

Budget Stretching Travel Ideas

Tips For Fueling Your Frequent Traveler Points And Miles

(NAPSA)—As fuel prices continue to rise and traveling becomes more expensive each day, people are finding ways to decrease the cost of their vacation plans because they are strapped for cash. In a recent survey by Kayak.com, 79 percent of respondents said that while the recent economic downturn caused them to alter their vacation plans, they are still planning to get away. Of those who changed the destination of their vacation, 28 percent said they will stay closer to home, 23 percent will drop a star from their usual standard and 20 percent will choose a location where friends and family can offer room and board.

While Americans are considering alternative ways to cut back on their travel costs, one often overlooked way to bring down the cost of a vacation is to utilize frequent traveler points and miles from loyalty programs. Travelers can take advantage of their hotel and airline rewards programs to redeem for discounts, upgrades and free rooms and airfare.

"I think that many travelers don't maximize their hotel point earnings because hotel rewards programs often seem more complicated than they actually are," said Adam Burke, senior vice president and managing director, Hilton HHonors Worldwide. "Most travelers are well aware of the opportunity to earn and redeem airline mileage, but travelers who are truly interested in maximizing the earning power of their travel should enroll in a hotel rewards program in addition to their frequent flyer programs."



Frequent travelers who have points or miles sitting in their program accounts should consider redeeming their points to help alleviate the cost of future travel expenses. Travelers who haven't taken advantage of customer loyalty programs are missing out on a world of rewards and free travel. From vacation packages to car rentals, members can use their points and miles as a new form of currency to plan for their next trip. When planning for your next vacation, consider the following tips on how to make the most out of frequent traveler points and miles:

1. Choose A Rewards Program Carefully and Stay Loyal—All customer loyalty programs are not created equal, so take the time to research which hotel and airline programs are the best fit for your travel needs. By staying loyal to one hotel and one airline program, you will earn more rewards faster and can receive various VIP privileges and special recognition.

2. Choose Your Preferred Currency—Whether you want free nights or free flights, choose a program that gives you the flexibility to earn the way you want. Hilton HHonors, for example,

offers three different earnings options, which impacts how members earn points and miles. You can also concentrate your earnings into one currency by converting your hotel points to miles or airline miles to points.

3. Don't Get Blacked Out—Since hotel rooms can be more expensive during peak travel seasons, redeeming your points for a free night during these peak periods saves you more money. Look for a hotel rewards program that allows you to redeem during the times of year you want to travel the most and make sure to check the fine print on the program's blackout policies.

4. Redeem Points for Vacation Packages and Experience Rewards—In addition to vacation packages to exciting and exotic locations, some programs also offer a variety of one-of-a-kind experiences that you can redeem for rewards. For example, Hilton HHonors offers members the chance to soar above New York City in a helicopter or test-drive their dream job while on vacation.

5. Other Ways To Earn Points—Staying at a hotel is not the only way to earn points. Most loyalty programs offer a variety of credit cards that allow you to earn points or miles for just spending money you would normally spend. You can even earn points by renting a car from one of your reward program partners. Some programs, such as Hilton HHonors, also offer an Earnings Mall that allows you to earn bonus points for each purchase.