Jumping Through Loops: Little-known Strategy Adds Free Side Trip — Plus Lowers Your Fare

December 2020

FCF’s side hustle delivers the goods – even during the lockdown era.

It’s been almost a year since we discussed our Stopover Loophole Strategy (SLS). But it’s time to bring it back. We’ve just found some great SLS fares that 2021 travelers should consider jumping on right now.

SLS Crash Course

What is the Stopover Loophole Strategy again? Here’s how it works. A stopover is a planned stop of more than four hours (domestic) or 24 hours (international) between flight segments on a trip. But longer stopovers are sometimes allowed for free (or a very small fee) – i.e. these allow you to enjoy a “second destination” for

several days or much longer – most often in the applicable airline's hub city. This presents an interesting opportunity for business travelers and/or those wanting to add a little extra pleasure to their trip.

That's because the stopover can be turned into a vacation if you're on a business trip or a second vacation if you're already traveling for pleasure. So the SLS strategy allows you to add a bucket list destination for a fraction of the normal price, or even free in many cases! And on top of that, the flight to your original destination can even be less. See some examples of this below.

Savings That Scream "Why Didn't I Know About This?!"

If you play it right, this cool strategy opens up the world for way less. I'm talking Business Class fares to the far-flung reaches of the planet for under $3,100; that's two destinations for the price of one.

The following SLS options involve Europe and Africa. Here are two scenarios that demonstrate this opportunity:

Scenario #1: You are going to Africa, and you'd take a side trip in Europe if it were free or cheap, or actually lowered your fare to Africa.

Scenario #2: You are going to Europe, and you'd take a side trip in Africa if it were free or cheap, or actually lowered your fare to Europe.

Either way, the SLS works hard to save you money.

Dan's Pyramid Scheme

Dan from Dallas has always dreamt of seeing the pyramids in Egypt. If Dan pays a regular round-trip fare in Business Class on United to Cairo, he'd have to dish out $3,209. On the other hand, if Dan goes via Frankfurt, he gets to add Frankfurt onto the trip for a total cost of $2,459 – a $750 savings. More for less. We love that equation.

While that's the biggest saving we could find, the chart below shows a lot of other options. Many of them add a city for less, about the same, or only a bit more. In all cases, it's definitely something worth considering for your next trip.

Airline	U.S. Origin	Africa Destination	Africa R/T Fare	Europe Add-on	Two-Stop Fare	Cost For Adding Europe Stop
Lufthansa	New York	Cairo	$3,121	Munich	$2,819	-$302
British Airways	Chicago	Johannesburg	$3,860	London	$3,740	-$120
United	Chicago	Lagos	$3,512	Vienna	$3,399	-$113

Airline	U.S. Origin	Africa Destination	Africa R/T Fare	Europe Add-on	Two-Stop Fare	Cost For Adding Europe Stop
United	New York	Lagos	$3,558	Munich	$3,457	-$101
SWISS	New York	Marrakesh	$2,837	Vienna	$2,935	-$98
United	Washington, DC	Dakar	$3,545	Brussels	$3,529	$16
United	Los Angeles	Lagos	$3,801	Zurich	$3,825	$24
American	Seattle	Cairo	$3,887	London	$3,848	$39
United	New York	Dakar	$3,512	Brussels	$3,569	$57
British Airways	Dallas	Johannesburg	$3,857	London	$3,940	$83
TAP	Boston	Casablanca	$2,593	Lisbon	$3,049	$456

*Fares valid at time of publication and are likely to change; use data as a general guide and experiment with your dates to find lowest fares.

Great Deals on Loop(hole)

As you can see, you either pay up to just $250 more for a whole extra city OR you pay up to $750 *less*. In those cases **you're essentially being paid** for the privilege of visiting another city. You also have the choice of spending a short layover in the European city on the way to Africa, or a long layover. Make it a vacation in itself – it's entirely up to you.

LOYALTY TIP: The North African trips use Star Alliance airlines, while the South African ones work when using Virgin (but not SkyTeam). South Africa works best with Oneworld. Loyalty-free agents can skim the cream from SLS, in other words.

Got Another Place in Mind?

If the cities featured aren't the ones you have in mind, remember that travel within Europe is inexpensive and there are many options to get around. For example, Berlin is just an hour's flight from Frankfurt, and it's about the same distance to Vienna. Also, play around with dates and itinerary combinations for many other opportunities we haven't highlighted.

Strategy Cheat Sheet

Oneworld SLS Deal Trends:

Lowest-Fare Departure Cities: New York, Boston, Miami, Dallas, Los Angeles.

Lowest-Fare Europe Destinations: Barcelona, Frankfurt, London, Paris, Rome, Vienna.

Lowest-Fare Africa Destinations: Capetown, Lagos, Johannesburg.

Star Alliance SLS Deal Trends:

Lowest-Fare Departures: Dallas, Miami, New York.

Lowest-Fare Cities in Europe: Frankfurt, Vienna.

Lowest-Fare African Cities: Cairo, Lagos, Marrakesh.

Virgin SLS Deal Trends:

Lowest-Fare Departure: Boston.

Lowest-Fare Europe: London.

Lowest-Fare African Cities: Johannesburg.

Spanish Fly: Iberia's 4-for-1 (Almost-Free Upgrade) Business Class Deal to Europe, Now Available

December 2020

Or depending on how you look at it, how (and when) Amex and Chase points players can save 73% on award travel.

I hate to be the guy that says, "I told you so," but as we mentioned for American here, and Delta here and here, cheap awards are drying up faster than a wet sock on a Madrid sidewalk.

That said, there's a new top *hombre* in town when it comes to cheap awards that are actually bookable now: Iberia *(cue dramatic Ennio Morricone music. And yes, we know he's Italian but it's the right vibe).*

IBERIA: PUNCHING ABOVE ITS BAGGAGE WEIGHT

Iberia, Líneas Aéreas de España, S.A. Operadora, Sociedad Unipersonal, or **Iberia** for short (thankfully), is Spain's national carrier. For European-bound Business Class travelers, it's an airline that's definitely worth running your *ojos* over. Here are a few topline reasons before we drill down to an airline versus airline battle, specifically against the big three U.S. carriers.

Iberia operates a flight-distance award chart, so the miles required are based on the length of the flight. Boston, Chicago, and New York Business Class departures to Madrid cost 100,000 miles round-trip in peak season and 68,000 in low season. Los Angeles and Miami are 125,000 and 85,000 miles, respectively.

LOW TAXES

On their New York-London route, British Airways' taxes can be $1,400! Iberia is a welcome exception. Taxes come to about $196 from East Coast gateways and $238 from the West Coast.

EASY ACCESS TO IBERIA MILES

The airline is an Amex and Chase transfer partner.

Iberia's U.S. gateways to Madrid are Boston, Miami, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

Now, let's head to the bullring for some head-to-head airline battles for context.

DEAL PERSPECTIVE #1: IBERIA VS. DELTA

Delta charges 250,000 to 620,000 miles to fly Business Class New York-Madrid. But on Iberia, that flight goes for as low as 68,000 miles — that's almost **four tickets for less than the price of one** with Delta.

DEAL PERSPECTIVE #2: IBERIA VS. AMERICAN

American charges 120,000 to 270,000 miles in Business Class New York-Madrid, while Iberia charges as few as 68,000 miles. That's only 8,000 more miles than AA charges for economy. So you're essentially getting an **upgrade for 8,000 miles**, and chances are good that you'll get that upgrade because Iberia now offers up to 95% more award space than American. Wow and wow. Iberia 2, U.S. airlines 0.

DEAL PERSPECTIVE #3: IBERIA VS. UNITED

United charges 120,000 miles in Business Class New York-Madrid, while Iberia charges as few as 68,000. That's only 8,000 more miles than UA charges for economy. Again, that equates to getting almost a free

upgrade. And you'll likely get it because Iberia now offers 70%+ more award space than United. That's a clean sweep in my mind: Iberia cruises to a crushing 3-0 win in the bullring.

AVAILABILITY SURVEY

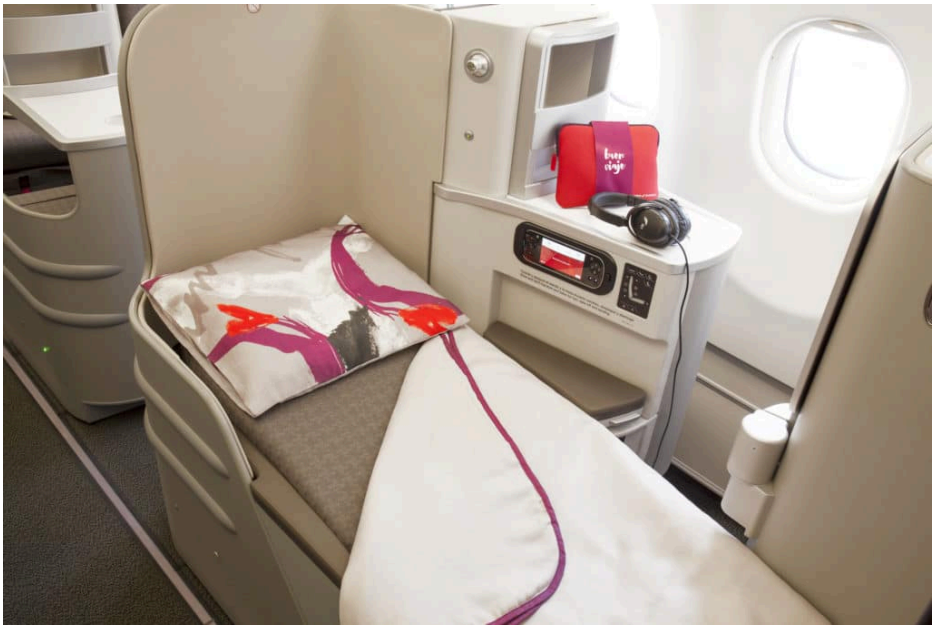
Airline	Route	Published Fare R/T	Mileage Cost R/T	Depart			Return		
				4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
Iberia	New York - Madrid	$3,200	68,000	Jan., Feb, March, April	March, April, Sept.	Sept., Oct.	Jan., Feb., March., April, May, June	Feb., April, May	April, May, Sept., Oct.
Iberia	Boston - Madrid	$2,564	68,000	April, May, June, Sept.	May, June, Sept.	May, Oct.	April, May, June	April, June, Sept.	May, Sept., Oct.
Iberia	Miami-Madrid	$3,070	85,000	Feb., March, May, June, Sept.	Feb., Sept.	Jan., Feb., Sept., Oct.	Feb., March, April, May, June	March, June, Sept.	Jan., Feb., March, May, Sept., Oct.
Iberia	Chicago-Madrid	$2,264	85,000	Sept.	Sept.	Oct.	April, May, Sept.	April, Sept.	Oct.
Iberia	Los Angeles-Madrid	$4,595	102,000	April, Sept.	Sept., Oct.		May, Sept.	April, Sept., Oct.	
Iberia	San Francisco-Madrid	$4,655	102,000	June, Sept., Oct.	April, May, Oct.		June, Sept.	April, May, Oct.	

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

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

IBERIA BUSINESS CLASS SEAT

- Lie-flat seat
- 1-2-1 cabin configuration
- 26 inches wide



Iberia Business Class

The Secret to Getting to Asia When Round-Trip Awards Aren’t Available

December 2020

Having trouble booking a round-trip mileage award? Consider a one-way ticket instead.

If you find you’re having a hard time booking round-trip award travel to Asia (and who isn’t?), don’t despair. Let one-way award tickets come to the rescue.

First, let’s 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 available with the partner's own mileage program.
- When the Stopover Loophole Strategy (SLS) to Asia saves you so much money all you need is a one-way ticket to kick it off.

The idea is simple and it works wherever you're going: just divide your itinerary in two and search for the best deal on each leg.

I almost never book round-trip mileage awards because I'm usually going to multiple destinations, and/or I'm not planning to return to where I started. So there's rarely an ideal departure-return pairing on the same airline because with each different route I'll likely find better seats and/or schedules via different programs.

That's the key: getting the best option on each independent leg rather than on the round-trip as a whole.

BEST ONE-WAY DEALS TO ASIA

Air Canada: With dynamic award pricing, Air Canada flights range from 52,000 to 150,000 and their partners start at 55,000 miles one-way in Business Class and 90,000 to 200,000 miles in First Class while partners are 90,000 one-way. This includes airline partners such as Singapore and United. If you don't have these miles, you can get them through Amex Rewards point transfers. (Go here and here for some of the recent Business Class award availability alerts).

Air France: Air France and partner flights start at 85,000 miles one-way in Business Class. It includes airline partners such as Delta, Japan Airlines, Korean, and Singapore. If you don't have miles, you can get them through Amex Rewards point transfers.

Alaska: The cost varies by route. The cheapest partner flights in Business Class to Asia are on Cathay Pacific for 50,000 miles while American's range from 60,000 to 70,000 miles. In First Class, American flights range from 80,000 to 110,000 miles while Cathay is just 70,000 miles. Japan Airlines ranges from 60,000 to 65,000 miles in Business Class and from 70,000 to 75,000 miles in First Class. Korean Air ranges from 105,000 to 120,000 miles in Business Class and Singapore Airlines from 80,000 to 100,000 miles in Business Class and from 110,000 to130,000 miles in First Class.

American: With dynamic award pricing, its flights and those with partners start at 60,000 miles one-way in Business Class. Partners include Cathay Pacific and Japan Airlines. First Class starts at 80,000 miles one-way.

Cathay Pacific: The cost varies by route, starting at 70,000 miles one-way (Los Angeles-Hong Kong) in Business Class and 110,000 miles in First Class. On American, it's 75,000 miles in Business Class and 120,000 miles in First. FYI, Amex points transfer to Cathay. (Go here, for a recent Business Class alert and here, and here for some of the recent First Class award availability alerts).

Japan Airlines: The least expensive flights are to/from Japan: 50,000 miles in Business Class and 70,000 in First. Oneworld partner awards vary and are higher than JAL's own. (Go here and here for some recent Business Class and here, and here of the recent First Class award availability alerts).

United (does not offer a chart) has dynamic award pricing, with flights and those of their partners starting at 88,000 miles in Business Class and 121,000 miles in First Class, valid on United and Asiana, among other airlines. United is a Chase transfer partner.

Singapore Airlines: Cost varies by route. The least expensive flight is Los Angeles-Tokyo for 92,000 miles in Business Class and 107,000 miles in First. Award cost on Star Alliance partners is higher. Amex Rewards members can transfer points to Singapore miles. (Go here and here for recent Business Class award availability alerts).

Virgin Atlantic: Partner-flight cost varies, starting at 60,000 miles on Delta in Business Class. (Go here and here for some of the recent Business Class award availability alerts).

MULTIPLY YOUR CHANCES AT THE "CARD TABLE"

One of the best things you can do is to be in a credit card program that links to many different airline programs. (Read about it in 80/20 in 2020—Putting the Pareto Principle to Work for a Better Travel Credit Card Life). It means you can get around the availability barriers that airlines put up –– sneaky critters that they are.

Like I always say, **options matter**.

Miracle Berth to Asia: FCF's Secret Strategy Now Prices Delta Flights 67% Cheaper Than Delta Charges

December 2020

How Chase and Amex points players can get 3-for-1s on Business Class flights on Delta.

Dear Delta Loyalist,

I feel your pain. In many ways, the airline performs operationally better than American and United. And, yes, we know that many of you live in a city that provides very few options other than Delta.

But I still have to write this subheadline (apologies if you feel a slight sting).

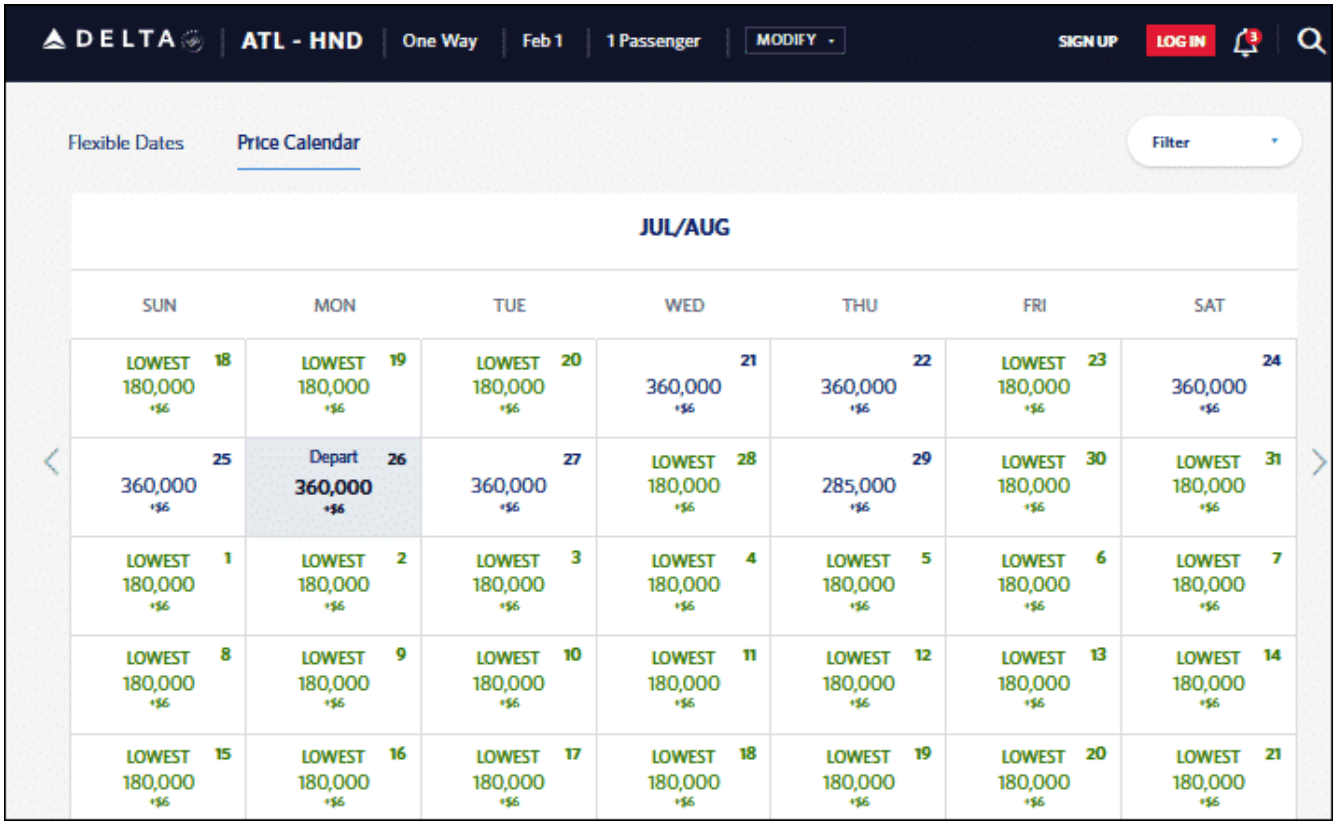
HOW AMEX & CHASE POINTS PLAYERS CAN PAY 67% LESS FOR DELTA-OPERATED FLIGHTS THAN DELTA SKYMILES MEMBERS DO

Ouch!

What the heck?! Although it sounds crazy, it's true. Here's why: Delta only releases a small number (if any) of low-priced mileage award seats to Asia, forcing you to settle for full-priced options (in the 320,000 to 640,000 miles territory). But here's the catch… **using Virgin Atlantic miles for the same Delta flights/routes can open up low-priced saver award space that Delta doesn't offer SkyMiles members.**

DELTA'S GIFT TO VIRGIN

Delta SkyMiles **one-way** tickets to Asia usually cost 180,000 miles and up to 360,000 — double ouch! — on Delta-operated flights, as the screen below attests.



On the other hand, Virgin Atlantic (an Amex and Chase points transfer partner) offers **one-way** flights to Asia for just 60,000 miles on Delta-operated flights, as shown below.

virgin atlantic ATL - HND | One way | Jul 14 | 1 passenger | Edit search | Join | Log in

Flexible dates | Calendar view | Filter

AUG/SEP

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Lowest 60,000 +$6 8	Lowest 60,000 +$6 9	Lowest 60,000 +$6 10	Lowest 60,000 +$6 11	Lowest 60,000 +$6 12	Lowest 60,000 +$6 13	Lowest 60,000 +$6 14
15 Not available	Lowest 60,000 +$6 16	17 Not available	Depart 18 60,000 +$6	Lowest 60,000 +$6 19	Lowest 60,000 +$6 20	Lowest 60,000 +$6 21
Lowest 60,000 +$6 22	Lowest 60,000 +$6 23	Lowest 60,000 +$6 24	Lowest 60,000 +$6 25	Lowest 60,000 +$6 26	27 Not available	28 Not available
Lowest 60,000 +$6 29	Lowest 60,000 +$6 30	Lowest 60,000 +$6 31	Lowest 60,000 +$6 1	Lowest 60,000 +$6 2	3 Not available	Lowest 60,000 +$6 4
Lowest 60,000 +$6 5	Lowest 60,000 +$6 6	Lowest 60,000 +$6 7	8 Not available	Lowest 60,000 +$6 9	Lowest 60,000 +$6 10	Lowest 60,000 +$6 11

So that's round-trip for 240,000 *fewer* miles? Yup. The cost to use Delta miles is generally 360,000 miles round-trip and about $36 in award taxes. Virgin Atlantic only charges 120,000 miles and $36 for taxes.

And by the way, this isn't the first time we've mentioned this under-the-radar, secret FCF strategy. We reported on low-cost awards using Virgin here, here, here, here, and here. Then we reported the switch where Delta had space and Virgin did not here. Now it's back to Virgin having saver award space and for much less than Delta. It's a rollercoaster ride with this special strategy. But hey, now you're back around to the place with the good view.

AVAILABILITY IS GOOD

There are 12 Delta-operated routes to Asia with award space available using Virgin Atlantic miles right now at 67%-off levels, with departures from Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Portland and Seattle **to Tokyo**. You can also find routes from Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, and Minneapolis **to Seoul**; from Detroit **to Nagoya**; and Los Angeles **to Shanghai**. Happily, there are lots of booking options available for mid-late 2021. So dust the lockdown residue off your suitcase and get ready to fly.

VERSUS THE FULL FREIGHT FARE

Or you could be like regular travelers and pay the standard published fare (not a good idea). For example, Atlanta to Tokyo in Business Class in July costs $7,058, round-trip. On a high-priced route like Los Angeles-Shanghai ($13,497), the value-per-mile is an impressive 11 cents per mile, which we like to see in FCFville.

Link it up with FCF's Leg Stretch Strategy. Elsewhere in this December Upgrade Advisor, we talk about our awesome Leg Stretch Strategy. This Virgin play (particularly one-way) pairs with it like dumplings and hoisin sauce. Mmm…

HOW TO BUY MILES

If you don't have enough miles, you can buy them for as low as $3,036 round-trip (includes about $36 in award tax). The lowest published fare Los Angeles to Shanghai is currently $13,497, netting you a huge savings of $10,461 (77%). And FYI, you can buy Amex Membership Reward points for 2.5 cents each and transfer them to Virgin Atlantic. Check out How to Buy American Express Membership Rewards Points, and When to Buy Miles Instead of Purchasing a Normal Published Fare.

Chase and Citi points also transfer to Virgin Atlantic miles.

HOW TO SEARCH FOR DELTA FLIGHTS BOOKABLE ONLINE USING VIRGIN ATLANTIC MILES

You don't have to create a Virgin Atlantic mileage account to check for availability. However, if you are booking award seats, then you'll have to log in. Just go to "Book" and click "Advanced search." For more on searching for Delta flights, see our report here (the important information is about halfway down the page with the same header as above).

HOW TO ADD CONNECTING FLIGHTS

If you need to add extra flights to the nonstop Delta flight that has good availability, you'll have to spend more miles. A one-way domestic (non-transcontinental) flight costs 22,500 more Virgin miles. More here on how to book Delta connecting flights with Virgin miles.

SOME NEED-TO-KNOWS WHEN USING VIRGIN ATLANTIC MILES

To review other key details such as credit card partnerships, throughout-the-year transfer bonuses, and mileage award taxes, go here.

RISKY TO BOOK WITH MILES?

Both Virgin Atlantic and Delta have a "travel fee waiver" currently offered for new bookings until the end of this year. This includes award flights. That means there won't be any fees to cancel your ticket.

Normal mileage award booking policies vary by airline, but you can generally redeposit or change your mileage ticket for as little as $50. Details here.

Think of the change and/or redeposit fee as an insurance policy. If your plans change and you decide not to travel, you can do so with very little hassle and cost. We think it's well worth it.

Airline	Route	Mileage Cost R/T	Depart			Return		
			4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
Delta	Atlanta - Tokyo	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Oct.	Oct.	March to Sept.	Oct.	Oct.	March to Sept.
Delta	Detroit - Tokyo	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000		Oct.	March to Sept.		Oct.	March to Sept.
Delta	Los Angeles - Tokyo	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000		Oct.	April to Sept., Oct.			April to Oct.
Delta	Seattle - Tokyo	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000			March to Oct.		Oct.	March to Sept.
Delta	Minneapolis - Tokyo	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000		July, Oct.	April to June, Aug., Sept.	Oct.		April to Sept.
Delta	Portland - Tokyo	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Oct.	Oct.	April to Sept.	Oct.		April to Sept.
Delta	Seattle - Seoul	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Jan., Oct.	March	Feb., April to Sept.	Jan.	Oct.	Feb. to Sept., Oct.
Delta	Atlanta - Seoul	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Jan.	Oct.	Feb. to Sept.	Jan.	Feb., Oct.	March to Sept.

Airline	Route	Mileage Cost R/T	Depart			Return		
			4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month	4 to 8 Days Per Month	9 to 12 Days Per Month	13+ Days Per Month
Delta	Detroit - Seoul	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Oct.	March, Oct.	Feb., April to Sept.		Oct.	Feb. to Sept., Oct.
Delta	Minneapolis - Seoul	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000			April to Sept.		Aug., Sept.	April to July, Aug., Sept.
Delta	Detroit - Nagoya	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Oct.	June	April, May, July to Sept.	Oct.	June, July, Sept.	April, May, Aug.
Delta	Los Angeles - Shanghai	Under 360,000						
Virgin Atlantic		120,000	Aug.		July, Aug., Sept.	July, Aug.	July, Sept.	

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

Route	Normal Published Fare	Virgin Atlantic Mileage	Value of Miles
Atlanta - Tokyo	$7,058	120,000	5.8¢
Detroit - Tokyo	$7,108	120,000	5.9¢
Los Angeles - Tokyo	$5,562	120,000	4.6¢
Seattle - Tokyo	$5,858	120,000	4.8¢
Minneapolis - Tokyo	$6,558	120,000	5.4¢
Portland - Tokyo	$5,858	120,000	4.8¢
Seattle - Seoul	$3,813	120,000	3.1¢
Atlanta - Seoul	$7,321	120,000	6.1¢
Detroit - Seoul	$7,553	120,000	6.2¢

Route	Normal Published Fare	Virgin Atlantic Mileage	Value of Miles
Minneapolis - Seoul	$7,053	120,000	5.8¢
Detroit - Nagoya	$8,262	120,000	6.8¢
Los Angeles - Shanghai	$13,497	120,000	11¢

Update: More Historically Unprecedented Transcon Mileage Opportunities

December 2020

Get the Transcontinental crossing while the getting is good.

We have more good news on Transcontinental flights. Last month it was United's Premium Transcon service for $837 round-trip, a couple of weeks ago we found nonstop First Class availability between Ft. Lauderdale and Los Angeles for $582 round-trip, and two months ago it was American Airlines boasting 7+ seats on its premium Transcon flights for 200+ days of the year for a ridiculously low 40,000 miles round-trip.

Phew. That's a lot of great numbers in one paragraph.

But the good news doesn't end there. In this report we'll cover the latest opportunities on American and United, and also revisit why Delta travelers are still being left out on the wing.

If you have an anniversary, birthday, or any other firm dates or reasons for crossing the country, then now might be a good opportunity for you.

UNITED'S NEW SERVICE

Let's start with United, which just announced that it's returning to New York's JFK (in addition to continued service from Newark).

United's New York/JFK-Los Angeles and New York/JFK-San Francisco service begins February 1, 2021, both with two flights daily.

As shown in our Sweet Redeem alerts, both New York-Los Angeles and New York-San Francisco are available to book now in both directions most Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays at 70,000 miles r/t through May 26. Otherwise the regular rate is available at 100,000 miles r/t. **Not good.**

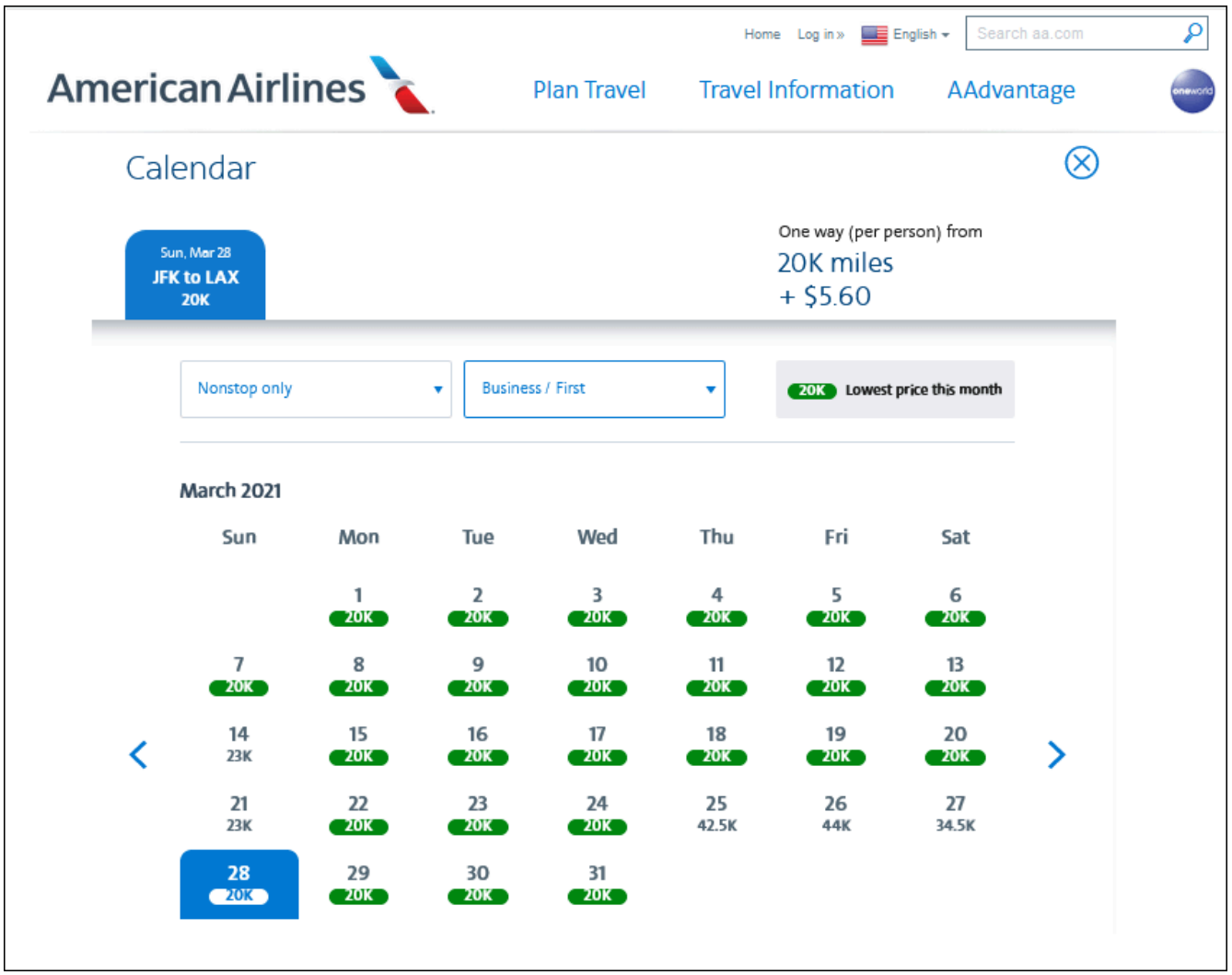
That's the same cost and almost exactly the same availability as both the Newark-Los Angeles and Newark-San Francisco routes.

United's Partner Air Canada offers the same flights for 50,000 miles r/t. **Not bad** if you want to burn points.

If you don't have miles, you can **transfer Amex points to Air Canada miles or Chase to United.**

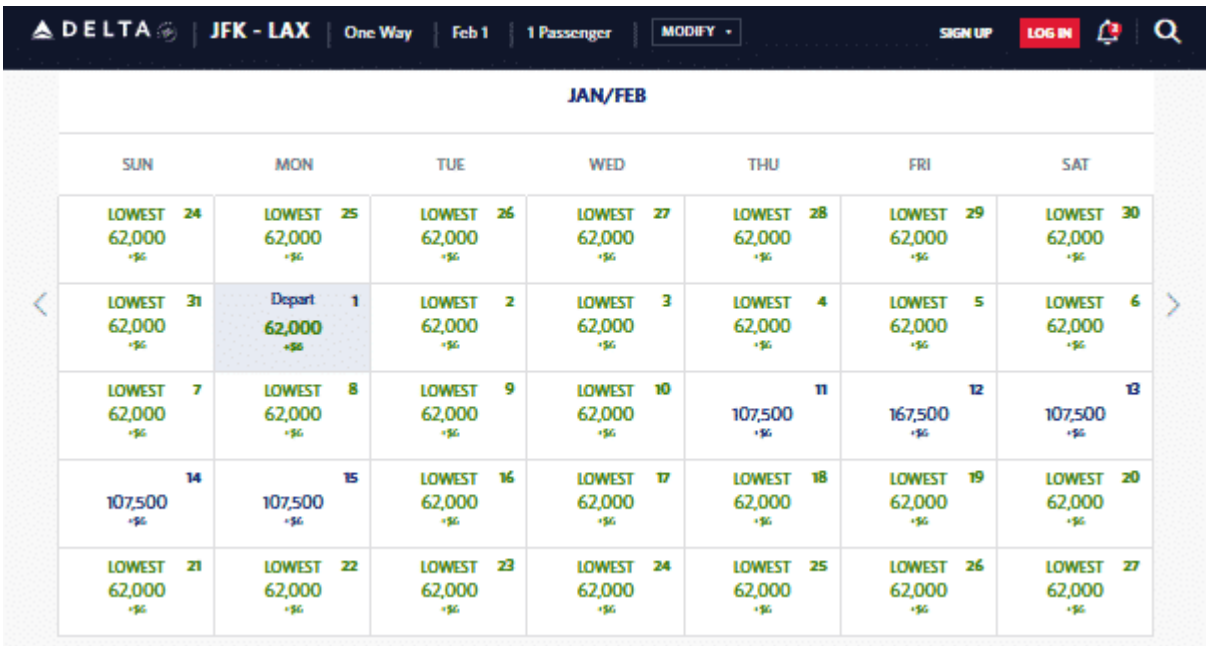
AMERICAN PRICING VARIES, SO WATCH CAREFULLY

American Airlines pricing ranges from 40,000 to 42,000 miles round-trip most days of the week (vs. United's Tue/Wed/Sat), with some days as high as 82,500 miles in early May for both New York-Los Angeles and New York-San Francisco.



AND DELTA? SHEESH...

Delta ranges from 124,000 to 335,000 miles round-trip, with availability scattered throughout most months at the lowest rates for both New York-Los Angeles and New York-San Francisco. We don't recommend this. If you have to fly Delta, just pay in cash for the ticket, and save your miles for another scenario.



THANKS FCF, BUT I DON’T LIVE IN NEW YORK OR CALIFORNIA

No problem. If you live in a city where you have to make a connection, say on a route like Palm Springs-New York, you can easily connect through these premium transcon flights with excellent seats like this and this.

The $1,000 Difference Trend: Why Oneworld First Class Is a Superior Alternative

December 2020

Seductive fares are calling to cross the pond...

Generally speaking, if I'm considering a route that's less than eight hours or so of flying, I'd choose Business Class that is nonstop over making a connection to ride in First Class.

That said, if there's no nonstop offered on that route, you know I'm going to prefer First Class.

That's where today's trend comes in. It works well at a lot of little airports where you'd have to make a connection anyway. So keep reading if you're flying to a city like Ibiza, Nice, or Valencia, and have to make a connection.

FIRST CLASS FARES TO EUROPE NORMALLY RUN $7,000 TO $17,000

First Class from New York to Paris on Air France runs $7,305 right now. Meanwhile, SWISS and Lufthansa First Class fares to Europe typically run from $7,000 to $12,000. You get the picture. First Class isn't cheap.

Or is it…? *(Cue the dramatic movie music.)*

AMERICAN AND BRITISH AIRWAYS ARE TRENDING BETWEEN $2,900 AND $3,500 IN FIRST CLASS R/T ON MANY ROUTES

Let me first say that American Airlines and British Airways First Class isn't nearly as good as what you'll find on Air France, Lufthansa, or SWISS.

That said, if you're a Oneworld traveler, so what?! They aren't an option anyway. What makes this fare trend such a great deal is that First Class fares on American and BA are now only $1,000 more than Business Class, and you end up with a much better seat.

SETTING THE TABLE FOR FIRST

That $1,000 difference as you'll see in the table below, is pretty standard down to the dollar. Given the quality difference and the flight length, it's right in the sweet spot for choosing First Class over Business. The value seems undeniable, as these examples show.

Britsh Airways First Class Varies by Aircraft, 787-9 Dreamliner Pictured Here

Route	AA/BA	AA/BA	Air France	Lufthansa	Swiss
Business Class	First Class	First Class			
Boston to Valencia	$2,273	$3,312	N/A	$13,597	$9,632

Route	AA/BA	AA/BA	Air France	Lufthansa	Swiss
Boston to Rome	$2,113	$3,113	N/A	N/A	$8,689
Boston to Venice	$2,161	$3,160	$7,217	N/A	$7,200
Boston to Milan	$2,113	$3,113	$7,216	$7,224	$7,200
Boston to Bologna	$2,062	$3,062	$7,241	N/A	$12,198
Chicago to Valencia	$2,112	$3,112	N/A	$8,755	$8,755
Chicago to Madrid	$2,281	$3,291	N/A	$8,775	$8,755
Chicago to Rome	$2,027	$3,053	N/A	$8,821	$8,801
Chicago to Bologna	$2,052	$3,053	$7,849	$8,871	N/A
Chicago to Milan	$2,087	$3,113	N/A	$7,827	$7,807
Chicago to Genoa	$2,179	$3,113	N/A	$7,895	N/A
Chicago to Venice	$2,261	$3,261	N/A	$7,827	$7,807
Chicago to Turin	$2,162	$3,162	$7,849	$7,877	N/A
Miami to Barcelona	$2,003	$3,056	N/A	$12,748	$10,461
Miami to Madrid	$2,106	$3,155	N/A	$13,926	$10,461
Miami to Rome	$1,923	$2,956	N/A	$7,798	$7,778
New York to Nice	$2,326	$3,423	$9,280	$9,287	$9,267
New York to Porto	$2,225	$3,323	$7,588	$7,595	$7,580
New York to Malaga	$2,115	$3,216	$8,511	$9,802	$9,782
New York to Malta	$2,326	$3,058	N/A	$8,703	$8,683
New York to Lisbon	$2,214	$3,289	$7,588	$7,595	$7,575
New York to Barcelona	$1,901	$2,953	$9,795	$9,802	$9,782
New York to Madrid	$2,054	$3,053	$9,795	$9,802	$9,782
New York to Rome	$1,954	$2,953	$8,636	$8,643	$8,623
New York to Milan	$1,954	$2,954	$8,611	$8,633	$8,613
San Francisco to Madrid	$2,314	$3,263	$10,436	$10,443	$10,423
Washington, DC to Madrid	$2,207	$3,263	$9,042	$9,049	N/A

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AMERICAN AIRLINES AND BRITISH AIRWAYS

BUSINESS AND FIRST CLASS SERVICE?

British Airways offers more clear-cut differences between First and Business than American, and more luxury extras in general (spa treatments before takeoff, anyone?). See more details in the table below.

	American		British Airways	
AA Business Class	AA First Class	BA Business Class	BA First Class	
Aircraft	787, 777	777-300	747, 787, 777, A380, A350	A380, 777, 787, 747
Seat Width	20.5	21.5	20	22
Seat Recline	lie-flat	lie-flat	lie-flat	lie-flat
Enhanced privacy		X		X
Complimentary seat assignments	X	X		X
Private check-in		X		X
Fast track through security and priority boarding at the airport	X	X	X	X
Up to 2 Bags complimentary	X		X	
Up to 3 bags complimentary		X		X
Access to First Class lounges		X		X
Dedicated concierge				X
Enhanced dining experience		X		X
Free Wi-Fi (Wi-Fi is being progressively rolled out across BA's fleet.)		X		X
Sleepware		X		X

American Airlines First Class

WHAT ARE THE RISKS IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR MIND?

American and British Airways are currently offering “travel fee waivers” even for their award flights. That means it won’t cost you anything to cancel or change your ticket for international travel for the remainder of 2020. However, we’ll have to wait and see how far it extends into 2021.

THREE MORE THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU BOOK

Not ready to book just yet? Hold your fare, then decide later.

Want to save even more? Book with Amex IAP

More ways to save with BA: Use BA’s AARP $200 Discount & BA Chase 10% discount. These drive the Newark to Milan extra cost over Business for First down to as little as $523, for example.

FCF’s Favorite Free Vacation Strategy Is Now Better Than Ever, With New West Coast Additions

December 2020

FCF’s renowned Leg Stretch Strategy is back, connecting Asia, South America, and you.

The Leg Stretch Strategy is the gift that keeps on giving. Usually, it connects Europe and South America via the U.S. for crazy-low prices, like a free ride in Business Class. It’s typically best for East Coast flyers (and sometimes Midwesterners) simply due to the geography of the novel *two-trips-on-one-ticket* approach.

Well, now we’ve got some great news for West Coasters. Amidst all the lockdown distractions we’ve been experiencing, we’ve spotted a well-connected Leg Stretch route from Asia to South America via the U.S.

THE LEG STRETCH IN A NUTSHELL

The “Leg Stretch Strategy” (LSS) is FCF’s name for an outrageously inventive ploy where airlines connect three continents for an *extremely* low price, like $3,672 in Business Class for four segments, which is equal to two round-trips. In today’s case, it connects Asia, South America, and the U.S.

LEG STRETCHING FROM ASIA TO SOUTH AMERICA (VIA THE U.S.)

To get the spoils, you have to start this ticket in either Asia or South America (one-way tickets are not that difficult to get) and return there, stopping in the U.S. both ways in between (more on booking details in links below). BUT, you can stay in the U.S. for up to a year — it’s a free stopover both ways (meaning that if you live in the U.S., you just come home).

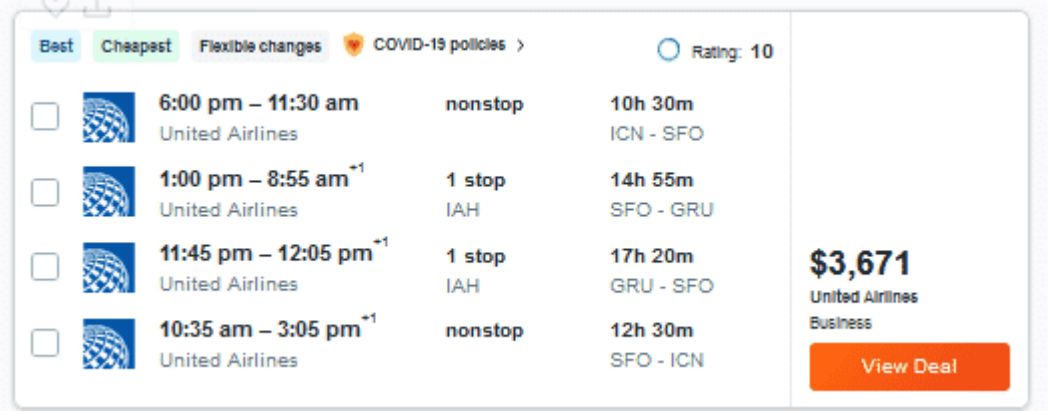
So if you are planning to visit those other continents for business or pleasure, you end up saving thousands of dollars or getting the equivalent of **a free Business Class ticket.**

As the world unlocks, the LSS could be the perfect way to see the Olympic Games in Tokyo. Or the Andes in South America. You choose your preferred 2021 lockdown escapade.

We have 10 LSS example options here – using Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York, Washington, DC, or San Francisco (thus our happy West Coasters) as the U.S. stop-offs.

The savings are stunning, as you’ll see detailed in the screenshots below. You could easily pay twice as much if you were to do those same trips separately. The LSS is a gift from Mr. Upgrade.

LSS SAMPLE ITINERARY TO SAN FRANCISCO
FROM SEOUL TO SAO PAULO AND BACK



UNITED | United States | English | Saved trips | Contact us | MileagePlus: Sign in or join

Trip summary

View checked baggage charges

Tue, Feb 02, 2021

6:00 pm Seoul, KR (ICN) → 11:30 am San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) — Nonstop, 10h 30m total

MileagePlus earnings: 4,155 base award miles, 1 PQF | 831 PQP

Seoul, KR (ICN) to San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) — United Polaris business (P)
6:00 pm - 11:30 am (10h 30m) — Dinner
UA 892 | Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner

Tue, Feb 09, 2021

Tue, Feb 9 1:00 pm San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) → Wed, Feb 10 8:55 am São Paulo, SP, BR (GRU) — 1 Connection, 14h 55m total

MileagePlus earnings: 4,785 base award miles, 2 PQF | 957 PQP

San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) to Houston, TX, US (IAH) — United First (P)
1:00 pm - 6:50 pm (3h 50m) — Snack
UA 2260 | Boeing 737-900

Terminal change Red-eye flight

1h 25m connection

Houston, TX, US (IAH) to São Paulo, SP, BR (GRU) — United Polaris business (P)
8:15 pm - 8:55 am (9h 40m) — Dinner
UA 62 | Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner

Depart IAH: Tue, Feb 9
Arrive GRU: Wed, Feb 10

Depart IAH: Tue, Feb 9
Arrive GRU: Wed, Feb 10

Wed, Mar 10, 2021

Wed, Mar 10 11:45 pm São Paulo, SP, BR (GRU) → Thu, Mar 11 12:05 pm San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) — 1 Connection, 17h 20m total

MileagePlus earnings: 4,785 base award miles, 2 PQF | 957 PQP

São Paulo, SP, BR (GRU) to Houston, TX, US (IAH) — United Polaris business (P)
11:45 pm - 6:30 am (9h 45m) — Dinner
UA 63 | Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner

Depart GRU: Wed, Mar 10
Arrive IAH: Thu, Mar 11

Depart GRU: Wed, Mar 10
Arrive IAH: Thu, Mar 11

Long layover Terminal change

Red-eye flight

3h 10m connection

Houston, TX, US (IAH) to San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) — United First (P)
9:40 am - 12:05 pm (4h 25m) — Snack
UA 2372 | Boeing 737-800

Thu, May 27, 2021

Thu, May 27 10:35 am San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) → Fri, May 28 3:05 pm Seoul, KR (ICN) — Nonstop, 12h 30m total

MileagePlus earnings: 4,155 base award miles, 1 PQF | 831 PQP

Multi-city (1 traveler) — Edit search

Tue, Feb 02, 2021
ICN - SFO 6:00 pm - 11:30 am

Tue, Feb 09, 2021
SFO - GRU 1:00 pm - 8:55 am

Wed, Mar 10, 2021
GRU - SFO 11:45 pm - 12:05 pm

Thu, May 27, 2021
SFO - ICN 10:35 am - 3:05 pm

Fare	$3,573.00
Taxes and fees	$99.10
TOTAL	**$3,672.10**

or starting from $328/month

San Francisco, CA, US (SFO) to Seoul, KR (ICN)
10:35 am - 3:05 pm (12h 30m)
United Polaris business (P)
Lunch
UA 893 | Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner
Depart SFO: Thu, May 27
Arrive ICN: Fri, May 28
Depart SFO: Thu, May 27
Arrive ICN: Fri, May 28

Follow this link here for a pre-baked trip above, which you can book in five minutes.

Perspective: A round-trip to Asia and one to South America for the routes above in nonstop **Business Class** on United Airlines can generally cost $7,211. But with the LSS strategy, you get **two Business Class tickets for the price of $3,672.**

Here are 10 example itineraries where this strategy works well.

Airline	Start Your LSS Ticket In:	Your U.S. Stop (Both Going and Coming):	Your South American Destination:	Fare At Time of Writing, for Four Legs (in effect, two round-trips)	Quick Links:
American	Seoul	Miami	Sao Paulo	$3,673	Ready Baked Trip
	Seoul	Dallas	Sao Paulo	$3,664	Ready Baked Trip
	Seoul	Chicago	Rio de Janiero	$3,899	Ready Baked Trip
	Seoul	New York	Rio de Janiero	$3,899	Ready Baked Trip
United	Seoul	San Francisco	Sao Paulo	$3,671	Ready Baked Trip
	Seoul	New York	Sao Paulo	$3,671	Ready Baked Trip
	Beijing	New York	Sao Paulo	$4,372	Ready Baked Trip
	Beijing	Chicago	Sao Paulo	$4,376	Ready Baked Trip
	Beijing	Washington, DC	Sao Paulo	$4,372	Ready Baked Trip
	Beijing	San Francisco	Sao Paulo	$4,381	Ready Baked Trip

SLS Asia/S America

PREVIOUS FCF LEG STRETCH STRATEGY REPORTS
+
DETAILS ON HOW TO BOOK LSS FAST & EASY

The Secret of Getting to Asia When Round-Trip Awards Aren't Available

Business Class for up to $139.65 Less than Coach on Delta & SkyTeam Partners to Europe and South America

Business Class for the Cost of Coach With United to Europe and South America

$617 Per Business Class Long-Haul Flight Segment On Delta from the Midwest and East Coast

How American Airlines International Travelers Can Get Business Class 3-for-1s

Business Class for Up to $66.68 Less than Coach on United (and Partners) to Europe and South America