



This month we take FCF's Leg Stretch Strategy up a notch – to First Class.

Again, we look at leg-stretching Europe, the U.S., and South America, but this time with American Airlines and its oneworld partner, British Airways. This is for those who travel, or would like to travel, to Europe at least twice over a 12 month period, and South America once.

Quick definition

The Leg-Stretch Strategy takes advantage of the fact that U.S. airlines offer free stop-overs in the U.S. when traveling from Europe to South America and back (not to mention other destinations, as

we'll recap below). Our team found a way to connect these trips into stunningly low-fare opportunities.

Not you? **Hold on!** We think the fare is so spectacularly good it might tempt you to consider knocking off some bucket list destinations, given that you can get the luxury of First Class for less than the price of Business.

In the map and flight itinerary below, we show a leg-stretch between Lisbon, New York, and São Paulo in First Class starting at \$4,261.32; but the strategy also works from other cities on American and British Airways, including Buenos Aires, Atlanta, Boston, Miami, and Washington, DC.

Depart Lisbon, Portugal to New York, NY

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Aircraft	Class	Seats
 6575 American Airlines Operated by British Airways	10:40 AM LIS	1:35 PM LHR	2h 55m	320	Business	--
 6134 American Airlines Operated by British Airways	4:25 PM LHR	7:30 PM JFK	8h 5m	744	First	--

Depart New York, NY to Sao Paulo, Brazil

Thursday, March 1, 2018 to Friday, March 2, 2018

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Aircraft	Class	Seats
 951 American Airlines 	10:45 PM JFK	10:20 AM GRU	9h 35m	77W	First	1A

Depart Sao Paulo, Brazil to New York, NY

Saturday, March 10, 2018 to Sunday, March 11, 2018

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Aircraft	Class	Seats
 950 American Airlines 	10:20 PM GRU	7:15 AM JFK	9h 55m	77W	First	2A

Depart New York, NY to Lisbon, Portugal

Monday, June 25, 2018 to Tuesday, June 26, 2018

Flight	Depart	Arrive	Travel time	Aircraft	Class	Seats
 6145 American Airlines Operated by British Airways	10:55 PM JFK	11:00 AM LHR	7h 5m	777	First	--
 6359 American Airlines Operated by British Airways	3:15 PM LHR	6:05 PM LIS	2h 50m	320	Business	--

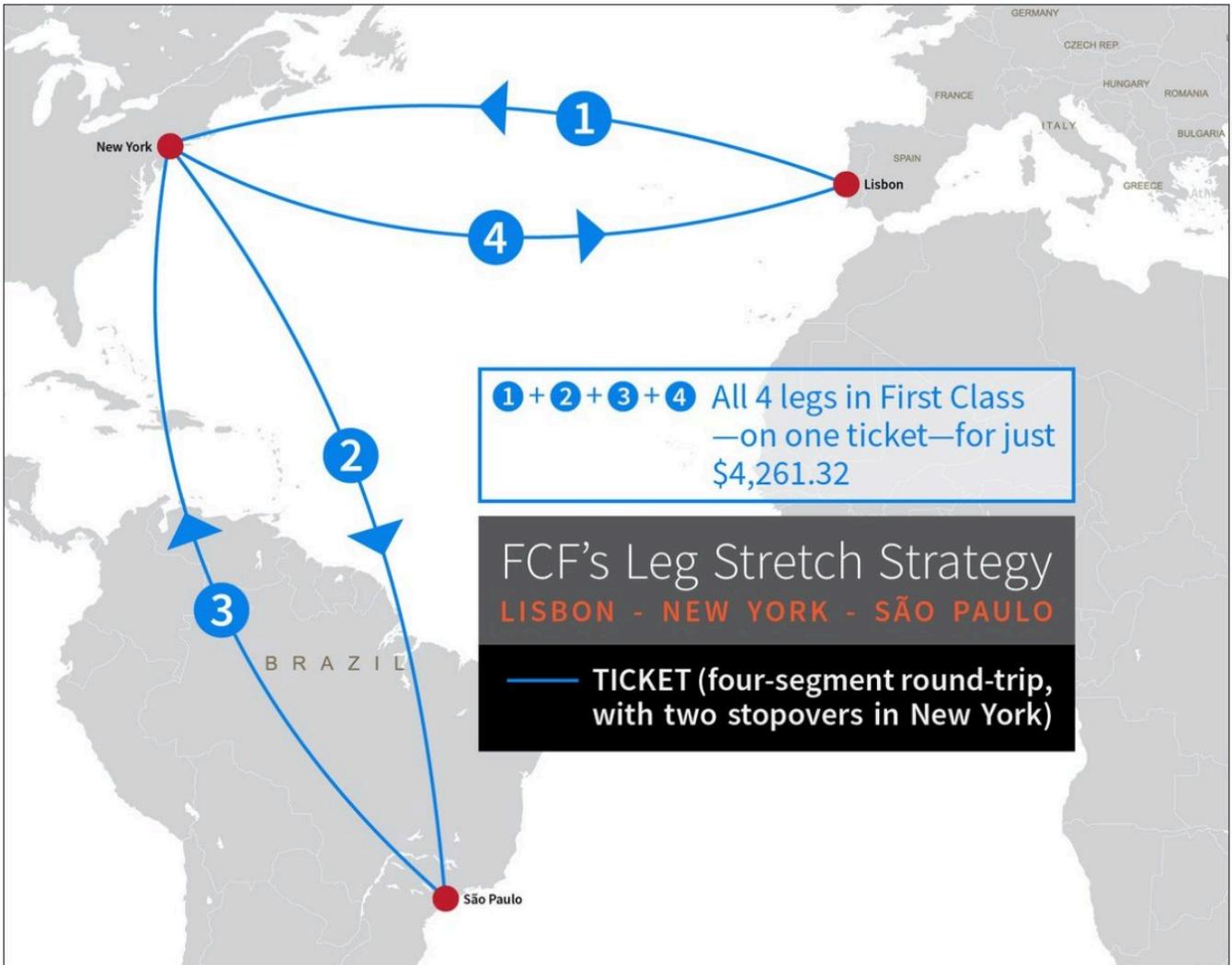
Cost summary

Your total

\$4,261.32

Includes all taxes and carrier-imposed fees

Passenger x 1	\$3,532.00
Taxes	\$258.12
Carrier-imposed fees	\$471.20
Total (all passengers)	\$4,261.32



EUROPE → U.S. → SOUTH AMERICA → U.S. → EUROPE IN FIRST FOR \$2,738.68 LESS THAN BUSINESS

A Quick How-To:

- You book a one-way ticket to Europe ([easy-to-do details here](#)).
- You then purchase a round-trip ticket on American (code-share flights on British Airways are also OK to book), departing from Europe to South America via the U.S., with free stopovers both ways in the U.S. (See ready-baked trips below.) You stay at home for however many months you like.

- You then go to South America.
- You then return to the U.S. whenever it makes sense.
- You then return to Europe on the final leg of the ticket.
- Decision Time: You can return home on another one-way ticket OR you can also start the process again, returning to the U.S. on leg #1 of your next Leg-Stretch Strategy ticket.

BEST WAY TO BOOK

Through your travel agent. You can book online with AA.com, but it's a complex procedure. Not only that, inventory information (booking class A) that a travel agency can easily check needs to be available.

STRETCHING YOUR FARE FURTHER:

Three Ways to Look at It (i.e. Ways to brag to your friends)

Perspective #1: Free Upgrade + \$2,738.68 Less than Business Class on Connecting Flights:

If you were to book these destinations separately, you'd have to get a bank loan. A New York to Lisbon return ticket in Business Class ranges from ~\$2,200 to \$3,500. A New York to São Paulo return ticket in Business Class ranges from ~\$4,800 to \$6,600 non-stop on American. That's \$7,000 at a minimum to fly Business Class—and easily more than \$10,000 depending on your dates.

If you use The Leg Stretch Strategy on the other hand, you can get to those same destinations in **First Class for \$4,261.32** (on American at the current exchange rate).

Perspective #2: Free Upgrade, and \$2,928.28 Less than Business Class on Non-Stop Flights:

A New York to London return ticket in Business Class starts as low as \$2,900. A New York to São Paulo return ticket in Business Class starts at \$4,800 non-stop on American. That's \$7,700 at a minimum to fly Business Class—and easily \$10,000+ depending on your dates. The Leg Stretch Strategy gets you those same destinations in First Class for \$4,771.72 (on American at the current exchange rate).

Perspective #3: Save \$10,528.28 in First Class on Non-Stop Flights:

A New York to London return ticket in First Class can be had for \$4,500 if you're lucky. A New York to São Paulo return ticket in First Class starts at \$9,800 non-stop on American. That's \$15,300 at a minimum to fly First Class—and easily \$20,000+ depending on your dates.

The Leg Stretch Strategy, on the other hand, nets those same destinations in First Class for \$4,771.72 (on American at the current exchange rate)—**a discount of \$10,528.28 with this ticketing strategy.**

We've crunched the numbers on several European/South American trips and found more options. Here are 7 examples:

The Leg Stretch Strategy Extrapolated

Start Your LSS Ticket In:	Your U.S. Stop:	Your South American Destination:	Fare At Time of Writing, for Four Legs (in effect, two round-trips)	Quick Starter Links:
Lisbon	New York	São Paulo	\$4,261	Ready Baked Trip
London	New York	São Paulo	\$4,771	Ready Baked Trip
Copenhagen	Atlanta	Buenos Aires	\$5,280	Ready Baked Trip
Copenhagen	Boston	Buenos Aires	\$5,291	Ready Baked Trip
Rome	Washington, DC	Buenos Aires	\$5,893	Ready Baked Trip
Oslo	Miami	São Paulo	\$5,736	Ready Baked Trip
Stockholm	Dallas	Buenos Aires	\$5,810	Ready Baked Trip

KEEP IN MIND

- Fares go up and down constantly and will likely be different when you read this. Also, prices are in U.S. dollars and fluctuate due to changing exchange rates.
- No airline currently offers First Class to Rio de Janeiro and Santiago, which is why we're only showing fares for São Paulo and Buenos Aires.

- Sorry West Coasters, this one takes a little more effort on your part, as this Leg Stretch Strategy is based on East Coast and Midwest (as far west as Dallas) departures, because American considers flights from farther west as “backtracking.”

More FCF Leg Stretch Strategies

More FCF Leg Stretch Strategies

AUGUST: [EUROPE/U.S./SOUTH AMERICA ON UNITED IN BUSINESS CLASS FOR \\$2,980](#)

JULY: [EUROPE/U.S./SOUTH AMERICA ON DELTA IN BUSINESS CLASS FOR \\$2,460](#)

JUNE: [ASIA/U.S./SOUTH AMERICA IN BUSINESS CLASS FOR \\$4,223](#)

MAY: [EUROPE/U.S./SOUTH PACIFIC IN BUSINESS CLASS FOR \\$5,242](#)

26 Ways American AAAdvantage Loyalists Can Upgrade to Europe for Less than Free, Free, or Very Little —by Adopting the Upgrade Mindset

September 2017

Part III of a series on how to hit Grand Slams using , AKA Transferable Points. Read on for Business Class deals on Air France, American, British Airways, Emirates, and Iberia.

When you read ‘free’ and ‘very little,’ you know exactly what we mean. It’s plain English.

But ‘less than free’? Isn’t free as low as you can go? After all, free is an absolute.

One thing we do here at FCF is propound a mindset, a way of thinking about getting the best deal on airfares that emphasizes thinking out of the box. (We call it the Upgrade Mindset.) Free is a kind of box: Once you're in it, you stop thinking.

You can do better.

In terms of premium air travel, a "less than free upgrade" means booking Business Class tickets for less than in-the-box thinkers pay for economy.

This report focuses on cheap, free, and less than free upgrade opportunities using what FCF calls Elastic Plastic Points. That just means using credit card points that gives you access to numerous loyalty programs, via simple "transfers". The [ultra-elastic points program \(46 partners\)](#) is Starwood.

See our previous report here for [Nine Ways Delta SkyMiles Travelers Can Upgrade to Europe for Free or Little More Than Coach](#), using Elastic Plastic Credit Card points; and here for [13 Ways United MileagePlus Loyalists Can Upgrade to Europe for Very Little, Free, or Less than Free](#).

Just look at the chart below, which uses the [baseline cost](#) for the lowest 'saver' award on American at 60,000 miles in coach round-trip to Europe, or 60,000 miles earned on your American co-branded credit card.

In most cases, you can upgrade for free, little more than free, or less than free—for travel to Europe on Air France, American, British Airways, Emirates, and Iberia, if you follow FCF's Upgrade Mindset, and corollary data analysis.

26 Ways to Upgrade Your Europe Experience for Less-than-Free or Little More than American Charges for Coach

To / From	Loyalty Program	Operating Airlines	Business Class Mileage Award Cost	Get Miles Via Partner; "Elastic Plastic" Credit Cards	Net Cost After "Elastic Plastic" Points Transfer	THE DEAL: Relative to Coach on American
London & Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC		British Airways	100,000 low season (120,000 high season)	SPG	80,000 (to 100,000)	Cheap upgrade: as low as 20,000 miles more than coach
				Amex (40% bonus deal)	71,500 (to 85,750)	Cheap upgrade: as low as 11,500

To / From	Loyalty Program	Operating Airlines	Business Class Mileage Award Cost	Get Miles Via Partner; "Elastic Plastic" Credit Cards	Net Cost After "Elastic Plastic" Points Transfer	THE DEAL: Relative to Coach on American
						miles more than coach
Madrid & Boston, Chicago, New York	Iberia	Iberia	68,000 low season (100,000 high season)	SPG	58,000 (to 80,000)	Less than free upgrade: as low as 2,000 miles less than coach
Madrid & Los Angeles, Miami			85,000 low season (125,000 high season)		70,000 (to 100,000)	Cheap upgrade: as low as 10,000 miles more than coach
Madrid & Boston, Chicago, New York			68,000 low season (100,000 high season)	AMEX (40% bonus deal)	48,750 (to 71,500)	Less than free upgrade: as low as 11,250 miles less than coach
Madrid & Los Angeles, Miami			85,000 low season (125,000 high season)		60,750 (to 89,500)	Almost free upgrade: as low as 750 miles more than coach
New York & Athens, Milan	Emirates	Emirates	90,000	SPG	75,000	Cheap upgrade: 15,000 miles more than coach
Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, or Raleigh Durham & Barcelona, Dublin, London, Madrid, Manchester, Paris, Rome, Zurich	Japan Airlines	American	63,000	SPG	53,000	Less than free upgrade: 7,000 miles less than coach
Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York & Barcelona, London, Madrid, Milan, Paris, Frankfurt			65,000		55,000	Less than free upgrade: 5,000 miles less than coach
Los Angeles, Dallas & Frankfurt, London			80,000		65,000	Cheap upgrade: 5,000 miles more than coach
London & Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC		British Airways	63,000		53,000	Less than free upgrade: 7,000 miles less than coach

To / From	Loyalty Program	Operating Airlines	Business Class Mileage Award Cost	Get Miles Via Partner; "Elastic Plastic" Credit Cards	Net Cost After "Elastic Plastic" Points Transfer	THE DEAL: Relative to Coach on American	
London & Atlanta, Denver, Houston, Miami, Seattle			65,000		55,000	Less than free upgrade: 5,000 miles less than coach	
London & Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose			80,000		65,000	Cheap upgrade: 5,000 miles more than coach	
Paris & Boston, Detroit, New York, Washington, DC		Air France	63,000		53,000	Less than free upgrade: 7,000 miles less than coach	
Paris & Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, Minneapolis			65,000		55,000	Less than free upgrade: 5,000 miles less than coach	
Paris & Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco			80,000		65,000	Cheap upgrade: 5,000 miles more than coach	
Madrid & Boston, New York			63,000		53,000	Less than free upgrade: 7,000 miles less than coach	
Madrid & Chicago, Miami			Iberia		65,000	55,000	Less than free upgrade: 5,000 miles less than coach
Madrid & Los Angeles		80,000			65,000	Cheap upgrade: 5,000 miles more than coach	
New York & Athens, Milan			Emirates		65,000	55,000	Less than free upgrade: 5,000 miles less than coach
Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Raleigh Durham & Barcelona, Dublin, London, Madrid, Manchester, Milan, Paris, Rome, Zurich		Cathay Pacific	American		80,000	SPG	65,000

To / From	Loyalty Program	Operating Airlines	Business Class Mileage Award Cost	Get Miles Via Partner; "Elastic Plastic" Credit Cards	Net Cost After "Elastic Plastic" Points Transfer	THE DEAL: Relative to Coach on American
London & Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, Washington, DC		British Airways	80,000		65,000	Cheap upgrade: 20,000 miles more than coach
Boston, Chicago, Miami, New York & Madrid		Iberia	80,000		65,000	
Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Raleigh Durham & Barcelona, Dublin, London, Madrid, Manchester, Milan, Paris, Rome, Zurich		American	80,000	AMEX, CITI	80,000	
London & Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, Washington, DC		British Airways	80,000		80,000	
Madrid & Boston, Chicago, Miami, New York		Iberia	80,000		80,000	
U.S. to Europe		Alaska*	American		100,000	

AMEX = American Express Rewards, CITI = CITI ThankYou, SPG = Starwood.

[*Rate change: Alaska partner rate for American is valid until Dec. 31; new rate starts on Jan. 1, 2018 for 115,000 miles.](#)



The Elite Status Relationship: For years, FCF has been saying, “Don’t be *loyal* to one airline.” You’re being exploited. But we know: breaking up is hard to do. Still, open your eyes and close your heart, if you might. The Big Three are *selling* elite benefits, including the most important one, upgrades to First Class, to anyone who will pay. Selah.

They are also requiring elites to spend a certain amount of money—rather than only flying a certain amount of miles—to maintain elite status. They call this requirement Elite Qualifying Dollars (aka EQDs). They’re picking your pocket. Declare independence. For more on how to do so, go [here](#).

ONE REASON TO BE BLUE

Transcon Fares on JetBlue: The airline that single-handedly drove down the cost of the Transcon (Los Angeles/San Francisco-New York, the highest-priced domestic route)—which used to be the job of airlines like America West and TWA—is now raising prices!

Fares these days range from \$1,500 to \$1,700+. What happened to \$1,098? Now you can only get JetBlue's lowest fare, \$1,117, on Saturday departures; other days start at \$1,317, but we seldom see that in reality.

FCF'S PERSPECTIVE

New Basic Economy Fares on United: According to the mainstream media, everyone is up in arms about United's not offering elite credit (PQM, PQS, PQD) on basic economy fares, and that these fares are driving up the cost of regular economy tickets. Here are my two cents. Take the Los Angeles-Chicago route, on which a basic economy ticket starts at about \$98 (no PQM, PQS, PQD), but chip in another \$80 for regular economy and you earn elite credit as well as an assigned seat and the right to have a carry-on bag. Did basic economy drive up the price of regular economy? I don't think so. I can't remember a \$100 round-trip ticket on this route, and \$180 seems about right. I'm baffled by basic economy. Who would buy a seat that doesn't allow a carry-on bag and probably puts you in a middle seat at the back of the plane?

I don't think basic economy changed average ticket prices, that much, very often, from what we're seeing. It is just bottom-fishing and there are always bottom fish. It could have been worse: United could have made the regular economy fare the basic economy fare.

But **the real point is that elite status is an ego-boost of dangled promises**—the allure of getting bumped up to a premium cabin, but how often do low- and mid-tier elites get an upgrade, these days?

WHAT HAS/N'T CHANGED

Modest or No Change in First Class Fares: Let's take the Washington, DC-Denver route, for example. Back in December 2016, the lowest First Class fare on United was \$568; now it is \$611—\$43 increase over nine months; I can handle this type of a modest increase.

Similar story on Denver-Nashville: In December 2016, the lowest First Class on American was \$580; now the lowest First Class fare on American is still \$580—no change, nice going AA. All indications are that these two are trying to keep domestic First Class fares down (if only to make sure they don't have to "give away" First Class seats to "elites").

Delta Domestic First Class Fares on the Rise: Unlike American and United, Delta has increased fares on many domestic First Class routes. Back in December 2016, Delta had two First Class routes at \$566 round-trip, Denver-NYC and Minneapolis-SFO at \$566. Denver-New York now is \$809, an increase of \$243, and Minneapolis-San Francisco is \$719, an increase of \$153. Other routes also show such jumps. **Being shackled to Delta seems to get worse by the week.**

American Free Mileage Awards: In past years the carrier had decent free mileage award availability on major non-stop Transcon flights, such as Los Angeles/San Francisco-New York, and Los Angeles-Miami, Boston, Charlotte, and Philadelphia. But now, as American is discounting more and more premium seats, free award travel is nearly impossible—the downside to the upside of having low First Class fares.

Not only are elites being forsaken, but so are mileage accumulators, in general! (Yes, that's American AAdvantage credit card users, now, too. [Get out of jail here.](#))

Many will see the latest trend's glass half empty, while many others half full.

You? Let's us know your thoughts below...

The Elite Status Relationship: For years, FCF has been saying, "Don't be *loyal* to one airline." You're being exploited. But we know: breaking up is hard to do. Still, open your eyes and close your heart, if you might. The Big Three are *selling* elite benefits, including the most important one, upgrades to First Class, to anyone who will pay. Selah.

They are also requiring elites to spend a certain amount of money—rather than only flying a certain amount of miles—to maintain elite status. They call this requirement Elite Qualifying Dollars (aka EQDs). They're picking your pocket. Declare independence. For more on how to do so, go [here](#).

ONE REASON TO BE BLUE

Transcon Fares on JetBlue: The airline that single-handedly drove down the cost of the Transcon (Los Angeles/San Francisco-New York, the highest-priced domestic route)—which used to be the job of airlines like America West and TWA—is now raising prices!

Fares these days range from \$1,500 to \$1,700+. What happened to \$1,098? Now you can only get JetBlue's lowest fare, \$1,117, on Saturday departures; other days start at \$1,317, but we seldom see that in reality.

FCF'S PERSPECTIVE

New Basic Economy Fares on United: According to the mainstream media, everyone is up in arms about United's not offering elite credit (PQM, PQS, PQD) on basic economy fares, and that these fares are driving up the cost of regular economy tickets. Here are my two cents. Take the Los Angeles-Chicago route, on which a basic economy ticket starts at about \$98 (no PQM, PQS, PQD), but chip in another \$80 for regular economy and you earn elite credit as well as an assigned seat and the right to have a carry-on bag. Did basic economy drive up the price of regular economy? I don't think so. I can't remember a \$100 round-trip ticket on this route, and \$180 seems about right. I'm baffled by basic economy. Who would buy a seat that doesn't allow a carry-on bag and probably puts you in a middle seat at the back of the plane?

I don't think basic economy changed average ticket prices, that much, very often, from what we're seeing. It is just bottom-fishing and there are always bottom fish. It could have been worse: United could have made the

regular economy fare the basic economy fare.

But **the real point is that elite status is an ego-boost of dangled promises**—the allure of getting bumped up to a premium cabin, but how often do low- and mid-tier elites get an upgrade, these days?

WHAT HAS/N'T CHANGED

Modest or No Change in First Class Fares: Let's take the Washington, DC-Denver route, for example. Back in December 2016, the lowest First Class fare on United was \$568; now it is \$611—\$43 increase over nine months; I can handle this type of a modest increase.

Similar story on Denver-Nashville: In December 2016, the lowest First Class on American was \$580; now the lowest First Class fare on American is still \$580—no change, nice going AA. All indications are that these two are trying to keep domestic First Class fares down (if only to make sure they don't have to "give away" First Class seats to "elites").

Delta Domestic First Class Fares on the Rise: Unlike American and United, Delta has increased fares on many domestic First Class routes. Back in December 2016, Delta had two First Class routes at \$566 round-trip, Denver-NYC and Minneapolis-SFO at \$566. Denver-New York now is \$809, an increase of \$243, and Minneapolis-San Francisco is \$719, an increase of \$153. Other routes also show such jumps. **Being shackled to Delta seems to get worse by the week.**

American Free Mileage Awards: In past years the carrier had decent free mileage award availability on major non-stop Transcon flights, such as Los Angeles/San Francisco-New York, and Los Angeles-Miami, Boston, Charlotte, and Philadelphia. But now, as American is discounting more and more premium seats, free award travel is nearly impossible—the downside to the upside of having low First Class fares.

Not only are elites being forsaken, but so are mileage accumulators, in general! (Yes, that's American AAdvantage credit card users, now, too. [Get out of jail here.](#))

Many will see the latest trend's glass half empty, while many others half full.

You? Let's us know your thoughts below...



How to Save an Additional \$200 + 10% Off on British Airways—Even with Amazingly-low Premium Flash Fares

September 2017

The steps that can take you from \$2,152 to \$1,766 in Business Class (if not much better) all day long.

In March FCF updated you on [the AARP membership discount](#) on British Airways First and Business Class tickets: It was reduced from \$400 to \$200.

But from now until Dec. 31 there's a way to claw back some of that savings with the British Airways Visa card [benefit of 10% off](#), using promo code CARDOFFERU (the 10% discount will most likely be extended at some point into 2018).

Sample Savings: On New York-Dublin, the lowest Business Class fare is currently \$2,152, but with the combined discounts the price comes to \$1,766, a savings of \$386. (See screenshots below.)

Lowest fare on British Airways.com:

✈️ Outbound - Thursday 26 October 2017						Price
19:30 26 Oct	07:35 27 Oct	John F Kennedy (NY) (New York)	Heathrow (London)	BA0176 British Airways	Club World	
08:35 27 Oct	10:00 27 Oct	Heathrow (London)	Dublin	BA0828 British Airways	Club Europe	
✈️ Inbound - Thursday 09 November 2017						
07:10 09 Nov	08:40 09 Nov	Dublin	Heathrow (London)	BA0831 British Airways	Club Europe	
09:40 09 Nov	12:40 09 Nov	Heathrow (London)	John F Kennedy (NY) (New York)	BA0175 British Airways	Club World	

Lowest fare on British Airways.com:

✈️ Outbound - Wednesday 25 October 2017						Price
19:30 25 Oct	07:35 26 Oct	John F Kennedy (NY) (New York)	Heathrow (London)	BA0176 British Airways	Club World	
08:55 26 Oct	10:20 26 Oct	Heathrow (London)	Dublin	BA0828 British Airways	Club Europe	
✈️ Inbound - Thursday 09 November 2017						
07:10 09 Nov	08:40 09 Nov	Dublin	Heathrow (London)	BA0831 British Airways	Club Europe	
09:40 09 Nov	12:40 09 Nov	Heathrow (London)	John F Kennedy (NY) (New York)	BA0175 British Airways	Club World	

Lowest fare on British Airways.com + AARP \$200 discount:

Add in the visa promotion code:

Promotion code or eVoucher

Promotion code

CARDOFFERU

Submit

✈️ Outbound - Wednesday 25 October 2017						Price
19:30 25 Oct	07:35 26 Oct	John F Kennedy (NY) (New York)	Heathrow (London)	BA0176 British Airways	Club World	\$1,765.70 1 passenger Email price quote Baggage allowance Currency calculator
08:55 26 Oct	10:20 26 Oct	Heathrow (London)	Dublin	BA0828 British Airways	Club Europe	
✈️ Inbound - Thursday 09 November 2017						
07:10 09 Nov	08:40 09 Nov	Dublin	Heathrow (London)	BA0831 British Airways	Club Europe	
09:40 09 Nov	12:40 09 Nov	Heathrow (London)	John F Kennedy (NY) (New York)	BA0175 British Airways	Club World	

Lowest fare on British Airways.com + AARP \$200 discount + Chase Visa 10% discount:

HOW TO WORK IT:

Step #1: Log in to your AARP account: (Costs just \$12 for [anyone of any age to join](#)) to get the \$200 AARP discount for Business Class, then...

Step #2: Click to go to BA's website, select your flights, then click the confirm-the-flight-and-fare-details, add in the 10% Visa discount code (CARDOFFERU), and purchase the ticket with your BA Visa card.

Note: The Visa discount is also valid for up to eight friends and family members traveling on the same itinerary, but only on British Airways-operated flights or on OpenSkies.



When to Use Miles to Upgrade a British Airways \$1,600/\$1,700-ish Business Class Fare to First?

September 2017

Plus, how to leverage the BA Six-Strategy Upgrade.

This is for those of you who know about super-cheap Business Class fares to Europe, which FCF tracks closely through [Newsroom Alerts](#), but also for those who can't find a low First Class fare to Europe.

Our Pitch: When Business Class fares are this low consider using British Airways (BA) Avios points to upgrade to First. Forget free mileage awards because they don't earn miles, plus you'll pay dearly in award taxes (\$1,000+).

THE UPGRADE PROGRAM

British Airways' mileage program requires just 22,500 miles (off-peak) to 25,000 (peak) one-way from Los Angeles, and 18,000 (off-peak) to 20,000 (peak) from New York each way—and is valid with the lowest Business Class fares (I), **which many airlines do not allow upgrading.**

When First Class fares are high, upgrades can offer a great return and make this program a deal.

As we wrote in FCF last month, all indications are that [Business Class fares to Europe are now dependably low](#). Over the last few months, we've seen Europe from the U.S. starting at \$1,750 (East Coast) to \$2,200 (West Coast), on **many different dates and routes.**

See math below using New York-Dublin's normal First Class \$8,045 fare as an example.

THE BA SIX-STRATEGY UPGRADE

1. **Special Low Business Class Fares:** Right now you can get Business Class for just \$2,152 on [many routes](#).
2. **AARP Discount:** Use it and save another \$200 (ages 18 and up; [\\$12 membership](#) fee).
3. **BA Visa Discount:** Buy the ticket using a BA Chase Visa card to [get another 10% off](#).

~ **Your Business Class ticket price is now \$1,766** ~

Now add:

4. **BA Mileage Upgrade:** Allows you to upgrade lowest Business Class fares to First from the U.S. to London for 18,000 miles (off-peak) or 20,000 (peak) one-way from New York. Upgrade **beyond London** requires more miles.
5. **Now, use the Current Amex-BA Transfer Bonus:** It's 40% and is valid through Sept. 17. That [reduces the cost to 13,000 miles](#) (off-peak) to 14,500 (peak) each way.
6. **Upgrade Availability:** Know the routes and seasons when deals are prevalent. (See FCF Cheat Sheet below.)

Bonus: BA does NOT charge a co-pay to use your miles to upgrade, whereas American and United charge \$1,100.



British Airways First Class

BA SIX-STRATEGY SUMMARY

To recap, you can buy a \$1,766 r/t Business Class ticket and use 26,000 points round-trip for an upgrade to First Class on a ticket that usually costs \$8,045. Even if you have no Amex Reward points, you can [buy the miles from BA](#) for only \$740 or from [Amex for \\$650](#)—which still yields a savings of \$5,629+ (70%).

Below is chart with eight routes that offer U.S. to London upgrade space at press time.

Sweet Redeem Survey: When Upgrading to First Class on British Airways is Easy

U.S. Departure Cities	Availability to London			Availability from London		
	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
Boston		Nov., May	Dec. to April, May, July		Nov., July	Dec. to May, July
Chicago	April, May	Dec., July	Jan. to March, April	April	Dec., Jan., March, July	Jan., Feb., March, April
Houston	Nov.	Oct., Jan., Feb., March, May	Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, July	Oct.	Nov., Feb., July	Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, May, June, July
Los Angeles	April				April	

U.S. Departure Cities	Availability to London			Availability from London		
	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		Dec., April, May	Jan. to March, April, June, July	May	Jan. to March	Dec., Jan. to March, April, June, July
Philadelphia	Nov., July, May	Dec., Jan., Feb.	Dec., Jan., Feb., March, April, July	May, July	June	Dec., Jan. to April, July
San Francisco	Dec.	March, April		Dec., March		April
Washington, DC	Sept. to Nov.	Dec., July, May	Jan. to April	Oct., May, June	Nov., July	Dec., Jan. to April, July

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



Three Best Ways to Get First Class Non-Stop Between Asia and California on Oneworld

September 2017

(Pay \$23,000+? No.)

Airlines don't make it easy to fly First Class between Asia and the West Coast.

But FCF does.

This time we present the best ways to fly from Los Angeles and San Francisco to Hong Kong (and from there to the rest of Asia) in long-haul comfort.

We've gone to the Pearl of the Orient—this is not a clichè as Hong Kong is located in the Pearl River Delta—for this installment and uncovered the following:

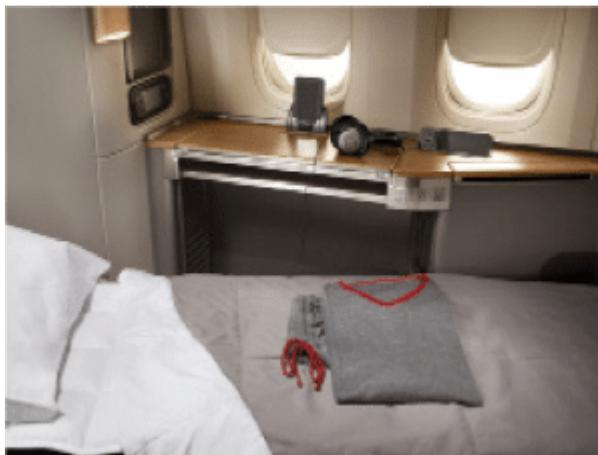
- The “When?” and “On what airline?” mileage award availability exist
- The partnership opportunities that get you the ticket for far less than retail
- Why buying miles or points can save you a lot of money or **get you in the game if you don't have any**

AMERICAN AIRLINES:

Published First Class Fares: To Hong Kong normally \$23,008 from Los Angeles round-trip, making these prime routes for using miles.

Mileage Cost: 220,000. See mileage award availability in chart below.

No American Miles? No Problem: Transfer 180,000 Starwood points.



American First Class

CATHAY PACIFIC:

Published First Class Fares: To Hong Kong normally \$15,832+ from Los Angeles and San Francisco round-trip, again prime routes for using miles.

Mileage Cost: 180,000. See mileage award availability in chart below.



Cathay Pacific First Class

No Cathay Pacific Asia Miles? No Problem: Transfer 145,000 Starwood points, 150,000 Citi ThankYou points [with current 20% transfer deal](#), or 180,000 Amex points.

How the “Buy Miles to Fly in Style” Strategy Can Save Up to 71%: Simply purchase Amex Rewards points. They cost 2.5¢ each. That brings the cost of a First Class ticket to Hong Kong down to \$4,500 round-trip (plus about \$86 in award taxes, which vary slightly by route) for a seat that otherwise goes for \$15,832+.

PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES:

Alaska Airlines: Just 135,000 miles for American flights (booked by Dec. 31) and 140,000 for Cathay Pacific flights.

Starwood Points: Transfer to Alaska to bring down the award cost to 110,000 to 115,000 miles (with the 25% transfer bonus) to/from any U.S. city, a savings of up to 39%.

Save 82% through Alaska Airlines: The current purchase bonus (ends Oct. 5), which is up to 50% (see alert [here](#)), brings Los Angeles-Hong Kong in First Class down to about \$2,800 (plus about \$79 in award taxes) on Cathay Pacific. *(However, Alaska Airlines’ mileage inventory is much less than Cathay Pacific’s, but it’s still worth checking.)*

Japan Airlines: 135,000 miles to Hong Kong round-trip from San Francisco on Cathay Pacific and 155,000 for both American and Cathay from Los Angeles.

Starwood Points: The 25% transfer bonus with JAL brings the award cost down to 110,000 to 125,000—a savings of up to 35,000 points (24%). *(Japan Airlines mileage inventory is often similar to Cathay Pacific’s own, but always check before committing to a transfer or purchase.)*

Sweet Redeem Survey: First Class to Hong Kong for at Least One Traveler

Airline	U.S. Departure Cities	Availability to Asia			Availability from Asia		
		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
American	Los Angeles		Sept.		Sept.	Oct.	
Cathay Pacific	Los Angeles	Jan.	Feb.	March to July	Jan.	Feb.	March to July
	San Francisco	Jan., Feb.	March	April to July	Feb.		March to July



Southern South America: Part Three About Why One- Way Mileage Awards Are the Way to Go

September 2017

So, this is dead simple, as we've told you in the last two installments (see [special report here](#) for travel to Europe, and for travel to Asia [here](#)): One-way tickets increase your chances of getting a First or Business Class seat at a lower award-cost level and can get you the itinerary you want, not the one the airlines offer you. Just divide the itinerary in two and search for the best deal on each leg.

Here's the key point: Having a credit card program that links to many different airline programs. (More on that in [The Lazy Upgrader's Guide to Lucrative Credit Card Opportunities](#)). It means you can outflank the availability barrier airlines put up.

We'll just recap when one-way tickets are the way to go:

- When a round-trip saver award is not available
- When you want the best routing and best premium seats
- When a partner saver round-trip award is not available on your preferred carrier, but is with the partner's own mileage program

Like we have always said, **options count**.

The majority of the best one-way deals to southern South America (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile) are available to those with Starwood Starpoints, Amex Membership Rewards points second, and Chase Ultimate Rewards and Citi points a distant third and fourth.

THE BEST DEALS TO SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

[Air Canada](#): The airline and its partner flights with United cost 55,000 miles one-way in Business Class (45,000 SPG points). First Class is 70,000 miles one-way (60,000 SPG). The airline also works with Amex Rewards points.

[Alaska](#): Partner flights on American start at 50,000 miles (40,000 SPG) in Business Class and 63,500 miles (53,500 SPG) in First Class; LAN is 45,000 miles (40,000 SPG) in Business Class. Partner rates rise on American on [Jan. 1, 2018](#).

[American](#): Its flights and those with partner LAN cost 57,500 miles one-way in Business Class (47,500 SPG). First Class is high, starting at 85,000 miles one-way (70,000).

[Asiana](#): **The best one-way deal**: Business Class starts at 35,000 miles (30,000 SPG) and First Class at 45,000 miles (40,000 SPG) on United flights.

[Cathay Pacific](#): Cost varies by route, starting at 45,000 miles (40,000 SPG) one-way (Miami to Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Santiago, and Dallas to Santiago) in Business Class on its partners American and LAN, and 70,000 miles (60,000 SPG) in First Class. Amex and Citi points also transfer to Cathay.

[Korean](#): Partner flights with Delta cost 55,000 miles one-way in Business Class (45,000 SPG points). Compare that with 75,000 Delta SkyMiles!

[Lufthansa](#): Charges 52,500 miles for partner awards in Business Class one-way (42,500 SPG) on United flights. First Class is high, 85,000 miles one-way (70,000 SPG).

[Singapore](#): Charges 50,000 miles in Business Class one-way (40,000 SPG) on for partner awards on United. First Class is 70,000 miles one-way (60,000 SPG).

[United](#): Charges 55,000 miles in Business Class one-way and 70,000 for First Class (60,000 and 80,000 respectively as of Nov. 1) for its own flights. Credit card partners are Chase and Starwood. (Note that SPG

transfer to United miles is not recommended, so transfer the SPG points to Marriott Rewards to be used with Marriott's Travel Packages on United, for more details go [here](#).)

[Virgin Atlantic](#): Partner-flight cost varies, starting at 45,000 miles (40,000 SPG) on Delta in Business Class.

Delta

This airline was not included in our one-way report as it's one of the highest priced awards at 75,000 for Business Class. Even with the SPG transfer, it would take 60,000 points and partner, Korean Air, offers a much better value.



AMERICAN TO ASIA

Starts new service on Nov. 5 (subject to regulatory approval) to Beijing from Los Angeles (B-787 aircraft). Mileage award space is very limited, but Business Class fares start at \$2,704 round-trip for departures and returns Monday through Thursday for travel through February 20, 2018 (booking code I). The regular fare is \$3,554, a savings of \$850.



American Airlines Business Class

BRITISH AIRWAYS

Starts new Nashville-London route May 2018 using a three-class B787-8 (Business, PE, and economy). Business Class costs 125,000 BA points off-peak (150,000 peak), which can be transferred from Chase, Starwood, or Amex Rewards (through the [current 40% transfer bonus](#), only 89,500 Amex points needed). Or 65,000 Japan Airline miles, and with the Starwood transfer bonus, just 55,000 points. FCF research shows good award availability for Business Class in May, June and July.



British Airways Business Class

DELTA

New Florida service to Europe. Starts March 30, 2018 between Orlando and Amsterdam using a B767-300ER that has flatbed seats in Business Class (140,000 Delta miles for an award). Points can be transferred from Starwood or Amex Rewards. Or 80,000 Korean Air miles, and with the Starwood transfer bonus, just 65,000 points. FCF research shows good award availability for Business Class in April, May, and June.



Delta Business Class

A photograph of a weathered, light-colored wall with a blue sign in the center. The sign has the number '90' written on it in white. The sign is slightly tilted and appears to be mounted on the wall. The background is a textured, off-white wall with some discoloration and shadows.

90 is the New Number to Get First Class to Europe

September 2017

The best deals, courtesy of Flash First Class Fares, are now three-month advance-purchase tickets.

Flash First Class fares now seem to be the out-of-town Broadway try-out for the airlines. Put it out, take it off, revise the script, and then really put the fare out there.

That's the gist of the 90-day advance-purchase fares that have cropped up and seem like they're going to have a long run. ([See latest here](#) for the ways in which the airlines have rehearsed this new script.)

Surprisingly, this new fare trend was started by Air France, normally not a fare innovator, especially in First Class, but [on July 28 it set off this trend](#). Previously, the norm for the lowest First Class fare was a 150-day advance-purchase. Air France's new fare started at \$3,413.

The airline pulled the fare after a few days, but other Star Alliance airlines (Lufthansa, SWISS, and United) caught the fever, offering [First Class at \\$3,514 on New York-London](#) with a 90-day advance-purchase. These fares, wildly underpriced, have since been pulled.

Here are two great examples of the new 90-day advance paradigm.

United (Star Alliance): In July, United's First Class fare Chicago-Madrid was about \$5,383. Now United's lowest First Class fare starts at \$4,575, a decrease of about \$808, and \$894 less than British Airways lowest 90-day advance-purchase fare of \$5,469.

Air France: Take the Miami-London route; in July the First Class fare cost \$5,765. Now, the lowest First Class fare is \$4,384, a decrease of about \$1,381 (a stop in Paris is allowed for \$500 one-way). On Philadelphia-Paris in July, a First Class ticket cost \$6,696; now the lowest First Class fare starts at \$4,222, a decrease of about \$2,474.

Will this 90-day advance-purchase trend and more Flash First Class fare trends continue? We think so.

Over the last five years, this skit has been played out with Business Class fares. Reduce (at times even change restrictions) and flash—and if it works, then that's the new norm. First Class is now being subjected to the same try-out.

Often these First Class Flash Fares first appear on routes which require a connection, so be ready to book. For more on how a ticket can be extended on 13 airlines' websites (plus as many as 15 partner airlines), see FCF's July report on [How to Hold Amazing Business and First Class Flash Fares Before They Disappear into a Black Hole](#).

In the meantime, scour 90-day advance-purchase First Class fares on Air France and Star Alliance airlines. If this trend continues, watch for oneworld airlines (American and British Airways) to join in.

The FCF Reference Shelf

[A year ago](#) American offered a \$125 one-way upgrade to First from Business Class on three international routes (Dallas to Paris, Madrid, and Frankfurt), with fares starting as low as \$3,174. The catch: American was updating its cabins, and among the changes was reducing aircraft which offered a First Class cabin. Now, with only one aircraft offering a First Class cabin, AA's B777-300ER, AA no longer offers \$125 upgrades to First Class to Europe, but British Airways fares have been trending downward, seemingly sparked my American and around the same time.

Moral of the story: Don't rely on what was true yesterday for reason X or Y, as the speed of change is accelerating and for reasons we can't always see, including the most obscure and one-off circumstances can accelerate the premium airfare rEvolution, never to return, "the way things used to be," *for better and worse.*



American Airlines International Premium Economy Fares are Upending the Applecart

September 2017

In July FCF wrote about [how you can easily fly Premium Economy \(PE\) for less than the cost of the best seat in coach](#) to Asia, Europe, South America, and the South Pacific on American, if you know how.

Now American is ramping up the international routes on which it offers a PE cabin, which leads FCF to the question, how is this impacting its competitor's Premium Economy fares?

After a great deal of research, FCF has found that the answer comes down to four words: Depends on the destination.

The South Pacific: It's a region long monopolized by flag carriers Qantas and Air New Zealand. Premium Economy often ranged from \$2,600 to \$3,500 from the West Coast, and seldom went on sale.

Well, **the monopoly has been disrupted** as American offers a great PE deal, [fares starting as low as \\$1,706 on the LAX-Sydney route.](#)

You would think that American's oneworld partner, Qantas, would match such low fares. Well it did, for a moment: You could book LAX-Melbourne and other Australian cities, such as Brisbane and Sydney, for only \$1,693 round-trip non-stop. Then the fare went back to the norm, \$2,647+.

FCF predicts that Premium Economy fares to this region will get a much needed overhaul, and decrease, if only via Flash Fares.

South America: American is the only airline offering a PE seat right now (starting at \$1,245 round-trip), so this is a great backup option (or for the kids), given that Business Class fares easily run \$3,000 to \$5,000.

MIA Miami	+	SCL Santiago		
Tue, March 13	◀ ▶	Tue, March 20		
Up to 1 stop ▼	Price ▼	American ▼	Times ▼	More ▼
Choose an outbound flight Sort by price ▼				
Prices round trip. Additional bag fees may apply.				
Track prices Learn more Save this trip to track price changes and receive price alerts and travel tips by email. <input type="checkbox"/> OFF				
\$1,245 round trip		10:55 PM – 8:16 AM+1 American	8h 21m	Nonstop

Europe: PE is not a newcomer to this market, as the region already has many international airlines offering a PE seat, so American will have to fight to get a foothold. The airline is, on some routes, trying to undercut its competitors on non-stop flights. Take Miami-Paris: AA fares start at \$1,066, while Air France charges \$1,547. Other low-priced routes include Chicago-Paris, starting at \$1,150, and Miami-Barcelona, starting at \$1,029.

MIA Miami
+

CDG Paris
+

Wed, January 17
◀ ▶

31 Wed, January 31
◀ ▶

Nonstop ▾
Price ▾
American (+1) ▾
Times ▾
More ▾
Clear

Choose an outbound flight

Sort by price ▾

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

Track prices [Learn more](#)

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

OFF

<p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold; color: #0070c0;">\$1,066</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #0070c0;">round trip</p>		<p>6:30 PM – 9:20 AM+1</p> <p>American</p>	<p>8h 50m</p>	<p>Nonstop</p>
<p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold; color: #0070c0;">\$1,547</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #0070c0;">round trip</p>		<p>8:10 PM – 10:45 AM+1</p> <p>Air France</p>	<p>8h 35m</p>	<p>Nonstop</p>

Some routes, Dallas-Frankfurt for example, are still priced high, starting at \$1,918. That's a strong sign that if AA owns a route, and it is one heavily used for business travel, it won't discount heavily. (Some could even argue that Business Travelers will keep the PE cost up on such routes, as many corporate travel policies often make allowance for PE travel while forbidding Business Class.)

Asia: Same situation as Europe: Lots of airlines offering a PE seat (All Nippon, Japan Airlines, Cathay Pacific, and Singapore), so AA faces a struggle. But all indications are that the carrier is going all out on LAX-Tokyo. PE fares start at \$1,027 round-trip, \$900 less than its oneworld partner JAL (\$1,929), \$1,000 less than All Nippon (\$2,025), and \$550 less than Singapore (\$1,572). But don't expect this to last forever. Airlines are famous for pricing rollouts inexpensively on routes where there is strong competition, as is the case on LAX-Tokyo.

Your trip summary

<p>Premium Economy Flexible</p> <p>Round trip (Refundable)</p> <p>\$1,027 per person</p> <p>Total \$1,026.46 (all passengers)</p> <p>Price and tax information</p> <p>More room</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wider seat with more legroom Priority security & boarding No change fee (fare difference applies) <p>Includes taxes and carrier imposed fees.</p> <p>Baggage and optional service fees</p>	<p>Depart Los Angeles, CA to Tokyo, Japan</p> <p>Monday, January 15, 2018</p> <p>11:45 AM → 4:45 PM 12h 0m Nonstop Premium Economy Flexible</p> <p>AA 169 ■ 789-Boeing 787</p> <p>Details Change</p>
	<p>Return Tokyo, Japan to Los Angeles, CA</p> <p>Monday, January 22, 2018</p> <p>6:45 PM → 12:05 PM 10h 20m Nonstop Premium Economy Flexible</p> <p>AA 170 ■ 789-Boeing 787</p> <p>⚠ Overnight flight or connection</p> <p>Details Change</p>

However, Dallas-Tokyo is high, with PE fares starting at \$1,800. So look for American to undercut on routes on which it has a lot of competition and to charge more if it has less competition and owns a route and it is a business route.

New Seats to Hawaii: Yes, kinda surprising, but AA will have two routes to Hawaii (Dallas to Honolulu and Maui) in January 2018 with the PE seat—and it will be the only airline to offer the PE seat on a domestic route. Fares start at \$1,287, which is high, considering that you can get LAX-Tokyo for \$1,027. But consider this: Economy is \$987, so the increase is only \$150 each way, and it is \$765 less than the Business Class fare for 16 hours of flying. Well worth it.

Dallas (all airports) +	HNL Honolulu	Economy Class \$987
Tue, January 16 ◀ ▶	31 Tue, January 23	Premium Economy \$1,287
Nonstop ▾ Price ▾ American (+1) ▾ Times ▾ More ▾		✓ Business Class \$2,052
<p>Choose an outbound flight</p> <p>Sort by price ▾</p>		First Class \$2,052
<p>Prices round trip. Additional bag fees may apply.</p>		
<p>These are the lowest fares within ±3 days</p> <p>Show Flexible dates</p>		

Here is a list of routes American offers Premium Economy seats (but always confirm when you book as the airline is still moving aircraft around and not every one has the PE seat yet, so some routes might only see the

seat during peak season) that the airline says it will have the seat starting between November and February, 2018.

Europe:

Barcelona-Charlotte, Miami, Philadelphia

Paris-Charlotte, Dallas, Miami, Chicago, Philadelphia

Dublin-Charlotte and Philadelphia

Rome-Dallas and Philadelphia

Frankfurt-Charlotte, Dallas, Philadelphia

London-Miami and Dallas

Madrid-Charlotte, Dallas, Miami, Philadelphia

Manchester-Philadelphia

Munich-Philadelphia

South America:

Buenos Aires-Dallas and Miami

Rio de Janeiro-Miami

São Paulo-Dallas and Miami

Santiago-Miami

Asia:

Tokyo-Los Angeles

Tokyo-Dallas

South Pacific:

Auckland and Sydney-Los Angeles

Domestic:

Dallas-Maui and Honolulu

Los Angeles-Honolulu (only during the Christmas/New Years' time frame for now)

Note: You can book connecting flights to the U.S. hub, and beyond the international one, too, only those flights will be in economy.