



Airline Tactical Fares and The Upgrade Mindset: A Match Made in Heaven, Part I

December 2017

We've bestowed a lot of names on extraordinarily low premium fares over the last 21 years at FCF: [Flash](#), [Mayfly](#), [EasyUp](#), [Anomaly](#), and more. Our names intended to capture the essence of the fares, but that changes so much with the times that we've decided to adopt the industry's technical term: Tactical Fares.

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet—as long as you're in the position to sniff it out.

EVERY SEAT HAS A DEADLINE

An airline seat has a strict use-by date. A departing flight with an empty seat is a missed revenue opportunity for the airline.

So, do airline execs sit back with fingers crossed *hoping* that UA 20 from Houston to Amsterdam will be full of customers?

No, they get tactical. They want the seats filled, so they reduce the price accordingly. But they do it very discreetly. And that's when the opportunity arises for those with the awareness and mindset ready to take advantage of it.

Now, just to be clear, we're *not* talking about economy fares that nudge up and down by \$50 to \$100 at a time. We're talking about **discounts of thousands of dollars** on Business and First Class flights on **major airlines**.

If you've read this far and are still interested, you're already being Upgrade Mindful, a crucial marker of having *The Upgrade Mindset*.

UPGRADE MINDFULNESS

To be mindful is to be aware and in the moment. To be Upgrade Mindful is to be aware that for airlines, filling seats is an incredibly complex and dynamic process, which often results in premium fares that are little more than economy fares.

Most people realize that an airplane seat has many different prices, if only because they change nearly every time they're checked, and some industry estimates say there are up to one million fare changes lodged with ATPCO, the largest fare aggregator, daily. When you know this is going on—and that really low fares exist that are not widely advertised—you're in a position to take advantage of the opportunities.

TOO MUCH ON THEIR HANDS

The sheer complexity of running an airline may just get you from A to B in comfort without paying too much.

What airlines are concerned about: Competition. Price matching. Route efficiency. Elite poaching. Business versus vacation travel. Profit. Shareholders. Regulations. Seasons. Seat quality. Aircraft availability. Aircraft maintenance. The weather. Surcharges. Safety. Child discounts. Penalties. Alliances. Direct versus multiple connections.

Within all that airline-side complexity lies opportunity. (It's hard to juggle 20 balls without dropping a couple.)

THE SALE NOBODY KNEW ABOUT

Why would an airline have a seat sale and not announce it publicly? Because most folks in premium class (meaning they paid a premium) would be angry if they knew the person next to them was traveling for \$2,000 less. "Why didn't they offer that to me?! I'm loyal!"

We're living in a time when airline computers can get more and more granular about seat demand on a given flight. As a result, the carriers can get more and more creative with Tactical Fares.

Take Washington, DC to Brussels. United's computers forecast some empty seats in Business Class, so they offer Atlantans going to Brussels (who are willing to fly via Washington, DC) a spectacular deal to fill those seats at the moment. The Washingtonians on that same flight are none the wiser for paying almost double.

United.com screenshot: Washington, DC-Brussels Business Class fare \$4,632.

Roundtrip (1 traveler) Edit search	
Tue, Jul 10, 2018	
IAD - BRU 5:40 pm - 7:15 am	
Tue, Jul 24, 2018	
BRU - IAD 12:00 pm - 2:20 pm	
Fare	\$4,536.00
Taxes and fees	\$95.76
TOTAL	\$4,631.76

United.com screenshot: Atlanta-Brussels Business Class fare \$2,545.

Roundtrip (1 traveler) Edit search	
Tue, Jul 10, 2018	
ATL - BRU 2:30 pm - 7:15 am	
Tue, Jul 24, 2018	
BRU - ATL 12:00 pm - 7:02 pm	
Fare	\$2,435.00
Taxes and fees	\$110.36
TOTAL	\$2,545.36

AWARENESS OF TACTICAL FARES IS A GAME CHANGER

If I had a nickel for every time I heard someone say or write, "On X day of the week" or "Y time of day is the best time to buy an airline ticket," I'd have enough to fly Emirates First Class, full freight. My answer to the "best time to buy" is simply when fares are extraordinarily low. (IOW: Not just a little less!) Sound trite?

Let me put it this way: If you don't have a sense of context or upgrade mindfulness, you might use your miles when it's ill advised to do so. It might be because a great low cash fare is available instead, or because you might choose a cruise that's on the edge of the high or shoulder season, or **lots of other reasons**. Are you

passive when it comes to fares or active? Perhaps it's time to consider what airlines are offering, and not just what you initially want. This is the Upgrade Mindset at work: Flying when the airlines want you to.

TACTICAL FARES, SOME MUG SHOTS

Here are a range of Tactical Fares with links to previous examples. One reason for this special report is the hope that heightened awareness will lead you to look out for these fares. And to put our cards on the table; it goes straight to why First Class Flyer exists: through research, analysis, and second-to-none experience, we're in a unique position to help you know when and where these tactical fares are occurring.

HOLIDAY TACTICAL FARES:

Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and New Year's are all examples of holiday Tactical Fare discounting. It's a time when many business travelers stay at home so airlines have many unsold premium seats.

This year on Qantas, a round-trip fare from [Los Angeles to Sydney was discounted from \\$5,457 to \\$2,719](#), a 50% saving. [Seattle to Taipei was offered for \\$2,190](#); the regular fare is \$4,100, a savings of \$1,910 (47%). These fares are sporadic and often fleeting, but the upgrade-mindful person is flexible, especially if he's not on a tight schedule. This person might have a bucket list they're happy to tick off in no particular order. "Hey, Sydney and Taipei are on sale—let's go to Sydney, or Taipei, or use one of them as a bridge route to another nearby destination on my list!"

DEPARTURE-SPECIFIC TACTICAL FARES:

American charges \$5,687 Business Class return from New York to Tokyo. United charges \$3,635. The difference, apart from the price? The United flight leaves from Newark, while the American flight leaves from JFK. So, the upgrade-mindful are aware of how an airport location can yield big savings. They don't pull the shutters down when JFK isn't on the table. If a cheaper fare appears from Hartford, they might spend \$120 on a limo to Hartford in order to save \$2,000 on the fare.

DESTINATION-SPECIFIC TACTICAL FARES:

While London and Paris might be on sale because of **excess capacity**, right now Sofia, Copenhagen, Oslo, Bucharest, and Budapest are examples of **softer markets**, and all of them are prone to market-specific Tactical Fares. The airlines look for ways to bolster sales to those destinations—when they need to. The upgrade *mindless* person says: "I don't want to go to Copenhagen, I want to go to Paris." And so the lights go out on the opportunity. The Upgrade Mindful, on the other hand, knows that most European cities are relatively close to each other. Flights within Europe are cheap, and at times, even free when you fly within airline alliances. For example: [Chicago-Bucharest right now goes for \\$2,059](#) round-trip, compared to London \$3,995, a savings of \$1,936 (48%).

ADVANCE-PURCHASE TACTICAL FARES:

These, for some reason, buck convention when it comes to advance-purchase requirements. New York-Frankfurt non-stop in Business Class on Delta, Lufthansa, and United, for example, goes for \$2,199, whereas

NYC-Paris is \$7,750 on short notice.

To me, it's simple: Knowledge is power.

Watch out for our new Tactical Fare Trend Column, starting this month, [here](#).

Over the next few months we'll also be taking a closer look at Tactical Fares, in order to make you more mindful of them.

[Let us know](#) what you'd like to know about premium Tactical Fares and we'll try to work that into our next mindfulness report.



The Scenic Route: How to Get Europe Free When Flying to Asia—Or Asia Free When Flying to Europe

December 2017

Depending how you look at it, fly halfway around the world for \$2,581 or less, or get Europe and Asia for \$1,290 each.

This unique fare opportunity isn't for everyone, and it's a little counter-intuitive.

Come to think of it, it's kind of counter-clockwise, too.

It's this: **travel to Asia** from the U.S. on a European carrier and you can **get a free stopover in Europe**. The cost difference between booking on the European carrier and its U.S. partner airline in the Finnair

example we'll show you below is over \$15,000.

Now, we know what you're thinking: Who in their right mind would travel from the U.S. to Asia heading East? Isn't that the long way? The *wrong* way?

Well, it's the long way, but not necessarily the wrong way. You may love the art of the deal, as so many FCF-ers do. They crave deal dopamine, the happy brain chemicals created when you see a deal too good to pass up. This deal ticks that box because it involves European adventure for free.

In fact, depending on the cities involved, it can be "less than free" because adding Europe may cost less than flying directly to Asia.

Or, you might be a bucket-list buster. You've got a stack of awesome places you've always wanted to visit, and here you're reading about ticking more off for free. If you have some time and flexibility, going the long way can mean a very relaxing, interesting adventure.

And then there are the mile-amassers, who can pick up a load here (and the associated savings they deliver).

MILEAGE RUN MADE IN PREMIUM CLASS HEAVEN






So, let's look at a couple of examples.

New York – Beijing with Free Stops in Helsinki




Did you know that Beijing is a "Twin Town" of Helsinki? It's true, so go figure. But combining these twins delivers a remarkable deal, as do lots of other Asian/European city combinations.

As the screenshots show, New York-Helsinki-Beijing-Helsinki-New York on Finnair (and booked on Finnair) is \$2,981. Now, if you were to travel New York-Beijing-New York non-stop on United, the fare is \$4,695. So save \$1,714 / 36%, and get Europe—Helsinki, or hop around innumerable cities in Europe (about 100 non-stops from the Finnish Capital in fact).

Your Airfare

ITINERARY New York - Helsinki Tue 10 July 2018 AY006 I 17:40 - 08:50 (Wed) Business cabin Helsinki - Beijing Mon 16 July 2018 AY085 I 18:20 - 06:55 (Tue) Business cabin Beijing - Helsinki Sun 22 July 2018 AY086 I 10:55 - 14:15 Business cabin Helsinki - New York Fri 27 July 2018 AY005 I 14:10 - 15:50 Business cabin  Business Saver PRICE 2980.95 USD	NEW YORK - HELSINKI Tuesday 10 July 2018  AY006 JFK 17:40 >> HEL 08:50 (Wed) Business Saver Total duration: 8h 10min
	HELSINKI - BEIJING Monday 16 July 2018  AY085 HEL 18:20 >> PEK 06:55 (Tue) Business Saver Total duration: 7h 35min
	BEIJING - HELSINKI Sunday 22 July 2018  AY086 PEK 10:55 >> HEL 14:15 Business Saver Total duration: 8h 20min
	HELSINKI - NEW YORK Friday 27 July 2018  AY005 HEL 14:10 >> JFK 15:50 Business Saver Total duration: 8h 40min

Book that same flight on American Airlines, Finnair's partner, and you pay over \$18,000. (Screenshot as shown on Google Flights below.)


 Book, track or share this flight Ads ⓘ	
Total incl taxes & fees for 1 adult · Additional bag fees may apply.	
Book with Finnair AY 6, AY 85, AY 86, AY 5	 \$2,981
Book with American Marketed as AA 8986, AY 85, AY 86, AY 5	 \$18,256

LOS ANGELES TO BEIJING WITH A FREE STOP IN ZURICH


And you West Coasters aren't left out in the sun either. You can do Los Angeles to Beijing in Business Class, with a stop in Zurich, for \$4,033; whereas Los Angeles to Zurich Business Class round-trip is \$4,535, making it \$502 less!


SWISS.com screenshot:

Flight information


 **Outbound flight**
Los Angeles (LAX) - Zurich (ZRH)


10 July 2018
19:20 LAX → **15:15** ⁺¹ ZRH

Business - P
 **LX 41**
Operated by SWISS GLOBAL AIR LINES


 **Return flight**
Zurich (ZRH) - Beijing (PEK)

21 August 2018
13:15 ZRH → **05:15** ⁺¹ PEK


Business - P
 **LX 196**
Operated by SWISS


 **Outbound flight**
Beijing (PEK) - Los Angeles (LAX)

28 August 2018
06:45 PEK → **11:20** ZRH

Business - P
 **LX 197**
Operated by SWISS

28 August 2018
13:05 ZRH → **16:20** LAX

Business - P
 **LX 40**
Operated by SWISS GLOBAL AIR LINES

Selected services			Show details
Name	Services	Price USD	
Adult		USD 4,032.57	

POLE POSITION: USE YOUR IMAGINATION FOR ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME TRIP POSSIBILITIES

The same strategy can be applied to other Asian destinations as well, such as Singapore and Tokyo.

Formula One fans can really take the chequered flag with this kind of deal. Next year the Italian Grand Prix

takes place at Monza on September 2, followed by the Singapore Grand Prix on September 16 (a nice little one-two combination).

Think of all the cool trips and places to conquer with a Europe-Asia one-two punch.

THE MILES EQUATION MAKES IT EVEN SWEETER

Flying these routes means earning lots of miles, which in turn brings down the cost of the flight.

An example is SWISS booked in P Class. [P Class earns 100%](#) of the flight miles flown with the United mileage program. In our Los Angeles–Zurich–Beijing example above, the flight miles come out to just over 21,800. So, if the ticket costs \$4,033, and even if you value miles at a measly 2¢ each, you earn \$436 in mileage value if you’re a non-elite with United. This brings the overall cost of the trip down to \$3,597. Another way to look at it: you’re getting Europe and Asia each for \$1,798 round-trip.

On the New York–Helsinki–Beijing trip mentioned above, the miles earned are easily valued at \$400 with the American Airlines mileage program, bringing the trip down to \$2,581. Quick math dump: earned miles on Finnair are 125% for an AA mileage member, so the math is 16,100 flight miles—which become 20,100 thanks to the 125%—at 2 cents per mile is \$400.

ELITES GO EVEN LOWER

There are also Elite bonuses, depending on your status, that can bring the cost down even more—to between \$129 and \$387 for AA elites, for example (see below).

Mileage bonuses

Benefits	Executive Platinum	Platinum Pro	Platinum	Gold
Elite mileage bonus*	120%	80%	60%	40%
Minimum EQM guarantee	✓	✓	✓	✓

U.S. mileage programs (American, Delta and United) often don’t offer elite qualifying dollars (EDQs) on a ticket issued by a partner airline, so check with the airline directly based on your needs as rules vary. That said, elites do earn award miles and elite qualifying miles (EQMs).

United Elites Reap: If you’re a United [Prem 1K](#), you’ll earn a whopping 21,800 miles on the aforementioned SWISS flights, easily worth \$436, and your net cost for the two continents will be just \$3,161!

NOT AS FAR AS IT LOOKS

Remember that international travel isn’t all left-to-right, and right-to-left as it appears on a flat map of the world. You take short cuts. And that’s because (spoiler alert) the earth is round. Amazing, right? It means that

you can go up and over rather than down and around as it may appear on a flat, two-dimensional map. This only to say that it's not as bad as it seems.



WORKS FOR CANADIANS

The Long Way Round to Asia via Europe also works from many Canadian cities. For example, you can do Toronto to Beijing in Business Class round-trip, with a stop in Frankfurt, for \$3,168 by flying Air Canada and Lufthansa, whereas Toronto to Beijing on Air Canada in Business Class is \$3,922. Making it \$754 less.

MORE TO COME

Over the next few months FCF will look at other regions where going the long way round can get you much more for free.

In the meantime, please provide feedback below on what you think of this approach...



FCF's [Daily Alert](#) research shows premium fares have been on the rise since September, [something we wrote about last month here](#). It's long been our policy to only report on fares under the \$2,000 mark from the East Coast and \$2,500 from the West Coast (which otherwise cost \$4,000 to \$8,000), but we've had to relax that rule recently due to these increases.

So, while that's obviously not great news, it's not disastrous either because there are other strategies you can put into play. Also, for more about how airlines use unadvertised tactical low fares, see our report [here](#).

STRATEGIES FOR HIGH-FARE TIMES: MILES / POINTS

Applying FCF's Upgrade Mindset, when fares are trending higher, means thinking about using your miles/points first—or [buying them if you don't have any or enough](#).

It's a symbiotic relationship—when fares are low, leave your miles alone because the value of each mile decreases relatively.

You should look at those routes where you can use your miles for free. (We have.) In our [Daily Alerts](#) section of the site, we've dialed up a lot of miles-friendly deals lately, so if you've been hoarding, it's time to start rewarding.

Funny thing about miles: many are intimidated by them. They can feel complicated, with lots of rules, and they feel hard to redeem. FCF devotees, of course, know that we do all the hard work for you, finding miles-specific deals WITH saver (deeply discounted) availability.

Here are a few miles deals we've found to Europe. (There's a load more to [see in our Daily Deals section](#), just set your filter to miles and there they are.)

- [Iberia Business Class to/from Madrid for less than coach.](#)
- [Air France Business Class to/from Paris for 5,000 more miles than coach.](#)
- [United Business Class to/from London for 5,000 more miles than coach.](#)
- [British Airways Business Class to/from London for less than coach.](#)
- [Lufthansa Business Class to/from Europe for 5,000 more miles than coach.](#)
- [Delta Business Class to/from London for 5,000 more miles than coach.](#)
- [American Business Class to/from Frankfurt for less than coach.](#)

OPPORTUNITY FARES

Another strategy is to grab low-fare routes to a city that's not your intended destination, especially in Europe. You save a lot, then fly to the intended destination cheaply on a separate ticket. For example, you might want to go Boston-Frankfurt, but the fare is \$4,228, so consider going Boston-Amsterdam (\$2,096) and save 50%. [More on that approach here.](#)


A few low-fare options our truffle hounds have recently found:

- [Business Class to Europe starting at \\$2,059.](#)
- [First Class to Europe from \\$3,732.](#)
- [Business Class to Europe starting at \\$2,033.](#)
- [Business Class to Europe starting at \\$2,097.](#)

- [Business Class to Europe starting at \\$2,159.](#)
- [Business Class to Europe starting at \\$2,346.](#)
- [Business Class to Europe starting at \\$2,400.](#)

LESSER-KNOWN AIRLINES

If you can't be flexible with the route, look at low-cost airlines, such as Aer Lingus. For example, Washington, DC to Frankfurt on Aer Lingus is \$2,207 with a connection in Dublin, versus \$4,700 non-stop on Lufthansa.



South Pacific: Best Premium Economy Seats & Deals

December 2017

Best Experience, Best Fares, Lowest Mileage Cost.

Last month we analyzed the best Premium Economy opportunities to
. This month we take our awards show to the South Pacific. And here they are (drumroll):

LET'S RECAP THE SHOW SO FAR

Premium Economy has an A-list (PE Elite) and a B-list (PE Lite). The former refers to airlines that have created a separate cabin and an upgraded seat—among them, many international airlines as well as

American and Delta—while the latter (United among them) are offering nothing more than a bit more legroom at the front of the economy cabin.

THE BEST PE ELITE AIRLINES TO SOUTH PACIFIC

Here's a rundown—the seat and the cost to use miles or cash.

Air Canada

SEAT

Varies by aircraft: 18 to 20 inches wide, 38-inch pitch, 7- to 8-inch recline. 10.4- to 11-inch touch-screen (8.9 inches on the A330-333), adjustable headrest, foot bar, amenity kit (international flights), and upgraded meal service.



Air Canada Premium Economy

MILEAGE AWARD COST

135,000. Business Class is 25,000 miles more.

CASH

Varies by route. Vancouver-Sydney starts at US\$1,850 versus US\$5,344 in Business Class, and Vancouver-Brisbane costs US\$1,851 (Business Class is US\$4,952). Air New Zealand

SEAT

19.3 inches wide (with a 5-inch wide armrest), 41-inch pitch, 9-inch recline. 11-inch touchscreen monitor, leg and foot rest, adjustable winged headrest, amenity kit, and upgraded meal service.



MILEAGE AWARD COST

Varies by cost of ticket.

CASH

Fares start at \$1,794 on Los Angeles-Auckland, versus \$4,078 in Business Class, and on San Francisco-Sydney (connecting in Auckland) at \$2,149, compared to \$4,904 in Business Class.American

SEAT

19 inches wide, 38-inch pitch, 6-inch recline, 15.6-inch touch-screen monitor, foot, leg and head rests, amenity kit, and upgraded meal service.



American Airlines Premium Economy

MILEAGE AWARD COST

While it offers a PE Elite seat, AA currently does not offer Premium Economy mileage awards.

CASH

Varies by route: Los Angeles-Auckland (service ends in March) fares start at \$1,603 versus \$5,717 in Business Class; LAX-Sydney at \$1,596 versus \$4,895. Qantas (New Premium Economy Seat Offered on B787-9)

SEAT

22.8 inches wide, 38-inch pitch, 9.5-inch recline. 13.3-inch monitor, leg and foot rest, headrest with integrated pillow, amenity kit, and upgraded meal service. (First U.S. route to get the new seat is [Los Angeles-Melbourne starting Dec. 15](#) on QF96 and QF95 flights.)



Qantas Premium Economy

MILEAGE AWARD COST

Cost varies by route, as mileage program is based on flight distance. Los Angeles-Melbourne is 144,000 points in PE, and 192,000 points in Business Class.

CASH

Fares start at \$2,246 on Los Angeles-Melbourne route, compared to \$5,084 in Business Class. Virgin Australia

SEAT

19.5 inches wide, 41-inch pitch, 9-inch recline. 10.6-inch monitor, leg and foot rest, headrest, amenity kit, and upgraded meal service (Champagne cocktail and canapés served before take-off, and self-serve pantry with beverages and light refreshments).



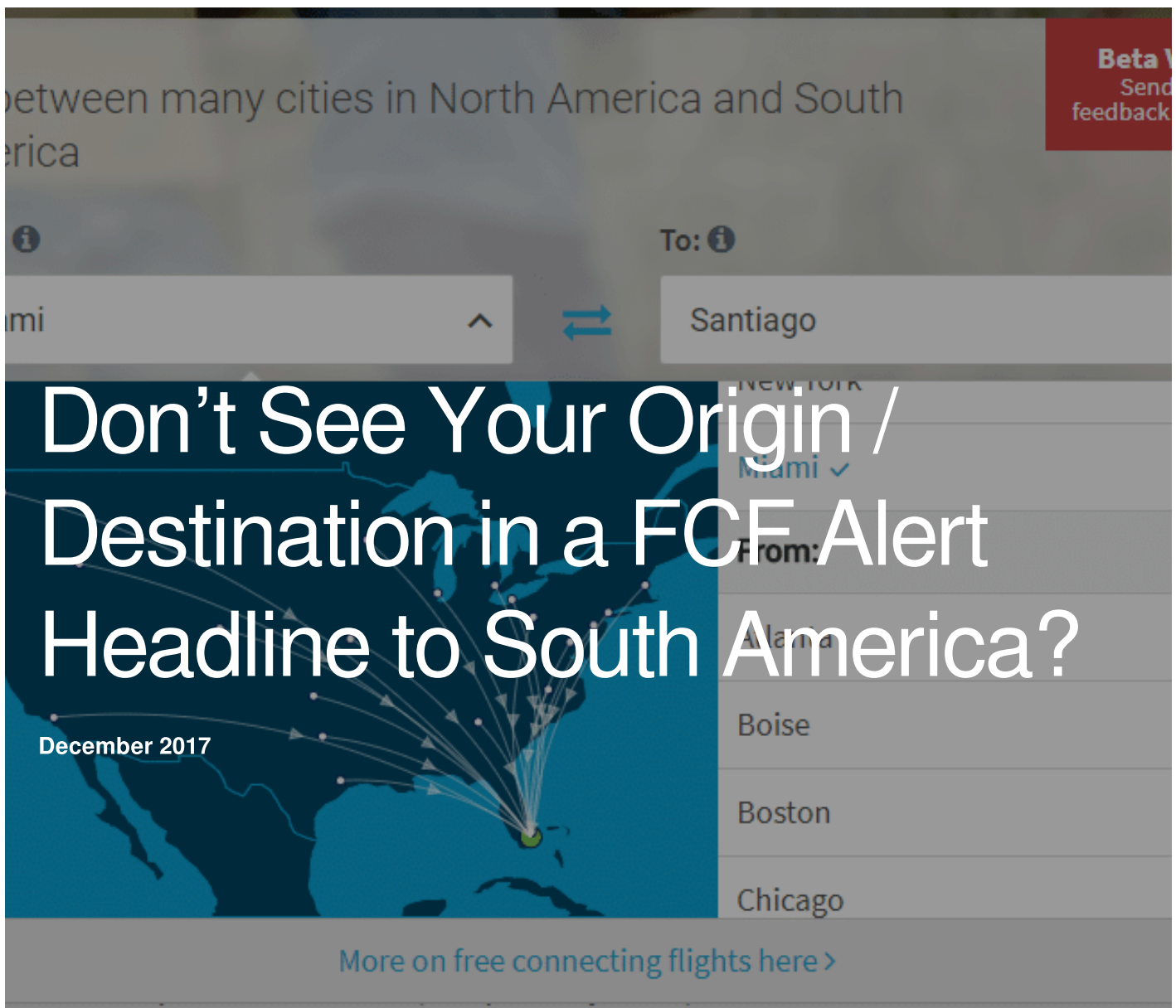
Virgin Australia Premium Economy

MILEAGE AWARD COST

No U.S. mileage program offered.

CASH

Fares start at \$2,196 on Los Angeles-Sydney, compared to \$4,895 in Business Class, and on LAX-Melbourne start at \$2,194 compared to \$4,882 in Business Class.



How to use FCF's new connection widget to understand how to snag a deal to southern South America.

In October, FCF released its new "Sweet Redeems" (SR) widget for [travel to Europe](#). It highlights mileage programs that offer a free add-on connection in the U.S. and Europe. So even if your departure city isn't mentioned in a [Newsroom](#) Alert headline, the Sweet Redeem Widget can often still help you [know how to get the mileage award](#). See last month's report on [how the Widget can get you to Asia](#).


HOW TO USE THE SWEET REDEEM WIDGET FOR TRAVEL TO SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

In general, the southern South America widget is like the Europe one: Scour the FCF Newsroom for a deal on the long-haul route; then use the Widget to get an idea of the connecting flights that can potentially be made to/from the gateway(s).

Let's take a recent American Airlines Sweet Redeem alert, which reported on good availability from Dallas and Miami to São Paulo, Brazil, in Business Class for 57,500 miles one-way. Did you Zone Out because you live in Detroit? Or Chicago?

Dallas-São Paulo one-way award Business Class on AA 963 screenshot below.

57.5K

 963

7:05 PM
DFW

7:05 AM
GRU

American Airlines
[View Available Seats](#)
Aircraft: 77W
Total travel time: 10hr 00min


Meal: Dinner Breakfast
Booking Code: U
Class: Business

☐ [Flight Details](#)
Overnight flight or connection

We say: Zone In—because very often, the connecting flight to the hub we mention in the report (in this case Dallas or Miami) is free. (The exception is usually Hawaii.)

Chicago-São Paulo one-way award Business Class on American connecting in Dallas on AA 963 screenshot below.

57.5K


 2331

3:09 PM
ORD

5:46 PM
DFW

American Airlines
[View Available Seats](#)
Aircraft: 738

Meal: Snack \$
Booking Code: T
Class: Economy

 963

7:05 PM
DFW

7:05 AM
GRU

American Airlines
[View Available Seats](#)
Aircraft: 77W
Total travel time: 13hr 56min

Meal: Dinner Breakfast
Booking Code: U
Class: Business

☐ [Flight Details](#)
Overnight flight or connection
First or Business is not available on all flights

And very often, too, the same applies for travel in southern South America. So you may want to go to Santiago instead of São Paulo. Again, very often, the connection from São Paulo to Santiago is free, as long as you're

flying on a partner airline.

That's mainly because, most airlines treat southern South America as one zone, so every destination costs the same as long as you fly on the same airline or a partner.

On American that means booking connecting flights on LATAM Airlines (former LAN and TAM Airlines), as both are part of oneworld. The same applies to United and its Star Alliance friends (Avianca and Copa), and Delta with its SkyTeam alliance buddy (Aerolíneas Argentina).

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN USING FLIGHT-DISTANCE MILEAGE PROGRAMS

Airlines that use a Flight-Distance Award Chart (British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Iberia, and Japan Airlines) can charge extra for a U.S. connecting flight or an onward flight, as the cost is based on distance flown.

Meaning point-to-point flights can cost less miles. A non-stop flight on American from Miami to São Paulo in Business Class using AA miles (a zone-chart program) costs 115,000 miles round-trip. However, if you use Japan Airlines miles (a flight-distance program) the cost is only 65,000 miles (50,000 fewer miles). Right, it sounds counter-intuitive, but you pay us to ferret out these anomalies.

Using Operating Airline Miles: Free Award Connections to South America

Operating Airline You See In FCF Sweet Redeems Alert Headline	Operating Airline Miles Round-Trip		Free U.S. Connecting Ticket On Operating Airline?	Free Connecting Ticket To Other Countries In South America When Using Operating Airline?	Getting The Operating Airline Miles
Business Class	First Class				
American	115,000	170,000	Yes	Yes	SPG
Delta	150,000	N/A	Yes	Yes	AMEX, SPG
United	120,000	160,000	Yes	Yes	CHASE

AMEX = Amex Rewards, CHASE = Chase Ultimate Rewards, SPG = Starwood.

Using Partner Miles: Free Award Connections to South America

Operating Airline You See In FCF Sweet Redeems Alert Headline	Possible Better Deal: Get Free Connecting Flights With These Partners Mileage Programs In U.S./Canada And South America Hub Cities	Partners Programs Miles Round-Trip		Free U.S. Connecting Ticket When Using Partners Miles	Connections To Other Countries In South America When Using Partner Miles	Getting The Partners Miles
Business Class	First Class					
American	Alaska Airlines*	100,000 (savings: 15,000 miles)	125,000 (savings: 45,000 miles)	Yes	No: AA Flights only	SPG
	Etihad Airways	100,000 (savings: 15,000 miles)	125,000 (savings: 45,000 miles)	Yes	No: AA Flights only	CITI, SPG
Delta	Air France/KLM	125,000 (savings: 25,000 miles)	N/A	Yes	Yes	AMEX, CITI, SPG
	Korean Air	110,000 (savings: 40,000 miles)	N/A	Yes	Yes	CHASE, SPG
	Virgin Atlantic	90,000 (savings: 60,000 miles)	N/A	Yes	Yes	AMEX, CITI, CHASE, SPG
United	Air Canada	110,000 (savings: 10,000 miles)	140,000 (savings: 20,000 miles)	Yes	Yes	AMEX, SPG
	All Nippon	88,000 (savings: 32,000 miles)	165,000 (no savings)	Yes	Yes	AMEX, SPG
	Asiana	70,000 (savings: 50,000 miles)	90,000 (savings: 70,000 miles)	Yes	Yes	SPG

*Rate increases as of Jan. 1, 2018: 115,000 and 170,000. AMEX = Amex Rewards, CHASE = Chase Ultimate Rewards, CITI = Citi ThankYou, SPG = Starwood.



Business Class One Way, Premium Economy the Other. Here's Why.

December 2017

A smart way to compromise when Business Class fares are very expensive and you're out of upgrade strategies.

There are three reasons that can make flying two classes of service—Business Class one way and Premium Economy Elite the other—better than one:

Reason 1: It's less money.

Reason 2: You might plan to work or watch movies for the most part on one flight.

Reason 3: You're simply connection-averse, and insist on a non-stop flight.

If you are not really using the benefits of a Business Class seat—maybe just reclining slightly and using the footrest—or you're not planning to sleep even though you have a lie-flat seat (you're on a day flight to or from Asia, so a nap will do)—many might wonder about the need to pay the premium for Business Class, as PE might suffice.

The more Premium Economy takes off, and the more First Class disappears, the more you might think about the value of a Business or First Class seat if you're not using it to sleep.

For people who are connection-averse and pass on making a stop, even if it gets them a higher class of service, FCF has the prescription: Fly Business on the overnight segment—to sleep, not to dine—and Premium Economy on the day flight, when work (or watching movies or reading), not sleep, is paramount.

COMBINING CLASSES SAVINGS

For example, the lowest average Business Class fare on Singapore Air from Los Angeles to Tokyo is \$3,526 round-trip. Compare that to buying a mixed-class ticket, meaning flying to Tokyo in Premium Economy—the flight leaves LAX at 10am (so you're not really thinking of going to sleep if only because it's the morning and you just woke up) and arrives in Tokyo at 1:30pm the next day, so it's not really an overnight flight—and returning in Business Class (\$2,549). The difference? \$977.



Flight details

1. LOS ANGELES TO TOKYO

FLIGHT SQ 11 ▾

Premium Economy (P)

LAX 10:00

Los Angeles

01 May(Tue), Los Angeles Intl



NRT 13:30

Tokyo

02 May(Wed), Narita

Singapore Airlines

Total travel time: 11hrs 30mins

2. TOKYO TO LOS ANGELES

FLIGHT SQ 12 ▾

Business (U)

NRT 19:15

Tokyo

15 May(Tue), Narita



LAX 13:25


Los Angeles

15 May(Tue), Los Angeles Intl

Singapore Airlines


Or, take New York-Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific, which offers three non-stop flights, one of which leaves NYC at 9am. Again, you've only been up for a few hours, so you're not thinking about sleeping again. If all you'll need is a nap, PE might suffice. Save 32% by purchasing a mixed-class ticket.

JFK New York City	+	HKG Hong Kong	+
Tue, March 6	◀ ▶	Tue, March 20	◀ ▶
Nonstop ▾	Price ▾	Airline ▾	Times ▾
More ▾			Clear




Choose an outbound flight

Sort by price ▾







Prices round trip. [Additional bag fees](#) may apply.



Track prices [View all \(1\)](#)

Save this trip to track price changes and receive price alerts and travel tips by email.




	12:55 AM – 5:40 AM+1 Cathay Pacific · American	15h 45m	Nonstop
	9:00 AM – 2:10 PM+1 Cathay Pacific · American	16h 10m	Nonstop
	1:50 PM – 7:05 PM+1 Cathay Pacific · American	16h 15m	Nonstop

HOW TO SEARCH AND BOOK

Any travel agent or airline reservationist can price this for you, however, only some airline sites offer this search option, among them Air Canada, American, Delta, Japan Airlines, and Singapore will let you do it online.

MAKE SURE TO GET BEST SEATS

Airlines with [the best Premium Economy seats to Asia](#) are: All Nippon, Japan Airlines, and Singapore. Visit the link above for more on airlines to Asia that offer a true Premium Economy product.



The Hidden Power of American Upgrades to Europe—Plus Jaw-Dropping Availability Survey

December 2017

Leisure and business travelers can make the most of AA miles when traveling to Europe with saving up to 84%, often with availability for six travelers.

This special report is primarily for oneworld (American / British Airways) members looking to achieve or maintain their elite status card—and **for anyone** who can't otherwise find a low [tactical Business Class fare](#).









Our Pitch: Forget about free mileage awards because they don't earn elite credit and can be difficult to find availability; think about using miles to upgrade instead given you'll earn miles and elite credit and are much more widely available.

AMERICAN'S UPGRADE PROGRAM

To Europe, American requires 25,000 miles plus a \$350 co-pay each way to upgrade the lowest upgradeable economy fares (H, K, M, L, V, G, Q, N, O, S classes). The co-pay is kind of high, but when Business Class fares are high, this upgrade offers a great return.



SAVE 72% ON BUSINESS CLASS EVEN IF YOU MISS THE ADVANCE-PURCHASE DEADLINE

Say you're traveling New York-Milan in mid-January. You can easily pay \$787 for a non-stop on American, while Business Class is often \$5,248 (\$4,461 more). So even with the \$700 co-pay, you can save 72% off the published fare by using miles. (See chart below for upgrade award availability survey.)

Round trip	One way	Multi-city	Economy	1 adult
JFK New York City	+	MLA Milan	✓ Economy Class	\$787
Fri, January 12	◀ ▶	Tue, January 30	Premium Economy	
			Business Class	\$5,248
			First Class	
Outbound flight				
Fri, Jan 12		6:00 PM – 8:00 AM*1 New York City (JFK) – Milan (MLA) American 198 · Economy Class · Boeing 767 Average legroom (31") Overnight flight Often delayed by 30+ min	8h 00m	 Some seats with power  Stream to your device  No Wi-Fi
Return flight				
Tue, Jan 30		10:00 AM – 1:40 PM Milan (MLA) – New York City (JFK) American 199 · Economy Class · Boeing 767 Average legroom (31") Often delayed by 30+ min	9h 40m	 Some seats with power  Stream to your device  No Wi-Fi
<div>Book, track or share this flight</div> <div>Total incl taxes & fees for 1 adult · Additional bag fees may apply.</div> <div>Book with American</div> <div>AA 198, AA 199</div> <div>\$787</div>				


SAVE 64% ON HIGH-FARE ROUTES


Say you're traveling Los Angeles-London, often an expensive Business Class route in general, even when booked way in advance. The lowest AA economy fare is currently \$602 from LAX, while Business Class is \$3,004 more (\$3,606)—so even with the \$700 co-pay, you can save 64% off the published fare by using miles. (See chart below for upgrade award)

Round trip	One way	Multi-city	Economy	1 adult
LAX Los Angeles	+	LHR London	✓ Economy Class	\$602
Wed, March 7	◀ ▶	Wed, March 14	Premium Economy	
Outbound flight			Business Class	\$3,606
			First Class	
Wed, Mar 7		5:25 PM – 12:05 PM ⁺¹ Los Angeles (LAX) – London (LHR) American 108 · Economy Class · Boeing 777 Average legroom (31") Overnight flight	10h 40m Wi-Fi In-seat & USB power On-demand video	
Return flight			✕	
Wed, Mar 14		1:10 PM – 5:40 PM London (LHR) – Los Angeles (LAX) American 135 · Economy Class · Boeing 777 Average legroom (31") Often delayed by 30+ min	11h 30m Wi-Fi In-seat & USB power On-demand video	
<div>Book, track or share this flight Ads ⓘ</div> <div>Total incl taxes & fees for 1 adult · Additional bag fees may apply.</div> <div>Book with American AA 108, AA 135 \$602</div>				

SAVE 84% ON SHORT-NOTICE

Book a New York-Madrid trip inside of 14 days and you're looking at a Business Class fare of \$7,460—while coach is just \$493 to upgrade on routes with good availability so you can easily save \$6,267 / 84% by using your miles.

Round trip	One way	Multi-city	Economy	1 adult
JFK New York City	+	Madrid (all airports)	✓ Economy Class	\$493
Wed, December 6	◀ ▶	Thu, December 14	Premium Economy	\$1,034
Nonstop	Price	American	Business Class	\$7,460
 Choose an outbound flight Sort by price			First Class	
Prices round trip. Additional bag fees may apply.				

Round trip	One way	Multi-city	Economy	1 adult
New York City (all airports)	+	London (all airports)	✓ Economy Class	\$691
Fri, December 29	◀ ▶	Tue, January 16	Premium Economy	\$1,223
Nonstop	Price	American	Business Class	\$5,025
 Choose an outbound flight Sort by price + best			First Class	\$6,050
Prices round trip. Additional bag fees may apply.				

BRIDGE ROUTE CONNECTIONS CAN SAVE UP TO 83%

Smart travelers use the long-haul Business Class flight as a “bridge”. All they have to do is get to and from the bridge gateway.

From the U.S., that means you might even buy an **economy through-fare** ticket, meaning the fare gets you to and from the international gateway all on one ticket—not two separate tickets. You just upgrade the long international / important legs of the trip.

For example, say you are traveling from Boston to Milan. The through-fare ticket gets you to and from Milan via New York for \$545 instead of \$7,458 for a Business Class ticket. Even with the \$700 co-pay, you can save 83% off the published fare by using miles.

Round trip	One way	Multi-city	Economy	1 adult
BOS Boston	+	MXP Milan	✓ Economy Class	\$590
Fri, January 12	◀ ▶	Tue, January 30	Premium Economy	
Outbound flight			Business Class	\$7,458
			First Class	

Fri, Jan 12



12:10 PM – 1:30 PM

Boston (BOS) – New York City (JFK)
American 2463 · Economy Class · Airbus A321
(Sharklets)
Average legroom (31")

1h 20m

- Wi-Fi
- In-seat & USB power
- On-demand video

Layover in New York City JFK

4h 30m

6:00 PM – 8:00 AM⁺¹

New York City (JFK) – Milan (MXP)
American 198 · Economy Class · Boeing 767
Average legroom (31")

Overnight flight
Often delayed by 30+ min

8h 00m

- Some seats with power
- Stream to your device
- No Wi-Fi

Return flight



Tue, Jan 30



10:00 AM – 1:40 PM

Milan (MXP) – New York City (JFK)
American 199 · Economy Class · Boeing 767
Average legroom (31")
Often delayed by 30+ min

9h 40m

- Some seats with power
- Stream to your device
- No Wi-Fi

Layover in New York City JFK

3h 34m




5:14 PM – 6:36 PM

New York City (JFK) – Boston (BOS)
American 4630 · Economy Class · Embraer RJ-175
Operated by Republic Airlines as American Eagle
Average legroom (30")
Often delayed by 30+ min

1h 22m

- Wi-Fi
- Stream to your device
- No in-seat power


 **Book, track or share this flight** Ads ⓘ
Total incl taxes & fees for 1 adult · [Additional bag fees](#) may apply.

Traveling Onward in Europe: It's easy if you stick with AA's partners, British Airways, Finnair, and Iberia, and book the entire trip on one ticket.

For example, say you are traveling from Los Angeles to Dublin. On American, that means making a connection in London. The through-fare is \$723 round-trip versus \$3,525 in Business Class. You upgrade the bridge leg of the trip, Los Angeles-London-Los Angeles. Even with the \$700 co-pay, you can save 60% off the published fare by using miles. Note that the London-Dublin leg will be on British Airways and will be in economy. Most people are okay in coach for 90 minutes.

Outbound flight ✕

Return flight ✕



Book, track or share this flight

Total incl taxes & fees for 1 adult · Additional bag fees may apply.

Ads


HOW ANYONE CAN PLAY THIS UPGRADE GAME

Sweet Redeems Survey: American Business Class Upgrades

Routes	Departure Availability			Return Availability		
	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 - London	Dec., March			Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April		
Chicago - Paris	Dec., Jan.			Dec., March, May, June	Dec., Aug.	April, Aug.
Dallas - Frankfurt	Feb., March, April, May, June	Jan., Feb., March, April, May, June	Feb., April	Dec., Feb. to April, May, June, July	Feb., March, April	April, May
Dallas - London	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, July, Aug.	Dec., Jan., Feb., March	Dec., Jan., Aug.	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, June, July, Aug., Sept.	Jan., Feb., March to July	Jan., Aug.
Dallas - Madrid	Dec., Jan.	Aug.		Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April		
Dallas - Paris	Dec., Jan., Feb.			Feb., March, April		
Los Angeles - London	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April	Feb., March		Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April	Jan., March, April	Feb., March
Miami - Barcelona	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, May	Jan., Feb., March, May		Jan. to March, April, June	Jan., Feb., March, April	Feb.
Miami - London	March, Aug.	Aug.		Dec., Jan., Feb., April	Feb., March, Aug.	March, Aug.
Miami - Madrid	Feb., March			Feb., March, April		March
Miami - Milan	Dec., Feb., March, May, June, July	Dec.	Dec., March, July	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, June, July	Dec., March, June	March, May
Miami - Paris	Dec., Jan., March, July	Dec., Jan., March	Jan., Feb.	Dec., May	April	Jan. to March, April
New York - Barcelona	March, April, May, June	Feb., March, April, July	Dec. to Feb., July	June, July	March, April, May, June, July	Dec. to Feb., March, April, May., June

Routes	Departure Availability			Return Availability		
	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
New York - London	Dec., Jan., March, April, May, June, July, Sept.	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, May, July, Aug.	Dec., Feb., March, April, May, July, Aug.	June, July, Aug., Sept.	March to May, June, July	Dec. to Feb., March to May, June, July, Aug., Sept.
New York - Madrid	Dec., Jan., Feb., April, July	Dec., Jan., March, Aug.		Dec., Jan., April, June, July	Dec., March, April, May	Dec., Feb., March
New York - Milan	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, May, July	Dec., May	July	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, May, July	Jan., Feb., June, July	March, May
New York - Paris	Dec., Jan. to April, May	Feb., April, July	Aug.	Dec., Jan., March, April	Jan., Feb.	Dec., Feb., March
Philadelphia - London	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April	Dec.,		Dec., Feb., to Apr., May, July	Dec., Jan., Feb.,	Dec.
Raleigh Durham - London	Dec. to Feb., March, July	Dec., Jan., Feb., March	Dec., Jan., July	Feb., March, April, May., June, July	Feb., March, May	Dec., Jan., March

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



Coach For Barely Less Than First? Don't Get Schmucked by United.

December 2017

It could cost you as much as First Class.

Airlines know that it's easier to upsell than sell. Once they've got your patootie booked for one of their coach seats, they offer little incentives with price tags attached. Window seats...

Extra bag allowance...

Premium economy legroom... and on and on it goes.

But those little incentives add up.

There’s psychology involved. Many of us go into a different state of mind once the seat is booked: “OK, now I’ve got my low-cost seat, I might indulge just a touch—it’s still going to be way cheaper. *Right?*”

Depending on the route, United’s upsell options can cost as much as a domestic First Class seat, and that’s outrageous.

LET’S HAVE SOME SHOW AND TELL

On a Houston to Denver return flight, the average basic economy fare is \$192. (Screenshot below.) Do you see where it says, “This fare has restrictions”? United is not kidding! No seat selection, no carry-on baggage, and (no) more.

TOTAL	\$192.40
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This fare has restrictions.
Please review the information below before continuing.

Trip summary
Tue, Jan 16, 2018

12:45 pm

Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental)

2:21 pm

Denver, CO, US (DEN)

Basic Economy

Nonstop

2h 36m total

UA 737 Boeing 737-900

Details

Tue, Jan 23, 2018

11:30 am

Denver, CO, US (DEN)

2:50 pm

Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental)

Basic Economy

Nonstop

2h 20m total

UA 1819 Boeing 737-800

Details

Basic Economy restrictions apply, including:

No seat selection

- Seats assigned prior to boarding
- No group or family seating
- No Economy Plus® seating or upgrades

No full-sized carry-on bag on board*

- Check bags before airport security for the applicable fee (starting at \$25)
- Bags brought to the gate incur an additional \$25 gate handling charge

No refunds or flight changes

- Refunds are not allowed except as stated in our 24-hour flexible booking policy

No Premier® qualifying credit or lifetime miles

- Earn award miles only (based on the fare and your MileagePlus® status)

qualifying MileagePlus credit cards or Star Alliance™ Gold members.

restriction does not apply to MileagePlus Premier members, primary cardmembers of

Page 2 of 6

Roundtrip (1 traveler) Edit search	
<hr/>	
Tue, Jan 16, 2018	Revise
IAH - DEN 12:45 pm - 2:21 pm	
Tue, Jan 23, 2018	Revise
DEN - IAH 11:30 am - 2:50 pm	
<hr/>	
Fare	\$199.06
Taxes and fees	\$43.34
<hr/>	
TOTAL	\$242.40

Without those restrictions, the standard economy fare is \$242 for that flight.

Now, United has different “bundle options” for that standard economy ticket. The lowest is for a premium economy seat called “Economy Plus,” which offers just a bit more legroom. Because, as United says, “a little extra legroom goes a long way.” We would add (for United): “a long way for us to make a better profit on this seat.”

Travelers can also opt for a checked-in bag. Depending on the route, other opt-ups can include dedicated check-in lines, security lanes, and priority boarding. United’s prices on these options for the flights mentioned above are shown below.

Select Offer	Choice Offer
1. Economy Plus®	1. Economy Plus®
	2. Extra checked bag
+ \$78 per person	+ \$95 per person
Select	Select

As you can see, the extra cost ranges from \$151 to \$185 on top of the round-trip economy ticket of \$242. So if you chose the Economy Plus option (a bit more legroom) and an extra checked bag, the price is \$427.


Roundtrip (1 traveler) Edit search	
<hr/>	
Tue, Jan 16, 2018 Revise	
IAH - DEN 12:45 pm - 2:21 pm	
Tue, Jan 23, 2018 Revise	
DEN - IAH 11:30 am - 2:50 pm	
<hr/>	
Fare	\$199.06
Taxes and fees	\$43.34
Travel Options bundle	\$185.00
<hr/>	
TOTAL	\$427.40

Are you ready for the outrageous bit? The same flights in domestic First Class cost \$444, a \$17 difference round-trip (screenshot below). The \$17 gets you an “extra spacious...beautifully contoured two-tone” First Class seat (United’s words), meals each way, free checked bag, preferred check-in and boarding, and more.

Not bad for an extra \$17. A coffee, newspaper and bagel at the airport could set you back about as much.

The lesson, of course, is to always check the cost of a First Class seat. Sure it’s a relatively short flight, but why not fly First if it’s costing you only a few dollars more?

Tue, Jan 16, 2018

12:45 pm 


Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental)

2:21 pm

Denver, CO, US (DEN)

Nonstop

2h 36m total

 UA 737 Boeing 737-900

[Details](#)

MileagePlus earnings:


970 base award miles
1,724 PQM | 1.5 PQS | \$194 PQD


Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental) to Denver, CO, US (DEN)

United First (P)


12:45 pm - 2:21 pm (2h 36m)

Lunch

 UA 737 | Boeing 737-900

 Power outlets

Tue, Jan 23, 2018

11:30 am 


Denver, CO, US (DEN)

2:50 pm

Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental)

Nonstop

2h 20m total

 UA 1819 Boeing 737-800

[Details](#)

MileagePlus earnings:


970 base award miles
1,724 PQM | 1.5 PQS | \$194 PQD

Denver, CO, US (DEN) to Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental)

United First (P)

11:30 am - 2:50 pm (2h 20m)

Lunch

 UA 1819 | Boeing 737-800

Roundtrip (1 traveler)

[Edit search](#)

Tue, Jan 16, 2018

[IAH - DEN](#) 12:45 pm - 2:21 pm

Tue, Jan 23, 2018

[DEN - IAH](#) 11:30 am - 2:50 pm

Fare	\$386.98
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Taxes and fees	\$57.42
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TOTAL	\$444.40
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