend to arise when you're later in the Lifecycle and have locked yourself into dates.**

Check Amex's IAP Discount

If your dates and destination are etched in stone, why not nip a couple hundred or more extra greenbacks off the price? We'll show you exactly [how to save on many normal fares with Amex](#). **Dates are almost never an issue.**



Check Vacation Packages

Package deals can offer amazing value, particularly to Europe. We found a [package deal on American and British Airways](#) at short notice that offered a 52% saving with accommodation at a five-star hotel. And with vacation packages, finding **volumes of dates with availability of discount seats can often be easy.**

More insights on package deals: [American and British Airways to Europe](#), [American to Brazil](#), and [Delta to Australia](#).

Check Partner Space

You'd think an airline's own miles would offer the best value on their own flights. Well, that's not necessarily the case as we [uncover with Delta and their partner Virgin Atlantic](#). And what's more—when you find the best value with miles (even if it's not being redeemed for that airline's flights), you're not just getting a better value, but often **more availability too.**



Check Mixed Class Fares

Sometimes it makes sense to travel to Europe in Business Class, and return in premium Economy, or vice versa. Find out [when mixed class fares make sense and how to book them](#)—as these deals **don't come with date requirements** per se.

Check Using Miles for Upgrade, Not Free Tickets

I'm a huge fan of using miles to upgrade, rather than using them to buy a free coach ticket (like most people do). And [the numbers back me up](#). We have ten reasons why you should be doing this too—including **great availability** oftentimes.

Check Using One-way Mileage Awards

Most folks buy a round-trip mileage ticket when traveling. We have another way. Actually, we have two: two one-way tickets. Divide and conquer! Because, one-way tickets increase our chances of getting a First or Business Class seat at a lower award-cost level and for low-cost. More insights on one-way award tickets: To [Asia](#), [Europe](#), and [South America](#).

Across the Pond

If you travel to Europe often, heads up. You can take advantage of the fact [Europe to the U.S. fares are often cheaper](#) than the other way around, and **date restrictions are often minimal**.

Consider Buying Points or Miles

If you see a great miles or points deal and [you don't have any miles or points](#)—but you see an **FCF Sweet Redeem report with dates wide open**—it isn't the end of the line. You can buy them when they're cheap. I do it all the time. Here's also [how to buy up to 500,000](#) points with Amex.

BOOK WHAT YOU CAN NOW, AND CONTINUE TO CHECK FOR BETTER SPACE

If you thought that once you booked a flight there's no chance of scoring a better deal on that trip, think again. We have [seven ways to improve your situation even after you're booked](#) and confirmed.



BA AARP \$200 discount for Business Class travel

When airlines offer a gift, take it. In this case, British Airways' \$200 AARP discount per flight, yours for a mere \$16 a year—and [available to anyone of any age!](#) **This often has great availability too.**

Check Open-Jaw Fares

An open-jaw fare means that rather than going to a specific destination and returning from that destination, you go where the value is by adding another destination.

For instance, there are huge fare differences to Europe depending on which city you fly into, even though the cities might be close together. So, go where you have to go, then get yourself to a much cheaper return fare city.

Hey, it's probably a cool place too. With [published open-jaw fares](#), finding **volumes of dates with availability of discount seats can often be easy.**



Elite Status Seeker: The Power of American Airlines Business to First Class Domestic Upgrades—and Availability Treasure Map

May 2019

Elites, non-elites, business, and leisure travelers can now save big on First Class Transcon routes—up to 31% off.

This is a Spring gift from FCF for anyone who can't find a low First Class Transcon fare on AA. They also work for those who don't even have American miles.

FLYING “CATCH ME IF YOU CAN-STYLE”

American's glamour aircraft for domestic travel is [the A321](#) flying between Los Angeles and San Francisco and New York/JFK, and a few other transcontinental routes, including Los Angeles to Boston and Miami. It's as special as flying in America *on American* gets. So how do you get it?

AMERICAN'S UPGRADE PROGRAM

For domestic flights, [American](#) requires 15,000 miles plus a \$175 co-pay each way on discounted Business Class fares (I class) to First Class.

Availability is significantly better for these upgrades than with First Class free award tickets, which is another reason to consider this approach.

SAVES 31% WHEN BOOKING IN ADVANCE

The Los Angeles to New York/JFK average advance purchase Business Class fare is currently \$1,767 round-trip, while the average First Class fare is \$3,067. So even with the \$350 co-pay you can save \$950 (31%) off the published fare by using 30,000 miles to upgrade. (See our chart below for a survey of upgrade-award availability.)

SAVES 25% WHEN BOOKING LAST MINUTE

The Los Angeles to New York/JFK 7-day advance Business Class fare is currently \$2,977 round-trip, while the 7-day advance First Class fare starts at \$4,467. So even with the \$350 co-pay you can save \$1,140 (26%) off the published fare by using 30,000 miles to upgrade.

WHEN NOT TO USE MILES FOR AN UPGRADE

Don't use miles when booking special weekend/time restricted fares. In this case, the lowest Los Angeles to New York/JFK First Class fares start as low as \$1,717 round-trip, while Business Class starts at \$1,117. Add in the \$350 co-pay and you're looking at \$1,467 plus 30,000 miles to upgrade. This gives you a savings of only \$250 and a return on your miles of less than 1 cent. Not worth the trouble.

HOW TO BOOK MILEAGE UPGRADES WITH AMERICAN

With American, upgrades cannot be booked online, so you'll have to call. Before buying your Business Class ticket, call American at 1-800-433-7300 to find out if the specific flights or dates you want are available for a mileage upgrade and to book.

Sweet Redeem Survey: American First Class Upgrades

Routes	Depart			Return		
	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
Los Angeles - New York		Dec.	May through Nov., Jan, Feb.			May through Dec., Jan., Feb.

Routes	Depart			Return		
	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
San Francisco - New York	July, Aug., Jan.	June, Sept., Nov., Dec., Feb.	May, Oct.	Jan., Feb.	May, July, Aug.	June, Sept. through Dec.

Months in black at least one seat available; in green at least four seats; in purple at least six seats.

HOW ANYONE CAN PLAY THIS UPGRADE GAME—AND WHEN TO BUY MILES

Don't have enough American miles and need to top off your account? Easy. Just buy AA miles when they go on sale ([here](#)'s a recent one).

Don't have any American miles but do have Starwood/Marriott points? Then transfer those Starwood/Marriott points.

Need to know when you should buy miles? See FCF's article on [When to Buy Miles Instead of Purchasing a Normal Published Fare](#).

OTHER RECENT UPGRADE REPORTS

We've recently published 11 special reports of similar finds for oneworld (American) and Star Alliance (United) members looking to use miles to achieve or maintain elite status, or anyone who wants to save big:

December 2017: [American to Europe](#)

January 2018: [American to Asia](#)

February 2018: [American to South America](#)

March 2018: [Upgrades on American's Transcon](#)

April 2018: [American to Hawaii](#)

May 2018: [United to Asia](#)

June 2018: [United to South America](#)

July 2018: [United to Europe](#)

August 2018: [United to the South Pacific](#)

November 2018: [American to the Caribbean](#) and [United to Peru](#)



Tactical Fares: India First Class Slashed On British Airways

May 2019

Interested in travel to India? We've uncovered some great First Class 'tactical' fares on British Airways.

[Tactical fares](#) are significantly discounted fares that airlines offer sporadically for a variety of reasons, usually because their sophisticated algorithms tell them that seats won't sell—so they lower the price.

This diverse group includes holiday tactical fares (Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and New Year's), origin-specific tactical fares, destination-specific tactical fares, and advance-purchase tactical fares, to name a few.

Now FCF is seeing tactical First Class fares for travel to India on British Airways.

NEW FIRST CLASS FARES, TREND?

We've seen some big-time savings on certain routes from the U.S. to India. First Class fares have historically been in the \$6,000 to \$8,000 range on British Airways, and on other major carriers, such as Emirates, SWISS or Lufthansa, they can even range from \$11,000 to \$15,000. But on the routes we'll cover here, prices have dropped to \$4,240.



SAMPLE LOW-COST ROUTES

The best First Class fares have landed in India from Chicago, Dallas, and Seattle to Mumbai, and from Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, to Delhi.

Sample Savings from East Coast: Washington, DC, to Delhi goes for \$4,240 round-trip (inclusive). Compared to other airlines, such as Emirates, at \$10,859 (inclusive), that's a savings of \$6,619 (61%).

Sample Savings from West Coast: Los Angeles to Delhi goes for \$4,657 round-trip (inclusive). Compared to other airlines, such as Lufthansa, at \$14,328 (inclusive), that's a savings of \$9,671 (67%).

If you you've never been to India, it's an intoxicating kaleidoscope of colors, odors, sights, and sounds unlike anywhere else on earth. It's all on vivid display in the capital of Delhi, a city of 17 million, and in the chaotic jumble of Mumbai, with 21 million people.

Sample First Class Fares to India with British Airways

[fcf-deal-table title="Sample First Class Fares to India with British Airways" /]



Year-Out Planners: Here's Four Secret Routes to Snag First Class Suites to Tokyo and Beyond, Easy

May 2019

When it's easy to burn your miles and points for free \$25,000 First Class tickets and why those who only fly First Class are not snobs.

Airlines used to release lots of seats for travel 330-ish days in advance. As such, travelers came to rely on this, essentially becoming “trained” by the airlines over the years to expect lots of advance notice availability.

In most cases, this is a concept of the past—as we rarely see the same volume of availability a year out that we used to. But, rest assured—we do have one top airline with a hot First Class cabin that bucks the trend, on **four hidden routes.**

FIRST CLASS: KEY FOR MANY

If I've learned anything over the years, it's that most people conclude that it's a heck of a lot easier to stay home than it is to muscle through arduous airport and airline experiences—lines, wait times, ever-changing regulations—it's enough to drive lots of flyers crazy.

And I agree—if you're flying coach. That's why if I can't fly First, I won't fly, as far as discretionary travel goes anyway.

While it may be fun to say that it's "all about the journey," many folks I know—especially non-millennials who've been around the world countless times—will say it's all about getting the air travel portion over with.

I'm no different. And since I have the flexibility to work from anywhere in the world as long as I have an Internet connection, I'm able to **book First Class all the time**.

You can, too, if you have **insider knowledge**.

Simple.

JAL RARELY HAS TWO AWARD SEATS AVAILABLE IN FIRST CLASS: MOST OF THE TIME

While U.S.-Japan seldom sees First Class award availability in JAL's First Class suite, what many travelers don't know—what is, in fact, a well-kept secret—is that if you can plan way in advance, you can often find a JAL First Class suite on four little-realized routes.

[FCF's research](#) has found that if you book JAL First Class for travel far in the future (say 10 to 11 months from now) in March and April 2020, four U.S. routes to Tokyo—from **Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco** (and often flights beyond Tokyo)—will likely have very good availability for two passengers.



JAL First Class Suite

HOW TO BOOK?

Simple: [With American or British Airways miles, or Amex, Chase, or Marriott points.](#)

BA-CHASE 30% TRANSFER DEAL

From now till June 16, you get 30% bonus points when you transfer Chase Ultimate Rewards points into BA Avios points. For example, Los Angeles-Tokyo is 140,000 JAL miles or 200,000 BA miles, but during the transfer deal the cost is only 154,000 Chase points. That said, if you're considering booking with BA, do it by May 30 as the BA devaluation we've been telling you about has just been announced.