



FCF's Hula Loophole Soothes the Transcon Price Sting

July 2022

Lei over: How East Coast travelers can get free First Class tickets to Hawaii on their trip to California

A transcontinental route combined with a free round-trip ticket to Hawaii — how pineapple sweet can that be! In fact, it's quintessential FCF thinking — i.e. something most people never consider when flying but which yields a Business or First Class ticket for way less, or at the very least, a more valuable product for the same money. This is how it works.

TRANSCON DAYLIGHT ROBBERY

We published our [latest lament on ridiculously high transcon fares](#) — recently in the \$2,000+ plus price range for nonstops between Los Angeles or San Francisco and New York on American, Delta, and United (that aren't 6 a.m. departures or red eyes). We cover that in detail [here](#). Just when we got accustomed to those \$2,000 round-trips (after being accustomed to \$1,000 round-trips), one month later the average transcon fare jumped to \$2,300+. I get grumpy when five or six months ago fares were a third to half of what they are now, as you can see [here](#) and [here](#). That's where the Hula Loophole comes in.

WHAT THE HECK IS THE HULA LOOPHOLE?

The strategy involves combining Hawaiian and transcon routes to save money — and add a Hawaiian vacation at the same time. Adding a bit of Hawaii to *anything* is a good thing, right? Here's how to catch this palm tree swaying.



Hawaii. What better place for a lei over?

EXAMPLE OF HAWAII FOR FREE: BOSTON > KAUAI > LOS ANGELES > BOSTON

In this example, you can jump on the Hula Loophole for little more than a transcon fare. In the screenshot below, Boston to Los Angeles in Business/First Class typically goes for \$2,553. But if you fly from Boston, stop in Los Angeles and then on to places like Kauai, Maui, Honolulu, and Kona before returning back to Boston, *then* your fare would actually be *less* at \$2,397 (screenshot below).

Sample Trips to Cali that Get First Class to Hawaii for Free

Start Your Ticket In	Your Hawaiian Destination	Your Stop	Fare	Compare to Transcon Round-Trip	Savings
Boston	Kauai/Lihue	Los Angeles	\$2,397	\$2,553	\$156 / 6%
New York	Maui	Los Angeles	\$2,353	\$2,496	\$143 / 6%
New York	Kona	Los Angeles	\$2,458	\$2,496	\$38 / 2%
New York	Honolulu	Los Angeles	\$2,485	\$2,496	\$11 / 0%

[PLAN TRAVEL](#)
[TRAVEL INFORMATION](#)
[AADVANTAGE*](#)

Review and pay

[← New search](#)

DEPART
Boston, MA to Los Angeles, CA
Monday, August 15, 2022

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Class	Seats
1423 American Airlines	6:00 PM BOS	9:06 PM LAX	6h 6m	Business	Choose seats

DEPART
Los Angeles, CA to Kauai Island, HI
Monday, August 22, 2022

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Class	Seats
285 American Airlines	5:35 PM LAX	8:29 PM LIH	5h 54m	First	Choose seats

DEPART
Kauai Island, HI to Boston, MA
Monday, August 29, 2022 to Tuesday, August 30, 2022

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Class	Seats
286 American Airlines	11:00 PM LIH	7:25 AM LAX	5h 25m	First	Choose seats
Stop: Los Angeles (LAX)					
1423 American Airlines	8:15 AM LAX	4:51 PM BOS	5h 36m	Business	Choose seats

Cost summary

Your trip total

\$2,397.96

Includes all taxes and carrier-imposed fees

or as low as \$150/mo with [affirm](#). [Learn more](#)

Passenger		Bag and optional fees
Trip BOS / LAX	\$2,244.48	Reservation and tickets FAQs
Taxes	\$153.48	Price and Tax Information
Carrier-imposed fees	\$0.00	Conditions of Carriage
Subtotal	\$2,397.96	
AAdvantage* benefits		
Priority	\$0.00	
Same-day Standby	\$0.00	
Total (all passengers)	\$2,397.96	

Play with your pricing starting on the East Coast and stopping in places like Kauai, Maui, Honolulu, and Kona before continuing on to California on your way back to the East Coast.

That's a hulapalooza of a deal.

SUMMER

Hot August Nights Still Open for Business and First Class Travel

July 2022

VIBES

Spontaneous summer deals up to 53% off are still possible to Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South Pacific for Business and First Class flyers

I know what some of you are thinking. It's July and you would love to have an international summer trip to look forward to, especially if your friends and family are bending your ear about all THEIR amazing adventures this year.

But then you hear all the news about bad availability using miles thanks to full flights and the high cost of dynamic pricing, and when you check fares you see that prices to most destinations, particularly within 60

days, are high.

So you figure that your summer trip potential has passed you by, right? WRONG!

Our incredible team here at FCF has been burning the midnight oil to find not only award availability for solo travelers (more about those independent folk in [this](#) special report), but also some great options for couples and families.

SUMMER LOVIN'

Attention all summer lovin', deal grabbin' airficionados: You're going to love this special report.

We looked at this optimistically: With hundreds of flights for international travel from the U.S., there *must* be a handful with award space in August if you're a last-minute planner (and if you've read this far, you probably are). Whether you were planning a trip, [have your bags permanently packed](#) and ready to go, or you want to **trade your trip to Des Moines for one to London or Tahiti**, here are some pre-baked trips to choose from, meaning there's **little effort required on your end**. FCF has done all the work for you.

HIDDEN ROUTES FOR A LATE SUMMER FLING

Let's take a look at the team's discoveries to Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South Pacific for **Business and First Class flyers**.

BUSINESS CLASS TO EUROPE

How much do I love summer in Europe? Let me count the ways: Paris sidewalk cafes, Dublin rooftop bars, an afternoon Dubrovnik boat tour, a stroll through London's Hyde Park among office sunbathers (wear your sunglasses!), Rome's ancient vias with a cooling gelato, beautiful Vienna in shorts and T-shirts, and Germany's cobbled lanes without those winter chill goosebumps.

Austrian Airlines' Washington, DC-Vienna route has a handful of days with **two seats in August** outbound, one seat on the return; Chicago-Vienna has one seat both directions for a handful of days in August.

Lufthansa has a handful of **four seat options** outbound for August travel on its Detroit-Frankfurt route.

Singapore Airlines' Houston-Manchester route offers seats in both directions for two travelers in August. New York-Frankfurt has a handful of seats for **four travelers** outbound in August and some both directions for **two travelers**.

SWISS' New York-Geneva route has seats on the return in August for **four travelers**.

TAP's Boston-Lisbon route is wide open for in August, both directions.

Summer Travel to Europe Using United Miles

Airline	Route	One-way Mileage	Outbound			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
Austrian	Chicago-Vienna	77,000	Aug.			Aug.		
	Washington, DC-Vienna		Aug.	Aug.				
Lufthansa	Detroit-Frankfurt		Aug.					
SWISS	New York-Geneva	73,000				Aug.		
TAP	New York-Lisbon	77,000			Aug.			Aug.

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

Summer Travel to Europe Using Singapore Miles

Airline	Route	One-way Mileage	Outbound			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
Singapore	Houston-Manchester	103,500	Aug.			Aug.		
	New York-Frankfurt		Aug.	Aug.		Aug.		Aug.

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



Paris en été

UNITED BUSINESS CLASS MILEAGE UPGRADES TO EUROPE

From Boston to London, United has a handful of two-seat options available to upgrade outbound and is wide open on the return for up to **four travelers** in August. Washington, DC, to Dublin has a handful of seats for **four travelers** in August, in both directions, and they're upgradeable on the lowest fares for 20,000 miles each way.

Summer Travel to Europe Using United Miles

Airline	Route	One-way Mileage	Outbound			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
United	Boston-London	20,000	Aug.					Aug.
	Washington, DC-Dublin		Aug.	Aug.		Aug.	Aug.	

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

FIRST CLASS TO ASIA

While Tokyo is just starting to open up, you can fly *via Tokyo* as we reported [here](#) to fly beyond Tokyo. All Nippon has one seat available and is wide-open for travel in the month of August on their Chicago-Tokyo route.

Summer Travel to Asia Using All Nippon Miles

Airline	To Tokyo From	Round-trip Mileage	Outbound			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
All Nippon Airways	Chicago	150,000			Aug.			Aug.

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

BUSINESS CLASS TO THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East in summer is hot, but it's geared up for it with everything from the world's tallest indoor roller coaster in Doha (185 feet!) to an indoor ski resort in Dubai.

Qatar's Dallas and New York-Doha is wide open for four travelers both directions in August; Boston and Los Angeles are wide open for four travelers in August outbound, with a handful of four seats on the return from Los Angeles and a handful of two seats on the return in August from Boston.

Summer Travel to the Middle East Using Qatar Miles

Airline	To Doha From	One-way Mileage	Outbound			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
Qatar	Boston	70,000			Aug.	Aug.		
	Dallas				Aug.			Aug.
	Los Angeles				Aug.	Aug.		
	New York				Aug.			Aug.

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

BUSINESS CLASS TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The sun and the South Pacific go together like Penn and Teller: pure magic. And Tahiti? That's a poster attraction. The crew of The Bounty didn't want to leave, and neither will you.

United from San Francisco to Papeete has seats for **four travelers** on the return in August or both directions for one traveler.

Summer Travel to the South Pacific Using United Miles

Airline	To Papeete From	One-way Mileage	Outbound			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
United	San Francisco	70,000	Aug.			Aug.		

*Months in [black](#) at least one seat available; in [blue](#) at least two seats; in [green](#) at least four seats.

UPGRADE TO BUSINESS CLASS TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC

United from San Francisco to Papeete has a handful of seats for one traveler in August, both directions.

Summer Travel to the South Pacific Using United Miles

Airline	To Papeete From	One-way Mileage	Outbound			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
United	San Francisco	30,000	Aug.			Aug.		

*Months in [black](#) at least one seat available; in [blue](#) at least two seats; in [green](#) at least four seats.

SUMMER DEAL WHAT IF'S...

What to do if you only [find one seat](#)

What to do if you only find seats in [one direction](#)

What to do if you [don't see your origin or destination](#)

How [returning in a different class](#) can make for better value

FCF'S SUMMER PLAYLIST TO GET YOU IN THE MOOD

"Summertime" - Ella Fitzgerald & Louis Armstrong

"All Summer Long" - The Beach Boys

"Hot Fun in the Summertime" - Sly and the Family Stone

"Summer Breeze" - Seals and Crofts

"Summer Samba" - Marcos Valle

"August Day Song" - Bebel Gilberto

"Summer Nights" - Olivia Newton John and John Travolta

"Sunny" - Bobby Hebb

"Summer Wind" - Frank Sinatra

"Island in the Sun" - Weezer

United We Strand: Why Is United Making It so Hard to Use Miles to Europe?

July 2022

FCF's magnifying glass spots cracks in United's evolving award pricing: Discover the routes that can save you up to 53% off

Have you seen United's ridiculously high evolving award prices? Don't get me started. Oh wait, I'm writing this special report all about it. So I *am* going to get started.

In the past, United Airlines' Business Class award trips to Europe typically used to cost only 60,000 miles one-way, but now they are double or even triple that. It's hard to book affordable premium flights to Europe these

days and demoralizing to keep looking for uninflated awards using your miles. It takes time, effort, and generally, anguish.

WHAT THE HECK, UNITED?!

So if you're someone who often transfers points to United miles (many get Chase cards to transfer points to United miles), you should read this special report before paying United's gouge award rates. (By the way, transferring Chase points to Hyatt points can frequently net you 3¢+ of value per point at high-end hotels.)

UNSOLD SURPLUS SEATS, GENEROUS WHOLESALE PRICES

Generally speaking, most flights to Europe are full right now, but the sheer number of flights across the pond means it's inevitable that some haven't sold out. You just have to look closely to find them. Do you have the time to do that? Probably not. But if there are golden needles in that haystack, you know we'll find them for you.

AND THAT'S JUST WHAT WE DID

They may lose the occasional tussle with a cat, but FCF's team of truffle hounds have analyzed flight lists and sniffed out some treasures for you. Here's the scope of our survey:

Scope of FCF's July 2022 United & Partner Discount Award Survey

Airline	# of Routes FCF Surveyed	# of Routes FCF Found with Low-Cost Availability
United	62	1
Air Canada	29	10
Austrian	4	3
Brussels Airlines	3	2
LOT	4	1
Lufthansa	33	3
SAS	8	0
SWISS	11	4
TAP	6	5



Going up: United's award prices

Nowadays, if you're not careful or not reading FCF's special reports, plan on paying up to 155,000 miles for Business Class one-way to Europe. However, on 29 routes with eight Star Alliance partner airlines, FCF's team found one-ways for as low as 73,000 United miles — saving you ~53%. See FCF's cheat sheet here:

United & Star Alliance partner Treasure Map of Low-Priced Business Class Seats

Fly On	Route	Cost One-way with United Miles	Outbound			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
United	Boston-London	60,000-75,000	April		Sept. to March	April	Oct.	Sept., Nov. to March
Air Canada	Montreal-Barcelona	77,000		April			April	
	Montreal-Frankfurt		Jan., March	Jan., Feb.		Jan., March	March	Jan., Feb.
	Montreal-Geneva		Feb., March, April				March	Feb., April
	Montreal-Lisbon		April				April	
	Montreal-London			March			March	March
	Montreal-Paris		Feb.		March, April			March, April

Fly On	Route	Cost One-way with United Miles	Outbound			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
	Toronto-Amsterdam		April	Oct.		Oct.	April	
	Toronto-Barcelona		April				April	
	Toronto-London		Oct., Nov., Feb., March	March		Nov.	Oct., Nov., March	March
	Toronto-Paris		Feb., March	March		March		Feb.
Austrian	Chicago-Vienna	77,000	Aug., Feb., March		Jan.	Aug., Nov.	Sept., Dec., Jan., Feb.	Jan., Feb., March
	New York-Vienna		March	Feb., March	Jan., March	Sept., Nov., Dec.	Dec.	Jan. to March
	Washington, DC-Vienna		Aug., Jan., Feb.	Aug.		Sept., Nov., Dec., March	Dec., Jan., Feb., March	Feb., March
Brussels	New York-Brussels	75,000	Nov., Dec.		Jan. to May	Nov., Dec.	Dec.	Jan. to May
	Washington, DC-Brussels		March, May	April, May	April	March		April, May
LOT	New York-Warsaw	77,000	Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Feb., March	Nov., Feb.	Jan.	Oct., Nov., Dec., April, May	Oct., Dec., Jan., March	Nov., Feb.
Lufthansa	Atlanta-Frankfurt	77,000	Nov., Dec.	Nov.		Dec.	Dec.	Nov.
	Charlotte-Munich		Aug., Oct., Dec.	Nov.		Nov., Dec.	Nov.	
	Detroit-Frankfurt		Aug., Oct.	Nov.		Oct., Nov.	Nov.	
SWISS	Boston-Zurich	73,000	Oct., Jan., Feb., March			Nov.	Oct., Nov., Jan., Feb., March	Dec., Feb.
	Montreal-Zurich		Dec.	Dec., April	Nov., Jan. to March	March	Nov., Jan., Feb.	Nov.
	New York-Geneva		Jan., Feb., March	Feb.		Aug., Oct.	Sept., Oct., Dec., Jan.	Nov., Feb., March

Fly On	Route	Cost One-way with United Miles	Outbound			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
	Toronto-Zurich	82,500	Dec. to March			Dec. to Feb.		
TAP	Boston-Lisbon	77,000	Sept., Nov., Dec.	Sept.	Aug., Jan. to May	Sept., Oct.	Jan., April, May	Aug., Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb., March
	Chicago-Lisbon		Jan., March	Feb.		Jan., March, May	Feb.	
	Miami-Lisbon		Jan., May	April	Feb., March	April, May	Jan. to March	
	New York-Lisbon		Dec.	April	Jan. to March, May		April	Jan. to March, May
	Washington, DC-Lisbon		Nov., April	May	Jan. to March	Sept., Oct.	Sept., Nov.	Nov., Dec. to May

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



The State of Business and First Class refundable fares in 2022

Fully refundable fares have historically been very high. But the Lockdown created not only a waiver of cancellation fees, but also a whole new category of relatively low fully refundable fares.

And here's the catch – the industry hasn't noticed or emphasized this, with all the attention going to fee waivers. Not the same thing.

Since travel is back and booming post Lockdown, we thought we'd check the status of refundable fares to see how the opportunity landscape may have shifted with American, Delta, and United.

LET'S FIRST REVIEW NON-REFUNDABLE, BUT FEE-FREE, CANCELLABLE TICKETS

Fee-free cancellations get you a voucher or a trip credit that's usually valid for 12 to 36 months (more about that [here](#)). Although you have that year+ up your sleeve to plan something, "voucher" or "trip credit" means you won't get any cash back in your hands.

As we were working on this report — which **focuses exclusively on fully refundable fares**, NOT fares that are cancellable and rebookable for free or a fee — we discovered several things:

- They go by many names, including "flexible fares," "fully refundable," and "refundable."
- Opportunities vary for the same flight, from one airline and partner to the next.
- The Gold Medal goes to American for seemingly charging the least extra for refundability.

WHY PAY EXTRA FOR A REFUNDABLE FARE?

- It's good insurance if you don't fly too often. Otherwise you might just end up with an expired voucher after the 12- to 36-month period runs out.
- There's no buyer's remorse. It makes changing or canceling your travel plans much more palatable.
- You're protected if you have an unpredictable schedule.
- You're protected if you're traveling for business and the client is covering the cost (or not).
- When you're simply unsure about your dates, plans, etc.



Given Lockdown unpredictability, it's important to note that much of this is subject to change. So, **use this special report to learn about what variables** to look for if you care about no-risk ticketing.

On American, Delta, and United websites, you can see what their refundable fares are when selecting your flights, allowing you to take control of your destiny. In the new world order, this can net some huge savings

over traditional, exorbitantly priced refundable fares. All in just a click or two.

SAMPLE OF THE NEW REFUNDABLE FARE ENVIRONMENT

Notice how Boston to London is only \$400 dollars more.

Lowest Business Class Fare...

American Airlines

Your trip summary

Flagship® Business

Round trip (Non-refundable)

\$2,454 per person

Total \$2,453.47 (all passengers)

Price and tax information ⓘ

Room to work or relax

- Lie-flat seat with direct aisle access
- Flagship® Lounge and Admirals Club® access
- Priority check-in, security and boarding
- 2 free checked bags
- No change fees (difference in ticket price may apply)*

* Changes for trips that begin in Spain, the UK, New Zealand or Australia are allowed with a fee.

Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.

Bag and optional fees ⓘ

Depart Boston, MA to London, United Kingdom

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

9:00 PM → 8:40 AM 6h 40m Nonstop Flagship® Business

AA 108 = 772-Boeing 777

ⓘ ⓘ

⚠ Overnight flight or connection

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Return London, United Kingdom to Boston, MA

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

10:05 AM → 1:10 PM 8h 5m Nonstop Flagship® Business

AA 109 = 772-Boeing 777

ⓘ ⓘ

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Lowest Refundable Business Class Fare...

American Airlines

Your trip summary

Flagship® Business Flexible

Round trip (Flexible)

\$2,854 per person

Total \$2,853.47 (all passengers)

Price and tax information ⓘ

Room to work or relax

- Lie-flat seat with direct aisle access
- Flagship® Lounge and Admirals Club® access
- Priority check-in, security and boarding
- 2 free checked bags
- Changes and refunds allowed

Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.

Bag and optional fees ⓘ

Depart Boston, MA to London, United Kingdom

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

9:00 PM → 8:40 AM 6h 40m Nonstop Flagship® Business Flexible

AA 108 = 772-Boeing 777

ⓘ ⓘ

⚠ Overnight flight or connection

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

Return London, United Kingdom to Boston, MA

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

10:05 AM → 1:10 PM 8h 5m Nonstop Flagship® Business Flexible

AA 109 = 772-Boeing 777

ⓘ ⓘ

[Details](#) | [Change](#)

COMPARING THE BIG THREE U.S. CARRIERS

Let's take a look at some sample costs for the privilege of refundability.

Region	Sample Route	American	Delta	United
Asia	Los Angeles-Tokyo	N/A	\$700	\$700
Caribbean	New York-San Juan*	\$50	\$350	\$200
Europe	New York/Newark-London	\$400-\$500	\$650-\$750	\$550

Region	Sample Route	American	Delta	United
Hawaii	Los Angeles-Honolulu	N/A	\$210	\$400
South America	New York-Sao Paulo	\$100	\$400-\$3,500**	N/A
South Pacific	Los Angeles-Sydney	N/A	\$600	\$600
Transcon	Los Angeles-New York	\$500	\$500	N/A

N/A = No low refundable fares found. *American Miami-San Juan. ** Low refundable fares found on low fare dates.

THE NEWS ISN'T ALL GOOD

Keep in mind that some routes offer low flexible fares and some do not. The lowest American Airlines Los Angeles-Tokyo fares are \$6,354, while the lowest flexible fare is a whopping \$18,502.

Depart Los Angeles, CA to Tokyo, Japan
Wednesday, February 8, 2023

Lowest Fare Flexible

Sort by: Relevance

LAX
HND
12h 10m

10:15 AM → 3:25 PM
Nonstop

AA 27 = 788-Boeing 787

Business

FLAGSHIP*
Round trip
\$ 6,354

Depart Los Angeles, CA to Tokyo, Japan
Wednesday, February 8, 2023

Lowest Fare Flexible

Sort by: Relevance

LAX
HND
12h 10m

10:15 AM → 3:25 PM
Nonstop

AA 27 = 788-Boeing 787

Business Flexible

FLAGSHIP*
Round trip
\$ 18,502

Lockdowns may have wound down, but we're not out of the weeds or the madness just yet. Keep your eyes on airlines' refundable fares to potentially net some big savings, protect yourself if plans change, and get some cold hard cash back in your pocket if you need to rebook your next vacation. There's no telling how long this new refundable fare world will last, so take advantage while you can if it makes sense for you.

Page 4 of 4



Take the Fifth: Score Discount Business Class Awards Tickets *Now* to Europe With Quirk that Opens Up Secret Opportunities

July 2022

How to save up to 48% to Europe in a Comfy Business Class Seat

“If you’ll hold my hand we’ll chase your dream across the sky. For we can fly, we can fly up, up and away”

The Fifth Dimension, 1967

To be fair, the Fifth Dimension were singing about flying in a “beautiful balloon,” but that song became an earworm while preparing this report and I just can’t shake it. That’s for two reasons: this opportunity gets you

up, up, and away **using your precious miles and points** AND the song is by the Fifth Dimension, which is apt considering we're talking about a unique quirk of international travel, "Fifth Freedom Flights."

FIFTH FREEDOM FLIGHTS

Towards the end of World War II, countries began working out agreements for international air travel. They called them "[Freedoms of the Air](#)," of which there are now nine. Today we're talking about Freedom No. 7: a flight between two countries on an airline that belongs to *neither of those countries*.

Two examples (and the focus of this special report) are New York-Frankfurt and Houston-Manchester, both **on Singapore Airlines** – a points partner with Amex, Capital One, Chase, and Citi. Our first thoughts for the Frankfurt trip would be Lufthansa or a U.S. carrier; and opting for British Airways or a U.S. airline for the Manchester journey, *not* Singapore Airlines. And there lies the opportunity: a Fifth Freedom flight, not the obvious option, can often have better availability of discount premium award tickets. On top of that, to sell premium seats, the "Fifth Freedom" airline often discounts the prices as they tend to have a greater surplus of seats.

This speaks to two things I'm hearing so often right now: "Bennett, I can't use my %\$#@ miles or points!" and "Bennett, Europe is %\$#@ expensive to get to!" Well here's a golden opportunity to dissolve that angst. Let's get up, up, and away.

Although Singapore Airlines has increased mileage costs from 144,000 to 162,000 round-trip for both of these routes, United usually charges 310,000 miles round-trip.

TAKE THE FIFTH: YOUR RIGHT TO REMAIN INFORMED ABOUT THIS PLAY

There's **unusually good availability** of discount awards on Singapore's New York/JFK-Frankfurt and Houston-Manchester routes, otherwise a secret. Both give you a bridge route to 70+ European destinations – via connections with Singapore's European Star Alliance partners – for travel through May/June 2023. Remember, you can travel beyond Frankfurt and Manchester on Star Alliance partner airlines for free. The table below shows Star Alliance connection cities and flight times from Frankfurt and Manchester.

STAR ALLIANCE AIRLINES CONNECTION TIMES FROM FRANKFURT AND MANCHESTER:

Onward Connection Times From:	To:		
Less than 2 Hours	2 to 3 Hours	3 to 4 Hours	
Frankfurt	Amsterdam	Alicante	Heraklion
	Bari	Athens	Santorini
	Berlin	Barcelona	

Onward Connection Times From:	To:		
	Bordeaux	Bucharest	
	Bristol	Catania	
	Budapest	Corfu	
	Bucharest	Dublin	
	Cagliari	Glasgow	
	Copenhagen	Ibiza	
	Dubrovnik	London	
	Edinburgh	Madrid	
	Florence	Malta	
	Geneva	Minorca	
	Hamburg	Mykonos	
	Kraków	Palermo	
	Lyon	Palma	
	Manchester	Sofia	
	Marseille	Stockholm	
	Milan	Tirana	
	Munich	Valencia	
	Naples	Varna	
	Nice		
	Oslo		
	Paris		
	Prague		
	Rome		
	Salzburg		
	Split		
	Venice		
	Vienna		
	Warsaw		

Onward Connection Times From:	To:		
	Zagreb		
	Zürich		
Manchester	Copenhagen	Lisbon	Athens
	Frankfurt	Munich	
	Oslo	Stockholm	
		Vienna	
		Zürich	

WHAT AVAILABILITY LOOKS LIKE

The table tells the story. There's lots of free award seat availability there, particularly to and from Frankfurt, even if you're looking for **four seats**. Take your husband, take your best friend, and your mother-in-law.

Singapore Airlines Business Class Free Award Seat Availability

From/To	Outbound			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
Houston-Manchester	Aug., Sept., Oct. to Dec., Feb., March, May	Oct., Jan., April	Nov. to May	Aug., Oct.	Nov.	Dec. to May
New York-Frankfurt	Aug., Sept.	Aug.	Oct. to June	Aug.	Sept.	Oct. to June

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



Solo Yolo Fomo: Single Travelers to Asia Rejoice That the First Class World Was Made For You

July 2022

Ignore the glass-half-empty headlines about First Class award travel to Asia

I'm seeing a lot of negative reports about First Class air travel right now that contradict some of what we've found in our own research. And then it hit me: a lot of reporting focuses on trips with *more than one traveler*. Single travelers, or *unaccompanied majors(!)*, are a different kettle of fish, and their First Class story is a lot brighter.

RETAIL PRICING

Airlines are pretty good at filling seats. They've been doing it for a long time now, and these days, big technology and data analytics help them score even more revenue. Fair enough, we're all trying to make a buck.

In the Asian market, U.S. airlines American, Delta, and United have aggressive pricing departments that are completely unpredictable. Meanwhile, Asian airlines have a more steady hand. Month in and month out, we see general themes or trends that are more reliable. So while you're reading this special report, know that what you see on an Asian airline this month, will likely be similar next month. But this is less so for the U.S. airlines.

In a perfect airline world (not a perfect passenger world), every flight would be full, with every passenger paying full freight to get from A to B. But that's not what happens. The guy next to you, the brunette in 4A, the little old man in 12D, and we are all paying different prices for the same product: getting from A to B. You probably realize that *retail* reality. But do you know the *wholesale* story?

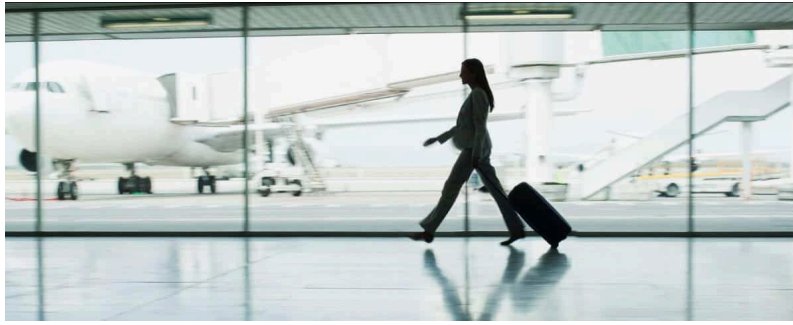
WHOLESALE PRICING

The airlines can never know for sure how many seats are going to sell at full price or not, so they hedge their bets by releasing wholesale mileage award tickets. It means they don't get full compensation for those seats because they either gave you the miles that you earned by flying, or you paid 1.3 to 3.5 cents for them, or they're giving the seats away to partners, probably at around one cent per mile. All this means those seats are going for a lot less than the advertised international First Class prices, which are sometimes up around the \$20K to \$30K mark.

So, on flights that the predictor-bots say will not be full in First Class, the airlines release mileage award availability. BUT, it's **generally only one seat at a time**, which means they benefit solo flyers. They don't want to give away their prime real estate too easily, so again, they hedge their bets.

Important things to note:

1. If you hear people talking about high airfares, the level of ease or difficulty in upgrading, free award seat availability, or difficulty finding free award seats in one particular class of service, you must consider that there are two types of travelers: solo travelers and non-solo travelers. This report is made for you **SOLO travelers** because **YOLO** (You Only Live Once) and **FOMO** (you don't want the Fear of Missing Out).



Go solo without the FOMO

2. In our research (which you'll see below), we demonstrate the odds of what does and doesn't apply to solo travelers.

Like flying solo? What if you were the [only_passenger on an 8-hour flight](#)?

WHEN ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO SCORE DISCOUNT FIRST CLASS SEATS?

When are the airlines most likely to release seats they think will go unsold? The closer to departure the better their forecasting abilities, so some airlines don't have a problem releasing First Class seats that will almost definitely not get sold. That's why close-in is a great time to score mileage award seats at the deepest discounted levels.

Two or three months before departure, depending on the destination and route, is when the airlines will be unsure of how many seats are going to get sold. So they keep their First Class seats close to their chest, releasing few if any.

The second most lucrative time to find discount First Class free award seats in general, and to Asia in particular, is when airlines post schedules and start selling seats – this typically happens from 11 to 12 months out. On routes where airlines historically haven't sold out, they'll release one or sometimes two knowing they're not going to sell all of them at retail pricing. So the second time solo travelers can score big is when airlines release seats 330 to 360 days in advance because they have high confidence that they're not going to sell out entirely.

By three to five months before departure, the airlines have already leaked out some wholesale seats, have run some sale fares, have played with pricing, and are fine tuning their approach to filling those departing flights.

Airlines With a First Class Cabin and How They're Trending for Solo Travelers

Airline	Offers two seats	Offers one seat last minute	Offers one seat 11-12 months out
All Nippon	Usually a handful 11 months out, both directions	Typically	Typically
Cathay Pacific*	No	Not Typical	Typically 8 to 11-12 months out
Japan Airlines	Rarely	Typically	Often available 1-2 days a month in addition to last minute and 11-12 months out
Singapore	Most likely to offer two seats within 90 days of travel	Typically	Not likely

*Cathay Pacific is not currently operating First Class flights

So the general rule is: the best time to find award seats is close-in, which could still be within six or eight weeks of departure to Asia; and far-out, which means it could be between 330 and 360 days. This varies by airline. Use the table below as a guide for when to start booking far in advance of travel.

Days in Advance You Can Book

Airline	Days
All Nippon	355
Cathay Pacific*	360
Japan Airlines	360
Singapore	355

*Cathay Pacific is not currently operating First Class flights

SOLO TRAVELERS SCORE 860% MORE DATES WITH ACCESS TO WHOLESALE PRICING

FCF research shows the number of days with one seat versus two seats for your top First Class seats to Asia.

First Class Trends for Solo Travelers – By Route

Airline	Route	Number of Dates with One Seat Outbound	Number of Dates with One Seat Return	Number of Dates with Two or More Seats Outbound	Number of Dates with Two or More Seats Return	% More Dates with Wholesale Pricing for Solo Travelers
All Nippon	Chicago-Tokyo	54	57	-	-	
Japan Airlines	Chicago-Tokyo	15	17	-	-	
	Los Angeles-Tokyo	25	28	5	7	750%-800%
	New York-Tokyo	22	26	3	8	690%-860%
	San Francisco-Tokyo	33	28	11	8	660%-710%
Singapore	Los Angeles-Tokyo	13	4	3	1	750%-760%

SOLO TRAVELERS AND BRIDGE ROUTES

Here at FCF we talk about bridge routes all the time. It's the long-haul flight that connects one continent to the other. This is the leg of the trip that matters most because it's the time you're in the plane the longest. Ideally you'd [connect at your home continent](#) so that when your long-haul bridge route flight lands, you're at your final destination. But if you live in Kansas City, you could connect to Asia, for example, because there are no nonstops from Kansas City. So you would fly Kansas City to Chicago or Dallas or Los Angeles or even San Francisco to get to your final destination in Asia. You want to be bridge route-minded with long-haul flight opportunities, in this case between the U.S. and Asia.

For example, on All Nippon we found only one route with First Class free award seats for solo travelers from Chicago to Tokyo for travel on several dates in August 2022 and June 2023, and a handful of seats in both directions in May 2023 and return in February. You only need one long-haul route with free award seats if you have to make a connection. So in this case, there are all kinds of dates with availability between the U.S. and Tokyo, through Chicago.

With Japan Airlines, we found First Class free award seats for solo travelers from Chicago to Tokyo for travel on several dates in June 2023, both directions from Los Angeles, a handful of seats end of July 2022 and June 2023 for solo travelers and a handful of seats for two people end of July 2022, both directions; from New York, a handful of seats end of July 2022 and June 2023 for solo travelers and a handful of seats for up to four people end of July 2022 on the return; from San Francisco, several dates with seats in June 2023 for one person and a handful of seats for up to four people end of July 2022, in both directions.

We checked Singapore Airlines but they only had close-in outbound flights from San Francisco to Tokyo, and nothing on their return in First Class.

Cathay is not showing any First Class seats at the present time.

FIRST CLASS ROUTES WITH SEATS FOR SOLOS

Given Asia is slowly regaining flights to/from the U.S., it's best to book now before Asia gets hot again. Here are the airlines and routes we found with free First Class award seats, when to find them, and how to get the miles if you don't have any.

All Nippon is a points transfer partner with Amex, Virgin Atlantic, United, and Air Canada.

- For bookings within 331 days, use partner Virgin Atlantic – a transfer partner with Amex, Chase, and Citi.
- All Nippon, a Star Alliance partner, gives you access to awards using your United miles or you can buy them at [1.8 cents when on sale](#).
- Use Air Canada miles or transfer to Air Canada from Amex, Capital One, and Chase or you can buy them as low as [1.3 cents each when on sale](#).

All Nippon First Class Opportunities For Solo Travelers

All Nippon Airways	Outbound			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-Tokyo	May		Aug., June	Feb	May	Aug., June

Months in black at least one seat available. *August 2022, use Virgin Atlantic miles 60,000 one-way or 120,000 round-trip; February, May and June 2023, use 150,000 All Nippon miles round-trip.

Japan Airlines partners with American, Cathay, and British Airways

- Japan Airlines, a oneworld partner, gives you access to awards using your American miles or you can buy them at [1.8 cents when on sale](#).
- Cathay Pacific is a transfer partner of Amex, Capital One, and Citi
- British Airways is a transfer partner of Amex, Capital One, and Chase

Japan Airlines First Class Opportunities For Solo Travelers

Japan Airlines	Outbound			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-Tokyo		June			June	
Los Angeles-Tokyo	July	July, June		July	July, June	
New York-Tokyo	July	June		July	July, June	
San Francisco-Tokyo	July	July, June	July	July	July, June	

*Months in black at least one seat available; in blue at least two seats; in green at least four seats. *July 2022, use 80,000 American miles one-way; June 2023, use 70,000 Japan miles one-way.

Singapore Airlines is a transfer partner with Amex, Capital One, Chase, and Citi.

Singapore Airlines First Class Opportunities For Solo Travelers

Singapore Airlines	Outbound			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 - Tokyo	July, Aug					

*Months in black at least one seat available. *July and August 2022, using 107,000 Singapore miles one-way.

What to do if...

You [only find seats in one direction](#).

You [don't see your origin or destination in the headlines or charts above?](#)