



How to Get 16 Round-the-World Flights for the Price of Two With Delta

February 2019

Discover SkyTeam's best Round-the-World (RTW) deal with miles + how to get the \$10,920 ticket for just \$4,400 if you DON'T have any miles.

You know I like very little about the Delta SkyMiles program, as I've written extensively on the topic, including last month's [eight reasons why I don't like their co-branded credit cards](#) (the kind that lock you into the most worthless of currencies).

Instead, you can—for little or no extra effort—get a card like Amex, which allows you to *transfer* those points into Delta miles (so you get the Delta miles without the Delta card), plus—and this is the best part—allows you

to redeem those points for Delta SkyTeam partners, which—by and large—offer a much more lucrative program than Delta itself.

EXAMPLE OF BETTER OPPORTUNITIES WITH AMEX AND DELTA SKYTEAM PARTNERS

Here's a deal that starts with an American Express Membership Rewards transfer bonus (for a limited time) to Aeromexico.

On Jan. 14 Amex announced a special limited-time promotion to transfer points to Delta's SkyTeam partner Aeromexico miles to get a **25% bonus** through February 14, 2019.

With the bonus, you get an RTW mileage award for about the same price as a simple round-trip with Delta to Europe, which normally starts at 172,000 miles.

(Of course, you can transfer Amex points to Aeromexico anytime to get the RTW ticket, but it will just cost a bit more.)

The hang-up that some people have about RTW flights is that they seem so long. Yet, the distance covered is often little more than many typical long-haul round-trips.

You don't have to see the whole world. You're free to skip destinations and stop where you want. But if you have a bucket list that needs checking off—and if SkyTeam airlines are your preferred carriers—here is a deal for you.

THE AMAZING AEROMEXICO CLUB PREMIER?

Curious about the deal but never heard of the airline?

Aeromexico has been in business since [1934](#) and officially became Aeromexico in 1972; it has offered its loyalty program, Club Premier, since 2011.

One of the best values the program offers is for Round-the-World tickets, for [352,000 "kilometers" in Business Class](#). With the current Amex bonus, you **only need to transfer 176,000 Membership Rewards points**.

To put this opportunity in context, consider that Delta charges [172,000 miles for a Business Class round-trip to Europe](#) and [188,000 miles for one to South America](#).

NO MILES? NO PROBLEM.

You know the routine by now: Just buy the miles. Amex sells them for just 2.5¢ each—a five-minute phone call to Membership Rewards *et voilà!*

You can [buy the 176,000 points from American Express](#) for just \$4,400 and transfer them to Aeromexico for RTW itineraries—for the ticket that would normally go for \$10,920+.

THE BEST SKYTEAM ROUTES

If we've done our job, you should now be convinced that there are ways to maximize Aeromexico miles to score deals on SkyTeam flights.

If you're ready to "hit the air," here are a few SkyTeam Alliance partners and routes to keep in mind that generally offer good availability.

Korean generally has very good availability from Los Angeles and New York to Seoul. The best airlines to/from Europe are generally Air France and KLM—and at times even Delta to London.

So, although there's no shortage of flights within the SkyTeam Alliance to Asia or Europe, availability is always a concern. **That's why this month FCF's Daily Alerts will focus on SkyTeam flight availability that can help you piece together world-class itineraries with Aeromexico, fast.** Keep an eye out for them.

FINE PRINT & WHAT ELSE TO KNOW

- You must book by phone (855) 412-2650.
- Use AirFrance.com to get a sense of availability for partner award flights, (because this airline's website is relatively easy to use) before you call (FCF has heard reports that the engine sometimes displays phantom availability, causing people to transfer points, so **before you do any transferring of points, call Aeromexico to make sure of availability.**)
- Transfers from Amex to Aeromexico take about 24 hours, so there's a chance your seat could disappear. Here's how I think about this: I look for routes and dates with **cluster availability**, meaning if I miss one day, there's a good chance the seat is available on the day before or after. More on [the risks of transferring points here](#).
- You must travel in one direction (no back tracking), eastward or westward (FCF recommends westward for less jetlag).
- Travel must begin and end in the same country.
- Valid on 19 SkyTeam-operated partner flights including: Aeroflot, Aerolineas Argentinas, Aeromexico, Air Europa, Air France, Alitalia, China Airlines, China Eastern, Czech Airlines, Delta, Garuda, Kenya Airways, KLM, Korean Air, and more.
- You must have a minimum of three stops and no more than 15 stopovers, with no more than five per continent (16 flights total).
- All flights must be booked in the same class of service.

FCF'S FAVORITE ROUND-THE-WORLD TICKETS

So, you're getting a sense that we here at FCF like the amazing ways to book a Round-the-World dream trip using miles and points, which most people never think of. In fact, we've published three special reports on the

topic, including FCF's favorite [The Ultimate Mileage Award Ticket](#), [The Ultimate oneworld Business Class Mileage Award](#), and most recently [Around the World in 80 Ways—for Much Less than Simple Round-Trips](#).



When Booking American Mileage Flights Over the Telephone Is the Way to Go

February 2019

Time to dispel the myth that booking over the phone is necessarily a drag or lacks rich opportunity.

You have the option to book online or by phone. But which is best?

Is one method better in some cases and less so in others?

The table below lays out three scenarios where booking by phone has advantages most don't consider.

	On the Phone: (800) 433-7300	Online
Do I have access to upgrade award availability?	A reservationist can tell you about upgrade space on the phone, before you buy the economy ticket. This way, you can make sure before you buy that the dates and flights you want have upgrade space.	Online you can NOT check for upgrade space.
How accurate is the data about free award ticket availability?	By calling you can be more sure that you are receiving the most accurate availability figures. Although you might want to double-check what you are being told.	Data can be inaccurate and there's no way to know when a glitch or phantom availability is showing.
Can I book with American partner airlines?	All American partners can be booked over the phone including Cathay Pacific and Japan Airlines to name a few which can only be booked by phone.	Some American partners can be booked online, and these are: Air Tahiti Nui, Alaska, British Airways, Cape Air, Fiji Airways, Finnair, Hawaiian, Iberia, Malaysia Airlines, Qantas, Qatar, Royal Jordanian, S7 Airlines, and SriLankan Airlines.



Secret Ticketing Strategy: How American Airlines International Travelers Can Get Business Class 3-for-1s

February 2019

Discover more ways FCF's "Leg Stretch Strategy" Double Play Nets Free Tickets.

Say you travel to Asia in Business Class twice a year (or more) and once or more to South America, or would if premium class fares were ridiculously low. If you're part of the 99.9% (of non-FCF subscribers), you would buy round-trip tickets for each trip.

OPEN YOUR MIND WITH FCF'S LEG STRETCH STRATEGY

The Opportunity: Book a Seoul-to-Buenos Aires round-trip fare that **offers a free stopover** in Dallas—and in many other U.S. cities—in **both directions**. We'll go into details here in a minute but suffice to say—this

strategy can save you more than \$7,300 over booking the destinations separately.

The trick is to think laterally. Rather than booking the trips to Dallas and Buenos Aires separately—which everyone does—connect them. That's what we call the Leg Stretch Strategy (LSS).

YES, IT SEEMS COMPLICATED, BUT IT SAVES A LOT OF MONEY

Here's how it works. In short, you're booking a Seoul–Buenos Aires round-trip *via a free stopover* in Dallas both ways.

The strategy makes use of round-trip itineraries between two continents—in this month's incarnation of LSS, Asia and South America—with stopovers each way in a third continent (in this case, North America, specifically the U.S.).

This last one (North America) is the “connecting continent.” Would you believe that the prices for tickets booked using this kind of strategy are actually lower than coach in many instances? Say it with me now: **free upgrade!**

But keep in mind that this Leg Stretch Strategy starts in Asia. So obviously, you have to fly to Asia first. We suggest getting a one-way ticket using miles. We've made that part easy with [this special report](#). Doing it with cash can be easy too.

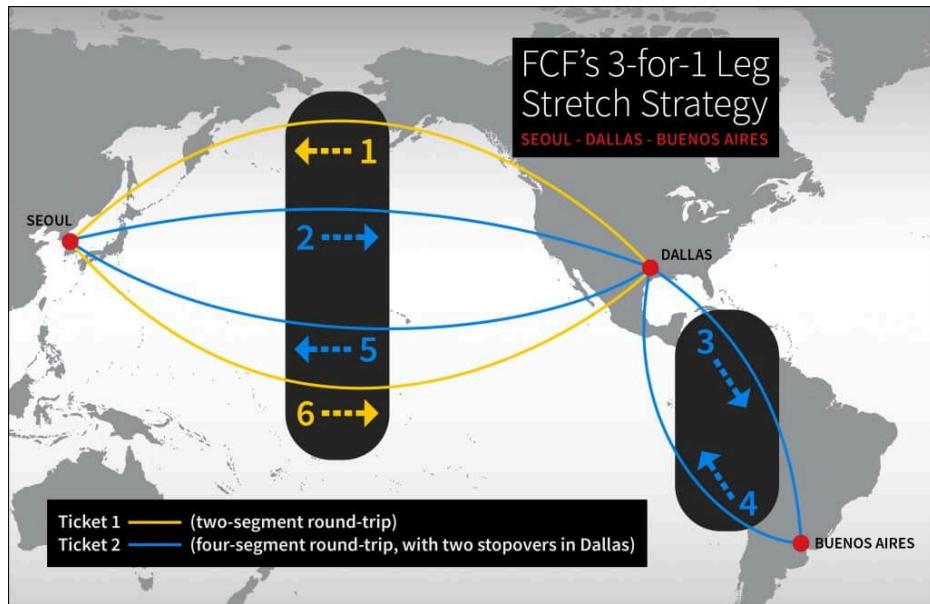
STRETCH YOUR FARE DOLLARS

A Dallas-to-Seoul return ticket in *economy* ranges from ~\$1,489 to \$2,342 non-stop on American. A Dallas-to-Buenos Aires return ticket in *economy* ranges from ~\$1,175 to \$2,104 non-stop. That's \$2,664 at a minimum to fly *economy*—and easily \$4,400+ depending on your dates.

Bragging rights: Save \$7,305 in Business Class on non-stop flights. In Business Class the lowest fare starts at \$5,469 for Dallas to Seoul, and \$5,184 for Dallas to Buenos Aires. That's \$10,653 at a minimum to fly Business Class.

The Leg Stretch Strategy, on the other hand, nets those same destinations in Business Class for \$3,348 for the four long-haul segments—at the current exchange rate, cost in South Korean Won (KRW) is 3,746,900—which nets a Business Class three-for-one.

Or fly Business Class for the price, if you prefer the free-upgrade perspective.



Or fly Business Class for the price, if you prefer the free-upgrade perspective.

AA.com screenshot below:

TOTAL
3,746,900 KRW

Taxes (fuel surcharge included)
Charges to the airline 3,555,000 KRW
Government, Authority And Airport
Charges 191,900 KRW

④ 1 Adult

Charges to the airline

Base fare 3,555,000 KRW
Total charges to the airline 3,555,000 KRW

Government, authority and airport charges

Fuel surcharge other airlines 31,600 KRW
(YRVB) (non-refundable)

Korea Passenger Service 28,000 KRW
Charge and Departure Tax
(BPDP)

United States: Animal and 9,000 KRW
Plant Health Inspection Service
(APHIS) User Fee (XA)

United States: Immigration 15,600 KRW
and Naturalization Service
Inspection Fee (XY)

United States: Customs User 13,000 KRW
Fee (YC)

United States: September 11th 12,600 KRW
Security Fee (AY)

Argentina: Airport Tax (XR) 54,600 KRW

Argentina: Immigration Tax 11,200 KRW
(QO)

Argentina: Security Tax (TQ) 11,200 KRW

United States: Passenger 5,100 KRW
Facilities Charge (XF) (non-
refundable)

**Total taxes, fees and 191,900 KRW
charges**

1 Seoul - Dallas
Tuesday 14 May 2019

17:25 Seoul
Incheon International (ICN)

16:10 Dallas
Dallas Ft Worth International (DFW)

[>Show flight details](#)

2 Dallas - Buenos Aires
Wednesday 7 August 2019

19:30 Dallas
Dallas Ft Worth International (DFW)

07:56 ^{+1 day} Buenos
Aires
Pistarini (EZE)

[>Show flight details](#)

3 Buenos Aires - Dallas
Wednesday 14 August 2019

20:00 Buenos Aires 05:01 ^{+1 day} Dallas
Pistarini (EZE) Dallas Ft Worth International (DFW)

[>Show flight details](#)

4 Dallas - Seoul
Tuesday 12 November 2019

10:50 Dallas
Dallas Ft Worth International (DFW)

16:25 ^{+1 day} Seoul
Incheon International (ICN)

[>Show flight details](#)

XE.com currency converter screenshot below:

Amount	From	To
3,746,900	 KRW South Korean Won	 USD US Dollar
3,746,900 KRW = 3,347.500 USD		

The map above shows the order of flights with those two tickets in different colors. **This itinerary has four discreet legs on one ticket (equivalent to two round-trips): Asia > U.S. > South America > U.S. > Asia, starting at \$3,354 in Business Class on American.** Quick story summation: Fly one-way from Dallas to Seoul (or even another Asian city as a starting point—in this case it's Seoul, the lowest LSS fare we found from Asia at the moment); #1 on the map above (in yellow). [Pay with miles](#) or take advantage of a great published fare. Return to Dallas on the first segment of your LSS ticket; a free stopover (#2 on the map). Stay home for a week or month or five or whatever until your next flight. Later, fly to Buenos Aires for the wedding or just to get a way for a week or two, as segment #2 of the LSS ticket (#3 on the map). Then fly back to Dallas (a free stopover); segment #3 of the LSS ticket (#4 on the map); stay home for a week or month or five or whatever until your next flight. Return to Seoul, which is segment #4 of the LSS ticket (#5 on the map). **Decision Time:** You can return home on another one-way ticket **OR** start the process again, returning to the U.S. as leg one of your next Leg Stretch Strategy ticket. (#6 on the map in yellow.) **HOW TO BOOK** You have several options but booking through a travel agent is best because inventory information (booking class I) that a travel agency can easily check needs to be available. You can also book online with AA.com, but it's a complex process. The other option is using Google Flights to plan out the trip by selecting the "Multi-city" option. But again, talking to a travel agent is your best bet due to the complexity of this itinerary. *Google.com/flights screenshot below.*

Quick story summation:

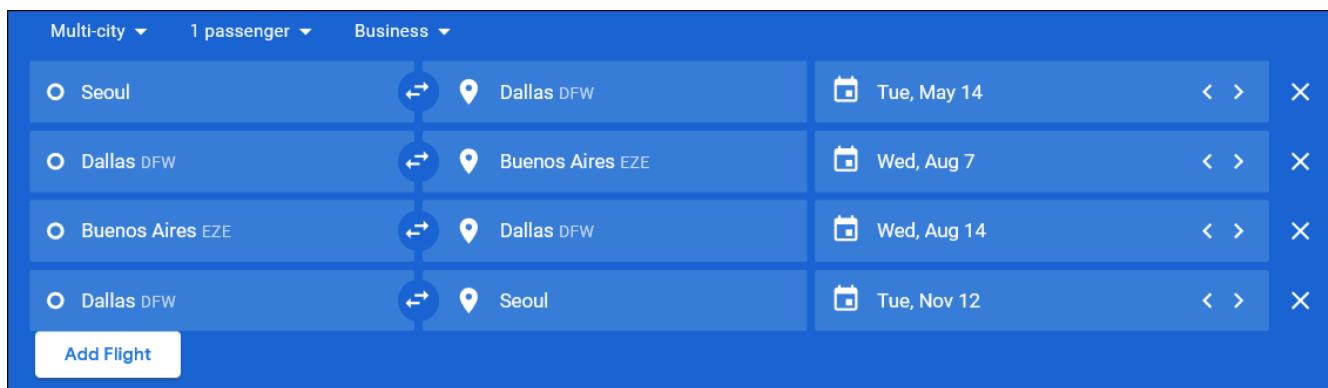
1. Fly one-way from Dallas to Seoul (or even another Asian city as a starting point—in this case it's Seoul, the lowest LSS fare we found from Asia at the moment); #1 on the map above (in yellow). [Pay with miles](#) or take advantage of a great published fare.
2. Return to Dallas on the first segment of your LSS ticket; a free stopover (#2 on the map). Stay home for a week or month or five or whatever until your next flight.
3. Later, fly to Buenos Aires for the wedding or just to get a way for a week or two, as segment #2 of the LSS ticket (#3 on the map).
4. Then fly back to Dallas (a free stopover); segment #3 of the LSS ticket (#4 on the map); stay home for a week or month or five or whatever until your next flight.
5. Return to Seoul, which is segment #4 of the LSS ticket (#5 on the map).

6. Decision Time: You can return home on another one-way ticket **OR** start the process again, returning to the U.S. as leg one of your next Leg Stretch Strategy ticket. (#6 on the map in yellow.)

HOW TO BOOK

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Google.com/flights screenshot below.



More Example Opportunities To Reap With FCF's Leg Stretch Strategy

Route	U.S. Stop (Perhaps your home airport, or one you can get to non-stop)	Local Asian Currency	Converted Fare Into USD	Two Business Class Fares	Savings
Seoul-Buenos Aires	Dallas	3,961,400 KRW	\$3,542	\$10,654	\$7,112 / 67%
Seoul-Rio de Janeiro	Dallas	3,976,600 KRW	\$3,555	\$9,802	\$6,247 / 64%
Hong Kong-Santiago	Los Angeles	28,030 HKD	\$3,573	\$9,437	\$5,864 / 62%
Hong Kong-São Paulo	Los Angeles	30,957 HKD	\$3,946	\$9,062	\$5,116 / 56%
Seoul-São Paulo	New York	4,862,000 KRW	\$4,346	\$8,821	\$4,475 / 51%
Shanghai-Buenos Aires	Los Angeles	33,218 CNY	\$4,923	\$8,742	\$3,819 / 44%



New Sale On Miles For Travel With 17+ Airlines

February 2019

Time to take advantage of a great sale on miles?

Yes, it's a great sale on Alaska Airlines miles, but here's the real bonus in this opportunity: You don't even have to fly Alaska Airlines to use the miles as you can cash in those purchased miles on Alaska's numerous partners: **American, Air France, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, LAN, Qantas, and 10 other carriers**—for up to **91% off normal fares**. Here's a recap of the offer that expires on February 22.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This is for Americans or Canadians who either don't have any miles in their kitty or don't have a credit card that allows them to buy points. But the sale is only open to Mileage Plan members who received the promo by

email—so check your mailbox and spam folder to see if this is you.

The airline previously had a rule that you must be a member of Alaska Mileage Plan for at least 10 days in order to buy miles; we tested this recently and even though we didn't see this rule on the website, our buy miles purchase for a new account was rejected. So get an account now if you don't have one already so you're prepared to pounce the next time the promo comes around.

SALE DETAILS

Alaska is offering a bonus of up to 40% on miles purchased (2.1¢ per mile). This is a good buy even though we occasionally see sales with a 50% bonus. The maximum purchase per transaction is 60,000, with a maximum of four transactions within 30 days, and Alaska introduced a new calendar year cap of 150,000, whether purchased by you or gifted to you. However, if you need more miles, and [need to get around mileage-purchase limits](#), just open another account for your dad, daughter, or other family members or friends, fill it with miles when they go on sale, and then **use the miles for your ticket**.

SAVE 91% TO ASIA IN FIRST CLASS

Using Alaska miles, Cathay Pacific First Class from the U.S. to Asia is 140,000 miles round-trip, and can save you 91%. The lowest published fare from New York to Hong Kong is \$33,056 round-trip. Booking a partner award during this miles sale through Alaska reduces the price to \$3,023 round-trip (including taxes and about \$67 in award tax), a savings of \$30,033 or 91%. See a recent FCF's Sweet Redemeems alert for [Cathay Pacific First Class mileage availability](#).

SAVE 76% TO AUSTRALIA IN FIRST CLASS

Using Alaska miles, Qantas First Class from the U.S. to Australia is 140,000 miles round-trip, a savings of up to 67% on First Class. The lowest published fare from Los Angeles to Melbourne is \$16,441 round-trip. Booking a partner award through Alaska during this miles sale reduces the price to \$3,956 (includes taxes and about \$1,000 in award tax), a savings of \$12,485, or 76%.

SAVE 53% TO SOUTH AMERICA IN BUSINESS CLASS

LAN Business Class from the U.S. to South America costs 90,000 miles round-trip with Alaska. The lowest published fare from New York to Santiago is \$4,121 round-trip. Booking a partner award through Alaska during this sale reduces the price to \$1,951 (includes taxes and about \$61 in award tax), a savings of \$2,171, or 53%.

SAVE 34% TO EUROPE IN FIRST CLASS

British Airways First Class from the U.S. to Europe is 140,000 miles round-trip. The lowest published fare from Seattle to London is \$6,507 round-trip. Booking a partner award through Alaska during this sale reduces the price to \$4,281 round-trip (including taxes), a savings of \$2,226 (34%). See a recent FCF Sweet Redemeems alert for [British Airways First Class mileage availability](#).

Keep in mind: The Alaska buying miles strategy is most worthwhile to Europe when fares are high (\$6,000+), which often is the case on short-notice.

SAVE 24% TO AFRICA IN FIRST CLASS PLUS A FREE SECOND CITY

British Airways First Class from the U.S. to Africa is 160,000 miles round-trip using Alaska miles, a 31% savings. The lowest published fare from Chicago to Johannesburg is \$7,125 round-trip. Booking a partner award through Alaska during this sale on miles reduces the price to \$5,419 round-trip (including about \$2,015 in award taxes), a savings of \$1,706, or 24%.

FREE STOPOVERS = BUCKET LIST BONANZA

Plus, if you take advantage of [Alaska's generous stopover rule](#) on partner awards, which, in case you forgot, allow for a free stopover in the partner's hub city—in this case London—you get to see a second city for free—a perk which is easily worth \$5,592 if you buy a separate ticket, giving you a total savings of \$7,298.

WHEN SHOULD I BUY MILES?

Our general rule of thumb is to consider buying miles when published premium fares are high, say \$1,800+ for domestic tickets; \$4,000+ for Business, and \$6,000+ for First Class international tickets. Published international First and Business Class fares are often highest when booked on short notice—the perfect time to use miles.

If you don't fly often and are looking to buy miles for a specific trip—make sure there is space on the flights and dates you want to book, **before you buy them**.

FOUR MORE REASONS TO LIKE THIS STRATEGY

SAVE ON TAXES: On some international routes, Alaska charges lower award taxes than the operating airline itself charges. For example, Air France's Business Class award taxes on the Washington, DC-Paris route are \$618 round-trip, while that ticket booked through Alaska's mileage program incurs only \$164 in taxes, a savings of \$454 (73%).

EASY SEARCH: Some airlines including Air France and British Airways require you to sign up for their mileage programs to check award space online. With Alaska you don't have to—you can see what's offered by its partners, even before you join. Note: To find availability on Cathay Pacific or LAN, you have to call (800) 252-7522. All others are booked online.

MIX AND MATCH: Alaska's awards allow you to use a different partner in each direction, or to book a one-way award. All of its partners are priced on a one-way basis, so a round-trip is simply double the amount of a one-way ticket.

FREE STOPOVERS: We said it before but it really must be reiterated—Alaska boasts a generous stopover rule on partner awards, allowing a free stopover in the partner's hub city. (Many other carriers allow no stopovers at all when traveling on a mileage award.) What's even more—you get one stopover for a one-way ticket (which is awesome enough), and two stopovers on a round-trip.



New American Airlines Premium Economy Developments

February 2019

Navigating the airline's new mileage award redemption rates and an updated mileage award search tool.

On Jan. 24, American Airlines (AA) finally released its Premium Economy (PE) mileage award rates. AA started PE service back in October 2016. Since then FCF has done many **fare** alerts for AA's PE product. Below is a list of the most recent ones (many of the fares have expired, as fares often only last a few days, but this shows how low fares can be with American in PE):

[Premium Economy Fares Found from California to Europe from \\$826 R/T, Spring and Fall](#)

[New Asia Premium Economy Fares Found Starting at \\$884 R/T](#)

[\\$1,759 R/T Australia and New Zealand Premium Economy Fares Found on American](#)

Plus, we did an in-depth report on how reasonable an AA upsell is from economy, which can [cost as little as \\$7 per flight hour](#)—or can even come out free once you add in all the extras economy can cost nowadays.

NEW PE DEVELOPMENTS

Well, the time is finally here. AA [now offers a mileage redemption](#) for its PE cabin. And overall, FCF is satisfied with the award rates for most regions, as many rates are a split between economy and Business Class. For example, PE costs 40,000 miles one-way for U.S. to Europe and southern South America vs. 30,000 in economy and 57,500 in Business Class.

The major exceptions to this are Alaska, Asia (region 1), and Hawaii, as **the cost of Business Class is not much more than PE**, which means it's likely a better value just to get a free Business Class award, if you could. (See chart below for a quick look at the difference between economy, PE, Business Class, and First Class.)

American's New PE Cost at a Glance: The Difference Between Economy, Premium Economy, Business Class, and First Class, Each Way

U.S. To/From:	Economy	Premium Economy	Business Class	First Class
Alaska	15,000	25,000	30,000	55,000
Hawaii	22,500	50,000	55,000	80,000
Southern South America	30,000	40,000	57,500	85,000
Europe	30,000	40,000	57,500	85,000
Asia 1	35,000	50,000	60,000	80,000
Asia 2	35,000	50,000	70,000	110,000
South Pacific	40,000	65,000	80,000	110,000

Note that AA at this point is NOT offering PE awards to all regions, such as the U.S., Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America. To reiterate: AA is NOT changing mileage award rates in any category; it's just adding mileage award rates for its PE seat product.

UPGRADES TO PE OR PE PARTNER AWARDS

Neither upgrades to PE on American nor partners—such as British Airways or Qantas—awards are available yet. FCF thinks that PE partner redemption and American upgrades will be added in the near future, however, for right now it's not an option.



American Airlines Six Reasons NOT to Use American's Co-Branded Credit Cards

December 2018

To continue our series on earning points through high-value credit card offers, let's review:

- Part One: In [June](#), FCF highlighted 21 credit cards that allow you to earn points that can be transferred into miles on airlines offering the most lucrative premium travel opportunities.
- Part Two: In July, FCF highlighted [elite status earning credit cards](#).

This month, we'll dive into Part Three, as FCF highlights the pitfalls of using co-branded American Airlines credit cards. Long story short—you're going to miss out on some desirable destinations with this card.

1. Have plans to travel to Australia or New Zealand? Not with miles in comfort, as American never has any upgrades to these destinations, and very seldom offers any free mileage award space. Even its partner

Qantas rarely has any free premium award space.

But United, a Chase point transfer partner, intermittently has many upgrade opportunities (go [here](#) for Sydney example, [here](#) for Auckland and Sydney, and [here](#) for Melbourne and Sydney).

2. Thinking about Asia in First Class? American, and even its partner Japan Airlines, very seldom offer free First Class award space.

But All Nippon, an Amex Rewards point transfer partner (and accessible via United miles too, and therefore Chase points, although at a much high cost), has up to two seats with mileage award availability, and yes, this is for free First Class, for details go [here](#). Or, what about [First Class on Singapore Airlines](#), an Amex Rewards and Chase point transfer partner? With an American Airlines credit card, don't even think about any of these awesome options.

3. Would love to fly Emirates and experience this showers in the sky? Not able to do that, either, with an American co-branded credit card, because AA is not a partner with Emirates. But you can transfer Amex Reward points to Emirates.

4. Want to save big on American short-haul premium class flights? Then book a short-haul flight with British Airways miles, a transfer-point partner with Amex Rewards and Chase, because then you can score Business Class to the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico on American flights [for the same price as coach](#).

5. Want to earn points faster? Sorry, but American co-branded cards won't [multiply your earnings](#) like other cards will. Get 5X points for airline tickets and hotels or 3X points for phone or dining, for example.

6. Wish you could get transfer bonuses? Unlike most other programs, Amex Membership Rewards offers great bonuses with [British Airways](#) and [Virgin Atlantic](#), up to 40%.



Survey Shows 2,900%+ More Dates Available Using Mileage Upgrades with American and United Over Using Free Mileage Awards

February 2019

We've been telling you for 23 years that some airlines allocate many more seats for mileage upgrade awards, nowadays specifically American and United. So, if you've been around here for awhile, you've heard me talk a lot about little-used mileage upgrades—and this is for many reasons. In short, mileage upgrades are of most interest to two types of travelers:

- 1. Elite Status Travelers:** When you redeem miles for a free ticket, you do not earn elite credit for the trip. Therefore, with all those miles elites accumulate when they fly, for the most part, they MUST redeem them for Mileage Upgrade Awards (or for other people). While [FCF is not a big fan of chasing elite status](#), we understand that many have a different opinion and we concede that it does make sense for some.

2. Less-Flexible Travelers: It's this special class of travelers we especially want to focus on here. To help you understand that using miles for upgrades opens doors that are often closed when trying to use miles for free travel, so we decided to illuminate it in a side-by-side date-availability chart.

FLYING FROM SMALLER (OR NON-HUB) CITIES?

Smart travelers use the long-haul Business Class flight as a "bridge," which, in FCF terms, means booking the premium seat on the international leg and using—if premium deals aren't available—economy tickets to reach the long-haul departure city.

From the U.S., that means you should consider buying an economy through-fare ticket that includes the entire itinerary on one ticket. Then use miles just to upgrade from the gateway to your international destination's gateway, at a minimum. If upgrade space is available on the domestic segments (meaning from your departure city to the gateway) grab it, as the cost is the same.

Survey of American and United Award Disparity - Between Business Class Free Awards and Upgrade Awards

Route	Airline	Number of Dates Over the Next 330 Days with Two or More Seats Available		Difference
Free Awards	Upgrade Awards			
Houston > Tokyo	United	9	73	800%
Tokyo > Houston	United	3	97	3,200%
San Francisco > Sydney	United	8	85	1,000%
Sydney > San Francisco	United	3	89	2,900%
Washington, DC > Rome	United	0	22	∞
Rome > Washington, DC	United	0	44	∞
Miami > Brasília	American	0	80	∞
Brasília > Miami	American	0	214	∞
Raleigh > London	American	0	27	∞
London > Raleigh	American	0	30	∞

**Researched the week of January 28, 2019.*

WHAT TO DO WHEN AN UPGRADE IS ONLY AVAILABLE ONE WAY?

American and United let you combine economy and Business Class fares, so you can upgrade the flight segment that has upgrade space and book the one that doesn't in Business Class or even in Premium Economy.

Many of these tactics also work for anyone who can't find a low Business Class fare and for those who don't even have many American or United miles.

NEW TRENDS

United's Flash mileage upgrade award space. Yes, you read correctly, not only are airlines getting much better at flash fare sales, but now FCF is increasingly seeing United releasing flash mileage upgrade availability. What we mean by that is that one day a route could have 20+ days of availability for four passengers and then a day later all space is gone.

American's lack of mileage upgrade award space. Over the last few months, FCF has also noticed that American is starting to release fewer and fewer mileage upgrade awards. A year ago American had a lot of dates with upgrade award space and now you cannot even find a handful of dates with upgrade space.

New trend? FCF hopes not. Stay tuned.

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MILES TO PLAY?

United: Don't have any or enough United miles? No problem. Here are three ideas:

- Buy United miles when they go on sale (recent opportunity [here](#)).
- [Marriott's Travel Packages](#)
- Transfer points from Chase to United.

American: Don't have any or enough American miles? No problem. Two choices for you:

- Buy American miles when they go on sale (recent opportunity [here](#)).
- Transfer Starwood points (takes about two days), and you too can save big.

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