



# The Way to Score Business Class to the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico on American for the Same Price as Coach

July 2018

**Time to think about using your BA miles, as they're on the verge of devaluation.**

It's an open secret that British Airways is about to devalue its miles, probably in the next 12 months, more or less. So, the savvy traveler does what everyone confronted with devaluation does: Spend the miles. Especially as you can use the miles to book travel as far as 354 days out.

You do that by taking advantage of differences between partner-airline award charts, which come in two flavors: zone and flight-distance. The former divides the world into regions (the 48 contiguous states and Canada, for example), with every destination within the zone costing the same number of miles. A flight-distance chart charges based on the distance flown.

## FREE BUSINESS CLASS UPGRADES TO/FROM THE CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA, AND MEXICO

This one is an easy American vs. British Airways—for flights up to about 1,150 miles in distance one-way: On American Los Angeles-San Jose del Cabo and Miami-Aruba flights, for example, BA charges only 30,000 miles round-trip for Business Class—20,000 (40%) fewer miles than American charges (50,000 miles); AA charges 30,000 miles for coach. **In other words, think of this as a free upgrade.**

Yes, BA has hefty fuel surcharges on award tickets to London and many other places operated by its own flights, but to the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico on American flights, BA imposes only modest taxes, sometimes less than AA does.

Award taxes on Los Angeles-San Jose del Cabo are \$82 on AA and BA, and on Miami- Aruba, \$85 on both carriers.

*BritishAirways.com Los Angeles-San Jose del Cabo screenshot:*

<b>FLIGHTS</b>	
<b>AA0237</b> AMERICAN AIRLINES   BUSINESS   Confirmed	
1 Aug 2018	1 Aug 2018
08:30	12:07
LOS ANGELES	SAN JOSE DEL CABO
Terminal 0	Terminal 2
<b>AA1050</b> AMERICAN AIRLINES   BUSINESS   Confirmed	
8 Aug 2018	8 Aug 2018
16:03	17:37
SAN JOSE DEL CABO	LOS ANGELES
Terminal 2	Terminal B
<b>COST</b>	
<b>Avios points debited</b>	30000
<b>Payment Total</b>	<b>USD 82.40</b>

American.com screenshot:

Round trip Los Angeles, CA to San Jose Cabo, Mexico

Wednesday, August 1, 2018 to Wednesday, August 8, 2018

Your trip total
50,000 miles
+\$82.40

BritishAirways.com Miami-Aruba screenshot:

## FLIGHTS

**AA2217**  
AMERICAN AIRLINES | BUSINESS | Confirmed

4 Sep 2018 18:19 MIAMI	4 Sep 2018 21:15 ARUBA
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**AA1028**  
AMERICAN AIRLINES | BUSINESS | Confirmed

13 Sep 2018 14:43 ARUBA	13 Sep 2018 17:55 MIAMI
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## COST

Avios points debited	30000
Payment Total	<b>USD 84.71</b>

**IF YOU ARE SHORT ON AVIOS POINTS:  
USE CASH AND MILES TO MULTIPLY OPPORTUNITIES**

BA's [Avios & Money](#) option can be a great deal if you're willing to pay more cash and use fewer miles. On Dallas-Cancun in Business Class, BA wants 30,000 Avios points plus \$79 in taxes, while the Avios

& Money option requires 16,000 miles and \$269 in cash. Here's the translation: **BA is selling you the miles at 1.4¢ each (with no limit)**, more than a penny a mile less than the usual cost. Book before the devaluation and you're buying miles on the cheap that will take you farther.

It's a great way to conserve miles or to **get in the game with fewer miles**. Look at Avios & Money before even thinking about buying Amex Rewards points at 2.5¢ (500,000-mile annual limit). AA charges 50,000 miles in Business Class and 30,000 for coach plus \$154 for taxes, \$75 more than BA.

*BritishAirways.com Dallas-Cancun screenshot:*

<b>FLIGHTS</b>	
<b>AA1001</b> AMERICAN AIRLINES   BUSINESS   Confirmed	
2 Jul 2018 <b>12:00</b> <b>DALLAS FORT WORTH</b> Terminal 0	2 Jul 2018 <b>14:35</b> <b>CANCUN INTERNATIONAL</b> Terminal 3
<b>AA1601</b> AMERICAN AIRLINES   BUSINESS   Confirmed	
9 Jul 2018 <b>13:00</b> <b>CANCUN INTERNATIONAL</b> Terminal 3	9 Jul 2018 <b>16:00</b> <b>DALLAS FORT WORTH</b> Terminal D
<b>COST</b>	
<b>Avios points debited</b>	16000
<b>Payment Total</b>	<b>USD 269.52</b>

*American.com screenshot:*

Round trip Dallas/ Fort Worth, TX to Cancun, Mexico

Monday, July 2, 2018 to Monday, July 9, 2018

Your trip total

50,000 miles  
+ \$154.52

## GETTING BA AVIOS POINTS

BA is a points-transfer partner with Amex Rewards, Chase, and Starwood/Marriott, making it very easy to get points. Transfer time from Amex Rewards and Chase to BA is often instantly, while Starwood generally takes two to six days.

## HOW TO SEARCH FOR BA PARTNER AWARD SPACE

First, [create](#) a British Airways mileage account (takes five minutes), then [log in](#) to check for award space or call (1-800-452- 1201).

*Over the last month BA has been having problems with booking partner award space online for AA flights. If online award availability does not show, call BA at 1-800-452-1201.*

It's recommended to check the AA website for AA-operated award-flight availability before you buy or transfer miles or points, or do anything irreversible, so you know what your options really are. Our past research has found that award space is, at times, similar when using BA miles.

After you've logged in, go to "[Book a reward flight](#)."

Now, input your departure and destination, travel dates, desired cabin, and number of travelers; and then hit "Get flights." That simple.

In the chart below are 25 short-haul routes that offer American Business Class flights to the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico for 30,000 miles using BA miles—the same amount as AA charges for coach. **In other words, think of this as a free upgrade.**

## Free Upgrades Using British Airways Miles Instead of American Miles to Central America, Mexico, and the

# Caribbean

U.S. Departure Cities	Destinations	American Miles Round-Trip in Business Class	American Miles Round-Trip in Coach	British Airways Transferred Miles Round-Trip in Business Class
Charlotte	Cancun, Nassau			
Dallas	Cancun, Cozumel, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta, San José del Cabo			
Los Angeles	San José del Cabo			
Miami	Cancun, Grand Cayman, Montego Bay (and Kingston), Nassau, Providenciales (Turks and Caicos), Aruba, Belize City, Guatemala, Port-au-Prince, Puerto Plata, Punta Cana, San Juan, San José (CR), Santo Domingo, St. Thomas	50,000	30,000	24,000
New York	Bermuda			
Philadelphia	Nassau			

Below, is a sample of mileage award availability on American Airlines in Business Class to Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean.

## Sweet Redeem Survey: American Airlines Business Class

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
Charlotte - Cancún	Aug., March	July, Nov.	July through Oct., Nov., Dec. through April	Feb.	July, Aug., Jan.	July through Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April
Charlotte - Nassau	Feb., March		Jan.		March	Jan., Feb.
Dallas - Cancún	Jan., through April	Sept.	July, Aug., Sept., through April	Sept., April	Aug.	July, Aug. through April
Dallas - Cozumel	Jan.	Aug., Dec.	July, Aug. through Nov., Dec., Jan. through April	Aug.		July, Aug. through April
Dallas - Puerto Vallarta	Sept., Oct.	Aug., Nov., Dec.	July, Aug., Jan., through April	Sept., April	Aug., Oct., Nov., Jan.	July, Aug., Dec., Jan. through March

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	
				through March			
Dallas - San José del Cabo	Oct., Nov., Feb., <a href="#">April</a>	<a href="#">July</a> , Jan.	July, <a href="#">Aug.</a> , <a href="#">Sept.</a> , Dec., April	July, Jan., Feb., <a href="#">April</a>	Nov.	<a href="#">Aug.</a> , <a href="#">Sept.</a> , Oct., Dec.	
Los Angeles - San José del Cabo	<a href="#">July</a> , Nov.	Sept., Oct., Dec., <a href="#">Jan.</a> , March	July, <a href="#">Aug.</a> , Sept., Jan., <a href="#">Feb.</a> , March, April	<a href="#">July</a> , <a href="#">Sept.</a>	Nov., <a href="#">Jan.</a>	July, <a href="#">Aug.</a> , Sept., Oct., Dec., Jan., <a href="#">Feb.</a> through April	
Miami - Aruba		<a href="#">July</a>	July	Nov.			
Miami - Belize City	<a href="#">July</a> , Aug., Oct.	Feb., <a href="#">April</a> , May	July, <a href="#">Sept.</a> , Jan., April, May	<a href="#">July</a> , Aug., Jan., Feb., <a href="#">April</a> , May	Oct., Jan., April	<a href="#">July</a> , <a href="#">Sept.</a> , May	
Miami - Cancún	Oct., March, April	<a href="#">Sept.</a>	July, <a href="#">Aug.</a> , Sept., through April			July through Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April	
Miami - Grand Cayman	July, March	Aug.	July		<a href="#">July</a> , Aug.	July	
Miami - Guatemala	<a href="#">Jan.</a>	Oct.	Aug., <a href="#">Sept.</a> , Oct., Jan., <a href="#">Feb.</a> through May	Nov.	Jan., <a href="#">Feb.</a> , March	Aug. through Oct., Dec., Feb., March, April, May	
Miami - Montego Bay			July, Aug. through April		July	Aug. through April	
Miami - Nassau	March	<a href="#">Feb.</a>	Jan., Feb., March	<a href="#">Jan.</a> , <a href="#">Feb.</a> , March			
Miami - Port-au-Prince	July		Aug., through Nov., Jan. through May	July	Sept., through Nov.	Sept., Oct., Dec., Jan. through May	
Miami - Providenciales	<a href="#">Aug.</a> , <a href="#">Sept.</a> , Dec., Feb.	<a href="#">Jan.</a> , April	Aug., Sept., Jan.	Aug., March, April	Feb.	Jan.	
Miami - Puerto Plata	<a href="#">Oct.</a> , Nov., Feb., <a href="#">April</a>	July, <a href="#">Aug.</a> , March	Aug., <a href="#">Sept.</a> , Oct., March, April	<a href="#">Sept.</a> , <a href="#">Oct.</a> , Nov., Jan., Feb., <a href="#">March</a>	July, Oct., Dec., March		
Miami - Punta Cana	Oct., Dec.	<a href="#">Sept.</a> , Jan. through March, April	<a href="#">Aug.</a> , Sept., April	Nov., Dec.	<a href="#">Sept.</a> , Oct., Feb., March, <a href="#">April</a> , May	Jan.	
Miami - San José (CR)	<a href="#">Oct.</a> , Nov., March	<a href="#">Aug.</a> , Sept., April, May	Aug. through Oct., April, May	Oct., <a href="#">May</a>	Nov., Dec.	April, May	

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
Miami - San Juan		Sept., Nov. through Jan.	July, Aug. through Oct., Feb. through April	Aug., Oct., Feb., April	Sept., March	July, Aug., though Oct., Nov. through Jan., Feb., April
Miami - Santo Domingo	Aug., Nov. through Jan., Feb.	March, May	Sept., Oct., Feb., March, April, May	Feb., March	Sept., Dec., April	Sept., Oct., April, May
Philadelphia - Nassau	Dec., Jan., April	Feb., March	Jan.	Jan.	Dec., through March	

Months in black at least one seat available; in blue at least two seats; in green at least four seats.

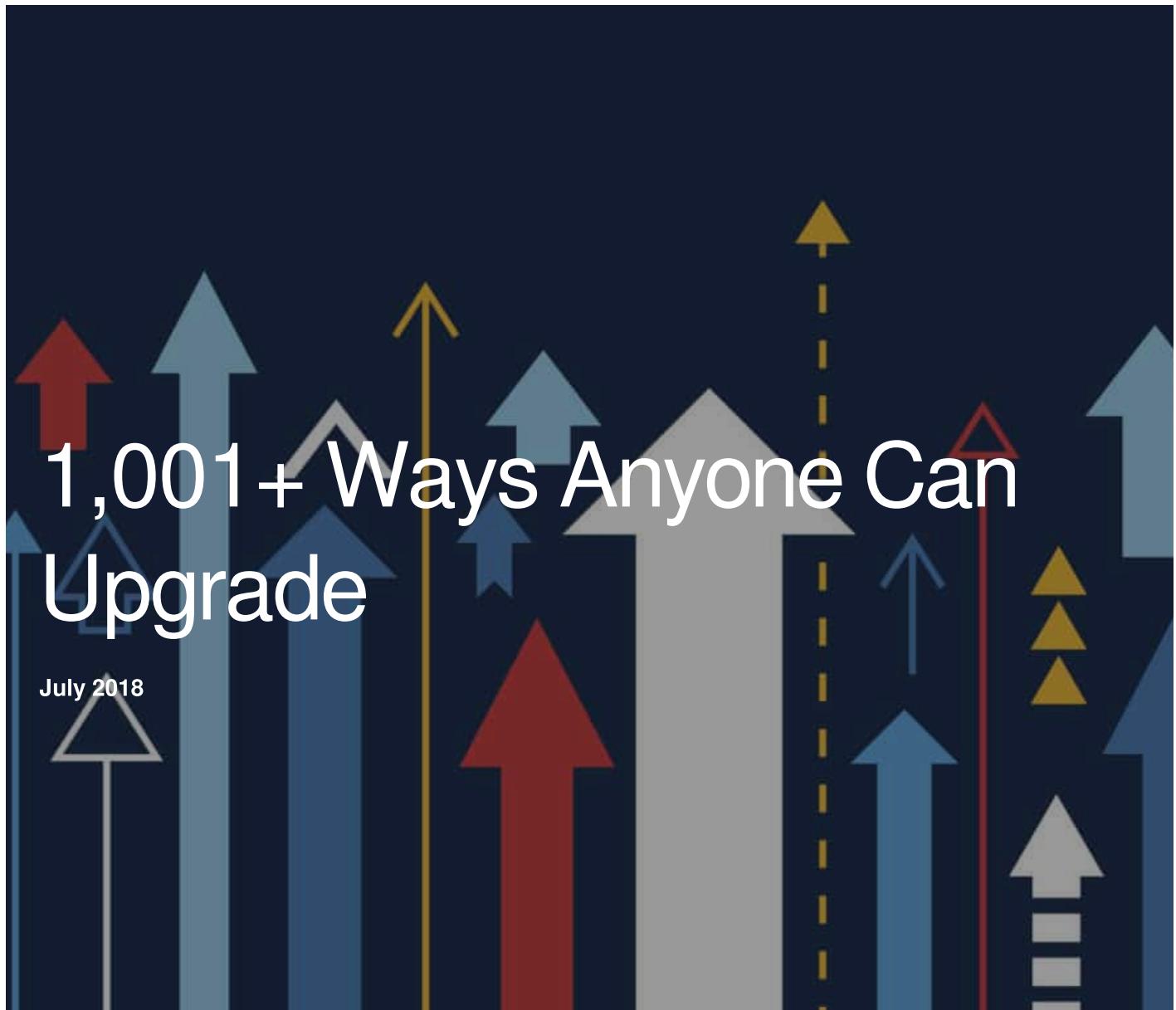
## Business Class for 10,000 More Miles Than Coach: British Airways Miles Instead of American Miles to Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean

U.S. Departure Cities	Destinations	American Miles Round-Trip in Business Class	American Miles Round-Trip in Coach	British Airways Miles Round-Trip in Business Class
Charlotte	Montego Bay			
Chicago	Cancun, Montego Bay			
Dallas	Guatemala, San José (CR)			
Miami	Antigua, Barbados, Curacao, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Mexico City, Trinidad, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Maarten	50,000	30,000	40,000
New York	Cancun, Port-au-Prince			
Philadelphia	Cancun, San Juan			

## CONNECTING AND LONG-DISTANCE FLIGHTS: BETTER DEAL WITH AMERICAN MILES

If you are flying **longer distances**, say, Chicago-San Juan, there's no sense in using BA miles, as BA does not offer a savings. For example, Chicago-San Juan in Business Class is 75,000 British Airways miles and American is 50,000—no deal with BA miles.

For **connecting flights**, like Atlanta-Cancun (via Miami), again, AA is the better deal because, AA only charges 50,000 miles total, BA charges for each flight segment, 30,000 miles for Atlanta-Miami and 30,000 miles for Miami-Cancun, a total of 60,000 miles.



Anyone can upgrade. That's right, there are lots of ways to do it.

*Let's first define what an upgrade is, to FCF anyway...*

## A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Upgrade (noun): A tangible mechanism which enables the quality of a situation to improve; could be status in a loyalty program, a reward, or something as simple as a piece of intel you weren't otherwise aware of.

**The quality of a situation.**

Knowing that a certain route has lie-flat seats, while another, which costs the same, doesn't—that's improving the quality of a situation. That's an **upgrade**.

Discovering a way to fly to London in Business Class for just 10,000 miles more than coach, when the cost is normally much higher—that's improving the quality of a situation. That's a **low-cost upgrade**.

Adding a second destination to lower your airfare by 50%—that's improving the quality of a situation. That's a **trip upgrade**.

## FEEL-GOOD UPGRADES

**Anyone can upgrade the quality of their seats—for no additional cost—if they know the domestic routes or flights** with seats that offer a much better experience: at last count, **138 ways**.

**Explain it:** Airlines invest much more in the quality of seats on long-haul, international routes, usually operated with wide-body aircraft, because fares are often \$5,000 to \$15,000, if not \$30,000—so they get a return on investment there. For various reasons, these aircraft show up in airline schedules on domestic flights from time to time, even though there's little revenue in domestic First these days. If you know the routes using these aircraft, you can upgrade your seat quality for no extra cost.

**Prove it:** If you're flying from Los Angeles to Honolulu on United, the UA1158 flight has a B777-200—with a lie-flat Business Class seat—while the UA1431 flight offers a meagre B757 with a standard domestic premium seat.

It's a HUGE difference, yet the cost is the same. At the same time, use this strategy if you're connecting onward. For example, from most cities in the U.S. you must make a connection to reach Maui, so why not book United via Chicago instead of via Los Angeles or San Francisco to get the international Business Class seat? That's a **free in-class upgrade**.

**Here are flights where anyone can upgrade:**

- 82 flights on American ([10 flights to/from Hawaii](#), [14 flights to/from the Caribbean](#), [58 domestic flights](#))
- 24 flights on Delta ([16 domestic flights](#), [8 flights to/from Hawaii](#))
- 32 flights on United ([2 flights to/from the Caribbean](#), [30 flights to/from Hawaii](#))

**Anyone can upgrade if they buy miles/points strategically**—especially when they're on sale—instead of paying big fare differences between one class of service and another. This works with dozens of airlines on 700+ flights.

**Explain it:** Airlines have gone ape selling everything but the kitchen sink, including priority boarding, checked bags, exit-row seating—and even their loyalty program miles. If you buy miles when they're on sale, you can easily fly First Class for the price of Business or for even much less.

**Prove it:** The published First Class fare on Cathay Pacific for New York-Hong Kong runs \$30,273. However, you could have bought American miles through a [recent sale](#) that offered miles as low as 1.72¢ each, and redeem them on Cathay Pacific, its Asian partner, to ultimately pay \$4,380 round-trip (including \$64 in taxes), a savings of \$25,893 (85%).

Considering Business Class typically runs \$7,803, you can get two First Class tickets for just \$950 more than the cost of one Business Class ticket. If you were to call this deal almost **a 2-for-1—plus a free upgrade**—you'd be right.

**A few recent deals based on buying miles:**

[Countless flights with American Airlines and partners](#) including British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines, and Qantas.

[Countless flights with Alaska Airlines partner opportunities](#) including Air France, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, and Emirates.

[Countless flights with United and partner opportunities](#) including Air Canada, All Nippon, and Singapore.

[Countless flights with LifeMiles and partners](#) including All Nippon, Asiana, Lufthansa, and Singapore.

[Countless flights with Amex Membership Rewards partners](#) including Air Canada, All Nippon, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, and Virgin Atlantic

[Countless flights with Starwood partners](#) including American, All Nippon, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Etihad, Singapore, and Qantas.

**Dive Deeper:** [FCF's Beginner's Guide to Buying Miles Strategically](#) to save 90%+. [When to buy miles/points](#) instead of purchasing a normal published fare.

[How the Major SkyTeam Airlines Rate for the Person Who Has Few or No Miles, But Wants to Get in the Upgrade Game Overnight](#)

[How the Major Oneworld Airlines Rate for the Person Who Has Few or No Miles, But Wants to Get in the Upgrade Game Overnight](#)

[How the Major Star Alliance Airlines Rate for the Person Who Has Few or No Miles, But Wants to Get in the Upgrade Game Overnight](#)

## [How the Major Non-Alliance Airlines Rate for the Person Who Has Few or No Miles, But Wants to Get in the Upgrade Game Overnight](#)

**Anyone can upgrade if they choose destinations with extraordinarily low premium fares**, or as the airlines call them, [tactical fares](#).

**Explain it:** Pricing of airfares can be a mystery. Often, it's simply demand, such as a heavy business-travel route versus a light-demand leisure route. Sometimes it's seasonality. Or sometimes it's based on projected flight loads or because airlines just want to poach competitors' customers by slashing fares in those hub markets.

Knowing destinations that are priced low in First or Business Class can net you a much more **luxurious vacation—one that starts when you board the plane**.

**Prove it:** Los Angeles to Honolulu in Business Class often costs \$1,000+ round-trip, or \$400 to \$700 in coach. But if you choose a vacation destination like Los Cabos, Mexico, or San Jose, Costa Rica, you can often buy Business Class for \$450 to \$700 round-trip—so, Business Class might only be \$50 to \$100 more than coach, or virtually a 2-for-1. That's a **tropical upgrade**.

While these fares come and go at the airline's whim—you can keep up with [FCF's latest finds here](#) and our latest [search tool in beta mode here](#). Six examples of recent destinations with **extraordinarily low premium fares...**

- [10 low fares to Asia](#)
- [7 hidden fares to South America](#)
- [5 hidden fares to South Africa](#)
- [10 hidden fares to India and the Maldives](#)
- [9 Caribbean Business Class fares that cost what coach does to Hawaii](#)
- [9 Mexico Business Class fares that cost what coach does to Hawaii](#)

**Dive Deeper:** If you can be an [opportunity traveler](#), the world opens up like an oyster. An insider's look at major airlines' [tactical fares](#).

**Anyone can upgrade—very cheaply and sometimes free—if they collect points in the most lucrative programs** that net Business Class for almost the same price as coach, **or** First Class for the same price or less than Business.

**Explain it:** If you earn points with a multi-currency credit card, like in American Express' Membership Rewards program, and book via a partner airline that charges a lot fewer miles, as opposed to earning miles via traditional airline co-branded credit cards, you can get free and low-cost upgrades.

**Prove it:** When you earn miles with a United credit card to book flights to Southern South America, it costs 60,000 miles for coach. But you can use an American Express earning card that nets points transferable to United's partner Asiana Airlines and pay 70,000 miles for Business Class for the same United flight—only 10,000 more miles.

Or, through the Amex Membership Rewards program, you can transfer 88,000 points to Star Alliance member All Nippon and book a ticket on Lufthansa to Europe in Business Class, instead of using United miles to book Lufthansa in coach for 70,000 miles—meaning you fly the Lufthansa flight in Business Class for only 18,000 more miles. That's a **low-cost upgrade**.

**Also, forget about being in bondage to American, Delta, and United**, and earn points with their partners and you can fly the big three U.S. airlines for much less.

**Here are 400+ examples of ways you can fly Business and First for the same cost as, or not much more than, coach or Business:**

[16 Ways American AAdvantage Loyalists Can Upgrade to First Class to Europe for Less than Free, Free, or Very Little, on 16+ Flights](#)

[26 Ways American AAdvantage Loyalists Can Upgrade to Business Class to Europe for Less than Free, Free, or Very Little, on 26+ Flights](#)

[13 Ways United MileagePlus Loyalists Can Upgrade to Europe for Free, Less than Free, or Very Little, on 13+ Flights](#)

[Nine Ways Delta Travelers Can Upgrade to Europe for Less Than Free or Barely More Than Coach, on 9+ Flights](#)

[Cheaper than 2-for-1s for Delta travelers, or American and United fliers can fly Business Class for just 8,000 more miles than coach round-trip, on 5+ Flights](#)

[Business Class for as little as 3,000 more miles than coach for travel to Europe, on 14+ Flights](#)

[Business Class for the same price as coach to Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean, on 24+ Flights](#)

[Get Business Class to Europe on Delta for only 20,000 more miles than coach, on 150+ Flights](#)

[Get Business Class to South America on United for only 10,000 more miles than coach, on 50+ Flights, and 20,000 more miles to Europe on 150+ Flights](#)

[Get Business Class to South America on American for only 5,000 more miles than coach, on 5+ Flights](#)

**Anyone can upgrade—for free or less—if they tack on a side trip to high-cost Transcontinental U.S. routes.**

**Explain it:** Sometimes you can get two destinations for the price of one with stopover rules, the deep weeds of the airline business. The key is to find **a low-fare route that allows a free stopover**. On the transcontinental route, if you're flying less than 14 days out you might as well get a free side trip.

**Prove it:** American's New York-Los Angeles round-trip Business Class fare runs [\\$2,877+](#) on short notice, while New York-San Jose del Cabo runs just [\\$1,423](#) and allows a stop in New York (which would be your transcon flight JFK-LAX). So, you can do business in Los Angeles, vacation for a few days in San Jose del Cabo, and then fly home. That's **massive savings** and **a trip upgrade!**

Here are a few more examples:

[Outflanking Sky-High Transcon Short-Notice and Saturday-Night-Stay Fares](#)

[The Scenic Route: How to Get Europe Free When Flying to Asia—Or Asia Free When Flying to Europe](#)

[How to utilize a strategy to get three destinations for “half the price of one.”](#)

**Anyone can upgrade short-haul (domestic or international) flights—if they use airline mileage programs that charge by distance.**

**Explain it:** Award charts come in two forms: zone and flight-distance. The former divides the world into regions (the 48 contiguous states and Canada is one zone, for example), and every destination within that region costs the same number of miles. A flight-distance chart simply charges fares based on the distance flown. Opportunity knocks when one airline's alliance partner uses a zone chart and another partner uses a flight-distance chart because the two can be played against each other.

**Prove it:** Fly American on the Miami-Aruba route, for example, and you could pay 50,000 miles in Business Class or 30,000 miles in coach with American Airlines miles (a zone-chart program). Or, use British Airways miles (easy to get with Amex Rewards, Chase, and Starwood/Marriott points transfers) because that airline utilizes a flight-distance chart program, and pay only 30,000 miles round-trip in Business Class for flights on its partner American. That's 20,000 (40%) fewer miles than American charges in Business Class or **a free upgrade from coach**.

**Dive Deeper:**

[How to Get Business Class to the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico on American—for the Same Price as Coach](#)

[Get Business Class to Canada on American—for Less Than the Price of Coach \(or Just a Bit More\)](#)

[Domestic U.S. Steal](#): Get Business Class on American Airlines for 20,000 fewer miles

**Anyone can upgrade if they pick routes with unusually high availability of low-cost mileage awards instead of locking into high-cost dates and/or destinations.**

**Explain it:** Fly the exact date/airline/route that you want and 99 times out of 100, airlines will give you inflated “anytime award” pricing. Book when seats are available at low-cost mileage levels and fly Business Class for the price of coach or First Class for the price of Business or less.

**Prove it:** Delta usually charges 350,000 miles for an anytime award to Europe in Business Class and up to 134,000 miles in coach. Book when seats are available at [low-cost mileage levels](#), such as 140,000 miles to fly Business Class, which is little more than the price of coach.

To South America, United typically charges 310,000 miles for an anytime/everyday award in Business Class and 140,000 in coach. Buy when seats are [available at low-cost mileage levels](#), such as 120,000 miles to fly Business Class, for **less than the price of coach**.

Most people see these rates and give up. On the search at hand, and many give up on ever being able to spend their miles.

If this is you or someone you know, be encouraged with [247+ months offering ready-baked / upgraded trips](#) on **routes with low-cost mileage rates** we've covered over the last few months.

## A FEW BONUS UPGRADES

So there you have it: 1,001+ “other” ways to upgrade. Of the countless more ways, here are a few of [Mr. Upgrade's](#) favorites:

**Cash Deal:**

[FCF's Surefire Way to Outfox Delta and its SkyTeam Partners to Europe and South America](#)

**Miles Deals:**

[Premium Ticketing Strategy Nets Business Class for 33.33% LESS Than Coach When You Book Two Different Trips at the Same Time](#)

[Leg Stretch Strategy Nets First Class for 105,000 Fewer Miles than Business Class When You Book Two Different Trips at the Same Time](#)

[Fly around the world for 55,000 fewer miles than Delta and others charges to Asia in Business Class](#)

[Fly around the world for 20,000 fewer miles than Delta and others charges to Europe in Business Class](#)

 **MR MATTHEW BENNETT**

## Reservation Details

Reservation Number	Reservation / purchase status
<b>4A4ZHW</b>	Ticketed
Required mileage	Taxes/Fees/Charges
<b>105,000 Miles</b>	<b>USD 579.31</b>
Adult x1	

Flight Itinerary / Payment / Benefits Type		Passenger Passport/Passenger Information		Service Seat/In-flight Meal/Assistance		
Itinerary						
Departure/Arrival		Flight	Seat	Class	Status	Service
Feb 27 Monday 7h25min	15:55      New York(JFK) 05:20 +1day Frankfurt	LH401 74H Operated by Lufthansa German Airline	--	Business	OK	
Mar 8 Wednesday 11h25min	11:30      Frankfurt 06:55 +1day Tokyo(Haneda)	NH204 ANA 77W	--	Business	OK	 Lounge  Meal  Movie  Duty Free
Mar 20 Monday 2h40min	12:30      Tokyo(Narita) 15:10      Seoul(Incheon)	OZ101 77L Operated by Asiana Airlines	--	Business	OK	
Mar 22 Wednesday 13h55min	10:05      Seoul(Incheon) 11:00      New York(JFK)	OZ222 388 Operated by Asiana Airlines	--	Business	OK	

See you up front.



FCF discovered the Leg Stretch Strategy (LSS) to Europe and South America and unveiled it last July, when fares started at [\\$2,460 in Business Class](#). Since then, the fares have expired, come back at even lower rates, and then expired again.

Bingo! Now they're back on some routes, starting at [\\$2,555](#). But you need to move fast because these fares can turn on a dime.

## HOW DOES LEG STRETCH STRATEGY WORK?

**For FCF upgrade-mindset newbies and for the rest of you, a quick recap:** FCF's Leg Stretch Strategy (LSS) works best for the person who will travel (or would like to travel) to Europe at least twice in one year,

and South America once. If this isn't you, look at the amazing fares and ask yourself, "Might I consider such a trip if the cost is really this ridiculously low?"

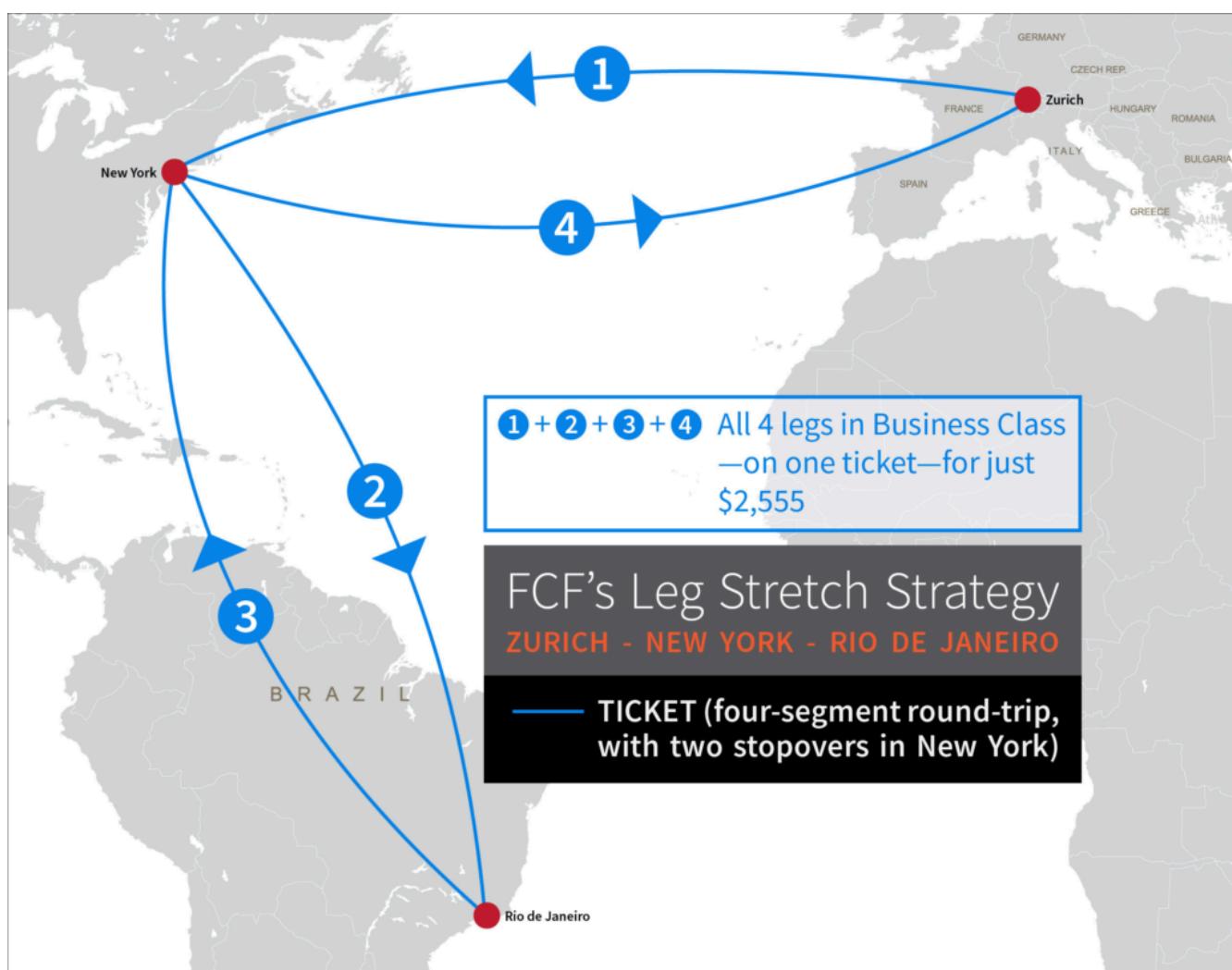
The strategy makes use of round-trip itineraries between two continents (in this case Europe and South America) with stopovers each way in a third continent (in this installment, North America, specifically the U.S.). This last one is the "connecting continent."

The one kicker is that you have to get yourself to Europe because that's where the itinerary originates. We suggest getting a one-way ticket using miles. We've made that part easy with a special report, go [here](#): Cheap & Easy Business and First Class One-Way Mileage Awards and How They Can Unlock a Big Deal.

**This itinerary has four discreet legs on one ticket (equivalent to two round-trips):**

So, let's make this concrete:

in Business Class on Delta.



**Here's how it goes, starting with the U.S. departure:**

1. Book a one-way ticket to Europe (details [here](#)).
2. Purchase a round-trip ticket on Delta from Europe to South America **via the U.S. (the stopovers are free) and you can stop over for as long as you like.** That is, as long as all travel on the ticket is completed within one year from your departure date.
3. Then it's off to South America.
4. Back to the U.S. (the second stopover).
5. Back to Europe, the final leg of the ticket.
6. **Decision Time:** You can return home on another one-way ticket **OR** you can start the process again, returning to the U.S. as leg one of your next Leg Stretch Strategy ticket.

A New York to Zurich return ticket on Delta in economy ranges from ~\$600 to \$900, and a New York to Rio de Janeiro return ticket in economy ranges from ~\$1,200 to \$1,800. That's \$1,800 at a minimum to fly economy—and the total can easily rise to \$2,700 during peak season. The LSS nets the same itinerary for \$2,555. See below.

WED 12 SEP	<b>ZRH → JFK</b> 1:40 PM 4:42 PM <b>DL 408</b> 9h 2m   NONSTOP	Delta One® (Z) Changeable / Nonrefundable <a href="#">Delta Air Lines Baggage Information</a>	Price per Passenger <b>CHF2,355.00</b> Taxes, Fees and Charges <b>CHF189.50</b>
	<a href="#">▶ Details</a> <a href="#">View Seats</a>		
TUE 06 NOV	<b>JFK → GIG</b> 11:40 AM 06:45 AM <b>ARRIVES NEXT DAY</b> <b>DL 463, DL 61</b> 16h 5m   1 STOP	First Class (F)   Delta One® (Z) Changeable / Nonrefundable <a href="#">Delta Air Lines Baggage Information</a>	
	<a href="#">▶ Details</a> <a href="#">View Seats</a>		
TUE 13 NOV	<b>GIG → JFK</b> 10:50 PM 10:35 AM <b>ARRIVES NEXT DAY</b> <b>DL 60, DL 2350</b> 14h 45m   1 STOP	Delta One® (Z)   First Class (F) Changeable / Nonrefundable <a href="#">Delta Air Lines Baggage Information</a>	
	<a href="#">▶ Details</a> <a href="#">View Seats</a>		
WED 01 MAY	<b>JFK → ZRH</b> 8:38 PM 10:30 AM <b>ARRIVES NEXT DAY</b> <b>DL 407</b> 7h 52m   NONSTOP	Delta One® (Z) Changeable / Nonrefundable <a href="#">Delta Air Lines Baggage Information</a>	Total Price (CHF) <b>CHF2,544.50</b>
	<a href="#">▶ Details</a> <a href="#">View Seats</a>		

**CHF = Swiss Franc; Delta's currency conversion to U.S. dollars:**



**Currency Calculator** \*REQUIRED

\* Amount:

\* From Currency:

\* To Currency:  **CALCULATE**

Result: \$2555.19 USD \*

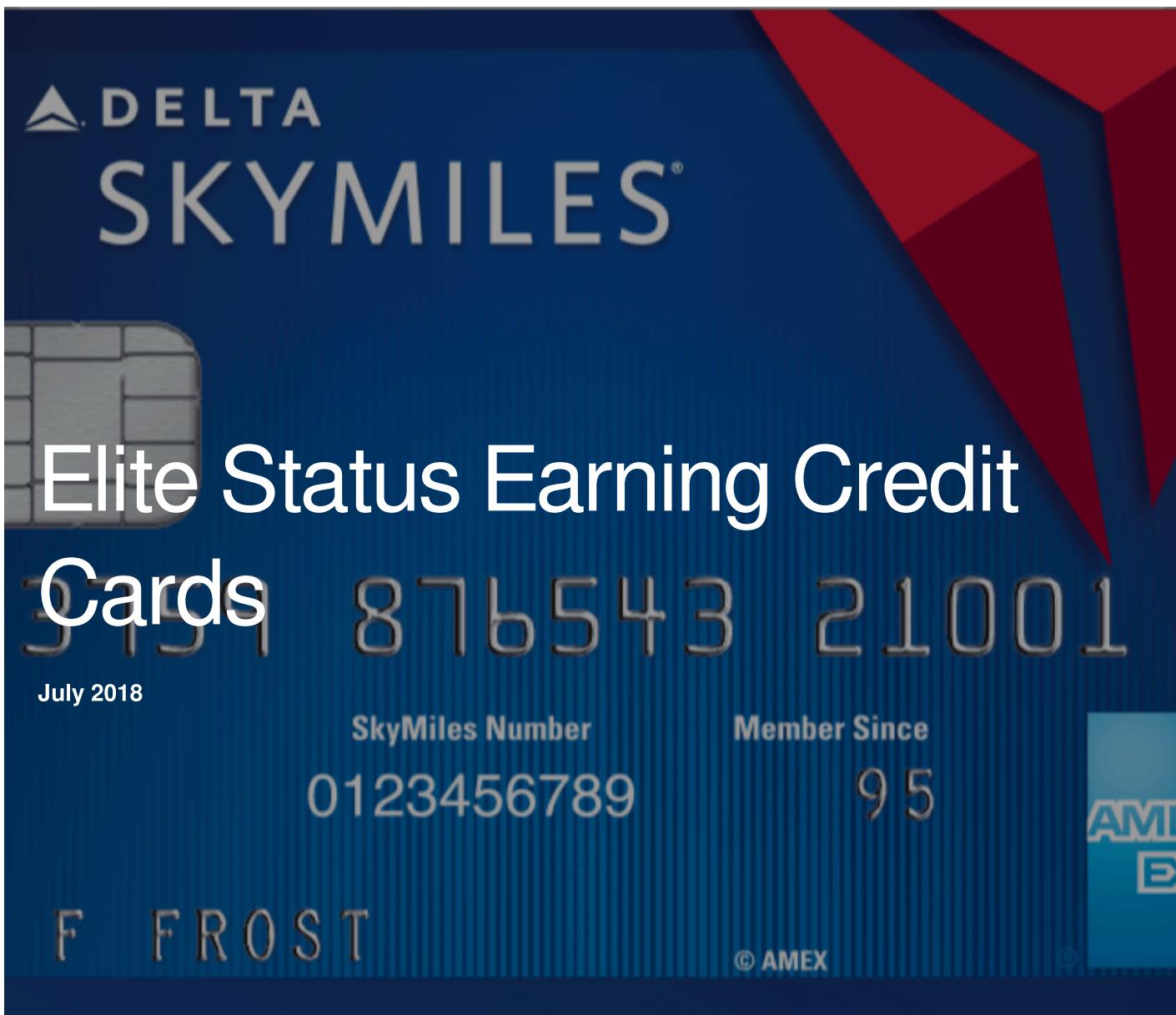
Approximate exchange rate: 1 CHF = 1.004201 USD

\* The total billed may appear differently on your credit card statement based on the exchange rate at the time your card issuer processes this transaction. [↳](#)

## THE LEG STRETCH STRATEGY EXTRAPOLATED

We've crunched the numbers on a number of Europe/South America trips and found many options. Here are 12 examples that come in under \$2,985, each with a link to the Google Flights page showing the deal.

Start Your LSS Ticket In:	Your U.S. Stop (Both Going and Coming):	Your South American Destination:	Fare for Four Legs (in effect, two round-trips)	Quick Links:
Zurich	New York	Rio de Janeiro	\$2,565	Expired
Zurich	New York	Sao Paulo	\$2,556	Expired
Stockholm	Atlanta	Buenos Aires	\$2,658	Expired
Amsterdam	Washington, DC	Sao Paulo	\$2,719	Expired
Stockholm	New York	Sao Paulo	\$2,766	Expired
Lisbon	New York	Sao Paulo	\$2,856	Expired
Madrid	New York	Rio de Janeiro	\$2,901	Expired
Milan	New York	Sao Paulo	\$2,848	Expired
Copenhagen	New York	Rio de Janeiro	\$2,988	Expired
Frankfurt	Atlanta	Sao Paulo	\$2,944	Expired
Munich	Atlanta	Sao Paulo	\$2,937	Expired
Lisbon	New York	Rio de Janeiro	\$3,081	Expired



## Worth the Deal? Only if elite is a must.

Last month, FCF highlighted 21 credit cards with one focus: earning points that can be transferred into miles on airlines offering the most lucrative premium travel opportunities.

In the report, FCF included our [new Credit Card-iogram](#) and highlighted how credit cards are a two-way street: earning and spending.

This month, part two, we add to our Credit Card-iogram those cards whose focus is to earn elite qualifying miles (EQMs) and/or elite qualifying dollars (EQDs).

## ELITE... IF YOU MUST

As many long-time FCF readers know, we've written about the elite subject many times over the last 22 years, from day one. Our view is that you should have an ***Elite-Status Declaration of Independence mindset***, more on that [here](#). But we also know that many of you have reasons to remain elite focused. So, here are the three major airlines offering elite qualifying miles- or dollars-earning credit cards (which, by the way, have also been added to our [Credit Card-iogram](#)).

### TWO AMERICAN ELITE STATUS EARNING CARDS

- Citi / AAdvantage Executive World Elite Mastercard, \$450 annual fee.
- AAdvantage Aviator Silver World Elite Mastercard, \$195 annual fee.

The [Citi/AAdvantage Executive World Elite Mastercard](#) earns 10,000 EQMs after you spend \$40,000. It also comes with Admirals Club access.

Current AAdvantage Aviator Mastercard members can contact Barclaycard customer service to inquire about upgrading to the [AAdvantage Aviator Silver Mastercard](#). The Aviator Silver card earns 10,000 EQMs after spending \$40,000, and it also earns 6,000 EQDs after you spend \$50,000.

Get both cards (as they are issued by two different banks), meet the spending requirement on both, and earn up to 20,000 EQMs per year.

### TWO DELTA ELITE STATUS EARNING CARDS

- Delta Reserve Card, \$450 annual fee.
- Platinum Delta Card, \$195 annual fee.

The most EQMs can be earned with the [Delta Reserve](#) card. You get 10,000 EQMs after you spend \$3,000 in the first three months, plus you can earn another 15,000 EQMs after you spend \$30,000, and another 15,000 EQMs after you spend \$60,000 in one year, so a total of 40,000 EQMs. It also comes with lounge access.

The [Platinum Delta](#) card earns 5,000 EQMs after you spend \$1,000 in your first three months, plus you can earn another 10,000 EQMs after you spend \$25,000, and another 10,000 EQMs after you spend \$50,000 in one year, so a total of 25,000 EQMs.

If you don't meet the required EQDs spend, both cards have a built-in waiver. You can keep your elite status for Platinum, Gold, and Silver if you've earned the required elite miles or segments *and* spend at least \$25,000 on the card (for Diamond status you must spend \$250,000) within that qualification year.

### JETBLUE ELITE STATUS EARNING CARDS

- [JetBlue Plus Card](#), \$99 annual fee.

Simple: spend \$50,000 and you're an elite.

## **ALASKA AND UNITED ELITE STATUS EARNING CARDS**

Sorry, elites, neither airline offers an elite status earning card.

# How Business and Leisure Travelers Can Save Up to 62% to Europe With United Upgrades

July 2018

In the past seven months, FCF has written seven special reports for oneworld (American) and Star Alliance (United) members looking to deploy miles in order to achieve or maintain elite status *while flying up front*.

In December, we focused on [American to Europe](#), in January to [Asia on American](#), in February to [South America on American](#), in March on the [Transcon on American](#), in April to [Hawaii on American](#), in May to [Asia on United](#), and in June to [South America on United](#).

By the way, 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.

## SAME APPROACH APPLIED TO UNITED'S EUROPE ROUTES

**Our pitch:** As we've been saying, you might want to forget about free mileage awards because they don't earn elite credit, and it can be difficult to find free award availability. Instead, use miles to upgrade because availability is much greater, and you earn miles and elite credit.

## UNITED'S UPGRADE PROGRAM

To upgrade to Business Class to Europe, [United](#) requires 20,000 miles plus a co-pay of \$550 each way on the lowest upgradeable economy fares (W, S, T, K, L, and G). **When Business Class fares are high, using miles for an upgrade can offer a great return.**

## HOW TO SAVE 62% ON HIGH-FARE ROUTES

Say you're traveling Chicago to Munich, often an expensive Business Class route, even when booked way in advance. The lowest United economy fare is currently \$768, while Business Class is \$4,909 (\$4,141 more). So, even with the \$1,100 co-pay, you can save \$3,041 (62%) off the published fare by using miles. (See chart below for upgrade award availability survey.)

*United.com screenshot showing fare difference between economy and Business Class plus Upgrade Math:*

**Departure: Select your flight**  
Chicago, IL, US → Munich, DE

Nonstop \$768  With stops \$771 [Choose connecting airports](#)

Depart Arrive Stops Duration

Wed, Jan 16 6:05 pm Thu, Jan 17 9:50 am Nonstop 8h 45m [Details](#) [Seats](#)

Business (upgrade- eligible Economy fare)	Business (lowest)
Roundtrip <b>\$768</b> +20k miles +\$550 co-pay each way, per person	Roundtrip <b>\$4,909</b> <a href="#">Select</a>

## LOW ECONOMY ROUTE SAVES 56%

San Francisco to Paris is one of United's lowest economy fare routes, currently starting at \$628 round-trip, while Business Class is \$3,910. Even with the \$1,100 co-pay you can save \$2,182 (56%) off the published fare by using miles to upgrade.

*United.com screenshot with 56% savings opportunity:*

Fare	\$454.00
Taxes and fees	\$126.31
MileagePlus Upgrade Awards	40,000 miles
Airport passenger duty	\$48.00
Upgrade Award service charges	\$1,100.00

## Trip summary

Tue, Jan 08, 2019

**TOTAL** **\$1,728.31**  
+ 40,000 miles

Tue, Jan 8	2:50 pm	✈	Wed, Jan 9	10:35 am	Nonstop
	San Francisco, CA, US (SFO)		Paris, FR (CDG - Charles de Gaulle)		10h 45m total
	UA 990	Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner		WiFi	ⓘ
				<a href="#">Revise flight</a>	<a href="#">Details</a>

Tue, Jan 15, 2019

9:10 am	✈	11:45 am	Nonstop
Paris, FR (CDG - Charles de Gaulle)		San Francisco, CA, US (SFO)	11h 35m total
UA 984	Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner		WiFi
			<a href="#">Revise flight</a>
			<a href="#">Details</a>

## BRIDGE ROUTE CONNECTIONS CAN SAVE UP TO 54%

Smart travelers use the long-haul Business Class flight as a “bridge,” which means getting the premium seat on that leg, the one that matters most, and using economy to reach the gateway.

From the U.S., that means you should consider buying an economy through-fare ticket, meaning a fare that includes the entire itinerary on one ticket. If upgrade space is available on the domestic segments, grab it, of course, as the cost is the same.

**Example:** On Fort Lauderdale-Madrid the lowest through-fare ticket (connecting via Newark) costs \$698 in economy, instead of \$3,902 in Business Class. Even with the \$1,100 co-pay to upgrade the long-haul segment (Newark-Madrid), you save \$2,104 (54%) off the published fare by using miles.

Use our survey below to have an idea of upgrade availability on the long-haul segment.

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

United lets you combine economy and Business Class fares, so you can upgrade the flight-segment that has upgrade space and book the other leg in Business Class. On Chicago-Frankfurt, the combined coach-Business Class fare is \$3,353, while round-trip Business Class is \$4,923. So, even with the \$550 one-way co-pay, you can still save \$1,020 (21%) by using miles one way.

## TRAVELING ONWARD IN EUROPE, BUT NOT ON UNITED?

It's easy if you stick with United's partners, and book the entire trip on one ticket, in coach or Business Class, and just upgrade the United Transatlantic segments. Book the routing in coach based on the availability of Business Class upgrades.

[Lufthansa](#): Flights to other destinations in Europe from Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich include: Athens, London, Cyprus (Larnaca), Moscow, Prague, and countless others.

[SWISS](#): Flights from Zurich include: Amsterdam, Bucharest, Dublin, Malta, Oslo, and countless others.

[Brussels Airlines](#): Flights from Brussels include: Lyon, Milan, Nice, Stockholm, Venice, and many others.

**How you can get almost anywhere on one ticket:** Say you want to fly from Newark to Riga (Latvia). On United, that could mean making a connection in Frankfurt.

The lowest upgradeable economy through-fare is \$834 round-trip versus \$3,878 in Business Class. You upgrade the bridge legs of the trip, Newark-Frankfurt-Newark, which is easy by referring to **our cheat sheet below, which reveals the best months for upgrade availability**.

Even with the \$1,100 co-pay (plus 40,000 miles), you can save 50% (\$1,944) off the published fare by using miles. Note that the connecting leg (Frankfurt- Riga) will be in economy on partner airline Lufthansa.

## HOW TO BOOK MILEAGE UPGRADES ON UNITED

Determine availability date-clusters online using our survey below.

- Confirm that the flights/dates you want are available for the upgrade using miles by requesting upgrade award space on the "[All search options](#)" page.
- Make sure you have the miles required in your account.
- Click on the "Upgrade type" search in the middle of the page.
- In the "Fare preferences" section, select the "Buy Economy and upgrade" option to search for upgrade space to Business Class. Your search result will not only show fares and flight schedules, but also the

flights offering an upgrade and the cost.

- Click on “Details” to find out if the upgrade space is available.
- Select your flights and book your ticket.

This can all be done online. (For detailed screenshots of the steps go [here](#).) If you want to book over the phone, call (800) 421-4655.

## HOW ANYONE CAN PLAY THIS UPGRADE GAME

Don't have any or enough United miles? No problem. **Just buy United miles when they go on sale** (recent opportunity [here](#)), or transfer Starwood points to Marriott and redeem points with [Marriott's Travel Packages](#) (for more information go [here](#)), or transfer points from Chase to United.

## Sweet Redeem Survey: United Mileage Upgrades to Europe

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
Chicago - Brussels	Dec.			July, Aug., April	Sept., Jan., Feb., May	July, Aug., Dec., April
Chicago - Frankfurt	Nov., Feb., March	July, Aug., Dec., Jan., April	Jan.		Sept., Oct., March	July, Aug., Nov. through Feb., April
Chicago - London	Jan., April	Aug., Dec.		Sept., Oct., March		Aug., Dec. through Feb., April
Chicago - Munich	Aug., Oct., Nov.	July, Dec., Nov. through April	July, Jan.	Sept., Oct.	Nov., Feb., March	July, Aug., Dec., Jan., April
Chicago - Paris	Nov., Jan.	July		Aug.	July, Jan., March	Dec., Feb.
Houston - Amsterdam	Jan., Feb., April			March	April	Jan., Feb.
Houston - London	July, Aug., Dec., Feb., April	Jan.		March	July, Sept., Oct., Feb.	Aug., Dec., Jan., April
Houston - Munich	Jan., Feb.			Jan., Feb., April		

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 - London	Dec., March, April	Jan., Feb.			March	Dec., through Feb., April
Newark - Amsterdam	Aug., Nov., Dec.			Sept., Oct., Nov., Feb.	Jan.	Aug., Dec.
Newark - Barcelona	Aug., Nov., Jan.	Dec., Feb.		Aug., April	Dec. through March	
Newark - Berlin	July, Aug., Jan., April	Nov.	Dec.	July, Nov., Feb., March	Aug., Jan., April	Dec.
Newark - Brussels	Aug., Nov., Jan.	Dec.	July	Aug., Feb., March	Nov., Jan.	July, Aug., Dec.
Newark - Dublin	Dec., Jan.			Dec., March	Jan., Feb.	
Newark - Geneva	July, Aug., April			Sept., Oct.	July, April	Aug.
Newark - Lisbon	July, Aug.		April		July	Aug., April
Newark - London	July, Aug., Jan., April		Dec.		Feb.	July through Oct., Dec., Jan., April
Newark - Madrid	July, Aug., Nov., Feb., April	Dec., Jan.			Nov., Feb.	Aug., Dec., Jan., March, April
Newark - Milan	July, April			July, Aug.		April
Newark - Munich	Dec.				Dec. through Feb.	
Newark - Paris	July., Oct., Dec.			Nov.	July, Aug., Jan.	Dec., Feb.
Newark - Porto		July, Aug.	July	July	Aug.	
Newark - Rome	Jan. through April			Jan., Feb.	April	March
Newark - Venice	July, Aug., May			Sept., May		Aug.
San Francisco - Paris	Aug.	Oct.	Dec. through April		Aug.	Dec. through April
San Francisco - Zurich	July				Aug.	
Washington, D.C. - Amsterdam	Aug., Jan. through March	Nov., Dec., April		Sept., Oct.	Nov., Feb., March	Aug., Dec., Jan., April

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
Washington, D.C. - Barcelona	July	Aug.	Aug.		Aug.	
Washington, D.C. - London	Sept. through Nov., March, May	July, Dec., Jan., Feb., April	July, Dec., Jan., April	July	Sept.,	Aug., Oct., Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April
Washington, D.C. - Madrid	Aug.		July		Aug.	July
Washington, D.C. - Paris	Feb., March, May	April		March	Feb.	April
Washington, D.C. - Zurich		Jan., Feb., April			March	Jan., Feb., April

Months in black at least one seat available; in blue at least two seats; in green at least four seats.



# How to Get 5-Star Hotels— Plus Airline Miles For First Class Flights—Dirt Cheap (If Not Free)

July 2018

## 99+ reasons not to let this final Starpoints sale pass you by.

- Get \$1,000-per-night hotels for \$348, or
- \$600-per-night hotels for free, or
- First Class airline tickets, normally \$30,000+, for just \$2,718

Over the years, no one has discussed the merits of Starwood's Starpoints value more than FCF.

While [the program is set to end at the end of this month](#), you'd think I would stop telling you about how ridiculously great it is. Well, think again.

[This latest sale on Starpoints](#) is the same as the last one. You can buy Starpoints for 2.275¢ each through [July 20](#)—or if you pay with your SPG Amex card, 2.175¢ each (with the extra points you'll earn for the purchase).

[Starpoints transferred to airline miles](#): Given the 25% bonus when you transfer 20,000 SPG points at a time, this sale allows you to stock up on miles—go [here](#) for more on breaking through the annual buy-limit barrier. When you transfer them, you'll be paying 1.82¢ per airline mile because of that transfer bonus (or if you pay with your SPG Amex card, 1.74¢).

You can use the points for countless Starwood transfer airline partner opportunities through July 31, and beyond. I say “beyond” the end of the Starwood program because the points will only become more lucrative when Marriott automatically transfers them into their own program, [at a 3 for 1 ratio](#), given that the new Marriott program has even more partner airlines.

There are also many ways to use the Starpoints you can now buy cheaply for hotels, too. Let's start with flights first...

## SAVE HUGELY ON PREMIUM AIR TRAVEL NOW

Through this purchase of Starpoints at just 2.175¢ each, for example, gain access to:

SPG Points Transfer Partner Airline	Redeem Miles With	Fly Between	Class	Cost With Points on Sale*	Normal Fares	Strategy Savings	FCF Sweet Redeems Alert Link Examples**
Japan Airlines	Emirates	U.S. and the Middle East	First	\$2,718	\$22,568	\$19,850 / 88%	<a href="#">Dubai</a>
Japan Airlines	Cathay Pacific	U.S. and Asia	First	\$2,718	\$31,155	\$28,437 / 91%	<a href="#">Hong Kong</a>
Japan Airlines	British Airways	U.S. and Europe	First	\$1,740	\$6,300	\$4,560 / 72%	<a href="#">London</a>
All Nippon	All Nippon	U.S. and Asia	First	\$2,610	\$19,834	\$17,224 / 87%	<a href="#">Tokyo</a>
Asiana	Asiana	U.S. and Asia	First	\$2,827	\$8,469	\$5,642 / 66%	<a href="#">Seoul</a>
Japan Airlines	American	U.S. and South America	Business	\$1,196	\$5,898	\$4,702 / 80%	<a href="#">Rio de Janeiro</a>
Japan Airlines	Cathay Pacific	U.S. and Asia	Business	\$1,522	\$6,368	\$4,846 / 76%	<a href="#">Hong Kong</a>
Japan Airlines	Qantas	U.S. and South Pacific	First	\$2,718	\$11,797	\$9,079 / 77%	<a href="#">Melbourne</a>

SPG Points Transfer Partner Airline	Redeem Miles With	Fly Between	Class	Cost With Points on Sale*	Normal Fares	Strategy Savings	FCF Sweet Redemeers Alert Link Examples**
Japan Airlines	Emirates	U.S. and the Middle East	First	\$2,718	\$22,568	\$19,850 / 88%	<a href="#">Dubai</a>
Asiana	Etihad	U.S. and the Middle East	First	\$2,827	\$24,341	\$21,514 / 88%	<a href="#">Abu Dhabi</a>
All Nippon	Singapore	U.S. and Asia	Business	\$1,740	\$5,858	\$4,118 / 70%	<a href="#">Hong Kong</a>
Cathay Pacific	American	Transcon; LAX-JFK	First	\$1,631	\$2,817	\$1,186 / 42%	<a href="#">Transcon</a>

\*Not including award taxes, and based if you pay with your SPG Amex card at 2.175 cents each. \*\*Availability may have changed since original post; use for example purposes only.

## HOW TO SAVE HUGELY ON PREMIUM HOTEL STAYS NOW, TOO

I recently shared [How Star Alliance Travelers Can Get a Free Ritz-Carlton Seven-Night Stay Worth \\$5,600](#), (the Starwood Starpoints-to-Marriott Rewards opportunity netted nine cents in value per Starpoint) and [How \(and Why\) I Just Got 152,000 United Miles—plus Seven Nights at the Ritz Carlton Central Park—for 180,000 Starwood Points](#). These days, I use my Starpoints for **BOTH** miles and high-end hotel stays.

## THANK YOU IN-LAWS (NOT SOMETHING YOU HEAR EVERY DAY)

My in-laws are having a family reunion in New York in July. I like to be near Central Park, so why not the JW Marriott on Central Park? It's pricing at about \$600 per night, so for a week's stay I'd be out of pocket \$4,200.

The JW Marriott is a category 9 hotel, according to Marriott's **current Hotel + Air Package**, which will change in August (no specific date released yet) and be devalued greatly. So, if you are **planning to redeem for a Hotel + Air Package, you should do it NOW**, before the new pricing starts. I recently transferred 130,000 Starpoints to Marriott, netting 390,000 Marriott points (transfers are instant) for the following [redemption](#):

## Hotel + Air Package 1:

	7 Nights + 50,000 Miles or Avios	7 Nights + 70,000 Miles or Avios	7 Nights + 100,000 Miles or Avios	7 Nights + 120,000 Miles or Avios
Category 1-5	200,000   <a href="#">View</a>	220,000   <a href="#">View</a>	250,000   <a href="#">View</a>	270,000   <a href="#">View</a>
Category 6	230,000   <a href="#">View</a>	250,000   <a href="#">View</a>	280,000   <a href="#">View</a>	300,000   <a href="#">View</a>
Category 7	260,000   <a href="#">View</a>	280,000   <a href="#">View</a>	310,000   <a href="#">View</a>	330,000   <a href="#">View</a>
Category 8	290,000   <a href="#">View</a>	310,000   <a href="#">View</a>	340,000   <a href="#">View</a>	360,000   <a href="#">View</a>
Category 9	320,000   <a href="#">View</a>	340,000   <a href="#">View</a>	370,000   <a href="#">View</a>	390,000   <a href="#">View</a>
Tier 1-3	350,000   <a href="#">View</a>	370,000   <a href="#">View</a>	400,000   <a href="#">View</a>	420,000   <a href="#">View</a>
Tier 4-5	470,000   <a href="#">View</a>	490,000   <a href="#">View</a>	520,000   <a href="#">View</a>	540,000   <a href="#">View</a>

**Participating Airlines:** Aeromexico, Air Canada\*, **Alaska Airlines**, American Airlines, British Airways, Copa Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Frontier Airlines, GOL/Varig, Hawaiian Airlines, Iberia Airlines, Virgin Atlantic

## QUICK MATH

So, the 130,000 Starpoints set me back \$2,827. What did I get? A hotel stay on Central Park worth \$4,200 + 120,000 Alaska Miles, which are worth at least that much given you can [buy them on sale](#) directly with the airline, and for about the same price as I paid for the Starpoints.

**So the seven-night, \$4,200 hotel stay is essentially free!**

**If you're a real *airficionado* or plan on going for this deal:** Skim [this piece where I geek out on the math](#) and other deal nuances.

## WHICH AIRLINES TO GO FOR?

This is a really hard decision. Later this year I'm planning a First Class Around-the-World ticket on Star Alliance airlines (using All Nippon miles for what I think is [The Ultimate Mileage Award](#)), which will require 160,000 miles, so that was part of my thinking.

This is my favorite mileage award redemption, but through the Marriott Hotel + Air Package deal you only net 85,000 miles, instead of 120,000 on Alaska. I think I'll get all the ANA points I need through Amex Membership Rewards, however, so I'm not worried about that. (But it just goes to show what we talked about last month—how you need to think about how you're going to redeem miles *before* you pick a [credit card to earn miles](#) with.)

I passed on getting United miles through the Marriott Hotel + Air Package program, even though it offered 12,000 more miles. United miles are low on my list because I can get better low-cost mileage awards for Star Alliance flights through All Nippon or Asiana.

[Alaska offers decent deals with a broad set of carriers](#), so I'm diversified there, but you'd might also want to consider [British Airways because of short-haul partner redemption's to Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean](#), [Virgin Atlantic because of low-cost partner redemption's](#), and [Iberia because of one the lowest award rates to Europe](#).

You could even take fewer miles with these deals because of the lucrative, low-cost redemptions: Japan Airlines, even with the [Airline's coming devaluation](#) on Nov. 20; Lufthansa, [great availability for First Class mileage awards](#); Korean, with [access to Delta flights to Europe for 80,000 miles](#); Asiana, with [access to United flights to South American for 70,000 miles and Europe for 80,000 miles](#), etc.

## CATHAY PACIFIC AND JAL PROGRAM CHANGES

As FCF wrote last month, [here for JAL](#) and [here for Cathay](#), both mileage programs are being devalued. For Cathay the new prices started on June 22 while for JAL they don't take effect until November 20.

## NEW HOTEL + AIR PACKAGE PRICES

Marriott has announced that it will continue to offer Hotel + Air Packages with the new combined program, but as [you can see now](#), the new rates will not be nearly as good of a value. So, act now, before the devaluation starts in August.

Moving onto the value of hotel opportunities via this Starpoint sale...

## DON'T WANT TO STAY IN ONE PLACE FOR SEVEN NIGHTS? OR CAN'T POOL MANY MILES?

If you don't normally stay seven nights in one place (where the aforementioned Marriott Hotel + Air Package really pays off), consider what's possible on a per-night basis.

Also consider the power of smaller redemptions if you don't have friends or family that can have an account 30 days prior to August 1, as you can't pool points without having an account that long and at the same address.

## SPECIAL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Why Marriott decided to merge with Starwood in the middle of the year I don't know. Yet, there is a bonus to their quirky roll-out, in that they're not going to release their new top-tier hotel category, category 8, until 2019. Instead, they're opting to allow you to redeem points for most of their [top hotels at the second-highest tier](#) (category 7)—which amounts to **a big discount**. In August, the highest category (7) will cost 60,000 Marriott

points, which amounts to 20,000 Starpoints. (In 2019, many of these top-tier hotels will cost 70,000 to 100,000 Marriott points.)

**Compare that with what Starwood charges now:** For its top category, 30,000 to 35,000 Starpoints, the equivalent of 90,000 to 105,000 Marriot points.

In other words, **wait till August to book** and you can save up to 43% through the end of the year—**for stays all the way through 2019.**

### WITH THE FIFTH NIGHT FREE OPTION...

This takes the cost down to **16,000 Starpoints per night** (quick math: 20,000 Starpoints X 4 nights = 80,000 divided by 5 nights = 16,000 SPG), which you can now buy for 2.175 cents (using the SPG Amex card). That gets a room for an amazing **\$348 per night at hotels that can easily run \$1,000+.** Stay fewer than four nights and you're looking at \$435 per night.

Here's a table of some top properties and what their cost will amount to at the Starpoints purchase price of 2.175¢ each—**if you redeem between August 1 and the start of the new program at the beginning of 2019**—and redeem for a “fifth night free award” or when staying fewer than four nights, for hotels that normally run \$500 to \$1,500 per night:

Hotel	Cost Per Night Staying Four Nights or Less	Cost Per Night With Fifth Night Free
<a href="#">St. Regis New York</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">St. Regis Bal Harbour</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">The Gritti Palace Venice</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">Ritz-Carlton Central Park</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">St. Regis Rome</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">St. Regis Aspen</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">Ritz-Carlton Vail</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">St. Regis Maldives</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">Ritz-Carlton London</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">Ritz-Carlton Kapalua</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">St. Regis Bora Bora Resort</a>	\$435	\$348
<a href="#">Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel</a>	\$435	\$348

Look [here](#) for more luxury hotels under the Marriott brand collection: Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, JW Marriott, and the Luxury Collection.

## **MISCELLANEOUS THINGS TO REMEMBER & AND FINE PRINT:**

- Holding on to credit card points as long as you can is the general rule. Burn airline miles faster, as the airlines regularly devalue them. Credit card points however, because you can transfer them to so many airlines—40+ with Starpoints now, and 50+ with Marriott, which you can even [transfer today](#) ahead of August 1 / new program if you wish—retain their value longer.
- Know how to [get around the Starpoints 30,000-purchase limit](#) before it's too late. New members need to have an account for 14 days prior to buying the points, **which means act now**.
- In order to pool miles, you must have an account at the same address open for 30 days.
- You'll want to pool Starpoints before August 1, because Starwood is much more generous on this front, with no limit. Marriott, on the other hand, only allows you to pool 50,000 points per year. (With more points in a single program, you have more options than with fewer points in more accounts.)
- If you need more points, you can [buy Marriott points](#), up to 50,000 per year, for [1.25¢](#) each (\$12.50 per 1,000 points). Not a great deal, yet good for topping your account off.
- Seven-night Travel Package awards must be for consecutive nights. Unused nights are forfeited, meaning no refund.
- When you go for the Marriott Hotel + Air Package, you only need to choose the airline program for mileage transfer. The hotel portion comes in the form of a certificate you can redeem for awards in that category level. That said, better to book sooner than later your hotel stay, even if you're not sure of the dates, as the certificates could become worth less in the new program. In other words, I'm making placeholder reservations at hotels I'll stay at with the Hotel + Air Package certificates, with the idea I can change dates later.