

**Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®:
Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Alex: Is Marriott Bonvoy® the secret to luxury hotel stays or just another confusing points program? Today, we'll break down how to earn, redeem, and maximize your Marriott Bonvoy points.

Welcome to *Points Talk*®. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom. Let's talk points.

Alex: All right. Well, that was a, is that your first time doing the "let's talk points," Mom?

Pam: I think I did it one other time.

Alex: Yeah.

Pam: Pretty good at it.

Alex: Yeah. Jess, watch out. I'm just kidding. Jess, as you might have guessed, isn't here with us today. We're actually doing an episode today, we're talking all about Marriott. And when we had this on the schedule, Jess was like, she's got a crazy busy October. So she was like, Why don't you guys record that one while I'm gone? Because I have nothing to add. So they're Marriott doesn't have, or Jess doesn't have a lot of love for Marriott in her heart.

Pam: She doesn't even have a card, does she?

Alex: She doesn't have any Marriott cards. She did, like, years and years ago, there was this thing where you could do like a Marriott nights and flights where you could get these packages with your Marriott points, and she did use her

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

points. She stayed at a Marriott hotel not too far from the Grand Hyatt Kauai, and then she walked over to the Grand Hyatt Kauai, and she was like, Oh, I need to come here someday. So I don't know if she's really stayed a whole lot of other places.

Whenever we talk about Marriott things, she's like, "All right, I," she doesn't even, she doesn't even care. The way she talks. I mean, Jess will have to come on and like clear the air if she need, if I get anything wrong, but I don't think she has any interest in even ever getting a Marriott card.

Pam: But we keep telling, we keep talking to her about one hotel that we'll talk about later, and she, she'd like us to take her there with our points. So she is interested in that much.

Alex: Yeah, and I don't even think, as we'll discuss, I don't think it's necessarily been Marriott properties. It's just, they charge so much for their stays that it makes it, she's just, she's not a fan of that. She's, she's a Hyatt girl through and through. So, anyway, Mom, why don't you kick things off and kind of share your background with Marriott? Because you, when we got started on points and miles, you were, I mean, you nothing against Hyatt, but you were a Marriott girl.

Pam: Oh, 100%. And that's because I grew up with Marriott. I mean, the only place my dad wanted to ever stay was Marriott. He had his Marriott card. He would occasionally get a free night. He was team Marriott all across the board. And so that's just what I grew up with. I grew up, started having kids, guess where we stayed. We stayed at Marriotts. If we weren't staying at a Hotel 6 because we didn't have enough money to stay, we were staying at a Marriott, and I thought I was living the big life when we were staying at the Marriotts. And so we would stay there.

Now, a Residence Inn was my absolutely favorite Marriott stay. I mean, of course, at that time, I couldn't even have dreamed about Ritz-Carltons or anything else. It was, a Residence Inn was the top of luxury class to me. And it was great when we would have our five children because we could get a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom. There would be a full kitchen, so we could go to the store, we could get snacks, we could get stuff for snacking or for dinner.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

They had great breakfasts. I, at least, I thought in those days, I thought these were the best breakfasts ever.

Alex: You probably wouldn't now. Now you'd be like...

Pam: I probably wouldn't, probably wouldn't be now, but what I really remember is their oatmeal because they would have oatmeal and brown sugar and raisins and all the different toppings. And I just thought it was the queen of breakfast.

Alex: You know what else has the oatmeal with those toppings? Hyatt Place.

Pam: I know. I know. I know. And even because they really catered, Residence Inn catered to a business crowd. So on weeknights, they would have, like, Monday through Thursday, they would have some sort of a little snack. It might be a pizza and a little bit of salad, or they would have some light dinner.

Alex: For the business crowd?

Pam: Yes, it was, that's why they catered.

Alex: I never knew that. I thought it was like catering to families. But granted, when I was going there, I was like 6 years old, so I was like, "Great, pizza."

Pam: Yeah, no, but it was, you know, it was only on Mondays through Thursdays. They didn't have the rest of the nights. And so it was the, and so they were catering to them, and those of us with families took advantage of it. So not only were we having that great breakfast, we would also that, I made that your dinner. So really, we only had to pay for lunch. And so for me, you know, Marriott Residence Inn was where it's at.

So I continued for a long time loving Marriotts, and until they got rid of their award chart, I still was. I still have always liked Marriotts, and I guess until just a few years ago, when I converted to Hyatt-ism, then I changed everything, then it changed everything for me.

Alex: Yeah. So I just want to make this clear. So I got a DM like a couple weeks ago. Well, we, we got it on our Instagram account, and the person was like, "I always thought Alex was saying Marriott wrong, but apparently you've been

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

saying it right all these years." So you might notice, even just, it's so funny, I notice it now, but my mom, like, you were saying Marriott and you were saying Marriott. You kind of like use, and I think it's fine. I think a lot of people use it interchangeably. But anyway, so you can say whatever you want, anyone in our community, you call it whatever you want. I say Marriott.

But it was pretty funny because it was like a video of someone, I don't know if it was the CEO or someone really high up with Marriott, and he was saying, "The," he even, he said, "The correct way to say our hotel brand is Marriott. It's like the name, it's spelled like Elliott. And so you don't say Elliott, you say Elliott." And I was like, and I felt very validated. But anyways, so just if anybody's wondering the correct way, maybe if I find the real, I can put it in the show notes, but I don't know if I will find it, but...

Pam: That's funny, but that makes sense.

Alex: It was pretty funny. Yeah. So everybody, if you, if anyone else has been thinking I've been saying it wrong, I'm actually saying it right. So, anyways, Mom's, you're going to talk to us about earning Marriott points.

Pam: Okay, so earning Marriott points. Now, this is where, if you want to get confused about earning a type of points, this is where you can get confused.

Alex: Yeah, I was, I was actually surprised. My mom made the podcast outline today, and she gave this section to herself, and I was like, "All right, you can take the part that's a little confusing."

Pam: Well, it's so confusing because they are, Marriott Bonvoy® credit cards are issued by both Chase and American Express®. So you've got two issuers. And there are some of the most confusing rules on whether you can hold one or hold the other. Now, when I got started in this, luckily for me, they didn't have those rules. You could just, you know, you could have all of them.

Alex: Well, it's like Amex® used to, Amex had SPG, and then Marriott acquired SPG, and then it was like, well, Chase already had Marriott cards, and so they

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

kind of had to figure it out who's going to have what cards. And that's when all the rules came about.

But yeah, you used to be able to rack up so many Marriott points. The SPG card was like an amazing card. And so yeah, with all of those changes, when Marriott bought out SPG, that's when it, like, was, that was the end of some of the good old days.

Pam: Yeah. In fact, I will never get rid of any of mine because if I got rid of them, I couldn't get them again because of those rules. We're not even going to begin to talk about those rules. They are so incredibly convoluted, but we will link a chart in the show notes.

Alex: Yeah. So basically what the chart will, basically with the rules, it's like, if you have this card, you can't get this card. Or you can get this card, but you need to wait 30 days or, you know, 24 months or 90 days. Like, there's so many rules. So depending on the cards you have, what cards you're eligible to get. So that chart breaks it down by the card you have and the card you want. So you can know exactly what you're eligible for.

Pam: And I'm just incredibly grateful I got in a long time before that. I never have to think about that. So no one come to me with questions about eligibility for Marriott cards because I'm not going to let it take any rent, take space in my head.

Alex: That's very smart. Just use the chart if you have your questions. But the other thing too is on the, like, the details of like the bonus offer, usually we'll say you are ineligible for the welcome offer card, welcome offer on this card if X, Y, and Z. So you can find that information right on the credit card, like, information. But if you, it still can be confusing. So you can check out our chart.

Pam: Yeah. So one thing to know is that, of course, personal cards do fall under the 5 in 24 rule by Chase, that supposed rule. It's not a real, you know, the unwritten rule. And that's why they aren't a first choice usually, and that's probably why Jess hasn't been that interested in them, or sometimes people aren't that interested.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

There is one business card that's issued by Amex. And the craziest thing to me about the whole thing about these cards, every single one of these cards starts with the letter B. I mean, they're crazy words. It's really, crazy words as you'll see as we talk about them, Bonvoy Bevy®. Who thought of that? You know? Bonvoy Boundless®, Bonvoy Brilliant®. I mean, they're just everything starts with the B. I just think, could you try to confuse people anymore? You already have these confusing rules, and now you've got these confusing names. Doesn't make sense to me at all.

So we're going to kick it off by starting talking about the Chase cards. And we're not going to talk a lot about any of them. We'll leave you to, we've got a blog post about them, and we will link that in the show notes. But to start off, there in the Chase issues, the Marriott Bonvoy Bold®. It's an entry-level card with no annual fee. Only reason I have it is because it converted from an SPG. I would probably skip that. You know, it usually doesn't have a very high welcome offer.

After that, Chase issues the Marriott Bonvoy Boundless® credit card. This has a \$95 annual fee, but it comes with a 35K free night certificate each anniversary. And you can always top those off with an additional 15K. I have found a really good use for this. I live near Denver Airport, and there is a beautiful hotel, the Gaylord Rockies, that I can stay at for as little as 35K, 37K sometimes. Sometimes I do have to go all the way up and top it off with 50K. It's a beautiful hotel, definitely worth always keeping that card for me because of that. So if I'm going to fly out early from Denver, it makes a really nice stay the night before.

There are sometimes a really interesting offer that comes with this card, and it's called the five-night welcome offer. It's, you get them five nights up to 50K. It's really, really popular with our readers. A lot of people want to get that. I mean, that's great. Five nights for one signup.

The only thing is, if you know, now, for me, five nights at this Gaylord would be amazing because it is a really nice hotel, but most of the time, 50K properties for Marriott aren't going to be super luxurious. And so if you're going to go for that, and I certainly think for people who aren't looking for super luxury stays, you've

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

got a family, and you're, you know, following them with sports, you're going to go on road trips, some of those ideas, those things, it's a really good deal.

And I would just look at some of the 50K hotels. We do have some that we've talked about in a blog post, and we can link that in the show notes too. Just check it out. There are some good values to be had, but just don't think you're going to stay at some incredible places because that's not going to be,

Alex: Yeah. I mean, there, there have been times where people have found, I think you probably have to be very flexible on your dates. But they've, I have seen people being able to use these in Hawaii. Granted, they're not using it at the Ritz-Carlton.

Pam: Yes. At the Sheraton.

Alex: Yeah, at the Sheraton Maui, people have used them there. There's the Swan and Dolphin by Disney World that people have been able to use them at.

But I think the key part of keeping in mind, and this offer isn't, at the time of recording, it's not available. If it might, it usually comes up a couple times a year. If by some chance, by the time this airs, it comes available, we'll link to it. We'll put some information in the show notes.

But it is really popular. I think the biggest thing to realize is they expire a year after you earn them. And you want to have an idea of where you're going to use it because I can just see a lot of people getting that offer and then being disappointed when they're like, wait, this, I can't use this at the place I want to use it. I do think you can find really good value internationally with these. I've I've seen some people stay at some pretty neat places.

Pam: Especially if you're looking in Asia, where it's always less expensive, I think you could really get some good deals. The other thing to remember is that you have to book it one night at a time. You don't go in there and book all five nights. So that's important too.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Alex: And that's nice too. Like you don't have to stay five nights. You could do three nights here and two nights there. So it is, it does offer some flexibility, but in some ways, it's very unflexible.

Pam: Yes, and we have had readers be really disappointed, and then we've had other readers be thrilled with it. And I, you know, if it was me and I was looking at family stays, I'd definitely, you know, think about doing it.

Okay, the next Chase Marriott card is one that is actually my favorite card, but it's not really available for new sign-ups. It is only available as a product change from the Marriott Bonvoy Boundless, and that is the Ritz-Carlton card. It is an amazing, I love this card because it's a real premium card, and so far, they've kept the annual fee decent. It's \$450 is the annual fee, but it comes with a \$300 travel credit, and so that makes it \$150. And I'll tell you why I love it so much in a minute.

Now, to get that travel credit, it's for airline incidentals, but it does include upgrading to first class. So I love that, you know, my husband and I, at least for each of us once a year, we can be flying on an economy seat, find a, you know, \$300 upgrade to first class, and be able to fly first class. And so I definitely use that, no problem. You can use it, you know, on food on board, you can use it like I said on the upgrades, you can use it on luggage. So I'm able to use it.

Now, it is not going to be automatic. You do have to call or message Chase. I secure message them all the time and say, Hey, I just used my travel credit on this upgrade. They want me to send the information, and then immediately, they credit. So it's really easy to do.

But the reason that I love this card so much is that it comes with an 85K free night certificate. That's the highest value of a free night certificate that you can get from Marriott, and there's some really good hotels that you can stay at.

Alex is going to talk about our favorite hotel, where I primarily use it. I use, and I'll just give you a little spoiler hint. It's the Wailea Beach Resort in Maui. Love, love, love this hotel. I have also used it at the Ritz-Carlton in Koh Samui. I have

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

used it at a couple other Ritz-Carltons. You have to be, find just a kind of a lower value day to use it at a Ritz-Carlton, but it's not impossible.

Alex: You know, what I was going to say real quick is the other thing that's nice about Marriott free night certificates is you can top them off. So if you find something that is, with, I think it's up to 15,000 points. So that makes it nice to have that option.

Pam: Yeah. And that's, I usually do have to top off for the Wailea Beach Resort, but I'm happy to do that.

Alex: Okay, one second, Mom, there, what is also another Chase Marriott card. It's the Bonvoy Bountiful®. And this is one,

Pam: Oh, that's right. How did I miss one of those B cards?

Alex: I know, right? There's only what, six or seven of them. But this, you know what's funny, is I always forget about this card. So it's not just you. It's the Marriott Bonvoy Bountiful®. I think it's got like a \$250 annual fee. It's kind of a mid-tier card. It's not one we hear a lot about.

You know, we hear a lot. I think the most popular card with our audience is the Marriott Bonvoy Boundless card that you talked about with the \$95 annual fee. That is the card, Mitch actually has that card. And we use the free night certificate every year, and that's why we keep it. But just so people know there is another one, the Bonvoy Bountiful.

Pam: And I'm not sure with that one, if you get a free night certificate, I know with one of them with the Amex you don't. It's only it's related to spend.

Alex: I don't know. I, it might, this is this one. It's the Chase Bonvoy Bountiful®. You get a free night after you spend \$15,000 on your card in a year, and it's up to 50,000 points.

Pam: Okay.

Alex: So, for the Bonvoy Bountiful, which I think that's why, like, why would I want a \$250 annual fee card, and I don't even get a free night certificate?

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Pam: Yeah, I think it's, it runs exactly like the Bevy. I think those two just, you don't get automatically get a free night certificate and so it's like, why? Okay, let's move on to the cards that American Express issues. The first one...

Alex: Can I say one thing I want to clarify with the Amex cards that we don't have in our outline is there, I think you meant, Mom, when you said the Marriott Bonvoy Bold with Chase, that the one you said your SPG card became that, the SPG card actually is the Marriott, the old SPG is now the Marriott, you guys, these names, I have to like really slow down my brain. This one is the Marriott, just it's just the Bonvoy. It's just called Bonvoy. And it's the old SPG. It's an Amex card. And I only know that because I have that card. And I've had it for years and years, and literally the only reason I keep it is for the free night certificate because we use those for traveling with my kids' sports.

Pam: So, yes, so you can't apply for that one.

Alex: You can't ever get it again. And I use it every single year. So I'm like, well, I might as well keep this. And if there comes a point where I'm not able to get value out of that 35K certificate, then I would cancel it. But so that's the first Amex card, but no one can just, no one can get that card. It's only if you had that previous SPG. So we ignore it.

Pam: Actually, I would ignore, I would ignore the Bevy and the Bountiful, too. All these names. Okay. The Marriott Bonvoy Bevy Amex card is a \$250 annual fee, and again, you can earn one night award, free night award after spending \$15,000 on eligible purchases. Okay, I'm just not going to do it. That's the least compelling card.

Alex: Moving on.

Pam: Moving on is the Marriott Bonvoy Business® card. And I do have this, so does my husband. Yes. And again, it's because it doesn't take a 5 and 24 spot. It gets you a free night certificate every year, and that's worth 35K. And I find value with that. If nothing else, then staying at an airport or staying at a lower-tier Marriott. I'm for the boys for their sports. It's the perfect type of, you

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

know, certificate to use. And it's only \$125 annual fee. And you're, I'll tell you're going to stay at is probably worth \$200, \$250, so it's definitely worth keeping.

And then their, Amex's premium card is a Marriott Bonvoy Brilliant® card. When they increased the annual fee here, I said, "I'm getting rid of it. I'm done with this one. Not doing this." Because they increased the annual fee to \$650, and I was sure I was through with it. You do receive one free night award every year after your card renewal month that's worth 85K. And it is that 85K certificate that keeps me hanging in there.

Not only that, you do have a \$25 dining credit monthly. You just use the card at any restaurant, you get credit for \$25. And so that's worth \$300. So I say, okay, if I take that \$300, and I'm, you know me, I am meticulous. I'm using it. I'm using it, and I've probably used it by the middle of the month. I'm done with it. So I don't have to think about it.

Alex: There's been times where she's been like, "I'm out of the country. Can I order you some food?" I'm like, "Yes, please." So she definitely uses it.

Pam: I definitely use it. So it ends up being a \$350 card. And what really happens, it ends up being, I'm paying \$350 for an 85K certificate. So what it ends up being is just giving me a huge discount because I'm using it primarily at the Marriott, the Wailea, now I'm forgetting the name, Wailea Beach Resort. Yes. I'm using it primarily at that, and it's like a thousand-dollar room. So I'm paying \$350 for that thousand-dollar room. I love it so much. I can find good value. So if you're looking to stay in a luxurious hotel, it may be worth it. I honestly thought I was cutting my losses with it, but that luxury hotel room just drew me back in.

Alex: I've never had this card, and I am eligible to get this card with all of their rules. I can get this one. I haven't gotten it yet, but I have every intention of getting it someday. I think the kind of the takeaway with Marriott is, I don't think this is, and this is why I haven't opened this card, with their changes where they don't have an award chart, they do dynamic pricing, and so the pricing is going to fluctuate, the points price is based off the cash price.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

So that's why those really luxurious properties cost so many points. And that's primarily where we love to use our points, is to stay at those places that we, we can't afford to. And so because of those changes, like before, it'd be like, "Oh, there's a great limited-time offer. I'm just going to get a Marriott card, and I'll figure it out later."

But I feel like with those changes, I think it's really good to be strategic about applying for Marriott cards. Not just getting one because there's a great offer. I think, at least for me personally, everyone can do their what they what works best for them, but for me, I'm getting Marriott cards when I have a specific redemption in mind or a hotel that I want to stay at or something, something in my mind, a reason for those points because you're going to need a nice chunk of points to stay at some of those luxury properties.

So I've kind of had it in my mind when I'm ready to, you know, when I'm ready to go here or go there, and I have a spot in mind, that's when I'm going to get the Marriott Bonvoy Brilliant. And when they have an elevated offer to go with it.

So that's just my takeaway in general from Marriott cards is I think it's a good idea to have an idea of how you might use the points, because if you're like, "I'm just..." and I think the same thing about Hilton as well. It's like, if I'm going to open a card and it's 125,000 points, that's probably not going to get you a ton if you're looking at a high-tier property. You're going to need a lot more points than just that.

Pam: Well, even now, after having already gotten my welcome offers, and I still have some points, I mean, I've earned some points through referrals and different things. I never use points for Marriott stays. I'm mainly,

Alex: Unless you're probably topping off your certificates.

Pam: Exactly. Exactly. That's the main reason why I have them, because I'm primarily using my certificates. I probably get six certificates a year, so that's all that I need to stay at Marriott.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Alex: And I think that's the way to think about it, too is I'm the same way. I'm not earning a lot of Marriott points, but I'm still staying with Marriott because I have free night certificates, and there is a lot of value to be had in those free night certificates, especially. And I like how you said too, it's like, you keep the Marriott Bonvoy brilliant, so you can get a discounted stay. And sometimes, with the way programs work, sometimes that's the best we can do, but it's a lot better than not staying anywhere.

Pam: Oh, yes.

Alex: And Marriott too, just, they don't, they do charge resort fees. And so that's another thing you've got to add in when you're thinking of Marriott is, I'm going to have to pay some fees. So, really, in general, you're not getting a free stay with Marriott like you are with Hyatt. You're getting a discounted stay. But a discounted stay at an amazing property, I will take it, you know? I'm not going to be too upset about having to pay, you know, \$250 to stay at Marriott Wailea Beach Resort for five nights.

Pam: Well, I just have my special ones that I really like. And so I'm fine with doing it. Another one that I really like, I love the Westin at Denver Airport. It is a beautiful hotel. If I'm flying out at 5 in the morning, nothing is better than just to walk over.

Alex: Yeah, it's literally connected. Yeah, it's right there.

Pam: Yes, it's connected. And so I love it. So, yeah, so there's definitely, you know, it's worthwhile for me to keep these cards and use them for my pet projects on Marriott. Okay, Alex is going to talk to us a little about, a little bit about their free night awards and some other things.

Alex: Yeah. All right. So I mean, we've kind of already touched on the free night awards. They have 35K free nights, 50K, and 85K. You can top them off with up to 15,000 points. They expire one year after they're issued. And you get them every year on your account anniversary.

Pam: I hate that. You know what? I don't like that. Do you?

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Alex: You know why I don't like it? Is because I have to remember when I got them.

Pam: Yes. I'd rather, why can't everything be calendar year?

Alex: Yeah.

Pam: And then you don't have to use your brain so much. That's my problem.

Alex: Well, and what I noticed too with my Amex ones, from my business card, my Amex business card, is a lot of times my annual fee will come or, or no my, my year date will come. My annual fee won't come from a little later. It's always delayed, and then my free night certificates, they come, sometimes take like another month for those. And so it's a little frustrating because I'm always like, when is this coming? I have something I need to book. So I wish it was very, I agree with you 100%. It'd be really nice if it was just calendar year and you didn't have to keep track. Granted, most people aren't probably having six or seven like you.

Pam: Me.

Alex: Like, between me and Mitch, I think we get four a year. So,

Pam: That, that I guess it's a, it's a, it's a really tough problem to have, isn't it?

Alex: Yeah.

Pam: First world problems for sure.

Alex: Yeah. So one thing that's interesting, and I learned this a few years ago when I tried to do this is when you're booking with a free night certificate, you can only book a standard room.

So let's say you have an 85K certificate, and there is like an ocean view room that's 80,000 points. Even though you have an 85K certificate, you cannot book the 80K ocean view room because that's an upgrade. You can only book standard rooms with your free night awards.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

And you have, you book these online. It's super easy. I really like that you can book them online. I really wish Hilton would get with the program and let you book online too. But, and you know, you're not going to get that outside value like you are with Hyatt, but you can still find some really good value with these free night awards.

I will say, I find it a little bit annoying because I have, you know, the four 35K certificates I get, and I use them at a Springhill Suites for soccer every year. And I went to go do to go book them, because these are Springhill Suites, and they're charging me 49,000 points a night. So I have Marriott points to top it off with, but I'm like, a Springhill Suites, you know, in a little, in a, it's not like I'm going to, I can see if it's like the Springhill Suites Moab, like the national park ones where they're very popular. This isn't that. And so I'm like, this should really be no more than 40K, but it is what it is.

So, and then one thing that's great about Marriott, and that we love, is you get the fifth night free on award stays. So I, and that's why I haven't used my Marriott points in a while, and I probably should because, you know, the whole earn and burn thing we've talked about in previous episodes, they're probably devaluing. But you, this is a really nice thing, is you get the fifth night free. You know, you book four, you get five, and you're going to need that with the price of Marriott stays.

I really need to start using, I need to use my points and book, book one of these stays, but it's just been one of those things where I kind of forget that I have the points and I need to just go make it happen, but we really like that perk. And I think that's it for the fifth night free. Did I miss anything, Mom? Or is that...?

Pam: Just that, just that as long as you have hold any Marriott cards, you get that benefit, so that's pretty nice.

Alex: Okay. All right. And now some of the brands you might recognize. Now it might, I, you know, we've, I think it's clear that the card names and all the rules are a little much. And it makes it a little tricky, but there's still a lot of value to be had with Marriott, and the really nice thing about Marriott is they have so many

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

hotels. They're the largest hotel brand in the world. If you're wanting to go somewhere, you will find a Marriott. And so that makes it very compelling.

There's just so many brands, too. You've got from budget to moderate, to premium, to luxury. You've got, you know, your starting on the lower tier, you've got a Courtyard, your Four Points, Springhill Suites, Fairfield Inn, Aloft, Moxy, Residence Inn. And then you've got a little more premium, you've got your Sheratons, Marriotts, Westins, Renaissance, Le Meridien, Autograph Collection, Gaylord, Luxury, you've got St. Regis, Ritz-Carlton, JW, W Hotel, Edition.

Like, there's just so many brands, and they have amazing hotels. And so that's where I'm like, I need to build up, even get more points than I have right now, because there are some really great properties and there's, there is a lot of really good value to be had.

The other thing I want to say, too, is both Amex and Marriott or Chase transfer to Marriott. Now we don't really recommend it, but I will say I have seen a few examples where there'll be a transfer bonus to Marriott. And I still don't even recommend it, but I have seen some really good deals where people were able to get like, because of the fourth night free, to be able to get five nights in the Maldives, using their Chase Ultimate Rewards, transferring them to Marriott, and booking incredible stays.

I will say, you always, always want to do the math and see if, okay, yeah, I might get a good deal, but is this way more expensive than if I just booked the Park Hyatt Maldives? You know? And I don't have to pay any resort fees. So, something to keep in mind, you know, it is a transfer partner with Chase. They do have transfer bonuses. Just make sure you do the math and figure out if you're getting a good deal or not.

Pam: The other thing, they do allow combining points, but it's not, you know, like, oh, I can't just go and transfer all my points to my husband. No. We wanted to go to the JW Marriott in Masai Mara, and at one point, and you can only transfer 100K a year to someone. And so that was kind of a pain. I had to do 100K at the end of the year, 100K at the beginning of the year. So that is, I wish

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

it's like, okay, just, you know, or make it more. I hope that they change that sometime.

Alex: Well, especially where things cost so much more now, they should, it's like for inflation, they got to count for inflation.

Pam: Yeah, they're they're making us, you know, not get as good of a deal. So let us transfer more over. So Marriott's status is super easy to get. You just have to have one of their credit cards. They all come with some sort of status. Another reason I keep my Bonvoy Brilliant is it comes automatically with Platinum status. That is a good status. I end up getting breakfast at almost, at every hotel and sometimes I get upgraded to a suite or definitely an upgraded room with a better view or something. And so I like having that status. So that is another reason why I like to have that card.

Now we want to talk, we kind of touched on this, some of our favorite Marriott stays to date and the ones we're most looking forward to. And so one of my favorite stays of any hotel ever was actually a Marriott. And I went to this hotel after I saw a review on it on another blog site, and it's the JW Marriott Phu Quoc. It's an island off the coast of Vietnam. Never had heard of it, but it was the coolest place.

Alex: Can we just say how much of a Pam thing is this to be like, "Oh, there's this hotel in this place I've never heard of, but the hotel looks amazing, so I'm going to fly all the way there to check out a hotel."

Pam: And it lived, it lived up to everything. It's kind of like you would think it's like a Harry Potter-type hotel, except it's kind of built after this imaginary university. So everything has these residences, these dorms, there's a soccer field. There's, I mean, it, you know, they all have different uniforms. It is so imaginative. Every solitary turn, my friend and I were going, "Oh my goodness, did you see that? That is crazy. Have you seen that?"

I mean, it really was. If you want to go somewhere that blows your mind, and it is still really cheap because you're talking about Asia. So you can go there still for 49K to 63K a night. So I can use free night certificates and go there. If I can talk

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

anybody into going there with me, I would go in an instant. Nobody seems to want to go that far but me, just for a hotel.

Alex: Well, you know, I'd be interested for you to go again because this was one of your earlier points and miles trips. And I would be curious to see if you would love it as much as you did then now. I think you would.

Pam: I think I would because it was just, it was gorgeous.

Alex: Because I've heard amazing things about this property as well. But it's just would be interesting to see, you know, how it compares now that you've traveled and stayed at all these other amazing places too.

Pam: Yeah. Another place that I stayed that I really enjoyed was we went with a girls' trip to the Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota in Florida, and I looked to see if we could still do that with a free night certificate or how much it would cost. And it's 64K. That's not that bad for a Ritz-Carlton. And we really enjoyed it because they had not only was the hotel nice, they had then a beach club that we could go over with on a bus, and it was really nice. And we really liked Sarasota. Some of the best eating places was really good.

Alex: Oh, we went to this bar... I wish I could remember the name of that barbecue place we went to was so good.

Pam: If you're thinking about it, go look at our review on Sarasota because I know I did a blog post about it, and you can see where we ate that was amazing. Okay, places I want to try. Well, I'm dying to do the JW Marriott Masai Mara. We were there. We were going there the next day.

Alex: She, yeah, she was in Africa.

Pam: We were in, on the island of Mauritius, and then we got a text that said that our booking was canceled because they'd had massive flooding in Kenya. One of the most disappointing moments of my life in traveling. It was really sad. At that time, I had booked it for 70K a night.

Alex: Unreal. That it was that, it used to be that cheap.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Pam: And so it was, and the fifth night was free. So we're talking about 280K, and it included game drives, luxury tents. I've heard amazing reviews. Everybody that goes there loves it. I am still working with those them because I keep acting like they're going to give it, let me go back for that price. But I don't know. When you have to, when you've been working on it for months and months and they every two weeks, they write back again that, "Oh yeah, we're working on that," and nothing gets confirmed.

I mean, they've even given me the dates now in June. They've given me the dates. But I can't get the tickets until I have that confirmed. I mean, I don't know what to do at this point. I don't want to be rude because I don't want to, you know, not get this.

Alex: Hey, if they've given you dates, then I'd keep going. You're almost there.

Pam: Yeah, so anyway, fingers crossed that I go there. It's supposed to be this next June. Hopefully, I make it. To be determined. Okay, another place that I'd like to try is, you know, I love the Conrad Bora Bora, but I've always thought I wouldn't mind trying another resort in Bora Bora too. So maybe next time I can go to the Conrad Bora Bora and split it and go to the St. Regis Bora Bora. I'd be really interested in doing that. So that's something I'd like to try out. So Alex, how about you?

Alex: My favorite, our favorite, which we've mentioned before, is the Wailea Beach Resort. So it's on Maui in Wailea. That's like my favorite area of Maui. It's just so calm and relaxing. It's great. I thought that every time I've been there three times, I believe. Well, I also stayed with you, but I think it was just one night when you and I went there that one time. But we've been there three times with my husband, and we loved it.

One time when we went with our friends, our friends became obsessed with it, and they went back. I actually just ran into my friend the other day. I was on a walk. She lives in my neighborhood. And she was like, "I'm so sad. Like, it's so many points to go there, and I am just dying to go back to Wailea Beach Resort."

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

So, I'm that's actually, that's actually what I think I'll do with my points is go back there. I think Mitch has maybe around 400,000, and I have 100,000. So, I mean, I think we should have enough points for a five-night stay with what we've got. But I need you and Dad to go too, or else, in order to take the kids. Otherwise, it'll just be Mitch and I going.

Pam: I'd be happy to because Dad gets two free night certificates and I get two, so that would be four, and then I could just, you know, book another, another night. What I love about it is it is, it's really family-friendly. They've got an amazing water slide and a water park.

Alex: Yeah, they have two. I think they're the biggest slides on the island at one point. I don't know if they still are, but they were.

Pam: But we just, we were there this last summer, but we'd gone from when we had stayed at the timeshare, and then we'd stayed at the Andaz. This was the quietest by far of all the resorts. I don't know what there is. They play Hawaiian music. It is just chill.

Alex: I think what's really nice, the layout is like the hotel is spread out kind of wide, and so every pool is separated from the other one. So the family pool is at the end, away from everything. You have the adults-only pool, it's an infinity pool with amazing views. And so yeah, I got to go back. But I do want to take my kids because I love it so much, and I haven't been with them, and I think they would love the water slides. It's Wailea Beach is right there. They will set up chairs and an umbrella for you at the beach. So it's like you cannot go wrong at this property. You really can't.

Pam: It's the reason I keep, reason I keep those premium Marriott cards and will always keep them.

Alex: Yeah, it's it is one of my favorite hotels, and I wouldn't, it's not like it's the rooms are good. It's not like the rooms are, oh, this is so luxurious. It's kind of the location and the vibe of it, more so than the rooms even. Not that there's anything wrong with the rooms. I think when you were there, they were just, they were actually renovating some of them, weren't they?

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Pam: Yeah.

Alex: So, another one that I've stayed at was the Le Meridien Maldives. You guys, this is crazy. I booked this, and I was able to use 35K free night certificates for an overwater villa. Like, how wild is that? I mean, you can't really do that anymore, but you can still find some really good rates, though at this property. And you can, you know, it's, you can't use a free night certificate to book into an overwater villa, but you can use your points to book right into an overwater villa, really great prices.

There's, it's, it was brand new when I went, and so it's still a newer property. We absolutely loved it. The service was amazing. I wouldn't say the rooms are like the most luxurious as like a St. Regis, but that's to be expected with a Le Meridien and a St. Regis. But they were really, really nice. The bathrooms were beautiful. And we just, we were obsessed. We loved it so much. And I've known other people who've gone since me sharing about it and who've really loved it as well. So nice option for the Maldives if you don't want to, if you don't have a jillion points.

Another one I want to try. I don't know if I will because I'll probably use all my points to go back to my Wailea Beach Resort, but I've really had my eye on the Ritz-Carlton Turks and Caicos, and I would really like to go to that property. I've heard really, really good things about that one as well.

Pam: Well, I think what we need to do, we need to go stay at the Andaz for like four nights when that opens up.

Alex: The Andaz Turks and Caicos?

Pam: Turks and Caicos, when that opens up. And then do a couple nights at the Ritz-Carlton too.

Alex: Yeah, yeah. But see, and that's where I'm like, gosh, I need to get some of these, these, um, whatever it's called, like...

Pam: 85K free night certificates.

Ep #156: All About Marriott Bonvoy®: Earning Points, Free Nights, and Luxury Stays

Alex: Yeah, the Bonvoy Brilliant. And that's the other thing too. If you're planning a trip, like somewhere to the Maldives and you're going to stay with Marriott, you want to get a Bonvoy Brilliant so that way you can at least get the free breakfast because places like that aren't cheap. So that can be a really good option too.

Pam: Okay, well, Jess, I hope you're listening and you're learning all about Marriott. We hope that this episode has helped all of you understand the Marriott program a little better.

Alex: Maybe, maybe a little better. Hopefully, we didn't confuse you too much.

Pam: Yeah, it is a confusing program. That's all I'm going to say. But make sure that you're following us on Instagram and subscribe to our newsletter so you never miss an increased Marriott welcome offer.

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