

A photograph of the interior of an airplane cabin, specifically the Premium Economy section. The seats are wide and comfortable, with a dark brown leather-like upholstery and a lighter brown headrest. The seats are arranged in a 2-2-2 configuration. The lighting is warm and ambient, highlighting the texture of the seats and the overall spaciousness of the cabin. The text "Everything You Need to Know About United's New Premium Economy" is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Everything You Need to Know About United's New Premium Economy

January 2019

Does the airline's new entry change the Premium Economy landscape?

This report at a glance:

- Comparing United's Premium Economy (PE) fares for travel to Europe, Asia, India, and the South Pacific
- Are PE mileage upgrades worth it with United?
- Where to look for United's low-cost PE upgrades, starting at \$15 per flight hour
- Free upgrade to PE once the cost for extra leg-room seat is added

- Benefit of United's PE seat, and routes and features of aircrafts with PE seats
- Premium cabin fallback and for the kids

On Nov. 30, [United announced its new PE seat](#)—United Premium Plus—which officially went on sale Dec. 3, 2018, with travel starting on select international flights March 30, 2019. The new PE seat will first be on select B777-200ER, B777-300ER, and B787 aircraft. For the current rollout schedule with aircraft and route details, go [here](#).

WHAT IS PREMIUM ECONOMY?

In case you need a reminder or a better understanding of what is considered Premium Economy, in short, it is an upgraded seat when compared to standard economy that airlines have created within a separate cabin. This cabin usually also offers upgraded dining and boarding.

ANALYSIS OF UNITED'S PREMIUM ECONOMY FARES

All of the charts below detail how United PE fares compare to other airlines that fly similar routes with non-stop service.

For travel to Europe: As you can see from the fare chart below, in general, United's PE fares are very similar to airlines such as Air France, British Airways, Lufthansa, and Singapore. However, when compared to American's PE fares, United is priced a lot higher—up to \$484 higher round-trip.

Route	Lowest United PE Fare	Comparable Airline in PE	Lowest Comparable Airline PE Fare	Difference
San Francisco - Frankfurt	\$2,131	Lufthansa	\$2,131	0
Newark - Paris	\$1,355	American	\$925	\$430
Newark - Frankfurt	\$1,496	Singapore	\$1,361	\$135
Washington, DC - Paris	\$2,234	Air France	\$2,334	\$100
San Francisco - London	\$1,391	British Airways	\$1,345	About the same
San Francisco - Paris	\$2,576	Air France	\$2,616	About the same
Newark - Barcelona	\$1,373	American	\$889	\$484

For travel to Asia: When compared to airlines like All Nippon and Singapore, United's fares were about the same. When compared to lesser-known airlines, like Air China and China Airlines, United was priced higher—up to \$370 higher round-trip. But United beat Cathay Pacific's fares by \$784 round-trip.

Route	Lowest United PE Fare	Comparable Airline in PE	Lowest Comparable Airline PE Fare	Difference
San Francisco → Hong Kong	\$1,223	Singapore	\$1,186	About the same
San Francisco - Tokyo	\$2,151	All Nippon	\$2,253	About the same
San Francisco - Taipei	\$1,416	China Airlines	\$1,200	\$216
Newark → Hong Kong	\$1,454	Cathay Pacific	\$2,238	\$784
Newark - Tokyo	\$1,357	All Nippon	\$1,459	About the same
San Francisco - Beijing	\$1,405	Air China	\$1,035	\$370

For travel to India and the South Pacific: Let's talk India first. United faces no nonstop competition to Mumbai from Newark in PE class, but when FCF checked United's Business Class fares to Mumbai, the difference between PE and Business Class was as little as \$1,184. For travel to Auckland, United matched Air New Zealand's fare. Note that American offers seasonal service to Auckland, and in the past months offered fares starting at \$1,750. So keep an eye out for American to offer lower PE fares every once in a while to the South Pacific.

ARE PE MILEAGE UPGRADES WORTH IT WITH UNITED?

In short, no. United now offers three types of mileage upgrades instead of one (which was economy to Business Class, for which you had to pay miles and most often a co-pay). The three new mileage upgrades come in the form of:

1. Economy to PE: United charges miles for the upgrade only, and no co-pay
2. Economy to Business Class: United charges miles and a co-pay for the upgrade
3. PE to Business Class: United charges miles and a co-pay for the upgrade

The difference between upgrading to PE instead of Business Class is that United does not charge a co-pay, but United still charges the same number of miles.

For example, take the Newark-Hong Kong route (see screenshot below). As you can see, if you upgrade from economy to Business Class you are paying \$974 for the economy ticket and \$1,200 (round-trip) more for the co-pay, a total cash layout of \$2,174 plus 60,000 miles.

from New York/Newark, NJ, US (EWR - Liberty) to Hong Kong (HKG)

Departure date: Oct 08, 2019 Return date: Oct 22, 2019 Search by: Price [Update](#)

Departure: New York/Newark, NJ, US → Hong Kong

① All fares shown are the total price roundtrip, per person. Fares include taxes and fees. Additional bag charges may apply.

☒ Nonstop [Show fare type comparison ?](#)

Depart	Arrive	Stops	Duration	Economy	Premium Economy (lowest)	Premium Economy (upgrade-eligible Economy fare)	Business (upgrade-eligible Economy fare)	Business (upgrade-eligible Premium Economy fare)
Recommended flight Tue, Oct 8 3:15 pm Wed, Oct 9 7:10 pm Nonstop 15h 55m Details Seats				Roundtrip \$971 Select	Roundtrip \$1,905 Select	Roundtrip \$971 +30k miles each way, per person Select	Roundtrip \$974 +30k miles +\$600 co-pay each way, per person Select	Roundtrip \$1,908 +30k miles +\$450 co-pay each way, per person Select

But if you upgrade from PE to Business Class you are paying \$1,908 (PE ticket) plus the \$900 (round-trip) co-pay, a total cash layout of \$2,808 plus 60,000 miles. So you are paying \$654 more if you upgrade from PE to Business Class.

SAVER MILEAGE AWARD RATES AND AVAILABILITY FOR PE SEAT

At press time United did not have Saver Award pricing posted for PE in its online chart. Yes, you could book free mileage awards online, but many routes (particularly to Europe) were coming up at 120,000 miles one-way, and Business Class everyday rates were 120,000 miles. Is something broken?

WHERE TO LOOK FOR UNITED'S LOW-COST PE UPGRADES, STARTING AT \$15 PER FLIGHT HOUR

We've found a low-cost upgrade on the Newark to Tokyo route that equates to about \$15 an hour. Here's how the math works out:

- Coach is \$957, and PE is \$1,357
- Divide the difference (\$400) by flight hours (27) and you're right under \$15/hour

SKIP THE COACH UPSELLS AND GET A FREE UPGRADE TO PE

Now, if you fly Economy Plus on United, which is economy with a bit of extra legroom, then the upgrade to a Premium Economy seat is free on the Newark to Tokyo route. The screenshot below shows Economy Plus on United priced at \$1,520. Please note that Economy Plus is only available as a bundle offer and it also includes an extra checked bag and Premier Access (dedicated airport check-in lines, exclusive security lanes at select airports, and priority boarding).

As already mentioned, the cost for Premium Economy on United is \$1,357 (see below), or \$163 cheaper than Economy Plus—a seat that only gives you a bit more legroom.

Trip summary [View checked baggage charges](#) Your account may give you access to travel benefits. [Sign in](#)

Tue, Apr 09, 2019 [Compare offers](#)

Tue, Apr 9 11:05 am → New York/Newark, NJ, US (EWR - Liberty)	Wed, Apr 10 1:55 pm Tokyo, JP (NRT - Narita)	Nonstop 13h 50m total
UA 79 Boeing 777-300ER ⓘ		
Details		

Selected offer ✓

1. Economy Plus®
2. Extra checked bag
3. Premier Access®

+ \$301 per person

[Remove](#)

Tue, Apr 16, 2019

5:00 pm → Tokyo, JP (NRT - Narita)	4:50 pm New York/Newark, NJ, US (EWR - Liberty)	Nonstop 12h 50m total
UA 78 Boeing 777-300ER ⓘ		
Details		

Selected offer ✓

1. Economy Plus®
2. Extra checked bag
3. Premier Access®

+ \$262 per person

[Remove](#)

[View fare rules and restrictions](#) | Additional baggage charges may apply

Total \$1,519.83

Trip summary [View checked baggage charges](#)

Tue, Apr 09, 2019

Tue, Apr 9 11:05 am → New York/Newark, NJ, US (EWR - Liberty)	Wed, Apr 10 1:55 pm Tokyo, JP (NRT - Narita)	Nonstop 13h 50m total
UA 79 Boeing 777-300ER ⓘ		

Tue, Apr 16, 2019

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UA 78 Boeing 777-300ER ⓘ		

Tue, Apr 09, 2019 [Revise](#)
EWR - NRT 11:05 am - 1:55 pm

Tue, Apr 16, 2019 [Revise](#)
NRT - EWR 5:00 pm - 4:50 pm

Fare	\$1,270.00
Taxes and fees	\$86.83
TOTAL	\$1,356.83

4 tickets left at this price

BENEFIT OF UNITED'S PE SEAT, AND ROUTES AND FEATURES OF AIRCRAFT WITH PE SEATS

We all know PE offers more legroom, but some pre-boarding perks you can look forward to include Premier Access check-in and priority boarding and discounted entrance at United Club.

Now let's talk comfort. The PE seat itself offers more legroom, elbow room, and recline than a standard Economy Plus or economy seat, as well as:

- Upgraded dining (which includes complimentary items like: mid-flight snack and a pre-arrival dining service, beer, wine, liquor, and non-alcoholic beverages)

- Amenity kit (Saks Fifth Avenue blanket and pillow)
- Noise-reducing headphones
- Larger seatback entertainment screens
- Individual power and USB outlets
- Dedicated overhead bins and extra storage



United Premium Economy

If this sounds good to you, remember that the new PE seat will first be on select B777-200ER, B777-300ER, and B787 aircraft. For current rollout schedule for aircraft and routes go [here](#).

U.S. AIRLINE'S PREMIUM ECONOMY PRODUCT

For more information on American and Delta PE seat see FCF special reports [here](#) and [here](#).



Who's At Risk When Transferring Points Into Miles?

January 2019

One of the potential problems with transferring points to airline miles, for some people, is the time it takes; but who should / shouldn't care?

Great award availability at low rates often doesn't last long, so it can be stressful to think about what could happen with availability during the time it takes for your transfer miles to arrive, because many transfers aren't instant. So proof of availability is possible.

Are you quick enough on the "draw" in your particular circumstance?

It's high noon, let's swing those saloon doors open and get out on Main Street to find out.

FIRST: POINT-TRANSFER-FRIENDLY CREDIT CARD PARTNERSHIPS

With speedy points-to-miles transfer credit card partnerships such as Amex Rewards tight integration with Air Canada, British Airways, and Emirates and Chase's integration with Air France, Virgin Atlantic, and United for example, you subject yourself to virtually no risk when opportunity shows its shiny face.

What's your risk factor when it comes to transferring points?

THE FIVE TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO—OR VERY LOW—RISK OF MISSING AWARD AVAILABILITY, AND WHY

INSTANT-TRANSFER TOM

He can transfer credit card points to an airline that turn instantly into miles. He can move forward confidently as long as he has a reservation ready to book as soon as he transfers the points. Below is a chart showing the airlines and points that post points instantly.

Partnerships With No Risk Factor in Transferring Points to Airline Miles

Airline	Amex Points Transfer Time	Chase Points Transfer Time	CITI Points Transfer Time
Air Canada	Instant		
Air France/KLM	Instant	Instant	Instant
Alitalia	Instant		
Avianca (LifeMiles)	Instant		Instant
British Airways	Instant	Instant	
Delta	Instant		
Emirates	Instant		
Etihad Airways	Instant		
Iberia		Instant	
Virgin Atlantic	Instant	Instant	Instant
United		Instant	

AWARD-HOLD HARRY

He can book and hold award space without having miles in his mileage account, if the hold time an airline will hold a booking (without payment) is the same (or more) than the points transfer credit card time.

So, Harry might focus more on the carriers that will hold a mileage award seat when he doesn't have the necessary miles in the carrier's loyalty program to book it (especially if he has few miles and isn't flexible).

In effect, these carriers are lending him the time to transfer the miles needed. (For more details on What the Humble Pea Can Point Out About Using Miles & Points for Premium Air Travel, go [here](#).)

These award-hold friendly airlines include:

Air France/KLM: Holds free award space on its flights for 48 hours if you call (800-375-8723). For partner flights hold times vary by airline and route.

American: For tickets booked 15 or more days in advance and online, AA usually holds free award space for five days. This perk also applies to partners Airberlin, Alaska, British Airways, Finnair, Hawaiian, Qantas, and Royal Jordanian Airlines.

Awards on other partner airlines, such as Japan Airlines and Cathay Pacific, must be booked by phone. Departures booked within 14 days only net a 24-hour hold option. I find that they can sometimes be more lenient on a hit-or-miss basis.

Korean Air: Holds free award space on Korean flights if you call (800-438-5000), but it varies by each reservation and can be up to a month. No partner award hold offered.

United: Offers the "[Fare Lock](#)" option, which, for a fee of about \$7 to \$20, gives you a hold-time of three or seven days on United-operated flights only, not partner flights.

Virgin Atlantic: Holds award reservations for 48 hours based on inventory and the agent, but it's available only by calling the mileage desk (800-365-9500). For partner flights, hold times vary by airline and route for up to 48 hours.

LOTS-OF-POINTS LULU

If you have a ton of points like Lulu, don't worry about longer transfer times because you can find ways to use them in the future when award space changes or another trip comes up. This way, the next time you go to make an award booking you won't have this problem as you will already have miles in the account. Lulu has no worries. So this report isn't for her.

FLEXIBLE FELICIA

She's flexible. She knows that if an airline she's looking to book award space with is "wide open"—meaning they have many dates, seats, and flights with award availability—then making the booking after the points have transferred shouldn't be an issue, as even if availability shifts a bit, her *flexibility* will help her adjust course and still score the deal, just maybe on a different date. In the real world, "Felicias" tend to be retired folks, business owners, or anyone who has flexibility in the dates they can take vacation time.

Below are some awesome examples of recent FCF Sweet Redeem alerts that Felicia and Friends might take advantage of because they are flexible:

[Fly Delta Business Class to Australia Cheap with Delta Miles, Amex or Chase Points](#)

[Fly Singapore Airlines Business Class for Less than Coach to Asia—for Up to Four Travelers—with Amex, Chase, or Marriott Points](#)

[Fly Business Class to Hawaii Easy with American Miles, Amex, Chase and Marriott Points](#)

[Fly Delta Business Class to Santiago and Beyond for Only 1,000 Miles More than Coach](#)

ALWAYS-HAS-MILES MARY

She transfers to airline mileage programs where she always keeps a regular balance anyway, so she's OK, as she often books with this mileage program. Credit card transfer times—just like for Flexible Felicia and Lots-of-Points Lulu—mean nothing, as her mileage program always has miles and she often transfers just to keep a balance in there.

HERE ARE FIVE TYPES OF TRAVELERS THAT HAVE SOME RISK

NO-INSTANT-TRANSFER TOM

He transfers points to an airline where points DO NOT post instantly into miles, so he's in danger of missing out as mileage award space could disappear before his miles even hit his account. Below is a chart showing some major partnerships for which points are NOT posted instantly.

When Transferring Points to Airline Miles Might Have Risk

Airline	Amex Points Transfer Time	Chase Points Transfer Time	CITI Points Transfer Time	Starwood/Marriott Points Transfer Time
All Nippon Airways	1 to 3 days			N/A
Cathay Pacific	1 to 4 days	Less than 24 hours		5 days
Singapore	Less than 24 hours	Less than 24 hours	1 day	2 to 7 days
Qantas			2 days	Less than 48 hours
Qatar			2 days	2 to 3 days
Asiana				4 days
American				1 to 11 days
Japan Airlines				4 to 7 days
Lufthansa				3 to 10 days

NO-AWARD-HOLD HILLARY

She might miss out on award space if she CANNOT book and hold award space (or the hold is less than the transfer time) without having miles in her mileage account. She might be saying *sayonara* to a seat as award space can change at any time.

LIMITED-POINTS PETE

At any given time, Pete only has enough points for one trip in his account, so he must be careful. Because it's a one-way street as points cannot be transferred back.

NOT-FLEXIBLE FRANCINE

She doesn't have a lot of points, and is not flexible with travel dates. The airline only has limited space for travel dates, so her choices are limited. If she can't book on the dates she wants, she won't be able to use the points again, as they cannot be transferred back.

LIMITED-AWARD-SPACE LARRY

He is looking to book on an airline that has **very limited award availability**—meaning for example, only one month with five days—so he's in the lap of chance as mileage award space can change any time.



Stop Booking “Backwards” and Use FCF’s Screaming Deals to Book Dream Trips— Every Time

January 2019

Spending too much time looking for deals? Here’s how to find affordable high-end trips fast and easy.

If you’re like most people, you go through three steps to book a vacation trip:

1. **Dreaming:** Every trip starts with a dream. It can be inspired by an effective TV ad, an evocative movie location, a well-written travel story, or simply by friends or family sharing their own experiences. Whatever the spark, it won’t take long until you are planning the trip.
2. **Planning:** Once planning starts, travelers typically visit a whopping 38 websites—yes, 38—to find the perfect hotel and the best airline deal, according to Expedia.

3. **Booking:** Now that you have your destination, travel dates, and hotel set, you're ready to book the airline tickets.

SO LAST CENTURY THINKING

Ditch that old-school thinking that causes you to leave the airline booking for last because—let's face it—it's definitely the least “fun” part of trip planning. But here's the problem: by the time you're ready to book the airline ticket, you can't find any deals because you've boxed yourself in by the dates that your lodging has availability. You spend weeks planning but don't take into account where the airline deals are. Flip that model now!

STOP BOOKING BACKWARDS AND USE FCF'S SCREAMING DEALS FIRST

Do not box yourself in. **Do not** set yourself up for failure by going where there is no deal.

Embrace the FCF mindset. Start by booking where the deal is—the airline deal that is. Even if it's not the one you were thinking about, one of your bucket-list destinations is probably nearby.

Instead—let FCF find the best airfare deals, then plan the rest of your trip around those. Just keep a broad wish list of destinations, so when the opportunity arises to snag a great deal on airfare to one of them, you're ready to pounce.

WHO ONLY HAS ONE PLACE TO GO ON THEIR LIST?

I don't know anyone that wouldn't get excited about five (if not 50) different places to go next. When you generate that bucket list, you're going to want to keep a couple things in mind. Flexibility is key.

At the very least, consider a few different regions (or a few different places within a given region) for your next trip, and go with the one that affords the best travel opportunity during your time frame—or look at a few different places within a region, for the same reason.

For example, you can find a [deal in First Class to Hong Kong with Cathay Pacific](#), a ticket that can easily run \$30,000+; you can book for free using your Amex Rewards, Chase, CITI, or Marriott/Starwood points. Or see check out a [First Class deal to Australia on Qantas](#), [First Class deal to Asia on Singapore](#), [First Class to Asia on All Nippon](#), and many others.

HOW TO STOP BOOKING BACKWARDS

You can no longer afford to book a trip based on backwards thinking of dreaming, planning, and booking—unless you're happy paying the higher rates. Rates that the airlines offer can often be double, or more, as you are at their mercy based on your dates and destination.

Let's look at it this way. Here's what happens when you plan the way most people do and book your airline ticket last. Those ticket prices skyrocket, but you pay them anyway, which means—in

the big-picture view of your overall trip—you end up settling for a lower quality experience overall. You can't take as many excursions or eat at the best restaurants because you forked over all of your money to the airline.

When you settle for a lower-quality experience, you defeat half of the purpose you're getting out of town to begin with.

Or you pay the high rates and feel like you've been had.

Don't suffer low-quality experiences or defeat yourself before you get started or feel like you've been had because you don't have to.

Instead: Check out FCF's newsroom for special flash deal alerts to anywhere near your desired destinations. It's a completely different way of thinking: find a flight DEAL to or near your top 5 or 10 bucket list destinations, book the ticket, and *then* plan the rest of the trip.

THE UPGRADE MINDSET

Let's take Sally Sue, who has Asia, especially Bangkok, on her bucket list. She comes across an FCF Sweet Redeems alert with Cathay Pacific to Hong Kong, which has three months (July, August, and September) with very good mileage award availability in First Class.

Deal Availability

Fly at other times and pay double or triple.

Days Available >	13+	9 TO 12	4 TO 8
2019			
FEB			
MAR			
APR			
MAY			
JUN			
JUL			
AUG			
SEP			

 4 Seats
  2 Seats
  1 Seat

She decides to book a trip in September to Hong Kong, and then depending on award space, will try to add the Bangkok ticket on the same ticket as Hong Kong. If there's no award space, she'll buy a second round-trip ticket from Hong Kong to Bangkok in Business Class for \$500 (economy at \$200 could also be an option, as the flight time is only three hours). That's a win, as she gets her bucket-list destination, plus a second amazing destination, Hong Kong, at a great deal.

HOW TO GET AN AFFORDABLE DREAM TRIP, FAST AND EASY:

Check the Weather: Arm yourself with knowledge. Just type the city and weather by month into Google to find out what to expect. For example, the [Sydney monthly weather](#) forecast provides month-by-month temperature averages.

Sydney NSW, Australia

Weather averages

Overview

Graphs

Month	High / Low (°F)	Rain
January	78° / 66°	8 days
February	78° / 67°	8 days
March	76° / 64°	9 days
April	73° / 58°	8 days
May	68° / 53°	8 days
June	63° / 49°	8 days
July	62° / 47°	6 days
August	65° / 48°	5 days
September	68° / 52°	6 days
October	72° / 57°	7 days
November	74° / 60°	8 days
December	77° / 64°	7 days

Consider Other Cities/Destinations: New Zealand on your list? If you don't see a deal to Auckland in the FCF newsroom, but there's a First Class seat for less than the price of Business Class to Sydney, why not check out Sydney for a day or three on your way? Then tack on Auckland to the trip, while you're in that part of the world. You may not be Down Under again, so take advantage of the opportunity. That's what we call an [Opportunity Traveler](#).

In other words, book the deal you find on the long-haul flight when it comes up and then research the cost for nonstop flights to nearby destinations afterward. But wait, there's more! Half the time you can [get those extra connecting segments added on for free](#). If you book far enough out, you'll have time to figure out the other cities you want to visit, as well as the hotels and other travel arrangements needed. And the best part? You'll travel in comfort—and be a lot less cranky upon arrival.

When you're less cranky about flying, you don't think about flying.

When you don't think twice about flying, you take more trips.

When you take more trips, you're more enriched and rejuvenated.

Be enriched and rejuvenated.

TIME TO LOCK IN THE DEAL

If you know what nearby cities you want to visit, then check the cost for connecting flights from where the fabulous deal takes you. If you are unsure of what other cities you want, book them at a later date.

The key is to book the most important part of your flight—the long-haul great-deal flight—now. More on how you can be an [Opportunity Traveler](#).

MORE ON CONNECTING CITIES

If you come across a deal that is not from your departure city, know that you can often add a connecting city from almost anywhere in the U.S. For more on how to make FCF's Sweet Redeems work with connecting flights, go [here](#). Don't see your origin and/or destination cities in an FCF headline? Go [here](#). And for more on how to take advantage of discount long-haul flights, go [here](#).

Scout out Local Events: Keep an eye out for special events, which can enrich your travel further. For example, if you see an amazing FCF deal to Melbourne, but you really want to go to New Zealand, why not hit the Melbourne Cup horse race on the way? (Known locally as "the race that stops a nation.") Then you can add on a flight to Auckland and enjoy two destinations, instead of just one. Major events are one of my favorite ways to experience other cultures.

Redeposit/Change Mileage Award Ticket: If you find a \$30,000 Cathay Pacific First Class flight for a bargain, don't think twice about the [redeposit or change fee](#) of \$25 to \$120 (cost varies by type of service) if you wind up not wanting to take the trip or working around the dates of an itinerary that's heavily discounted.

Just grab the deal now and try to make an awesome trip of it. **You don't have to figure it all out right away.** If you do need to change later, that fee is peanuts compared to the huge savings you've scored.

The point is—deals disappear quickly, so be prepared to jump before they are gone.

Look at Hotels (Cruises and Packages) in Advance: This way, you're prepared when the great air deal comes up. For example, know that you can stay at a Saint Regis in Singapore starting at about \$270, that's not too expensive in that location before traveling onward to your final destination. Research the iconic hotels that you've always wanted to stay in to get a high-level sense of their cost without spending weeks trying to account for every dollar of the trip.

At the end of the day, you win—and win big—by aligning the air deal with the hotel or package cost. Well, if you adopt the priceless FCF mindset that is...

CONCLUSION

If travel is your thing—or you wish it was—keep your bags packed. Travel the world comfortably. Live while you're alive.



Our Sweet Redeem alerts (for exceptional low-cost award space availability) are different from our flash fare alerts. With flash fares, our team constantly checks for price fluctuations and updates our alerts accordingly. For example, a fare might increase from \$1,500 to \$1,900, and we'll reflect that in the alert until it expires or is no longer of FCF-worthy value. Fares are also instantly actionable. We give you a link, so you can book it instantly. While the fare data is obviously NOT 'real time,' it's checked and refreshed often.

In contrast, our Sweet Redeem finds are not updated after time of publishing as they are extremely labor intensive to produce. Given **award availability changes often**, as people book up the space, and airlines change their mind, both types of FCF alerts are very similar and different at the same time.

But that doesn't necessarily mean you can't put our Sweet Redeems to great use after some time has passed.

HOW TO PUT FCF SWEET REDEEMS TO WORK FOR YOU

Think of Sweet Redeem alerts as an **opportunity universe**, an overview for where and when to go **based on where award availability is**, rather than pre-picking a destination and then looking for a specific seat on a specific flight to that specific place on a specific date.

A Sweet Redeem alert gives you a big picture perspective for using your miles. Rather than being a booking engine, think of it as an **opportunity tool** that highlights when and where award space is available, in general.

A SWEET TIME SAVER

Use our Sweet Redeem alerts as a guide to save time when searching for award space. Think of the alerts as an opportunity guide highlighting when and where award space is available.

Can't find an alert you're interested in on your first try? Keep checking back, as FCF publishes Sweet Redeems alerts often and availability changes all the time. One search could result in no award space, and then a week later when FCF does another search, space opens up.

Because airlines only release a limited number of seats at low-cost mileage levels, our Sweet Redeem alerts spotlight **routes, airlines, and months** for which we've found discounted/low-cost mileage award space, instead of normal everyday rates, which can often be double or triple the cost.

They also shows how you can get miles, even if you don't have any and what miles and points are best to use.

ON YOUR MILES, GET SET, GO

Given that availability is always changing, FCF's Sweet Redeem alert data accuracy can and will change from the date that we publish the alerts. The solution: **Be ready to book** (have your bags packed, *if only mentally*).

Have a bucket list of routes, regions, or specific destinations you'd be happy to spend miles and points on, and you'll **be ready for FCF's Sweet Redeem alerts to appear on your radar!**



To continue our series on earning points through high-value credit card offers, let's review:

- Part one: In June, FCF highlighted 21 credit cards that allow you to [earn points that can be transferred](#) into miles on airlines that offer the most lucrative premium travel opportunities.
- Part two: In July, FCF highlighted [elite status earning credit cards](#).
- Part three: In December, FCF highlighted [six reason NOT to use American co-branded credit cards](#).

This month we'll dive into part four and highlight the pitfalls of using co-branded Delta credit cards.

The short answer: You're going to miss out on some desirable destinations and First Class travel with these cards and/or **pay up to 40,000 miles MORE than you have to for the same Delta flight.**

Let's first look at the destinations that are off the table with a Delta co-branded credit card:

1. Dreaming about travel to Australia or New Zealand *in comfort*? You rarely can with Delta miles, because the airline is very stingy to this region. Even its partner Virgin Australia rarely has any free premium award space using Delta miles.

On the other hand, United, a Chase partner, intermittently offers upgrade opportunities (go [here](#) for Sydney example, [here](#) for Auckland and Sydney, and [here](#) for Melbourne and Sydney).

2. How about Asia First Class? Delta does not offer a First Class redemption option to Asia; the best you can get is Business Class. So, its SkyTeam partners (Korean and China Eastern) reciprocate by not allowing Delta members to access their First Class.

However, All Nippon, an Amex Rewards partner (and accessible via United miles and therefore Chase points, too, although at a much higher cost), often has mileage availability—and **for less than what Delta usually charges for Business Class!** Yes, this is for free First Class tickets. For details, go [here](#); or consider [First Class on Singapore Airlines](#), an Amex Rewards and Chase partner.

3. Hoping for Europe in First Class? Try again. Delta does not offer a First Class redemption option; the best you can get is Business Class.

But British Airways, an Amex Rewards and Chase partner, often offers availability (minus some West Coast gateways)—free in First Class to Europe. For details go [here](#). With a Delta credit card, don't even think about it.

Now consider these additional benefits that you would forego with a Delta co-branded card:

4. Want to fly on Delta, but at a *much* lower mileage rate? You're out of luck with a Delta card. Instead, save up to 40,000 miles for travel to [Asia and Europe when booking a Delta flight with partner Virgin Atlantic](#) miles, accessible with partners Amex Rewards and Chase.

5. How about flying Emirates and enjoying those coveted showers in the sky? You can't do that either with a Delta co-branded credit card, because Delta is not a partner with Emirates. But you can transfer Amex Reward points to Emirates. For details, go [here](#).

6. Want to earn points faster? Sorry, but Delta's co-branded cards won't [multiply your earnings](#) like other cards will. Get **5X** (American Express Platinum card) points for airline tickets and hotels or **4X** (American Express Gold card) points for dining or supermarkets, for example. Chase Sapphire Reserve offers 3X points on travel and dining.

7. Wish you could get transfer bonuses? A Delta co-branded card won't help. But Amex Membership Rewards, unlike most other programs, offers great bonuses—up to 40%—with [British Airways](#) and [Virgin Atlantic](#).

8. Need more and cheaper miles? Nope, you can't buy points with Delta's co-branded card. If you buy miles via Delta directly, you are limited to 60,000 per year at a cost of 3.5¢. By comparison, you can buy up to [500,000 points at a cost of 2.5¢](#) via Amex Rewards and then transfer those points to Delta. But there plenty of other buy-miles deals that are even better.



What FCF Thinks 2019 Will Hold for Premium Air Travelers

January 2019

First Class seats keep disappearing, low-cost fares are scarce, and the strong economy keeps many premium seats sold, and as the airlines move to a “boil-the-frog” strategy, here’s how to continue to win at the low-cost upgrade game in 2019.

Let’s start with loyalty programs, where the news is mostly cautionary.

Miles and Points Outlook

AIRLINES BOIL US FROGS

You remember the fable: A frog that is put into a pot of boiling water will immediately jump out. But a frog that is put into tepid water that slowly comes to a boil will not notice the temperature change until it is too late.

So, too, with airlines. If they increase the cost of their mileage programs too drastically, they will immediately lose loyalty members who don't want to be boiled by the higher rates. But if they increase rates more incrementally, say to one region at a time, members will be more inclined to accept them without perceiving the cumulative danger of one small change on top of another until it's too late and they are cooked by the higher rates.

Two airlines are embracing the slow boil strategy: American and Delta.

AMERICAN: SLOW FROG BOIL

It seems like American learned its lesson back in 2016 with its major across-the-board overhaul. So, trying a new approach for 2019, it is just changing one category at a time—that is, **it's boiling the frog slowly**.

The airline has already posted new higher rates for Hawaii, going from 80,000 miles round-trip in Business Class until Jan. 16 to 110,000 round-trip thereafter—a whopping 30,000 mile (37%) increase. Going forward we foresee constant, steady increases rather than one-shot program overhauls like in the past.

DELTA: SECRET FROG BOIL

Delta has always been somewhat of a leader when it comes to revenue-increasing innovations. At times, it introduced great changes, such as [easyup fares](#) in 2012, which American, United and other airlines matched. Now it is making incremental changes to award travel in economy by dividing it into two classes/prices: basic economy and main economy. Going forward, you'll have to shell out even more miles for what used to be the baseline, main economy. For now, Delta is calling this a test, but the writing is on the wall. **Mileage award prices are increasing, and if economy increases so will Business Class.** In other words, **Delta is slowing boiling its customer frogs.**

Availability Using Miles and Points

Good airlines: These are airlines that often have low-cost mileage award space for many months, routes, and seats. Look for the trend to continue in 2019 with these airlines, which include All Nippon, Asiana, British Airways, Korean, Lufthansa, and Virgin Atlantic. Some examples:

[Up to Four Fly Virgin Biz Class to/from London from Atlanta, Boston, New York](#)

[First Class 42% Off with Money OR 70% Off with Miles on British Airways from the West Coast to Europe](#)

[Lufthansa First Class for Less than Biz Found to/from Europe With Miles—OR 75% Off With Money](#)

[Fly First Class to Asia for Less than Business from Chicago, Houston and More, with United Mileage Plus, Amex, Chase, and Marriott Points](#)

[Many Months with First Class Seats from LA + NY to Asia at 67% Off with Miles *OR* 76% Off with Money](#)

[First Class Korean Air Awards Found to/from Asia from Chicago and Dallas](#)

Okay airlines: These are airlines that sometimes have low-cost mileage award space. Again, look for the trend to continue in 2019 with these airlines, which include: Delta, Singapore, and American. Examples:

[Fly Business Class to Hawaii Easy with American Miles](#)

[Get Delta Business Class to Sydney and Beyond](#)

[Hot: Singapore Air First Class 67% Off with Miles *OR* 77% with Money](#)

Bad airlines: These are airlines for which it is hard to find low-cost mileage award space, especially in First Class, or to certain regions. Look for the trend to continue in 2019 with these airlines, which include: Japan Airlines in First Class and American to the South Pacific.

Using U.S. Airline Miles for First Class Partner Award Space: The situation is not good for the three major U.S. legacy carriers. For American, forget about booking First Class partner award space to Asia on Japan Airlines, unless you are booking First Class partner space on British Airways to Europe. For Delta, forget about it, because it offers no First Class award redemption. And for United, forget about booking First Class partner award space to Europe; First Class partner space on Asiana and at times All Nippon to Asia is somewhat reliable.

How Will 2019 Set the Stage for What Is to Come?

Through the beyond 2019 is probably not so great, there will be great flash deals now and then. Given the new ASC 606 Revenue from Contracts with Customers (whereby airlines need passengers to use their miles for the airline to record revenue), airlines *want* you to use your miles. So, look for them to slice up miles in many more ways and to do more unbundling. Many of these changes are in economy, but at some point, we should see the ever-emerging Premium Economy (PE) being offered at a lower cost than full-service PE. While that might not happen in 2019, eventually we will see PE split into basic PE and full-service PE, similar to what we're seeing experimented with in economy today.

The Impact of Premium Economy (PE)

Watch for 2019 to set the stage for 2020 with Premium Economy. FCF's team thinks it's scary that all three U.S. carriers have PE, because it will bring about changes in fares and mileage redemptions. American created PE service first, back in 2016. At this point, AA is pricing tickets on most routes relatively low, and considering it still has no mileage award redemption for PE, is waiting to see what the others will charge. Delta started PE service in 2018 and for the most part is charging more for PE than AA is. The same holds true for United, which will start service later this spring and is also charging more for PE than AA.

Now that all the three majors have PE, what will that do to the PE fare and mileage landscape? FCF predicts that the PE cabin will be the key factor in driving up fares and mileage award redemptions for Business Class.

Why? Because United's First Class cabin was pulled in late 2018 and six months later PE arrives. Plus, United is quickly rolling out its [new Polaris Business Class](#), due to be completed by 2020. Look at Delta's new One Suites, whose name already says it is more than just a Business Class seat. American will just follow what everyone else is doing.

Airlines will still continue to offer low-fare Business Class routes in 2019, but change is on the horizon for 2020.

Let's just hope that domestic carriers don't move to make upgrades work for just a one-class upgrade: from economy to PE and from PE to Business, as this would force paying a higher fare ticket for upgrades to Business Class.

Your Secret Weapon, For Now: Mileage Upgrades

Continue to keep American and United mileage upgrades in mind for international flights, as the trend in 2018 was significantly more upgrade space than for free awards. We expect this to continue in 2019. Some recent examples:

[American Upgrades to Barcelona, London, and Madrid—Best on the Return](#)

[Fly All Over South America in Business Class with United Upgrades](#)

[Fly Business Class from East Coast to France, Italy, and Beyond with Chase Points and United Miles](#)

[Fistful of American Upgrade Awards to Hawaii](#)

[Scads of Auckland or Sydney Upgrades to Business Class with United Miles](#)

Elite Status

FCF must sound like a broken record by now to many of you, as we have been saying for a decade that elite status (unless top elite, but even there too) is old-school thinking. Why spend more and more each year to keep your elite status?

Just consider that Delta expects, “Strong growth prospects from premium products” and says that “30 percent of our total revenue stream is coming from premium products, which is twice what it was six years ago.” Proving that Delta is selling, and is expecting to sell, more premium seat and giving away less *elite* upgrades.

For “top” elites, the airlines are making you work harder in 2019. Both American and United announced an increase for top elite spending from \$12,000 to \$15,000 Elite Qualifying Dollars. (Delta is already at \$15,000.)

Outlook For Premium Airfares in 2019

2018 First Class Fare Trend to Europe: In 2018 we saw First Class fares on the rise. At the same time, United’s low fares and competitor-matching practice dissipated with the elimination of First Class, and American had very few routes with a First Class cabin. Both of these airlines were leaders in offering many low-cost First Class fare routes—and that’s all gone now.

2019 First Class Fare Crystal Ball to Europe: With fewer airlines and routes with First Class seats this year, our best guess says prices will rise overall because there’s less competition to keep them down. Take Air France, for example. In early 2018 you could get New York to Barcelona for around \$3,500; now that same ticket is \$5,800+ (\$2,300 / 40% more).

2019 First Class Fare Trend for Domestic Short Haul: American and United will have modest First Class fare increases, with Delta having higher ones. The trend of airlines trying to sell First Class instead of giving upgrades to elites will continue in 2019; their *predictive analytics* will be so good that there will seldom be unsold premium seats for elites.

General First Class Fare Mindset for 2019:

- [Flash low-cost First Class fare routes](#): Keep an eye out for them in FCF’s alert room.
- [FCF’s buy miles in style strategy](#): Still one of the best ways to get First Class tickets for cheap.

Business Class Fare Crystal Ball By Destination:

Europe: Continue to look for low-fare routes; what was hot in 2018 may not be in 2019. Always keep an eye on [FCF’s fare alerts](#) to show the new low-cost routes so you can avoid paying \$4,000+ for Business Class tickets to Europe. Which will be the top destination for 2019? Palermo, Italy? Dublin, Ireland? Warsaw,

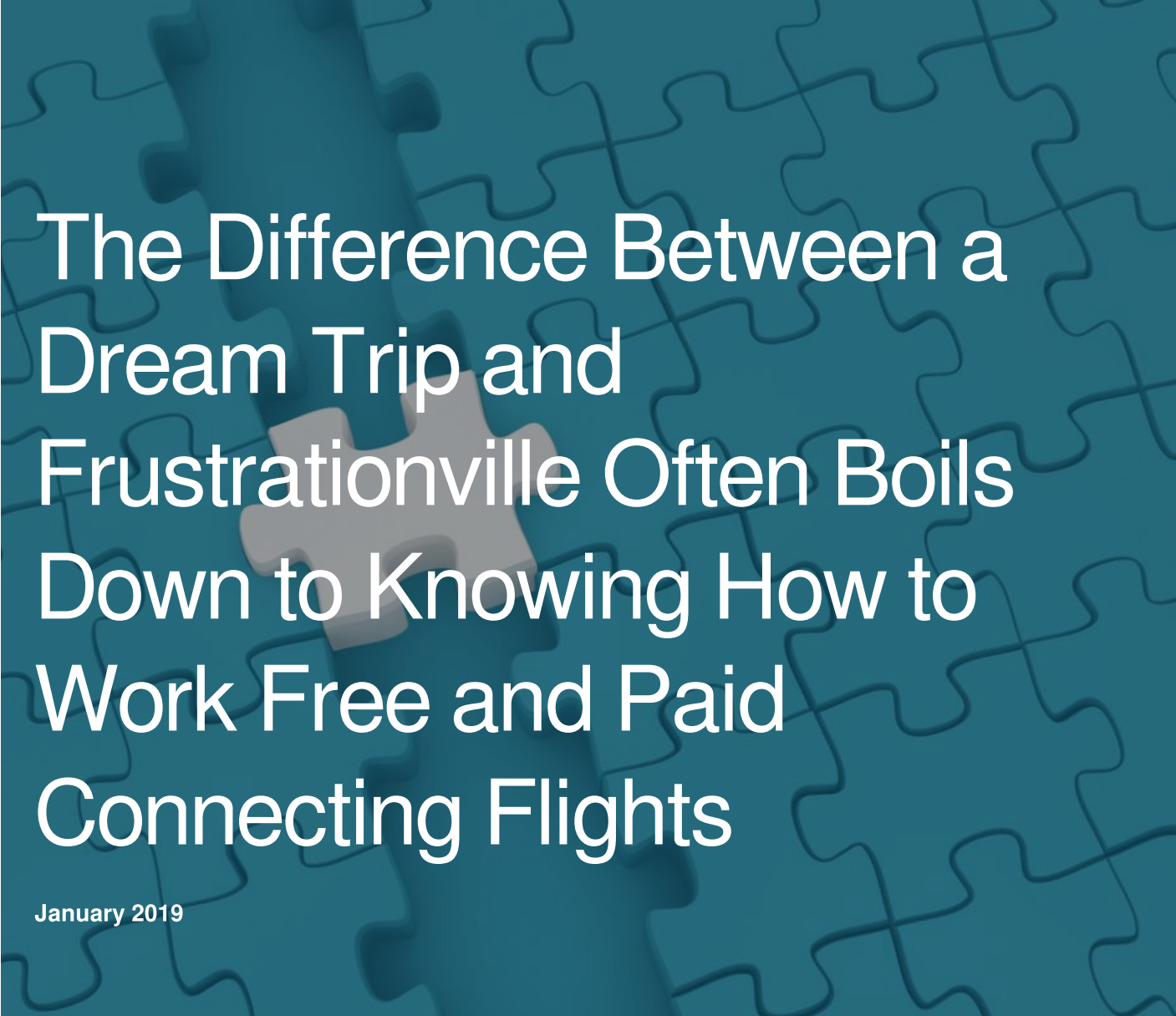
Poland? They were hot in the past, but this target is always moving. At this point, we can't say, but our alerts will identify the trend.

Asia: Beijing and Shanghai, China was the hot destination for 2018 (previous years saw Seoul and Tokyo). This could change in 2019; stay tuned.

Africa and South Pacific: These two regions are similar in behavior, perhaps because there's relatively little competition. Either way, continue to look for modest flash sales in Business Class on some routes. Want comfort, but not willing to pay the price? Remember [FCF's buy miles in style strategy](#), still one of the best ways to get Business Class tickets for cheap to high-fare destinations such as the South Pacific and Africa. Also keep Premium Economy in mind with low fares often offered on [Virgin Atlantic](#) to Africa and on [American](#) to the South Pacific.

South America: Continue to look for [LAN to have sales](#), as the big three U.S. airlines tend not to discount much to this region. The exception is [Lima](#), where we see some deals now and then.

Domestic Transcon: FCF predicts that fares for the transcontinental routes, San Francisco/Los Angeles-New York, for 2019 will be lower than in 2018. (They often hovered in the range of \$1,500 to \$1,700 with a 30-day advance notice.) The reason for this decrease is Alaska Airlines, a newcomer to this route. With its purchase of Virgin America, it is now operating non-stop flights, which will drive some tooth-and-claw competition with the four majors (American, Delta, JetBlue, and United). Look for fares in the \$1,100 to \$1,300 range to become the new norm in 2019 for all the airlines. And expect more transcon routes from American, which just launched Boston, and JetBlue, which has many new ones planned (go [here](#)) as long as the economy is strong.



The Difference Between a Dream Trip and Frustrationville Often Boils Down to Knowing How to Work Free and Paid Connecting Flights

January 2019

Smart questions from FCF subscribers answered.

Sweet Redeems are routes and airlines with low-cost Business and First Class mileage award availability, which we alert you to on a regular basis. What else but “sweet” would you call a mileage ticket that you can get for 115,000 miles when it’s normally 270,000?

That’s great, you say, but what happens if I live in a different city than the one in the alert? Can I use miles for a flight that connects to that city? Or will I have to pay more? Consider this report your Frequently Asked Sweet Redeem Connecting Flight Questions.

“HI FCF, I SAW AN INCREDIBLE FCF SWEET REDEEM BETWEEN CHICAGO AND FRANKFURT, BUT I LIVE IN CINCINNATI AND WANT TO GO TO ROME. SHOULD I FORGET IT?”

FCF only shows non-stop long-range routes in our Sweet Redeem alerts—that’s where the value and comfort lie most. But the important thing to note is that you can very often add a connecting flight [for free \(or a low fee\)](#) from where you live to the city in the Sweet Redeem alert. And you can do the same at the other end.

So, you can get a free connection from Cincinnati to Chicago with many mileage programs, and then a free connection from Frankfurt to Rome. It’s free if you stay with the same airline, or airline alliance (see alliances below) and are using a zone-based award chart (like what American, Delta, and United use).

This is one of the best-kept secrets in travel. We talk about it a lot. We use it a lot. We want every FCF-er to use it a lot. Here’s the play:

1. Find a jaw-dropping FCF Sweet Redeem deal [here](#).
2. Get to the Sweet Redeem departure city using a free (or a low fee) connection; just check the availability directly with the airline online or over the phone.

When short-haul connecting flights aren’t available in Business or First Class, check in coach (as I’ll sometimes endure a short flight in a tight seat if it makes an otherwise opulent itinerary work).

3. Enjoy the sweet long-haul flight in Business or First.
4. Then connect for free (or a low fee) on a short-haul flight to your final destination.
5. Do the same thing coming home.

“I SPOTTED A SWEET REDEEM I’VE GOT TO HAVE BUT CAN’T USE MILES FOR THE CONNECTION TO GET THERE. WHAT DO I DO?”

We hear this one often—and you do have options:

- Buy a connecting-flight ticket in either coach or Business Class from your home city to the Sweet Redeem departure city with cash. Make sure you have a longer connecting time than is required, as flights can be delayed and this could result in missing your international connecting flight.
- Buy a connecting-flight ticket in economy and use miles if possible, to upgrade to Business Class.
- Buy a ticket from your departure city using miles with another airline to the Sweet Redeem route. For example, you see a Sweet Redeem using United miles from Chicago to Europe, but you live in Philadelphia, and United has no connecting mileage award flights available, you could use British

Airways miles and book a second ticket for an American flight from Philadelphia to Chicago for 30,000 miles (20,000 fewer miles than AA charges for its own ticket).

- If you're in Europe, think about a train trip. The rail system there is fantastic.

One thing to note: When you buy that second ticket, check with the airline to make sure your bags will be checked right through. This depends on the airlines involved and their "interline agreements," which is way too boring to go into here.

Or travel with carry on bags only. This is so liberating for many reasons, including not having to restrict yourself to flight opportunities that involve multiple tickets or airlines.

And/or take your connecting flight early in case it gets canceled or delayed so you don't miss your long-haul segment. When you buy separate tickets, the second carrier is not responsible for what the first carrier does, unless you have all the segments on one ticket. So just be careful when you are on two tickets.

“WHAT AIRLINES CAN I GET FREE CONNECTING FLIGHTS IN THE U.S. OR EUROPE?”

Normally it's any airline within the alliance and as you probably know, there are three major alliances:

Star Alliance

Air Canada, Air India, All Nippon, Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines, Turkish Airlines, United, and more.

oneworld

American, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Finnair, Iberia, Japan Airlines, Qantas, and more.

SkyTeam

Air France, Alitalia, China Airlines, Delta, KLM, Korean Air, and more.

It's amazing how many travelers don't consider the power of these alliances. Think of all the airlines within them as one big airline with all the added flexibility it can offer.

The connecting flights apply within these alliances to all cities in the continental U.S. and Canada, as well as in Europe, that use region-to-region based award charts.

Let's say you see an FCF Sweet Redeems alert on United flying Houston-London, but you want to go to Copenhagen, not London. And what if you live in Amarillo? Based on availability, you can get a free

connecting flight from Amarillo to Houston on United and from London to Copenhagen on Scandinavian Airlines—at no extra cost—because of free airline alliance connections with region-based pricing.

In effect you’re getting six flight segments: Amarillo-Houston-London-Copenhagen-London-Houston-Amarillo.

Depart ▾

Arrive ▾

Stops ▾

Duration ▾

Business Saver Award ▾

Mixed cabin ?

Saver Award

57.5k miles

+\$30.90

Select

United Economy (X)

Snacks for Purchase

United Polaris business (I)

Dinner

Business (I)

Meal

Wed, Apr 4 12:00 pm

Thu, Apr 5 12:40 pm

2 stops

17h 40m

Details

Seats

Includes Travel Operated By Expressjet Airlines Db

Operated By Expressjet Airlines Db United Express

Long layover

Terminal change

Red-eye flight

2h 40m connection

Houston, TX, US (IAH - Intercontinental) to London, GB (LHR - Heathrow)

4:20 pm - 7:40 am (9h 20m)

UA 880 | Boeing 777-200

Power outlets

Depart IAH: Wed, Apr 4

Arrive LHR: Thu, Apr 5

Long layover

Terminal change

Red-eye flight

2h 10m connection

London, GB (LHR - Heathrow) to Copenhagen, DK (CPH)

9:50 am - 12:40 pm (1h 50m)

SK 502 | Airbus A320

Long layover

Terminal change

Red-eye flight

So, if you have stacks of United miles, you can use them to fly on Scandinavian Airlines within Europe to get to your final destination because they’re both Star Alliance members. It’s that simple.

“DO I HAVE TO PAY MORE FOR A CONNECTING FLIGHT?”

Short answer: It varies depending on the mileage program. Many mileage charts (all the ones in the U.S.) are zone-based. So as long as you're "in the zone" the connecting flights are free, as discussed above, for example within continental North America.

But some mileage charts use a flight distance chart. In that case, they charge by the miles actually flown. Imagine you're flying from Boise to Budapest. British Airways charges each segment separately. But with American, a zone-based airline, the Boise to Seattle flight is a free "tack on." The long-haul "bridge flight" on American from Seattle to London is the discounted mileage award ticket, and the British Airways skip flight from London to Budapest is also free because BA is an American partner. In general, flight-distance mileage programs offer better value on certain non-stops and shorter flights.

“HOW COME MY CITY DOESN'T SHOW AS A CONNECTING CITY IN THE DROP-DOWN LIST IN YOUR WIDGET?”

It's really a function of numbers and space. In the U.S. there are 285 cities with more than 100,000 people, so we don't have room to cover them all. But we do cover the larger ones that are geographically spread evenly.

But keep in mind what we said above, free connecting flights apply within alliances to all cities in the continental U.S. and Canada for region-based schemes. So even if your city isn't in the drop-down menu, you can still win. We only provide these cities as "examples of the potential."

RELATED REPORTS ON WHEN IT COMES TO CONNECTIONS

[Don't See Your Origin and/or Destination in an FCF Headline? This Report Was Made For You.](#)

[Don't See Your Origin and/or Destination in an FCF Asia Travel Headline? \(Part 2\)](#)

[The Art of Skipping Stones & What We Can All Learn from the Boise to Budapest Premium Traveler](#)

Does this help fill in any gaps for you? Have any other questions about FCF's Sweet Redeems? Please let us know at: [mr.upgrade \[at\] firstclassflyer.com](mailto:mr.upgrade@firstclassflyer.com)