

# November 2014: When Redeeming Miles Is Relatively Easy

Airline / Mileage Program	Route	Class	Departure Availability*			Return Availability*		
Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	Handful	Hopeful	Hooray			
Air Canada / Aeroplan	Montreal - London	Business	May, Aug.	Dec., July, Sept.	Jan. to April	July, Aug.	May, June	Dec. to April, Sept.
	Toronto - Frankfurt	Business	March, July, Aug.	Jan., Feb., Sept.		July	April	Jan. to March, Aug. Sept.

Airline / Mileage Program	Route	Class	Departure Availability*			Return Availability*		
	Toronto - Paris	Business	Jan., Feb.		March, July, Aug. J	Jan. to April		July to Sept.
American / AAdvantage and Dividend Miles	Chicago - London	Business	Jan. to April		May		May	April
	Miami - São Paulo	First			Nov., Dec.		Dec.	Nov.
	NYC - Rio de Janeiro	Business	June	March, May	April, July			March to July
Delta / SkyMiles	Detroit - Amsterdam	Business	Jan. March, April	Nov., Dec., Feb., July, Aug.		Nov., Jan., March, April, July		Dec., Feb.
	Detroit - Frankfurt	Business	Nov., March	Dec. to Feb., April	July, Aug.	Nov., Jan., March to Aug.	Dec., Feb.	
	New York - Paris	Business	Feb. to April	July	Aug.	Jan. to June	July	Aug.
United / MileagePlus	Chicago - Sao Paulo	Business	Feb., June, July	Nov., May, Sept.	March, April	Dec., Jan., July	April, June, Aug.	Nov., Feb., March, May, Sept.
	NYC - Amsterdam	Business			Feb, March		Feb.	March
	Washington, DC - London	Business	Nov. to Jan., March	Feb.			Nov.	Dec. to April
US Airways / Dividend and AAdvantage Miles	Philadelphia - Dublin	Business	Feb., June, July, Sept.			Feb., March, Sept.	June	
	Philadelphia - Paris	Business	Aug.	July			Aug.	
	Philadelphia - Madrid	Business	March		Sept.	Sept.		March

#### Major Credit Cards and Their Airline Point-Transfer Partners

**Amex Membership Rewards:** Air Canada, Delta. **Starwood:** Air Canada, American, Delta, United\*, and US Airways.

**Chase Ultimate Rewards:** United. **Diners Club:** Air Canada (U.S. residents only), Delta. \*2-to-1 exchange rate.

**Handful:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 4 to 8 days during the months indicated in the chart. Worth pursuing if you're flexible. **Hopeful:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 9 to 12 days during the months indicated. **Hooray:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 13 days or more during the months indicated

*\*When more than two consecutive months are indicated, it includes the entire last month. Thus, Jan. to April means “through April.”*

# How to Get a Free “In-Class Upgrade” on American Between the U.S. and Europe or South America

- *Know which routes and aircraft have the new seats*
- *Discover special analysis on where the “Sweet Redeems” are*

**Due in part to many years of neglecting the competitiveness in the Business Class market, there’s always an airline (or five) in the middle of a New-Seat Rollout.** Many airlines, instead, have historically chosen to garner loyalty by greasing the palms of business travelers with bonus miles and promising elite perks on the come to compensate for their in-flight experience shortfall. Today’s focus: American Airlines

## HOW TO LOOK FOR THE NEW SEAT?

Every airline moves its aircraft around, so the best *FCF* can do, is produce a list based on current data. So, before you book, check the seat map layout because the old and new seats are configured

differently. (Getting the new AA seat is not guaranteed until the seat roll-out is done because the possibility of AA changing the aircraft around last minute.)

- **B777-300ER:** New plane, new seat. Your best bet.
- **B777-200:** New lie-flat Business Class seats come in a 1x2x1 configuration instead of 2x3x2. Also, the First Class cabin has been eliminated in the new layout.
- **B767:** New lie-flat Business Class seats arranged 1x2x1 instead of 2x3x2.

## ROLLOUTS TAKE YEARS TO COMPLETE

When an airline is in mid-rollout, you have to know which routes and/or which planes have the new seats to get the most for your money (or miles). Airlines aren't trying to deliver an inconsistent in-flight experience necessarily; the rollouts simply take time.

It's 2014; almost 2015. There are self-driving cars I hear, yet American Airlines doesn't have a lie-flat seat in Business Class across its long-haul fleet.

American is a prime example. It is in the middle of rolling out new lie-flat Business Class seats on its long-haul fleet. (The old seat offered an angled 171-degree recline.) The upgrade started back in January 2013 and currently all new B777-300ERs have the new seat. Some B777-200s and some B767s have also been updated. So there are many routes on which the old seats are still flying.

## COMPLICATED CONSUMER BUYING EXPERIENCE?

When an airline is in mid-rollout, you can very often find multiple seat-and-aircraft-types on a single route. Let's take Dallas-London as an example: There is flight AA80, operated using a B767; AA78 with a B777-200; and AA50 with a B777-300ER—all with the same fares.

One route. Three different types of aircraft. Two types of seats. One headache. No?

**So how do you get the free in-class upgrade?** Be in the minority who avoids AA78 and 80 and book AA50 instead.

## FCF'S CHEAT SHEET ON WHERE TO FIND FREE UPGRADE OPPORTUNITIES

By knowing the routes, flight numbers, and aircraft type that have AA's new lie-flat Business Class seat, you can vastly improve—or upgrade—your in-flight experience.

## American Routes With New Seat Upgrade Opportunities

Route	Aircraft	Flight Number (Departure/Return)
Dallas - London	B777-300ER	AA50 / AA51
Dallas - São Paulo	B777-300ER	AA963 / AA762
Dallas - Santiago	B777-200	AA945 / AA940
Los Angeles - London	B777-300ER	AA136 / AA135
Miami - Paris	B767	AA62 / AA63
New York/JFK - Barcelona	B767	AA66 / AA67
New York/JFK - London	B777-300ER	AA100, AA106 / AA101, AA105
New York/JFK - Madrid	B767	AA94 / AA95
New York/JFK - Milan	B767	AA 198 / AA199
New York/JFK - Paris	B767	AA44 / AA45
New York/JFK - São Paulo	B777-300ER	AA951 / AA950
New York/JFK - Zurich	B767	AA64 / AA65

*\*As of Dec. 1; always recheck flights at time of booking due to aircraft rotation.*

## Booking New Seats With Miles



If you're paying in cash, you definitely don't want to fly an old seat. If you're paying in hard-earned miles, you likely feel the same way, and really value the Free In-Class Upgrade. To this end, below is a list of ways to purchase the new seats with miles, and below that there is a special report on where you can find easy upgrade availability.

### Round-trip Business Class—Free Tickets:

*American Miles:* 110,000 to Europe or South America.

*Starwood Point Transfer to AA:* 90,000 for Business Class.

### Round-trip Business Class—Upgrade Awards:

*American Miles:* To Europe or Southern South America, on almost any economy fare. Upgrade costs 50,000 miles plus \$700 co-pay round-trip.

## Analysis of Free & Upgrade Award Availability on American's New Seat

Route	Award Type	From U.S. Availability			To U.S. Availability		
Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	Handful	Hopeful	Hooray		
New York/JFK - Barcelona	Upgrade	Feb., March	Dec., Jan.		Jan. to March		
New York/JFK - Madrid	Upgrade		Dec.	Jan. to May		Dec.	Jan. to May
New York/JFK - Milan	Upgrade	Nov. to Jan., March to May		Feb.	March, May	April	
New York/JFK - Paris	Upgrade	Dec., March, April	Jan., Feb.		Dec. to Feb., May	March, April	
New York/JFK - Zurich U	Upgrade	Jan., Feb.		March to May	Dec., Jan.	Feb.	March to May
	Free		April			April	May
Miami - Paris	Upgrade	Nov., May	Feb., April	March	Jan.	Feb., April	March, May
	Free	Feb.			March to May		

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# Still Time: Holiday Business Class to Europe Starting at \$1,808

Take advantage of these fares to Europe, which are up to 74% less than regular fares. *Travel Season:* Outbound: Nov. 22 through Nov. 28 and Dec. 15 through Jan. 3, 2015; inbound: Nov. 27 through Dec. 3 and Dec. 22 through Jan. 7, 2015.

## Sample of Holiday Business Class Fares to Europe

R / T Fare	Route	Airline
\$1,808	New York - Madrid**	AC, LH, LX, OS, SN, UA
\$2,343	Dallas - Barcelona	AA, AC, AF, AY, AZ, BA, DL, IB, KL, LH, LX, OS, SN, UA, US

R / T Fare	Route	Airline
\$2,601	Atlanta - Copenhagen, Stockholm	
\$2,610	Chicago - Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Munich	
\$2,892	Los Angeles - Lisbon	

*\*Fares include the average taxes and fees for the route. **Ticketing deadline; Nov. 17.** \*\*Season: Nov. 23 to Nov. 28 and Dec. 16 to Jan. 3, 2015. AA = American, AC = Air Canada, AF = Air France, AY = Finnair, AZ = Alitalia, BA = British Airways, DL = Delta, IB = Iberia, KL = KLM, LH= Lufthansa, LX = SWISS, OS = Austrian, SN = Brussels Airline, UA = United, US = US Airways.*

# First Class Trend Monitor: Many Fares Between Europe & U.S. Continue Nose-Dive

- *Good for many travelers, short-term: Front-cabin seats plunge to more destinations*
- *For many other travelers, Low-Fare Side Effects emerge at the same time*

**For years we were programmed to travel during specific times of the year to get the best premium cabin airfares:** over the summer, and during Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. This all changed two years ago with the EasyUp Business Class fare revolution introduced by Delta and SkyTeam members, then intermittently followed by oneworld and occasionally by Star Alliance airlines. While the fares are not available all the time or for every route, the almost unbelievably low Business Class fares—very often little or no more than economy—have been snagged by many who know the when, where, who, and how to land them.

## BAD NEWS COMES WITH LOWER FARES?!

### *The Trend's Emerging Side Effects...*

- With lower First Class fares, there will inevitably be **fewer First Class seats open** for mileage-award seekers.
- With lower fares, there's likely less revenue for airlines. Less First Class revenue for airlines impacts the **volume of First Class seats they put on the market**—negatively.
- **Fewer seats** in the market combined with **fewer seats going unsold** due to lower fares being picked up, compounds the **problem for First Class Award Seekers**.

## FIRST CLASS FARE TREND FOLLOWS BUSINESS CLASS FARE TREND, RELATIVELY SPEAKING

We see a similar revolution in First Class fares to/from Europe. The new fares are certainly not cheap, even with the required advance purchase and a Saturday-night or other minimum stay (restrictions for this cabin—and corresponding discounting—didn't even exist long ago). Where fares have historically hovered in the \$13 to \$20K troposphere—and still do on some routes—over the last couple years, on many routes they have plunged 50% to 75%. **We're now seeing deep discounts offered on new routes almost by the month.**

## LOW-FARE DESTINATIONS (LFDS) AND LOW-FARE AIRLINES (LFAS)

There are destinations frequented more often by leisure travelers than business travelers; these are usually, but not always, on the list of **Low-Fare Destinations**. It's simple supply-and-demand economics.

There's also what I call **High-HubFare Airlines**, such as Air France and British Airways, which often charge two or three times more for a ticket to their hub city.

## KNOW YOUR ABCS: LFDS AND LFAS

**So, the way around this is to arrive by the side-door**, meaning fly to a Low-Fare Destination (LFD) or fly on a Low-Fare Airline (LFA) to get the best deal *any time of the year*, not just during the holidays.

**Example Low-Fare Destinations:** Let's take New York-Paris on Air France, which charges \$16,462 for a First Class seat. If you instead book New York-London—a low fare route on American, Lufthansa, SWISS, and United—the fare drops to \$5,579, a savings of 66% (\$10,883). You can even get a free stopover—or rather, you net ten grand for stopping over. LFDs often require a connection, and work best when a connection must be made anyway, or when you're okay about taking a free stopover, if only just to cut the cost.

**Example Low-Fare/High-Fares Airline(s):** Let's take Los Angeles-London on British Airways, which charges \$16,669 for First Class. If you book American (also a oneworld member so that you can earn BA miles/elite credit), Lufthansa, SWISS, or United, the fare drops to \$6,142—a savings of \$10,527. American

and United both offer non-stop First Class service to London. BA certainly invests more in its premium cabin experience than AA or UA—and it appears to be paying off.

## DON'T FORGET SEASONAL FARES

They're a great option for those who are married to a loyalty program or prefer a non-stop flight. Summer First Class fares will likely come out in February or March. Over the last several years, **United has started a First Class fare war** for summer travel, offering up to 45% off on published fares. **American, British Airways, Lufthansa, and SWISS** are among the carriers that last year joined the fare-slash, although not on all routes. Holiday fares often start to appear in June or July. All of these have been covered over the last 18 years in *FCF* and Daily Alerts.

**Why don't the airlines understand the price they pay by offering high-yield customers a mediocre product?**

## MINING FOR LOW FIRST CLASS FARES BY AIRLINE AND BY DESTINATION

From North America, six major airlines offer a bona fide First Class cabin between many U.S. and European cities and all of them offer some type of low First Class fare. Here's an overview.

**Air France:** Don't look for low First Class fares to its Paris hub unless you're flying from a smaller U.S. airport, such as Kansas City or Indianapolis. Instead, think of the airline when heading for Barcelona, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Madrid, Oslo, or Stockholm, where flights can be up to 66% less than flights to Paris. Like some other carriers listed, Air France is trying to lock down its hub.

**American:** It offers low First Class fares to Barcelona, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Oslo, Paris, and Stockholm from many U.S. cities including its major hubs, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, and New York.

**British Airways:** Low-fare destinations include Barcelona, Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Lisbon, Madrid, Oslo, and Stockholm, even from some smaller U.S. cities to London, such as Buffalo or Charleston.

**Lufthansa:** Don't look for low First Class fares to its Frankfurt hub but think of the airline when looking to fly to Barcelona, Copenhagen, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Oslo, Paris, and Stockholm.

**SWISS:** Don't look for low First Class fares to its Zurich hub but think of the airline when flying to Barcelona, Copenhagen, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Oslo, Paris, and Stockholm.

**United:** It offers low First Class fares to Barcelona, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Oslo, Paris, and Stockholm from many U.S. cities, including these hubs: Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC.

# Sample Year-Round Special-Fare Routes to Europe\*

Departure City	Low-Fare Destination	Fare**	Airline(s)	High-Fare Destination	Fare**	Airline	Special Route Savings
Chicago	Paris	\$5,775	LH, LX, UA	Frankfurt	\$10,419	LH	<b>\$4,644 / 45%</b>
Dallas	Frankfurt	\$5,102	AA, BA	Vienna	\$8,942	UA	<b>\$3,840 / 43%</b>
Los Angeles	Madrid	\$5,950	LH, LX, UA	London	\$14,870	BA	<b>\$8,920 / 60%</b>
Miami	Oslo	\$5,206	AF	Zurich	\$10,850	LX	<b>\$5,644 / 52%</b>
New York	London	\$5,579	AA, LH, LX, UA	Paris	\$16,462	AF	<b>\$10,883 / 66%</b>

*\*Look for more Low-First Class fare sample routes from other U.S. cities in our newsroom this month. \*\*Including taxes and fees. AA = American, AF = Air France, BA = British Airways, LH = Lufthansa, LX = SWISS, UA = United*

## FIRST CLASS EASYUP FARES

Many of the fares cited are identical to the Business Class version in that they have a built-in upgrade to First for a set surcharge. On Washington, DC-London for example, currently United's lowest every-day advance purchase Business Class fare is \$3,785 (fare basis code PNC51S). The First Class fare has the same fare basis code with the suffix "UP" (PNC51S/UPDI) and is only \$800 more round trip (\$4,585).

While the fare is great, relatively speaking, doesn't **something seem odd** to you here? If you were a loyal United customer and accumulated miles for the sake of upgrading, and bought a Business Class fare (if only because you didn't think to search for First Class as well!), and wanted to use your miles to upgrade this flight (knowing you'd be charged an \$1,100 co-pay), your pocket would be \$300 and 40,000 miles lighter than the person sitting next to you.

### Just two morals here:

1. Don't forget to compare fares in more than one class of service as you never know when an EasyUp fare may be lurking, and
2. Always think about what **loyalty costs** (at least whenever you are thinking about what it pays).

## MORE ON THE IMPACT OF EASYUP FARES ON MILEAGE UPGRADES

Mileage upgrades aren't always the best option. It depends on the route and the published Business and First Class fares. Sometimes they are very effective; other times not. Here's a quick guide as to when upgrades are a good card to play.

## AMERICAN'S FIRST CLASS UPGRADES

### *When an EasyUp First Class fare IS available: Bad Idea*

Why? Take New York-London, where the airline allows mileage upgrades on discounted Business Class (I) fares, starting at \$4,129, plus a co-pay of \$1,100, plus 50,000 miles. Considering the mileage replacement cost, even when on sale, this brings the relative cost to \$6,360—\$781 more than the First Class fare. By the way, availability is often the same for First Class EasyUp fares as it is for free mileage awards.

### *When an EasyUp Business Class fare IS NOT available: Good Idea*

Why? Take Los Angeles-Milan, where the airline allows mileage upgrades on EasyUp Business Class (I) fares, starting at \$2,123 (see [Oct. 17 alert](#)), plus a co-pay of \$1,100, plus 50,000 miles. The miles have a replacement value of about \$1,131 when on sale. This brings the cost to \$4,354, while a First Class fare is \$9,055—a savings of \$4,701.

## BRITISH AIRWAYS' FIRST CLASS UPGRADES

### *When an EasyUp First Class fare IS available: Coin Toss*

Why? Take Miami-Stockholm, where the airline allows mileage upgrades on discounted Business Class (I) fares, starting at \$3,868 plus 40,000 miles. The miles have a replacement value of about \$1,000 (via Amex). This brings the relative cost to \$4,868. A First Class ticket is \$5,284, a savings of only \$416—and there is less availability for the mileage upgrade.

### *When an EasyUp First Class fare IS NOT available: Good Idea*

Why? Take New York-London, where the airline allows mileage upgrades on discounted Business Class (I) fares, starting at \$4,129 plus 40,000 miles. The miles have a replacement value of \$1,000. This brings the cost to \$5,129, whereas a First Class ticket is \$12,482—a savings of \$7,353

## FOR FCF MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN CANADA AND ABROAD (OR IN U.S. CITIES NOT IN EXAMPLES)

Every month FCF posts fare and mileage alerts for members outside the U.S. For recent First Class fare promotions from Europe to the U.S., see the Oct. 22 alert, for example. We also cover many U.S. departure cities that are not mentioned, among them Atlanta, Boston, and Houston to name a few.

## UNITED'S FIRST CLASS UPGRADES

### *When an EasyUp First Class fare IS available: Bad Idea*

Why? Take Philadelphia-London, where the airline allows mileage upgrades on discounted Business Class (P) fares, starting at \$4,002, plus the co-pay of \$1,100 plus 40,000 miles. Considering the mileage replacement cost when on sale, this brings the cost to \$5,862—\$915 more than using the First Class fare—and there is less availability.

***When an EasyUp First Class fare IS NOT available: Good Idea***

Why? Take Chicago-Frankfurt, where the airline allows mileage upgrades on discounted Business Class (P) fares, starting at \$5,270, plus the co-pay of \$1,100, plus 40,000 miles. The miles have a replacement value of \$760 when on sale, bringing the cost to \$7,130, **a savings of \$3,289.**

## **AIR FRANCE, LUFTHANSA, AND SWISS FIRST CLASS UPGRADES**

***When an EasyUp First Class fare IS available: Bad Idea***

Why? Because SWISS allows an upgrade from Business to First on discounted Business Class fares, but charges 140,000 miles round-trip for the upgrade, which is nonsense because you can get a free First Class award at a similar cost with other airlines. Lufthansa does not allow upgrades from discounted Business Class fares (P, Z), and Air France does not allow the upgrade for non-elites.



# How Anyone Can Save Up to 90% on All Nippon's First Class Suite

**The Suite:** Eight semi-enclosed suites (no privacy doors) on B777-300ERs; arranged in a 1x2x1 layout. Each has a private closet, 77-inch-long lie-flat seat, and 23-inch-wide LCD monitor.

[Experience the suite in detail.](#)

## ROUTES WITH THE FIRST CLASS SUITE BETWEEN THE U.S. & ASIA

**To/From Tokyo and:** Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Washington, DC.

**Easy Connections To/From:** All over the U.S



All Nippon's destinations in **Africa, Asia**, and the **Middle East** can be added for more miles; cost depends on the region. [Find All Nippon's destinations here.](#)

## BEST VALUES (ROUND-TRIP)

**Baseline Fare:** Up to \$27,284 round-trip to Tokyo from JFK, making this a prime route for using miles and related opportunities.

**Baseline Award:** All Nippon's Mileage Club charges 110,000 miles to/from Tokyo and Los Angeles or San Francisco; 120,000 miles to/from Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC.

## GETTING ALL NIPPON MILES

**Transfer Amex Reward Points:** 110,000 (Los Angeles and San Francisco) or 120,000 (Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC).

**Transfer Starwood Points to ANA:** 90,000 (LAX and SFO) or 100,000 (Chicago, NYC, and Washington, DC).

**Amex Rewards Points Purchase:** Buy Miles to Fly in Style at 2.5¢ per point. That **nets a First Class ticket for \$2,750 to \$3,000 round-trip**, which otherwise costs as much as \$27,284.

## WHERE THE SWEET REDEEMS ARE...

# Survey of First Class Suite Award Availability on All Nippon to Tokyo

U.S. Departure City	Availability From U.S.			Availability To U.S.		
Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	
Chicago	Nov., Dec.		Jan. to Sep	Jan.	April, May, Aug.	Feb., March, June, July, Sept.
Los Angeles	Jan., May	Feb. to April, June	July to Sept.	Jan.	April	Feb., March, May to Sept.
New York	Jan.		Feb. to Sept.	Jan.	Feb., April, May to Aug.	March, Sept.
San Francisco	Jan.	Feb. to May, July	June, Aug., Sept.	Jan.	Feb. to May	June to Sept.

U.S. Departure City	Availability From U.S.			Availability To U.S.		
Washington, DC		Jan., Feb., May	March, April, June to Sept.		Jan.	Feb. to Sept.

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## HOW TO GET 88% OFF

If you don't have any Starwood points to transfer and don't have access to buying Amex Reward points, then buy miles through LifeMiles, the loyalty program of Avianca. This brings the cost of Washington, DC- Tokyo in First Class down to \$3,396 (the cost of 150,000 miles) while the normal fare is \$27,284. Otherwise, the Amex-point purchase at \$2,750 round-trip is a steal at 90% off the normal \$27k+ fare.

# November 2014: Where to Find Upgrade Opportunities Now

New routes, new seats, and aircraft changes can mean good to wide-open availability for a short time. Take advantage of the opportunities while they last

***THIS MONTH: TIME TO BURN AMEX, CHASE, DINERS CLUB AND STARWOOD POINTS AND JAPAN AIRLINES AND VIRGIN ATLANTIC MILES BETWEEN THE U.S., ASIA, AND EUROPE***

## ***Japan Airlines***

**New Seat Opportunity:** San Francisco-Tokyo on a B777-300 with upgraded [Business](#) and [First Class seats](#) starts Dec. 1.

**Easy Connections To/From:** All over the U.S.

**Fly To/From Beyond Tokyo:** Beijing, Hong Kong, Seoul, Shanghai, and Taipei cost only 10,000 more miles in Business Class and 20,000 more in First Class. Bangkok, Delhi, Singapore, and Sydney are 30,000 more in Business Class, and only 20,000 miles more in First Class. [Explore destinations.](#)

**How to Nail It** (Round-Trip):

## Survey of Award Availability: Japan Airlines San Francisco-Tokyo

Class	Availability SFO-Tokyo			Availability Tokyo-SFO		
Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	
Business	Dec.	Jan., Feb.	Feb. to Sept., March to July	Jan., June, July, Aug.	March, June, Sept.	Feb., April, May, Sept.
First	Jan, Feb., May, July	April, June, Aug	April, June, July, Sept	Jan.	Feb., March, Aug	May to July, June, Sept.

**Handful:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 4 to 8 days during the months indicated in the chart. Worth pursuing if you're flexible. **Hopeful:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 9 to 12 days during the months indicated. **Hooray:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 13 days or more during the months indicated. *Months in black: at least one seat available; in blue, at least two seats; in green, at least four seats.*

**JAL Miles:** 80,000 for Business Class and 110,000 for First Class. [Explore award space.](#)

**No JAL Miles? Transfer Starwood Points to JAL:** 65,000 for Business Class and 90,000 for First Class.

**With British Airways Miles:** 100,000 in Business Class, 150,000 in First Class.

**Amex, Chase, and Diners Club Points to British Airways:** 100,000 for Business Class and 150,000 for First Class.

**Amex Points Purchase:** 2.5¢ each. Get First Class for \$3,750 through the Buy Miles to Fly in Style strategy, a ticket that can cost as much as \$18,899 with no advance-purchase or minimum-stay requirements (a savings of \$15,149 / 80%).

**Virgin Atlantic**

**New Aircraft and Flight Opportunity:** Boston-London B787-900 starting Dec. 6 (training schedule for the B787-900 started Oct. 28); Los Angeles-London gets a second daily flight March 29, 2015.

**Easy Connections To/From:** Numerous airports in the South, Northeast, and Midwest.

**Flying From or Beyond London in Business Class:** Edinburgh and Manchester for no extra cost. [Explore destinations.](#)

**How to Nail It** (Round-Trip):

*Virgin Miles:* 80,000 miles London to/from Boston and 100,000 to/from Los Angeles; [find specific award space.](#)

*Amex Points Transfer:* 80,000 (Boston) or 100,000 (LAX).

*Amex Points Purchase:* 2.5¢ each. Get the Business Class ticket for \$2,000 from Boston (otherwise \$4,500 to \$15,000).

*Starwood Points Transfer to Virgin:* 65,000 to/from Boston and 80,000 to/from Los Angeles.

*With All Nippon Miles—Better:* 63,000 miles [round-trip in Business Class](#) to/from Boston and 85,000 to/from LAX.

*Starwood Points-to-All Nippon Miles—Best:* 53,000 to 70,000.

## Survey of Award Availability on Virgin Atlantic in Business Class to/from London

U.S. Departure City	Availability From U.S.			Availability To U.S.	
Handful	Hopeful	Hooray	Hopeful	Hooray	
Boston	Dec. to Feb., May, June, <b>March, April</b>	July, Aug	March, <b>April, Sept.</b>		Dec. to <b>Sept., March, April</b>
Los Angeles	April, <b>Aug.</b>	<b>May, July</b>	May to Sept. <b>May, Sept.</b>	<b>May, Aug</b>	April to June, Aug., <b>Sep., May</b>

**Handful:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 4 to 8 days during the months indicated in the chart. Worth pursuing if you're flexible. **Hopeful:** Our most recent research shows that award space is available for at least one person about 9 to 12 days during the months indicated. **Hooray:** Our most recent research

shows that award space is available for at least one person about 13 days or more during the months indicated. *Months in black: at least one seat available; in blue, at least two seats; in green, at least four seats.*

# How to Get Premium Cabin Two-and-Three-for-Ones to/from Mexico and the Caribbean, Plus 46% Off U.S. and Canada

## ***By taking advantage of award chart anomalies and industry semantics***

Airlines determine mileage award prices two basic ways: by flight distance or by zones. The zone system divides the world into regions (e.g., the 48 contiguous states and Canada is one zone), with every destination within a given region priced at the same number of miles. A flight-distance chart is simply based on distance flown. Opportunity knocks when one alliance partner uses a zone chart and the other partner a flight distance chart. Example: American Airlines (zone) and British Airways (flight-distance).

## RATING THE ALLIANCES' AWARD DISCREPANCY OPPORTUNITIES

This article rates the international partners of U.S. carriers on the basis of how easy it is to take advantage of discrepancies between the two charts. It's a story for those willing to leave the comfort zone of a primary carrier in order to learn how to play the two charts against each other. You can look at our ratings as simply a way to highlight loudly why you might think twice about being locked into specific loyalty programs. The anomalies highlighted here net **free tickets and upgrades for the loyalty-free agent**.

### KEEP IN MIND...

While a premium cabin ticket on a shorter flight may not seem worth the cost or effort, just remember how coach travelers get treated: in lines, with fees, baggage, etc. It's often things other than the seat that benefit short-haul First Class travelers most.

### DOMESTIC FIRST CLASS

Only one alliance, oneworld, has a flight distance partner discrepancy that can **net a savings of 23,000 miles (46%)** on short-haul, non-stop flights when compared to American or US Airways' own mileage award cost.

For example, on a non-stop short-haul flight, such as Chicago-Washington, DC, BA charges only 27,000 miles round-trip for First Class on a flight operated by its partner American Airlines—at almost half the cost of AA. You can look at this as an upgrade to First from coach for just 2,000 miles.

[BA's award calculator](#) for shows specific routes; see our cheat sheet below for many more examples.

## Alliance Opportunity Ratings: Short-Haul Domestic Routes

Alliance	Domestic Carrier / Miles		Partner Flight Distance Carrier / Miles		Partner Savings		Opportunity Rating
Miles	%						
Oneworld	AA / US	50,000	BA*	27,000 (Flight distance zone 1)	23,000	46%	A
SkyTeam	DL	50,000	No partner opportunities				F
Star Alliance	UA	50,000					F

AA = American Airlines, BA = British Airways, DL= Delta, UA = United Airlines, US = US Airways. \*oneworld airline LAN was lower (3,000 to 5,000 miles) on very short-distance routes, such as LAX-SFO, but BA was the better flight-distance partner overall and is easier to navigate; so we went with it to keep things simple.

# Sample of Domestic First Class American / US Airways Routes at 46% Off (27,000 Miles)

To/From Charlotte	Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, St. Louis
To/From Chicago	Atlanta, Memphis, Pittsburgh, Tulsa, Washington, DC
To/From Dallas	Albuquerque, Denver, Kansas City, Nashville, New Orleans, Pensacola, St. Louis
To/From Los Angeles	Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Reno, San Francisco
To/From Miami	Atlanta, Charleston, Nashville
To/From New York	Boston, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Columbus, Detroit
To/From Philadelphia	Boston, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville
To/From Phoenix	Denver, El Paso, Los Angeles, Reno, Salt Lake

## GETTING BA MILES ISN'T VERY DIFFICULT

You can transfer miles from Starwood, which drops the price to 22,000 miles, given the transfer bonus. Look at that as an almost Two-for-One or a *Less-than-Free* Upgrade, as people with American-centric credit cards will be paying more for coach than the Starwood Loyalty-Free Agent does for First Class. Amex, Chase, and Diners Club points are also transferable to BA.

## DOMESTIC ZONE-CHART DISCREPANCY: STAR ALLIANCE

Singapore, a Star Alliance partner with United (meaning you can use Singapore miles to fly United), is an exception to the flight distance loophole. It uses a zone chart, and charges only 40,000 miles round-trip for United's Business Class transcon and other U.S. domestic flights, a 20% savings. You can transfer Amex, Chase, Citi, and Starwood points to the airline.

## TO/FROM CANADA FIRST AND BUSINESS CLASS: A GAME OF SEMANTICS

Here, not only does the partner's flight-distance award chart play a role in getting a much lower mileage-award rate, but so does "**class-of-service semantics**."

Delta and US Airways call premium class on two-class flights to Canada "First Class," while American and United call it "Business Class." This is **key** because flight-distance charts charge more for First Class than they do for Business Class.

On a short-haul AA flight, such as Chicago-Toronto (842 flight miles round-trip), BA charges only 18,000 miles roundtrip in **Business Class**. But for a short-haul US Airways flight, like Philadelphia-Toronto (678 flight miles

round-trip), BA charges 27,000 miles round-trip in **First Class**.

Calling Business Class “First Class” on a flight to Canada has BA charging more for US Airways flights.

Another good example of a non-stop short-haul flight is New York-Toronto on AA; BA charges only 18,000 miles roundtrip in Business Class which is 32,000 less—**almost a Three-for-One**.

## Alliance Opportunity Ratings: Short-Haul Routes Between Canada and the U.S.

Alliance	Domestic Carrier / Miles		Class	Partner Carrier / Miles		Partner Savings		Opportunity Rating
Miles	%							
Oneworld	AA	50,000	BC	BA	18,000 (Flight distance zone 1)	32,000	65%	A
					40,000 (Zone 3)	10,000	20%	C
	US		FC		27,000 (Zone 1)	23,000	46%	A-
SkyTeam	DL	50,000	FC	No partner opportunities				F
Star Alliance	UA	50,000	BC	NH	38,000 (Up to 2,000 flight miles)	12,000	24%	C
					43,000 (2,001 to 4,000 flight miles)	7,000	14%	D

AA = American Airlines, BA = British Airways, DL= Delta, NH = All Nippon, UA = United Airlines, US = US Airways; BC = Business Class, FC = First Class.

## Sample Routes Between Canada and U.S. Offering Savings of Up to 65%

American	To/From Chicago	Toronto	18,000 Miles (65% Off)
To/From New York	Toronto		
To/From Dalla	Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver	40,000 Miles (20% Off)	
To/From Miami	Montreal, Toronto		
US Airways	To/From Charlotte	Toronto	27,000 Miles (46% Off)
	To/From Philadelphia	Montreal, Toronto	

American	To/From Chicago	Toronto	18,000 Miles (65% Off)
United	To/From Chicago	Toronto	38,000 Miles (24% Off)
	To/From San Francisco	Vancouver	

## TO/FROM THE CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA, AND MEXICO: FIRST AND BUSINESS CLASS

Here again, semantics is the key to savings, as US Airways calls its premium class “First Class,” while American, Delta, and United call it “Business Class.”

That’s one reason why, oneworld received the highest grade again—with **potential savings of up to 42,000 miles (70%)** on short-haul, non-stop flights to the Caribbean or Mexico. An opportunity with Star Alliance can net a savings of 37%.

For example, take AA non-stop short-haul flights such as Miami-Grand Cayman or Jamaica: BA charges only 18,000 miles round-trip in Business Class—42,000 fewer miles than AA charges (60,000 miles). It’s a **Three-for-One**.

## Alliance Opportunity Ratings: Short-Haul Between Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean and the U.S.

Alliance	Domestic Carrier / Miles		Class	Partner Carrier / Miles		Partner Savings		Opportunity Rating
Miles	%							
Oneworld	AA	60,000	BC	BA*	18,000 (Flight distance zone 1)	42,000	70%	A+
					30,000 (Zone 2)	30,000	50%	A
					40,000 (Zone 3)	20,000	33%	B
	US		FC	45,000 (Zone 2)	15,000	25%	C+	
SkyTeam	DL	60,000	BC	No partner opportunities				F
Star Alliance	UA	60,000	BC	NH	38,000 (Up to 2,000 flight miles)	22,000	37%	B+
					43,000 (2,001 to 4,000 flight miles)	17,000	28%	B-

AA = American Airlines, BA = British Airways, DL= Delta, NH = All Nippon, UA = United Airlines, US = US Airways; BC = Business Class, FC = First Class. \*BA also offers a savings on some routes such as Chicago-San Juan, which at 50,000 miles is a savings of only 10,000 (17%) miles so it is not included in the chart.

## Sample of Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean Routes in First / Business Class Up to 70% Off From Major U.S. Hub Cities

American	To/From Miami	Cancun, Grand Cayman, Montego Bay (and Kingston), Nassau, Providenciales (Turks and Caicos)	18,000 Miles (70% Off)
To/From Dallas	Cancun, Cozumel, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta, San Jose del Cabo	30,000 Miles (50% Off)	
To/From Miami	Aruba, Belize City, Guatemala, Port Au Prince, Puerto Plata, Punta Cana, San Juan, San Jose (CR), Santo Domingo, St. Thomas		
To/From Los Angeles	San Jose del Cabo		
To/From Chicago	Cancun, Mexico City, Montego Bay	40,000 Miles (33% Off)	
To/From Dallas	Guatemala, San Jose (CR)		
To/From Miami	Antigua, Bridgetown, Curacao, Grenada, Mexico City, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Maarten		
To/From New York	Cancun, Port Au Prince, San Juan		
US Airways	To/From Charlotte	Cancun, Nassau	45,000 Miles (25% Off)
United	To/From Houston	Belize City, Cancun, Cozumel	38,000 Miles (37% Off)
	To/From Los Angeles	San Jose del Cabo	
	To/From Chicago	Cozumel, Mexico City, Montego Bay, Nassau, Puerto Vallarta, Punta Cana	43,000 Miles (28% Off)
	To/From Denver	Cancun, Puerto Vallarta, San Jose del Cabo	
	To/From Houston	Guatemala City, Montego Bay, San Jose (CR), San Jose del Cabo, San Juan	
	To/From Los Angeles	Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta	

American	To/From Miami	Cancun, Grand Cayman, Montego Bay (and Kingston), Nassau, Providenciales (Turks and Caicos)	18,000 Miles (70% Off)
	To/From Newark	Nassau, Providenciales (Turks and Caicos), Punta Cana, San Juan, St. Maarten, St. Thomas	
	To/From San Francisco	Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, San Jose del Cabo	
	To/From Washington,DC	Cancun, Guatemala City, Mexico City, Montego Bay, Punta Cana, San Juan, St. Maarten, St. Thomas	

## A GOOD DEAL GETS BETTER: USE CASH & MILES TO MULTIPLY OPPORTUNITIES

BA offers **Avios & Money**, a program in which you pay cash to pay fewer miles—not always the goal for most travelers, but often a great deal.

Looking at Dallas-Cancun in Business Class, for example, our research shows that BA's normal miles option is 30,000 Avios points plus \$66 in taxes while the Avios & Money option requires 16,000 miles and \$266 in cash. Which simply translates to the airline selling you miles at **1.4¢ each (with no limit)**, a penny a mile less than the usual cost and a great way to conserve miles—or get in the game with fewer miles.

So, before buying Amex Rewards points at 2.5¢ (500,000- mile annual limit) per year for travel on BA, first exhaust the Avios & Money program.

## HOW ANYONE CAN GET TWO- AND THREE-FOR-ONES FAST AND EASY

**All Nippon:** ANA is a points transfer partner with Amex Rewards and Starwood.

**British Airways:** BA is a points transfer partner with Amex Rewards, Chase Ultimate Rewards, and Starwood. You can also purchase 27,000 miles directly from the airline annually at 2.8¢ per mile.

## KNOW YOUR POINT-TRANSFER FRIENDLY (PTF) CREDIT CARDS

**American Express Membership Rewards:** The website states that “the average transfer time is 24 to 48 hours with British Airways and two to four business days for All Nippon.” However, in my experience, transfers often occur the same day with both airlines.

**Chase Ultimate Rewards:** The website states that “the average transfer time is one business day, but can take up to 7 days.” In my experience, transfers to British Airways have sometimes been completed the same day.

**Starwood Preferred Guest:** Its website indicates that “transfers take an average of two to four weeks to U.S. carriers and four to six weeks to international ones.” In my experience, Starwood gets miles the same day to some airlines, including All Nippon, but my last transfer to British Airways took five days.