

# Ep #165: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of 2025 in Points and Miles



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

**Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg**

## Ep #165: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of 2025 in Points and Miles

Alex: 2025 was full of some good things in the points and miles world and some not-so-good things. Listen in as we share the good, the bad, and the ugly of 2025.

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: I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points.

It's hard to believe another year has passed, but just like every year before it, there have been some things in the points and some great things in the points and miles world, and some not so great things in the points and miles world. So today we are going to talk about the good, the bad, and the downright ugly from 2025.

I just want to say I feel like 2025 was a bit of a doozy when it comes to all of the changes that happened. But I also want to reassure you, we have been doing this for a very long time. Every year, there are changes. Every year, there are good things, bad things, and ugly things that happen. We are still going strong. We are still earning our points. We are still traveling nearly free. And so don't let it discourage you or say like, it's not worth it to do this anymore. It is absolutely worth it. It might take a little bit more effort, but it is 100% worth it. We're going to start out with the good, though.

Pam: Hey, Jess, I wanted to say one thing, is I feel like it kind of took my breath away this year because I think it all happened the last quarter of the year, or a ton of stuff did. I mean, good, bad, ugly, everything, and it was like, whoa, what

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is going on? My head was spinning. It was like, what's happening next? And so I think that now I've taken a deep breath, and I kind of agree with you that yes, this happens every year. It just hasn't happened in such a condensed time period, I feel like. And so, yeah. I mean, we all have trips planned. Our next year is looking great. And so it isn't, you know, really affecting us that much.

Jess: Yeah. We're going to start out with the good, though, just to, you know, start out the episode on a high note. And so there were a lot of brand new cards released this year and a lot of refreshes. And so this is one reason why none of us really plan our strategy super far in advance. You know, we don't have one-year, two-year, three-year plans when it comes to our credit card strategies, because you don't know what's going to happen. I could theoretically create one. It's all going to go down the drain when a new card is released or when a refreshed card comes out. So in my mind, I'm like, what's the point?

I feel like we each kind of have in the back of our mind, maybe the next card or two cards that we have on our radar. We in no way, shape, or form plan this out years in advance because I'm about to tell you about three or four new or refreshed cards that came out this year.

So number one was the Citi Strata Elite<sup>SM</sup>. This one we were kind of lukewarm on when it was first announced. And then I actually applied for this card, and I was like, wow, it is really easy to use these benefits. I'm loving the 6x on dining on Friday and Saturday nights. Like, this kind of surprised me.

And then a little later on in the year, the opportunity to triple-dip the credits came about. It was the triple dip heard around the world. Everyone was talking about it. But here's the thing, even if you didn't snag it in December, even just being able to double-dip the credits is amazing. Ella was, I was with Ella this past week, and she was saying, you know, I think I'm ready for my next card. And I was like, well, listen, the timing isn't great because you just missed out on the opportunity to triple-dip, but I 100% think this card is still worth it because you can double-dip the calendar year credits.

It comes with a \$200 Splurge credit, which is my favorite. You can use it at a few select retailers, including American Airlines, including Best Buy. And so I find it

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really, really easy to use that \$200 credit. And you get it every calendar year. So you get it once in 2026, and you get it again in January 2027. And then at that point, you can decide whether you want to keep the card or downgrade it, or cancel it. Another one was...

Pam: Hey Jess, I used mine January 1st. It will not surprise you guys that January 1st while Lee was watching football games, I was using all my annual credits, all my semi-annual credits for the first six months. I was using my monthly credits. I was on it. And that is an easy, easy that Splurge credit is probably one of the easiest credits to do because anything I can order on the computer, you know, is a win-win.

Alex: You know, we went we went shopping this last weekend, and we I was just in Costa Rica with my mom and my family for Christmas. We had a bunch of games, and my 10-year-old won a \$50 Best Buy gift card during one of the games that my mom put on. And so we were out shopping, and we were by Best Buy and he's like, oh, I want to go to Best Buy and see if there's anything I want to get.

So we just looked around, and then Mitch was looking at the Meta Ray-Ban sunglasses, and they're like, the ones he was looking at were like \$400. They're generation two ones. And I was like, oh, you should get them. Like, you know, he needs new sunglasses. He has his current pair are like a \$30 pair from Amazon. I'm like, you haven't had a good pair in a while. Let's you should just get them.

And he's like, well, I'll just think about it. And then we were driving home, and I was like, oh my gosh, we both have the Citi Strata Elite. Like, we can go back and get these, and it'll basically wipe out the whole cost of these glasses. And then I was like, we can even buy Kai's gift card off him. He ended up not using it that day. He wanted to wait. But I'm like, we could just buy him, give him \$50 and there you go. We've got you these sunglasses that were, you know, basically free with using the Splurge credit. So it was pretty cool.

Pam: And that \$50 gift card was a Splurge credit.

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Jess: I knew it. That's what I was about to ask. I was about to say, Pam, did you buy...?

Pam: I mean so many of those, I mean, not so many, but there were several gift cards in the games that we played that were, you know, from credit card credits.

Jess: I'm just imagining Pam's like playing games with Pam, and it's like Best Buy gift cards, Nothing Bundt Cake buntlets you could win.

Alex: You guys, listen to this.

Jess: Gummy worms from 7-Eleven.

Alex: She had an entire carry-on suitcase full of prizes and like, like things for playing the games, like cotton balls and solo cups and paper plates and all that kind of stuff for the Minute to Win It games. She had so many treats and candies, like bags of Hi-Chews. It was literally a carry-on bag for the games, full of treats from her 7-Eleven stops.

Pam: Exactly.

Alex: Using that DoorDash credit. It was awesome.

Jess: All right, so another brand new card that I think all three of us took advantage of was the Chase Sapphire Reserve® Business card. So brand new card to the Chase lineup, a business card. You know, we love our business cards because they don't count towards 5/24.

And the other thing is a little bit later, when we get to the bad and the ugly, we're going to talk about how this year it became a little bit more difficult to earn Ultimate Rewards®. But 200,000 Ultimate Rewards welcome offer. In a time when it's when they're harder to come by, this one was a no-brainer for us if you could meet that minimum spend. It comes with the \$300 travel credit that you can use on any travel purchase, and so, super easy right there, right off the bat to get that \$300 back. Um, a \$100 gift card credit that is also really easy to use. And so that one was a no-brainer for us when they released it.

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And then the Amex Platinum® personal card and the Chase Sapphire Reserve® personal card had a complete refresh. They were kind of couponfied annual fee increases, but in my opinion, the refreshes were a positive. And I think we've talked about this before. I went from hating on the Platinum to now I have it, and it is a keeper in my wallet. They come with a \$600 Fine Hotels + Resorts® or the hotel collection credit each year, \$75 per quarter Lululemon credit. That's an easy one for us to use, \$100 a quarter Resy credit. Again, easy to use. Increased digital entertainment credit. I was already maxing out that credit every month. And so those are just a few of the benefits that were refreshed that made the card better and a keeper for me now.

The Chase Sapphire Reserve, same thing, annual fee increased, but you still get that \$300 travel credit. You get Apple TV, Apple Music credits. Those are a no-brainer and something I was already paying for. Lots of other benefits added to the Sapphire Reserve. And so right there, four new or refreshed cards that we thought were for the better. Some may not agree, but for us, they were for the better.

The other thing is record-setting welcome offers over, you know, 100k points or more. And so that's the thing is the annual fees on these cards are going up, but so are the welcome offers. And you know, the Chase Sapphire Reserve, that card, the welcome offer used to be 60,000 points. When it was 60,000 points, I was like, eh, annual fee went up, but now the welcome offer is 125,000 points. You know, it more than doubled. And so Sapphire Reserve, great welcome offer. Like we said, Sapphire Reserve for business, 200,000 great welcome offer.

American Express® kind of changed up how they do their welcome offers and a lot of them are as high as now, but 100k plus with the Amex® Gold personal card, with the Platinum personal card, the Capital One Spark Cash Plus is another great one. And then, like we said, the Citi Strata Elite with that 100,000 point offer.

And so, a lot of great cards, a lot of great refreshes, and I'm excited to see, you know, like when 2025 started, I couldn't have predicted that the Citi Strata Elite was going to come out or that the Sapphire Reserve business was going to

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come out. So I'm always excited at the beginning of a year, like, what's going to happen this year? Hopefully, they keep it up, you know?

And then another really good thing that happened was there are more transfer partner options. And so Capital One added Japan Airlines, Qatar Airways, and Preferred Hotels as transfer partners. The best addition, in my opinion, was Citi adding AA, American Airlines as a transfer partner, and it is 1 to 1 transfer ratio. Citi is now the only bank that has American Airlines as a transfer partner. So before, the only way to really earn American Airlines miles was to open co-branded AA cards. Now you can open the Citi Strata Elite, the Citi Strata Premier®, and transfer those points to AA, which makes Citi much more valuable in my opinion.

And then Bilt came out and added a bunch of new partners, including Etihad Guest, Japan Airlines, Southwest. Hello, all our Southwest lovers. Spirit Airlines, that's, I mean, I've never flown Spirit, but it's nice to have a low-cost carrier as an option, assuming Spirit sticks around for a while. And then they also added Qatar Airways. And so, you know, we always love options. We love transferring our points. That's our favorite way to redeem points. And so, you know, it's always good to have more options.

Alex: You know, I feel like that was a lot of good stuff. And I think 2025 got a lot of hate for like, you know, the sky is falling type stuff in the points of miles world, but that was a lot of really good stuff. That was really exciting. And to me, the higher welcome offers kind of always stand out to me because I feel like when well when we got started, the like you said, the Sapphire Reserve used to be 60,000 points. When I got the Sapphire Preferred, it was 60,000, no, 50,000 points was the standard offered. Now the standard offer on the Preferred is 75,000 points. And so I mean, we love to see the higher welcome offers. It's so good. So, anyway, yeah.

Pam: It's funny that you say that it all of this got a lot of hate in the points and miles world, because I was thinking when Jess was talking, and even my thoughts overall about 2025 is that I feel like there's been so much positivity, and

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I feel like the same thing. I was thinking to myself, are we just Pollyannas over here, the three of us, that we're just looking at the bright side of everything?

Because there was a lot of hate. There's a lot of people that have been really focused on the negative things that happened. But I think that's just really important to realize that, you know, yeah, there's some things we don't like, but if you focus on that, it takes all the joy out of this hobby. And I'd rather focus on all the good things that happen because I think those new cards and those refreshes were incredible for us.

And yes, it is a coupon book type thing, but you know what? We all know I'm good at coupon books stuff. And it doesn't take that much effort. And always, always, always the even if you don't want to do all that stuff, with all the points you get that first year, it's always worth signing up for a card, a new card, getting that welcome offer, and then deciding if it works for you or not. It's always worth it. So.

Jess: Yeah. That's my little plug. Speaking of Pollyanna, I am curious your thoughts before we get into the bad and ugly, Alex. This isn't on our list because some people think it's good, some people think it's bad, some people think it's ugly.

I personally think all the Southwest changes are good. I am officially putting the Southwest changes under good. And that is because I booked a flight for spring break. We're going to Chicago. I went on there because I'm a Southwest credit card holder. I got to select my seats. Do you know how awesome it is to know, to have the peace of mind that I'm going to know exactly where I'm sitting on that plane? I don't have to set my alarm to check in twenty-four hours in advance. I don't have to worry about what number and letter I'm going to get for my, you know, I'm just like, this was such a positive change in my opinion.

There are some people who are going to say, I don't want to pay for my checked bags. I don't I like I feel like the people who like open seating are people with kids six and under who could board with family boarding. I've not been in that category for years. And so, but for me, the Southwest changes firmly fall under

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good. And I am actually looking forward to flying Southwest more now that I know that I will have a seat and exactly where it is.

Alex: Yeah, no, I agree with you. I, coming home from Costa Rica was on a newer Southwest plane. So they're coming, they're releasing new planes, they're retrofitting some of their old ones. I was on a brand new one, and it was nice. I was like, wait, hold on a second. This is Southwest. Like, I felt like I was okay, I'm not going to say I was flying Delta because I think Delta's personally the best because every plane has a good on-screen entertainment or seatback screen for watching anything you want. And that's so nice as a parent to have that for your kids.

But like, we had we got really lucky, and there no one did upgraded boarding. And so or there were only like a few people that did upgraded boarding. So we were some of the first people on the plane. We were A, like 16 through 21. And we the plane had the new extra leg room, and I didn't know that going on. I just thought it was the new seats, and then I sat down, and I was like, hold on a second. These are spacious. Like, it was really nice. And so I'm excited about that. I have booked some flights already where we got to choose our seats. You know, and because I have the Southwest Performance business card, we choose like row eight. And all three of us, and I'm able to book my whole family, you know, with our seats are taken care of. So it's really nice.

So, I actually do need to figure one thing out, though. I'm going to contact Southwest because I booked flights for me and a couple of my kids to go to my niece's wedding, and I picked mine and the kids, their seats were good to go. But then I added another one of my kids. He wasn't originally coming, and now he can come. And Southwest... and it's attached to my reservation, but they didn't let me choose his seat. And I'm like, I feel like they should let me choose a seat because he's attached to my reservation, and he's a kid. So I think as long as I contact them, I'm sure that they'd be fine giving him a seat. because I'm like I'm not paying for his seat. He would have been on my reservation, and it would have been free if I booked it with mine.

Jess: I already paid this annual fee for my Performance business.

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Alex: So anyway, I'm with you, though. I think it's a really good change. Um, I like seeing, we fly them so often that I like an update. I like things looking nice. One thing that's interesting, though, is every time I have flown a Southwest plane to or from Liberia, Costa Rica, they are the worst plane. Like, no chargers, old, dumpy seats. Like, I don't know what it is with that route. I've flown it to and from Houston and then to Denver. And I'm like, they really need to give some better planes on this route when you're on the plane for quite a while. So, anyway, side tangent. All right, on to the bad.

All right, so we'll see if we're still Pollyanna after we go through the bad and the ugly. But, uh, annual fees bad, but like we said, we found it worth it with the higher welcome offers. So some annual fees for like the Sapphire Reserve personal and business, the Amex Platinum personal and business, those are pushing close to a thousand dollars, which is really wild when you think about that.

You've really got to use those coupon books and make it worth it, but like my mom said, always worth it the first year. So, for some people, that is a huge negative for us, didn't really change much because we are going to make sure we use those benefits. We're going to be traveling anyway, so we make those benefits work for us.

Okay, this one's pretty bad. Um, Chase is approving fewer people for the Ink cards. They have new language out saying if you have no annual fee Ink card, you can't get another no annual fee Ink card. Or if you have a...

Jess: Or you may not be eligible.

Alex: You may not. Yeah, that's the key thing, you may not. Or if you have one with a fee, you may not get another card with a fee. And so that's kind of thrown some people for a loop. We're still it's still so new that we're just kind of filling it out and seeing, you know, what that actually looks like in practice, because may not that really lends to a really big interpretation of we might just give it to you. Maybe we won't. Like we don't really know. So we do have a whole Points Talk Premium episode where we go into detail about this. We each we kind of share

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what's our strategy going forward. So check out Points Talk Premium if you want to get the whole lowdown on kind of how we're handling this.

Um, the next thing, Ink Business cards took away referral bonuses. So, for people who already have a card. So if you have like, let's say, your player two has an Ink Cash, and you want to refer them to the Ink Preferred, since they already have an Ink Card, you will not earn a referral bonus when you refer them to the Ink Preferred. So that was kind of rough because we earned a lot of points referring our player twos and then referring us back and forth to Ink Cards. But with that new rule might, keyword might, be a little tricky getting a ton of Inks anyway. So that was a pretty big blow this year.

Another bad one was transfer partner ratios changed. So, Emirates, guys, I think Emirates has just been a blow overall. Their taxes and fees shot up a ton. They are not one-to-one. I think the only transfer partner that is still one-to-one is built.

Jess: Yes.

Alex: But I don't, I mean, I at this point, they keep like every few months it's like, okay, nope, we're not a one to one to Capital One. I think that one is coming. That one, probably by the time this airs, will have hit. They're, you know, just slowly with each bank, they've gone to, you know, not being one-to-one anymore. It's like five to four or something.

So Chase even just flat-out removed them as a transfer partner because Chase's big thing is all transfer partners are one-to-one. So I don't know where this leaves Emirates for us, like how often we will be flying Emirates, which is a huge bummer because they have such a nice product. We loved that Milan to JFK route was so nice. So we'll see.

Jess: Yeah, I honestly don't know if or when I will fly Emirates again because.

Alex: I mean, we did on the we had Thrifty Traveler on recently, and they shared what was it booking via Japan Airlines.

Jess: Yeah.

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Alex: But I don't know how reliable.

Jess: Yeah, it was really hard. It's not easy to find that availability. And that used to be such like a sweet spot in my mind that, especially that JFK to Milan route. And now I'm just like, between the lower transfer ratio and the increased taxes and fees, it's really not even doable. You know, it's really, I mean, maybe if you're just flying one person, it might be worth it, but if you're flying a family, no way.

Alex: Yeah. Well, and you used to be able to find availability via Air Canada for Emirates, but I don't know how reliable that is anymore, if like if that can be found. So.

Jess: I don't think it is.

Pam: Yeah. I haven't, I haven't seen it.

Alex: Yeah. So, yeah, and then it's, you know, it's just hard. Sometimes it can be hard to find business class award space to Japan, Australia, New Zealand. And I think part of that is you have so many more people who want it. It's very sought after. So those are kind of the bad for 2025. Mom, what are the... I think, actually, we should have moved the Ink stuff to the ugly.

Pam: I think we, I think we should have too. I think we should have too. It really is ugly.

Alex: You know, and we also had the forty-eight-month language on the Sapphire Preferred and Reserve is no longer a thing, but that one's also we're not entirely sure what that's going to look like. It could be a net positive if it's like, oh, if I had the Sapphire Preferred, now I don't. And it's a year later, and they approve me for the Reserve, that would be a net positive.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: Because you don't have to wait as long. But it's still like TBD how's this going to shake up. So Chase is really just shaking things up this year.

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Pam: Yeah. I also think in the bad, I feel like it's just been harder to find business class availability almost anywhere. I mean, it's just not as easy. It's not like I can't find it, but I'm a very flexible person. I can, you know, go at any time. And if you're looking for business class and you've got certain dates, I think that's gotten a lot harder. And, um...

Alex: Or you're just having to jump through more hoops. It's like, okay, I've got to be willing to position on both ends, maybe. Or I'm going to book right when the schedule...

Pam: You just got to plan ahead. You got to book right when the schedule is released or...

Alex: Or you've got to have Thrifty Traveler Premium would be my next thing. Like, just take the work out from you or, yeah.

Pam: I don't know. It was something like seats.aero, or PointsYeah, where it's not...

Alex: Like the days of searching yourself, those are we don't need to be doing that these days. It's so much work.

Pam: Exactly. Yeah, I can find stuff, but I would say I'm putting in more hours to find stuff now, where it was, you know, a lot easier.

Alex: Or it's you're like, I'm looking, and I'm not finding anything. I'll come back in a next week and look again.

Pam: Kind of thing too sometimes. It's not like, oh, I found it on my first try. Yeah. Exactly. Okay, let's get into the ugly. And honestly, there really, I mean, there is some ugly, but it wasn't, you know, as many as you would think. Again, I think I agree with you, Alex, those chasing things should have been in the ugly.

But one of the things that I thought was really ugly were the sudden no-notice devaluations to award redemptions. I mean, there are always devaluations. Hyatt does one every year in like March, but they're not no-notice. This is like you woke up one morning and Hilton properties that had been 120,000 or so,

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you know, were twice as much or just insane. They were just seriously insane amounts. Um, and so if you're holding Hilton points, all of a sudden you're like, oh, wow, I wish I'd used that before because this is like now I can stay one night where I thought I was going to be able to stay two nights. It became even more important to have the free night certificates

And honestly, when this happened, I went and applied for the Hilton Aspire because I go, I've got to have the free night certificates, you know? And my plan for this next year is for my husband to apply for that. We have to have those because if you're going to use Hilton points, it is insanity. I mean, I've looked at some of those, and I'm going, you really think I'm going to pay 300,000 points to stay at your hotel for one night? It's like it's insane. You know?

Flying Blue also increased the cost of many of their redemptions, and it was, you know, really sudden too. I mean, I used to be able to find tons of availability for 50k in business class over to Europe. You really need to be watching those Flying Blue promos every that come out every month. We do have a post. In fact, I today as we're talking, this isn't going to air for a while, but I just we just posted that today. That is where you still can find the good deals. But I have been shocked because Flying Blue was a mainstay for me to get from the United States over to Europe, and I, it's hard, really hard to find those. And some of those redemptions I'm going, again, you're Flying Blue, you really think I'm going to pay that much.

Jess: Well, the thing is, they were so they increased the award rates across the board. Um, business in particular went from 50k to 60k, but it's like you said, almost impossible to find those 60k rates. And I do think for economy, there are still great deals to be had with Flying Blue, especially if you have kids under 12 and they can get that 25% discount. But business class? Mm-mm.

Alex: Hey, can I share one that actually is a good for “no-notice,” quote unquote, devaluations? Yes. Well, there's good and bad. Virgin Atlantic going to dynamic pricing actually was pretty good because you can find business class for like, or we're doing premium economy to Europe, and it was like 17,000 points per person. You can find 7,000 points in economy. Like that's insane. They did

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recently jack up their um taxes and fees, but when you're rates, your points rates are so low, like I can look past that because I'm getting I'm paying like hardly any miles. It's just if you look at it like I'm getting a very discounted ticket to Europe, then it's a pretty good deal. So I think that was a pretty good one.

Pam: Yeah. I agree with that.

Alex: And they have really good transfer bonuses. So when you can factor in... I would say transfer bonuses to Virgin Atlantic and Air France pop up semi-regularly, like more than any other partners. And so those two, I mean, that I would put that in the good category.

Pam: Exactly. And then we get to what most families would say is probably the ugliest thing that happened in 2026, and that was changes to lounge access, particularly Capital One. Capital One going to only the primary cardholder can get into one of their lounges was just devastating. I mean, you used to be able to bring in two guests. You used to be able to add an authorized user who could bring in two guests. I mean a family of six could come into a Capital One Lounge.

Now I will say, my Capital One Lounge lately, every time I go there, there's a wait. And so I can see that a change needed to happen. It would have been really nice if they just said that maybe just bring it to the card holder, can bring in two, or the card holder, at least step it down to one instead of saying that you can't bring anything. So I think this is one that had a lot of people crying and feeling really bad and upset and...

Alex: Oh, people were like, I'm getting rid of my Venture X Card. I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa. This is still a really good card.

Pam: Yeah, exactly. So I think that was a really hard one. And so I just wanted to quickly talk about how to handle the bad and the ugly. I mean, obviously, we're thrilled about all the good that happens. But first of all, just expect that there's going to be changes like we said, and there's going to be some bad, and there's going to be some ugly, and we're going to be shocked at first, and we're going to be mad.

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And then when you think about it and just take a breath, you can go, okay, here's a workaround. Like Jess is going to go to the Capital One Lounge and she's going to go to the to-go section, and she's going to get food for all her family and bring it down. So, if it's, I say down because ours goes up an escalator. But you know, but so you know, there's workarounds, you know.

I think too, another reason is just to be gratitude, just to have gratitude for what we still have. Like I said, yeah, some things have changed, some things will continue to change, we'll continue to be bummed, but we are so lucky that so many of us that are in this hobby have been able to travel, see the world, do things that we never ever imagined would possibly be something that we would be able to do.

And the other thing that you have to do, even more so now, is to just be flexible. You know, if you're trying to take your family of six to Europe during the holidays and you're hoping to fly business class, you just got to be flexible and say, you know what? It's probably not going to be business class. It may not be the exact dates. We may have to plan to go right after holidays, take some kids out of school, find, you know, sorry teachers, if you're upset that I said that. But you know, find some, you know, find just be more flexible, position, um, just find flexibility. And as families, you know, just say, hey, it may not be business class. You know, I can do premium economy. It isn't, I mean, for me it is about the flight, but for most people, you know, it really shouldn't be. It's really about the destination.

If this if anything that this year taught us is that flexibility and power, the winners in the points and miles world were those who prioritized transferable currencies, who booked early and stayed alert to changes, who kept diversified balances across programs. So have more than one type of program. Don't get everything stuck in Ultimate Rewards. I worked with someone recently who had only Ultimate Rewards, and if she'd had some diversification, she would have had a lot more options. And then take advantage of elevated offers while they lasted. If you signed up for those big offers, then you got a lot more points to work with.

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Jess: Well, that's why some people say like, don't have shiny card syndrome. I'm like, no, do have shiny card syndrome. because that's how we get all our points. We wait, this is why, like I said, we don't plan ahead with our strategies. When a card offers elevated, we jump on it, you know? Like, I'm not going to have shiny card syndrome for Delta cards because I don't live in a Delta hub and I don't need a Delta card. But if a brand new Citi Strata Elite or Sapphire Reserve business comes out with 100,000 or 200,000 flexible points, you better believe I'm jumping on those offers, and I am, I am having shiny card syndrome.

Pam: Exactly. I think we all have that disease.

Alex: Yeah. Well, that is how we earn well over a million points a year. It's not because we're like, okay, well, I think I want to get a Venture card now, and the offer is this. I'm just going to get it. It's like, we're like, okay, what card is elevated this month? Okay, yep, that's the one I'm going to get. Oh, that one? Yeah.

Like, of course, there's times where we don't get elevated offers because there's not always an elevated offer. And it makes more sense to have that card and be earning points on that card continually than never getting it, especially where a lot of these cards still have some of them waiting periods before you can get it again. And so you want to start that clock. But if, when you can, when there is an elevated offer, you're going to earn so many more points if you prioritize elevated offers.

Pam: Exactly. Okay, quickly, everyone, what was the worst change that happened this year to each of you?

Alex: I would say, just Chase in general, making being more um, not as generous with approvals across the board. I would say that was the hardest for me. Um, but also I they have been so generous. And so we can't really blame them for being like, oh, we've been really generous, and so we're going to maybe take a step back. We, I'm in a good place where we have a good stockpile of points with them. We have a bunch of cards. So, you know, I'm not worried that we won't be able to get more. To me, this is, okay, time to take a little break and not open as many cards with them, focus on other issuers, focus

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on spending on the cards that I do have, and then come back around, and hopefully we'll be able to get more points.

Jess: Yeah, same for me. For me personally, the Ink changes with referrals and with tightening up on approvals.

Alex: Yeah, the referrals has been rough.

Jess: ... has been rough. I will say that it's TBD on how bad it actually is. We all three of us, I think, are at 5/24 or over 5/24 right now. And so it's going to be a while before I can actually test out some of the things that we discuss in that points talk premium episode is like how we're planning to move forward. So TBD on how bad it actually is in practice.

I will say I think one of the worst overall for families was the Capital One Lounge changes, just because for so long those were the go-to cards for families to access lounges, and they basically stripped it all away. And so I think that one for me personally that it didn't affect me as much. We don't have a Capital One lounge at Houston airport. And so it's not, I'm still keeping my Venture X. I'm not burning it. I'm not um throwing it into the fireplace or anything. But you know, if you live, if your home airport has a Capital One Lounge, that is a very rough change.

Pam: Well, and it depends on your perspective because for me, the Capital One change as, you know, not having kids that I'm bringing into it, I'm like, I'm going to get into it probably a lot quicker. It'll be interesting to see how that, you know...

Jess: I'm curious to see if the wait times decrease and all that. I have to assume they will, but...

Pam: Yeah. And for me, definitely the Ink changes, the ability to not earn as many Ultimate Rewards to then transfer to Hyatt was like a knife to my heart, you know. I too have a good stockpile of Ultimate Rewards, but definitely going to have to rethink my strategy on um how to go forward with this, because I really my biggest thing isn't the Ultimate Rewards, it's transfer them to Hyatt and keeping my Globalist status. And that becomes something that I may have to

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pay for, use some cheap stays, or you know, put more spending on cards and get me more Elite Night credits because it's real, you know, once you've been Globalist, it's you know, hard to go back. So we'll see. But a lot of this again is TBD to be determined. You know, I'm just sit back, know that I'm fine for, you know, I've booked a lot for this year. I'm probably fine for the next year, and we'll just, you know, see what, you know, how strategies change.

Needless to say, our heads were spinning at the end of this year as there seemed like there was one change after another in the points and miles world. We will always see change, good and bad, but we're here to stay for sure. If you like this episode, we hope you'll share it with a friend, leave a five-star review. Don't forget to check out Points Talk Premium, our premium podcast, for more content.

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