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First Class Flyer

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Hot Ticket

New Low-Cost Upgrade Strategy

Via British Airways and Starwood Starpoints

For every 20,000 Starpoints converted into British Airways miles through March 31, Starwood will award not only the standard 5,000 bonus miles, but also a special bonus of another 30% with BA—a fantastic promotion now in its third year by my calculations.

To qualify, you must be an existing Starwood Preferred Guest member, a British Airways Executive Club member, and a resident of the US, Canada, or Bermuda. BA miles post in about 4 to 6 weeks. Call (888) 625-4988 or log into your account to transfer.

Use this promotion to score a domestic Business Class ticket for only \$327 more r/t on American

Here's how to play it: Convert 25,000 Starpoints into 30,000 BA miles and net the limited-time 30% (9,000 miles) bonus. Then, you only need 11,000 BA miles for the upgrade, which you can purchase directly from British Airways' website (for \$327) to get to 50,000. That's the number of BA miles it takes to get a free Business Class ticket on American, domestically. This can save as much as \$1,500 off normal fares.



British Airways' Business Class Seat

Europe Business Class upgrades for \$420

Use British Airways miles to fly BA or one of its Oneworld partners (Iberia, American, or Finnair) to many European cities in economy (50,000 miles) or Business (100,000 miles). With this promotion, 50,000 Starpoints net 77,000 BA miles. Convert just 12,000 more Starpoints at the same time (otherwise available for purchase for \$420), and with the 30% bonus you'll have 100,000 miles, enough to fly Business Class on any of the aforementioned carriers.

Asia Business Class upgrades for \$420

Similar to the Europe upgrade strategy, 100,000 British Airways miles can net Business Class travel to Asia, with its Oneworld partner, Japan Airlines. Again, with this strategy, 50,000 Starpoints net 77,000 BA miles. Convert just 12,000 more Starpoints at the same time (otherwise available for purchase for \$420), and with the 30% bonus you'll have the 100,000 miles required to fly from one of Japan Airlines' five US gateways.

High & Inside with Matthew J. Bennett

Starwood Drastically Reduces Starpoints Purchase Limit

Here's how to get around it...

It's no secret that the Starwood Preferred Guest points program has long been a favorite. With a comparatively vast network of partner airlines, it offers unmatched booking flexibility and, hence, greater access to special Business and First Class opportunities.

When Starwood increased its points-purchase limit from 20,000 to 100,000, as reported in these pages last April, a great program only got better.

Ah, those were the days.

Everything was fine until December, when Starwood abruptly took a step backwards by cutting its purchase limit back to the original 20,000 points.

What could motivate such a retreat? Here's a theory: So many of you recognized the benefits of banking as many Starpoints as possible that the program couldn't support the resulting flood of demand.

If that's the case, being a vocal advocate on miles- and point-purchase opportunities, I feel some responsibility for the policy change (as I did when the lucrative Mexicana miles-purchase opportunity shifted from 1.6¢ to 2.2¢ per mile only three days after I recommended it). As such, I owe you a remedy.



So dry your eyes... here's an easy workaround I call The Same Address Game.

A little-known rule in Starwood's program allows points to be transferred between members with the same mailing address. Your spouse, daughter, son, mother-in-law, or roommate can each buy 20,000 points, and then transfer them into any account they choose among those people at that same address. Combine all those miles into one account and you can get 100,000 points fast, again. The 25% transfer bonus brings that up to 125,000 (effectively reducing the 3.5¢ cost to 2.8¢).

No other features of the Starwood program have changed, so let's keep in mind what makes Starwood so appealing in the first place.

The key to this points program is the network of participating airlines, and with 29 partners, Starwood trounces the competition. Amex Membership Rewards is also a fine program, but with only 16 airlines under its umbrella, it's little more than half as useful at time of redemption, despite a miles-purchase limit of 500,000 at 2.5¢ each. Another favorite credit card program, Diners Club, has no miles-purchase option at all.

Even with the severe cutback in its purchase limit, Starwood still shines brightly.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER



Matthew J. Bennett has been tracking down airfare deals since his days as a minor league pitcher for the Kansas City Royals. His specialty was uncovering bargain fares for teammates, which eventually earned him the sobriquet "the guy who doesn't pay retail for anything," and made him the most popular guy in the clubhouse. Since then "Mr. Upgrade" has gained a reputation as the leading authority on luxury travel values, serving his readers and his corporate clients by advising them how to travel in style without spending a fortune. He is consulted regularly by top publications including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, and other media including CNN, MSNBC, NBC, and FOX News.

in brief ...

Great Business Class Alternative to Asia

The fare for Singapore Airlines' Executive Economy starts at only \$1,475 when booked online, and the seats are wider than Business Class on American, Delta, United, and others. Fine print: Valid Monday-Thursday through March 31. Travel completion deadline: midnight, June 8.

http://www.singaporeair.com/saa/en_UK/index.jsp



Singapore Airlines' Executive Economy

AA Selling Elite Status

Who's eligible? AAdvantage Platinum and Gold members who haven't qualified can buy their way in during 2008. Platinum members who logged 40,000 or more miles in 2007 or 48 or more segments pay \$549; those who have logged fewer pay \$649. For Gold members, the threshold is 20,000 miles or 24 segments. (Above it the price is \$349; below, \$449.) These prices are about \$50 higher than last year's. More: aa.com/elite.

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Fast Upgrade via United Bonus

With the Mileage Plus Visa sign-up bonus, you can net 50,000 miles for award travel without leaving the ground. Here's how ...

First purchase:	20,000-mile bonus
Spend \$10,000 in six months:	10,000-mile bonus
Spend another \$10,000 by year-end:	10,000 miles earned
Reach your first anniversary:	10,000-mile bonus
Total:	50,000 miles

With that plan you can get a free domestic First Class ticket (up to a \$2,000 value) or almost two upgrades (30,000 miles each). You can purchase the remainder. Application deadline: February 29.

US Airways' Caribbean Promotion

The carrier is reducing mileage redemption rates for September travel to the Caribbean. Business Class drops from 60,000 to 50,000 miles and economy from 30,000 to 25,000 miles. The only caveat: It's the start of hurricane season.

Virgin Atlantic Investment in Premium Economy 'Paying Off'

The carrier says demand for the cabin has grown 20% since it was re-launched with new seats. As a result, it is increasing the number of Premium Economy seats on Boeing 747s by 10%.

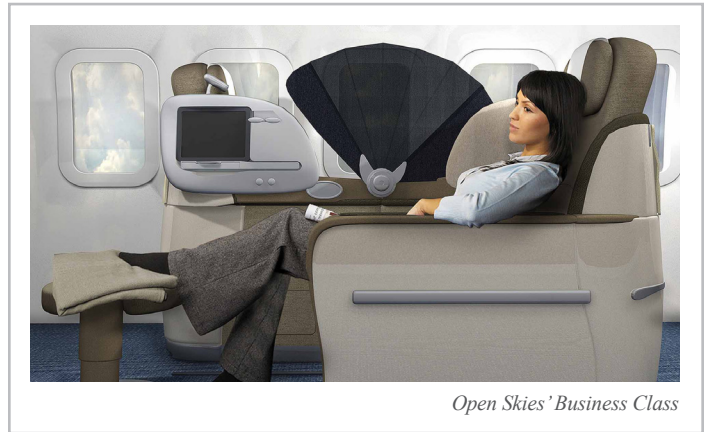


Virgin Atlantic's Premium Economy Seats

BA's "OpenSkies" Set For Takeoff

That's the name of the carrier's new subsidiary, which begins flying daily from New York to Brussels and Paris in June. The carrier will use Boeing 757s configured for Business, Premium Economy, and economy. Seats in Business Class convert to six-foot long flat beds, while those in Premium Economy have 52 inches of legroom, nearly as much as some airlines offer in Business Class. BA plans to operate six 757s by the end of 2009. The subsidiary's name refers to the new aviation agreement that has loosened the restrictions on what routes carriers may fly between the US and European Union. Tickets won't go on sale until all of the regulatory approvals have been obtained.

My take: BA's decision to offer three cabins—originally it was going to be an all-Business Class airline targeting business travelers—shows that it isn't sure how to



differentiate the new carrier. Moreover, the slow rollout indicates that this is not a vital initiative. My guess is that BA is trying to position itself to knock any other carriers who decide to take advantage of the new rules out of the sky.

US Airways Mileage Sale

Through March 31, the carrier has dropped the price on miles bought, shared, and given as a gifts.

	Regular price	Special
Buy miles	3.5¢ / mile + \$25 fee	2.5¢ / mile + \$25 fee
Share miles	3.0¢ / mile + \$25 fee	1.0¢ / mile + \$25 fee
Gift miles	3.5¢ / mile + \$25 fee	2.5¢ / mile + \$25 fee

Keep in mind that US Airways is one of only a few carriers with no annual mileage-purchase cap. There's a 50,000-mile limit per purchase—but no limit to the number of purchases. The cost is 2.5¢ per mile plus tax. This deal opens up a way to get Business and First Class travel on Star Alliance members at enormous savings.

More: www.usairways.com/awa/content/dividendmiles/purchasemiles/buymiles.aspx.

Save Thousands Using US Airways Miles For Travel on Star Alliance Partners

Airline	Route	Miles / Class	Cost in US Airways Miles	Reg. Fare	Savings
Air New Zealand	San Francisco - Auckland	110,000 / Business	\$2,750	\$9,818	\$7,068 (72%)
Lufthansa	Portland - Dubai	115,000 / Business	\$2,875	\$8,943	\$6,068 (68%)
Singapore	Los Angeles - Singapore	120,000 / Business	\$3,000	\$5,950	\$2,950 (50%)
South African	Washington, DC - Cape Town	150,000 / First	\$3,750	\$15,580	\$11,830 (76%)
SWISS	Los Angeles - Bombay	120,000 / Business	\$3,000	\$4,947	\$1,947 (39%)
United	Dallas - Buenos Aires	100,000 / First	\$2,500	\$16,470	\$13,970 (85%)

Under the Microscope

Free First Class Upgrade on Malaysia Airlines

The Deal: Full-fare Business Class passengers flying from Los Angeles to Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore, among other destinations in Southeast Asia can get free upgrades to First Class on a space-available basis. More details at: www.malaysiaairlines.com

The Carrier: Malaysia has worked hard in the past five years to improve. It's not at the level of Singapore Airlines but its

Sample Fares			
Destination (From Los Angeles)	Lowest Business Class Fare (code J)	Upgradeable Business Class Fare	Lowest First Class Fare (code A)
Taipei	\$3,300	\$4,750	\$4,900
Singapore	\$3,890	\$6,800	\$6,900
Jakarta	\$4,090	\$7,500	\$7,800
Delhi	\$4,090	\$7,500	\$7,800
Dhaka	\$4,090	\$7,500	\$7,800
Manila	\$4,090	\$7,500	\$7,800
Hanoi	\$3,990	\$7,120	\$7,350
Bangkok	\$3,990	\$7,120	\$7,350

Business and First Class cabins are certainly superior to many others. First Class seats recline to 180 degrees. The carrier's premium lounges in Kuala Lumpur International are very comfortable and even feature an enclosed area with massage recliners.

The Lowdown: The free upgrade doesn't yield much savings (see table at left) since it's only valid with the highest Business Class fares, which cost nearly the same as First Class.



There is one winner, however, and that's the business traveler working with a 'Business Class Only' corporate travel policy. Under this program the corporate policy people will only see Business Class on the ticket. Unless you're also required to purchase the lowest Business Class fare available, you should be fine.

Great Seats

The Aircraft Rotation Game

Airlines put their best seats on long-haul routes because they're the most lucrative ones, obviously. But logistics sometimes dictate that these aircraft spend time flying additional routes in between. US Airways, for instance, puts its 767s on Philadelphia-Charlotte year-round. The aircraft also end up flying from Philly to the Caribbean (San Juan, Cancun, and St. Thomas) at various times of the year.

If you're split on which airline to fly, US Airways offers more comfort for the money on these routes. The carrier should be top of mind for United Mileage Plus members, who can earn and redeem miles on these routes.

American Goes Broadband

This year the carrier is installing Aircell real-time broadband connection on all 15 of its Boeing 767-200 aircraft, which mainly fly transcontinental routes. This upgrade will provide an Internet connection, VPN (virtual private network) access, and e-mail capabilities through Wi-Fi-enabled laptops, PDAs, and portable gaming devices. Speed will be comparable to wireless, mobile, broadband services on the ground and coverage will be seamless over the continental US above 10,000 feet. The kicker: Whether you're in economy or First, there's a charge, which American hasn't yet announced.

'Frequency' Programs: All-Business Class vs. Legacy Carriers

How their mileage programs stack up

There's no argument that the all-Business Class carriers are a welcome addition to the North Atlantic. At the very least they made legacy carriers, such as American, realize they needed to upgrade their services. But the picture looks very different when the upstarts are compared to the veterans on the basis of their mileage programs. Look at the table below. When it comes to mileage program benefits the all-Business

Class carriers say "no," and the legacy carriers say "yes." That's one of the reasons why American was able to deal a deathblow to MAXjet in December. Once the big guy equaled the fare and upgraded its Business Class product, the mileage program benefits started to weigh in on customer choice. Sometimes you have to know when you've got it good.

How All-Business Class Carriers Stand Up Against The Competition: Sample Numbers, New York-London

Airline and Program	Lowest Current Advance Fare	Earning Based on Buying a Business Class Ticket	Upgrade	Free Ticket Cost	Earn or Redeem with Air/Hotel/Car Partners	Buy Miles	Earning Per Flight (R/T)	Trips Flown to Earn Free Ticket
Silverjet / Silverjet Set (Business Only)	\$2,198	1 free ticket for every 10 tickets booked (R/T)	N/A	10 Tickets (R/T)	No	No	10%	10
Eos / Club 48	\$2,650	7,500 points one-way or 15,000 points round-trip.	N/A	135,000	No	No	15,000	9
American / AAdvantage	\$2,250	125% miles	Yes	90,000	Yes	Yes	8,644	11
Continental / OnePass	\$2,322	150% miles	Yes	90,000	Yes	Yes	10,373	9
Delta / SkyMiles	\$2,250	150% miles	Yes	90,000	Yes	Yes	10,373	9
British Airways / Executive Club	\$3,040	150% miles	Yes	100,000	Yes	Yes	10,373	10
Virgin Atlantic / Flying Club	\$3,737	200% miles	Yes	90,000	Yes	Yes	13,832	7

Delta Transfer Bonus

Unused miles are everywhere. You likely don't have to look far to find family or friends with miles that they'll never use. Or, maybe you're the one with the excess miles. Either way, you can help each other get that award ticket, now cheaper than ever. Through March 31, Delta is offering a promotion to encourage miles transfers. Give someone miles and Delta adds a 20% bonus, 30% if the recipient is a Medallion member.

Example: If you are a SkyMiles member and transfer 10,000 miles, your recipient will receive a bonus of 2,000 miles for a total of 12,000 miles.

www.delta.com/skymiles/buy_transfer/transfer_miles/transfer_miles_lto/index.jsp

Strategy Session

How Anyone Can Use Mexicana's Mileage Purchase Deal to Almost Any Destination

Thinking about point-purchase opportunities at Starwood and Amex got me thinking about Mexicana's little-known program, which sells miles at 2.2¢ each, applicable for travel on many airline partners. While it's been well over a year since last discussed, the offer stimulated many reader success stories.

Mexicana Airlines flies to many destinations in North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, and it is one of the leading airlines for flights between Mexico and the US. But one of its nuances goes unnoticed: It offers mileage redemption with a variety of airlines and crosses normal

'alliance lines.' In other words, you can access flights of several Oneworld alliance carriers (American, LAN, Iberia) and a few Star Alliance carriers as well (Air Canada, Air New Zealand, Singapore, Lufthansa, LOT Polish). That means buying miles in Mexicana's Frecuenta mileage program is actually a gateway to almost anywhere in the world because Mexicana does not impose an annual mileage purchase limit. Miles are also a bargain, 2.2¢ versus the usual rate of 2.5¢ to 3.5¢ each.

Sample Savings Redeeming Awards on Mexicana Partner Airlines

Partner	Route	Miles Needed / Class	Cost @ 2.2¢	Reg. Fare R/T / Savings / %
North America				
American	San Francisco-New York	50,000 / Business	\$1,100	\$2,704+ / \$1,604 / 59%
American	Los Angeles-New York	66,000 / First (on 3-class aircraft)	\$1,452	\$4,766 / \$3,314 / 70%
Africa				
Lufthansa	New York-Joburg	150,000 / Business	\$3,300	\$6,828 / \$3,528 / 52%
Lufthansa	Los Angeles-Addis Ababa	200,000 / First	\$4,400	\$15,507 / \$11,107 / 72%
Asia				
Asiana	New York-Seoul	80,000 / Business	\$1,760	\$5,132 / \$3,372 / 66%
American	Chicago-Tokyo	100,000 / Business	\$2,200	\$5,520 / \$3,320 / 60%
American	Dallas-Tokyo	140,000 / First	\$3,080	\$11,326 / \$8,246 / 73%
JAL	New York-Tokyo	90,000 / Business	\$1,980	\$5,520 / \$3,540 / 64%
Europe				
Air New Zealand	Los Angeles-London	120,000 / Business	\$2,640	\$4,988 / \$2,348 / 47%
American	Chicago-Paris	100,000 / Business	\$2,200	\$8,226 / \$6,026 / 73%
American	Los Angeles-London	140,000 / First	\$3,080	\$13,098 / \$10,018 / 76%
LOT	New York-Warsaw	80,000 / Business	\$1,760	\$2,600 / \$840 / 32%
South America				
American	San Francisco-Santiago	100,000 / Business	\$2,200	\$7,954 / \$5,754 / 72%
American	New York-Sao Paulo	140,000 / First	\$3,080	\$9,036 / \$5,956 / 66%
South Pacific				
Air New Zealand	San Francisco-Auckland	160,000 / Business	\$3,520	\$10,625 / \$7,105 / 67%
Qantas	Los Angeles-Sydney	160,000 / Business	\$3,520	\$17,467 / \$13,947 / 80%

Corporate Corner

BA's Other Mileage Program Offers Free Upgrade

Through March 31, the British Airways 'On Business' program—the carrier's corporate travel loyalty scheme—is offering a promo of 8,000 BA 'points' for joining—enough for a one-way upgrade from Premium Economy to Business Class. The program is open to any company with three or more employees. To get the bonus one employee must also complete a qualifying flight by March 31. Enroll online at ba.com/onbusiness, using code WBNBA8 to ensure proper credit. Good news: Both the company and traveler earn loyalty program credit.

"On Business" Points Needed for Award Flights				
North America to:	First	Club World	World Traveller	World Traveller Plus
Africa, Middle East, India	25,000	15,000	15,000	17,500
Europe	20,000	20,000	8,000-12,000	11,000-13,500
Far East, Australia	30,000	25,000	20,000	22,500

"On Business" Points Needed for Upgrade			
North America to:	Club World to First	World Traveller Plus to Club World	World Traveller to World Traveller Plus
Africa, Middle East, India	16,000	16,000	12,000
Europe	18,000	8,000	5,000
Far East and Australia	12,000	12,000	9,000

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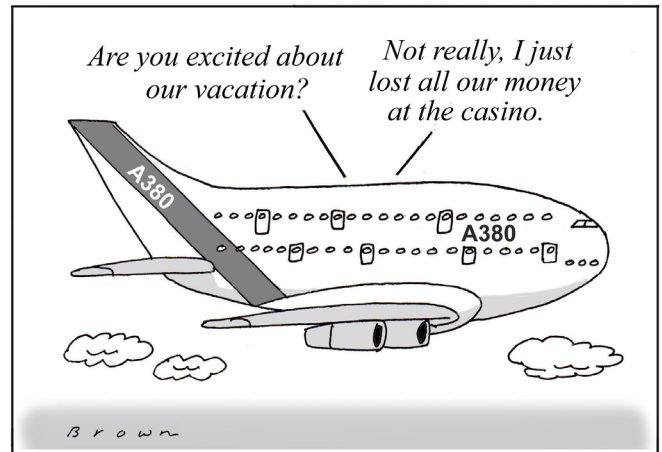
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- More Elite Status Strategies for 2008
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- New Premium Economy Seats
- Airline Spotlight: Air Canada and Emirates
- Alliance Fare Comparisons
- Routes With Best Mileage Availability
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