

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Alex: Citi ThankYou Points aren't points we discuss a ton, but with a new card that earns these points and a new transfer partner, they've become a major player for us. Listen in as we take a deep dive into the Citi ThankYou® Rewards program.

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. Today is all about the Citi ThankYou Points Rewards program. We've already covered American Express Membership Rewards®, Capital One Venture Miles, and Chase Ultimate Rewards® on previous episodes. But when Citi came out with the Citi Strata EliteSM last year, it kind of reignited our excitement about Citi points. And they also added the ability to transfer to American Airlines®, which no other bank does, and that was exciting news in the points and miles world. So we figured with both of those things combined, it was time that we had our own dedicated episode to Citi ThankYou points.

So, I am going to go over, I think it's five, five of the most popular cards that earn Citi ThankYou Points. So starting out with our new favorite, it's the Citi Strata Elite. All of us got this one when it first came out.

Alex: And our player twos.

Pam: I haven't gotten it yet.

Jess: Were you denied?

Pam: I was denied. I'm going to try again pretty soon, but my husband got it.

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Jess: Poor Pam. Okay, so five out of the six of us got it. And it's funny because when I first got this card, I purely got it because I was like, "Okay, 100,000 points I can transfer to AA, and then I'll cancel it." But once I got it, I kind of learned how easy it is to redeem these credits that it offers, and they're calendar year credits.

Alex: It's funny because when we did an episode on *The Battle of the Premium Cards*, and we were all kind of like, "Eh, I don't know about this card. Like, these benefits are kind of dumb. Like, I don't know if we'll ever use them." As Jess said, they're pretty easy to use, and I'm... I've... it's only... It's like pretty early into the new year, and I've already used a lot of my credits. So, Jess is going to get into it, though.

Jess: So, yeah, so it does have a \$595 annual fee, but it has the \$300 annual hotel credit. It has to be a minimum two-night stay, and you have to book it through Citi Travel. But what makes it really easy to redeem is it doesn't have to be through any specific program. Like, it's not like Amex Fine Hotels + Resorts® or Chase The Edit, it can literally be any hotel that's in the portal. And so it's really easy to find two nights that are fully covered by the \$300, especially if you're like road tripping, staycation, traveling for kids' sports, super easy to find two nights fully covered by the \$300.

And then it comes with a \$200 Splurge CreditSM every calendar year. This can be used at select retailers. You can choose two. So it's Best Buy, AA, Firstdibs—I don't even know what that is—Future Personal Training, Live Nation, which I think you can also use at Ticketmaster. I selected Best Buy and American Airlines. I feel like those are probably the two that most people select.

Alex: For sure.

Jess: And spoiler alert, Best Buy sells gift cards to other third parties. And so this is basically, you know, this is basically a \$200 Starbucks card for me that I'm going to use at some point during the year.

Alex: Yeah.

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Jess: Then there is a \$200 Blacklane chauffeur credit. It's \$100 semi-annually. So \$100 January through June, another \$100 July through the end of the year. This is kind of like a fancier version of Uber, where you can book it ahead of time and they'll be there at the airport to pick you up. So for people like us...

Alex: I just used that recently, and it was really nice because I used it for airport transportation. And yes, it's much more expensive than Lyft, but at certain times or Uber, but at certain times of the day, Lyft and Uber can be really pricey. And the nice thing was we arrived at the airport, and the car was already there waiting for us. It wasn't like, okay, time to call my Uber, and now we got to wait, like, you know, 10 minutes or so for the car to get here, and we don't know, like sometimes the cars can be a little like not as nice. Like the Blacklane cars are nice. Like, they're... It's more of a luxury chauffeur service, and it's a you're paying a premium for it, but when you get \$100 credit, the ride was a little bit less or about the same price as if I did Lyft, but like after the credit, but it was a better overall experience. And so it was nice.

Jess: Between the three of us, we use airport transportation enough that this is a really easy credit for us to redeem.

Alex: Yeah, I will also say I was using it in New York City, and New York City is going to be more expensive, probably, than a lot of other places that I would maybe be using this credit. The other thing too is one of, so my, I used my credit, and I booked it the morning of. It wasn't even like I had to book it, you know, super far in advance, and it worked out great.

Jess: Awesome. It also comes with Priority Pass™ lounge access, and you get two free guests. This wasn't a huge selling point for us, but if you don't have other cards that include Priority Pass and two free guests, this could be a good selling point for you. Four AA Admirals Club lounge passes each year.

The cool thing about these is you can take a screenshot, at least for now, and share it with someone else. And so if you're not going to use it, maybe you know someone else who does. And kids under 18 get in free with you. And so if you are a family of four and you have two adults and two kids, you really only need two Admirals Club... Admirals Club lounge passes to get into the Admirals Club.

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

You also have to be flying AA or another Oneworld partner to be able to access the lounge.

Global Entry and TSA PreCheck® credit. I have enough of those to last me a lifetime. But hey, you know, what's one more? 12 points per dollar spent on hotels, car rentals, and attractions booked through Citi Travel. Six points per dollar spent on air travel booked through Citi Travel.

This one is a... this one surprised me how much I like it. Six points per dollar spent at restaurants on Fridays and Saturdays from 6 p.m. Eastern time to 6 a.m. Eastern time, and then three points per dollar spent at restaurants during other periods. I don't memorize the times. I just tell myself if I'm getting... if I'm dining out Friday or Saturday night, which we normally do anyways, I'm just going to use my Citi Strata Elite and earn 6x.

Alex: You know, this was pretty cool too because if like I'm two hours ahead. So for me, it starts at 4 p.m. And so you get a little... us West Coast, I mean, and then if you're in California, you start at three. You get it even longer. And so it's pretty cool. I was looking at Mitch's statement for his to see like how much more we needed to spend to hit our minimum spend. And he took my boys to a BYU basketball game. Him and the older two went, and they went out to eat before the game at like 4:30. I don't even know, earlier. And then they got some like something at the concession stand. And that coded as the like... what do they even call it? The eats something...

Jess: Citi NightsSM.

Alex: Citi Nights. Yes.

Jess: Guess what coded for us?

Alex: What?

Jess: The movie theater. Like the concessions at the movie theater coded as Citi Nights. And so I was like, dang.

Alex: So I was like, well, this is cool. Like, if you guys know BYU, like they're famous for their cougar tails. It's like a big maple donut, like an extra-long maple

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

donut. And my kids always like to get them if they go to a BYU sporting event. And so it was like, "Oh, we got Citi Nights on our BYU cougar tails." It's pretty funny. But movie theater, that's awesome.

Jess: Yeah, and another little trick is I on Friday and Saturday nights, I'll just reload my Starbucks app, and then I just get my 6x on my Starbucks. So there's another little pointer for you if you have any food apps that you regularly reload. And then you get 1.5 points per dollar spent on all other purchases. So this is a really solid option for earning AA miles on dining and just plain old everyday spend. So, as I said, no other banks transfer to AA. So, especially if you're in an AA hub, I feel like that one's a no-brainer at least for the first year.

Citi Strata Premier®, which is more like the Chase Sapphire Preferred® version for the Citi cards. It is a \$95 annual fee, \$100 off a single hotel stay of \$500 or more when booked through Citi Travel. Eh. Uh, 10 points per dollar spent on hotels, car rentals, and attractions booked through Citi Travel. Eh.

This is where it gets really good. This card has some really good earning categories. So three points per dollar spent on restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations, electric vehicle charging station purchases, plus other hotel and air travel. I think this card might have the overall best spin categories of any card... of any card.

Alex: I 100% agree. Yeah. Totally agree.

Jess: Because you're basically getting 3x in every possible category that you're spending most on daily. And then one point per dollar spent on all other purchases. So I feel like the Citi Strata Premier paired with the Citi Strata Elite could be a pretty killer combo for earning those AA miles.

And then last but not least in this category is the Citi Strata card. This one has no annual fee. The points do not transfer to AA and do not transfer one-to-one to all partners. So we're not going to get into all the categories for earning points on everyday spend for this one. This is... this is the one I have because I downgraded my Citi Strata Premier. Like it just spit out and gave me this one. This is not one that I would outright apply for. It's just not good enough to take a 5/24 spot in my opinion.

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

The next two cards I'm going to cover are cashback cards, but they function like the Freedom FlexSM and the Freedom Unlimited[®], where you can earn Citi ThankYou Points, and they can be cashed out, or you can move them to a Citi Strata Premier or a Citi Strata Elite if you have one of those.

And so there's the Citi Double Cash[®]. It has no annual fee and it's really simple. Just a 2%... flat 2% cashback, 1% when you purchase, and 1% when you pay your bill. And so it's kind of giving Freedom Unlimited vibes, but 2% instead of 1 and a half percent.

And then there is the Citi Custom Cash[®]. Again, no annual fee, 5% cashback on your top eligible spend category. And that includes restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, select travel, select transit, select streaming services, drugstores, home improvement stores, fitness clubs, or live entertainment. And that is up to \$500 spent each billing cycle.

This one is unique because it has that home improvement stores category. This is one that's recommended a lot when someone is trying... is going to do like a home renovation. And they know I'm going to be spending a ton of money at Home Depot, or I'm going to be spending a ton of money at Lowe's. This is a... this is one that's often recommended.

Alex: Yeah, and it's like similar to the Flex, where you get the 5% back. The only difference is like the Flex you... This actually has better categories. It's not like...

Jess: And you get to determine it because with the Flex it's like they tell you.

Alex: Like, I don't need 5% back at Norwegian Cruise Lines, you guys. I don't... I don't need that.

Jess: Or American Heart Association.

Alex: But, and this one it's \$500 spent each billing cycle, where the Flex is \$1,500, but it's per quarter. And so it's pretty similar.

Jess: Yeah. All right, so you could make a really good case for some of these cards for your everyday spend and especially if you wanted to pair a couple of them. Like if you wanted to have a Citi Custom Cash, get that 5% back on your

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

top spend category, and then you also had a Citi Strata Elite or a Citi Strata Premier and you could transfer those points out to AA or some of the other Citi transfer partners.

So they've got... they've got a really solid option for cards, and the fact that they added the Strata Elite and another way to earn those points just makes this program that much more valuable.

Alex: Yeah, for sure. I'm actually really impressed with their earning potential on their cards. And if you do value their transfer partners, especially AA, I feel like it is... makes perfect sense for somebody to make some of these cards their everyday spend cards.

All right, so I'm going to talk about combining points and points expiration. So Citi, it's a little... they do things a little differently. First of all, you can combine points among your own cards. So if you have a Citi Strata Elite and the Custom Cash, you just move your points over from your Custom Cash to your Citi Strata Elite, and those points are going to become much, much more valuable.

The interesting thing here is if you moved points to another card, for example, you moved points from your Citi Strata Elite to a Premier because you're like, "Hey, I don't want to keep paying the \$595 annual fee. I just want to do a \$95 annual fee." Like, I feel more comfortable with that.

What's interesting is then you cancel your Citi Strata Elite, your points from your Citi Strata Elite will expire in 60 days. So it's really unique because the points that you earn on each card, they're still tied to that card, even if you move them to a different account. So it's really...

Jess: It's really unique/bad.

Alex: Yes. So you just have to think, okay, if I am going to get rid of my Citi Strata Elite card, I've either got to transfer those points to a transfer partner to avoid losing them in 60 days, or you're just going to want to... yeah, keep the card basically. There's not like a ton of good options. So I don't...

Jess: I was reading about this, and one of the suggestions was to downgrade the Strata Elite instead of completely closing it. So, like if you have a Strata Elite,

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

you could downgrade to just the Citi Strata card. You could transfer your points to your Premier, downgrade to the Citi Strata, no annual fee. And then you keep that credit line open, your points don't expire because you haven't closed the account.

Alex: Yeah, that's a good strategy.

Jess: So I really don't... I really don't see a benefit at all for closing one of these Citi cards if there is a no-annual-fee downgrade option.

Alex: Yeah, if you still have points on the card. If you've used all your points and you're like, Yeah, I'm like kind of done with Citi. Like, kind of only really got it for, you know, just to have for a little while. Otherwise, your points won't expire as long as you have the card. So if you have a Citi Strata Elite or any of those cards and it's open, you're never going to lose those points.

Okay, let's talk about combining your points with somebody else. This is kind of dumb, too, but I mean, we've seen worse. Like Amex, you can't even do it. So, you know, we'll take what we can get, I guess. But nobody beats Capital One because Capital One you can share with anybody, and there's no limits. With... what bank are we on? Citi. With Citi, you can share up to 100,000 points a year. You can also receive up to 100,000 points a year. This is really dumb right here: points expire after 90 days.

Jess: So... That is so weird.

Alex: So it to me it seems like they're just giving themselves more work. I don't know how they build this into everything, but when you go to redeem your points, they pull the ones expiring soonest first. So you don't have to worry about like, okay, well, my, like, let's say Mitch transferred all his points to me, and I go book something, they're going to use his points before they use my points sitting in my account." So I mean, that's nice.

Jess: This seems so overly complicated.

Alex: So overly complicated.

Jess: Just throw us a bone and let us... let them not expire.

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Alex: Yeah, like especially if you're going to have a limit of 100,000 points. Like, that's enough safety net for you there. You don't need to then have them expire. So the key here is you just don't want to transfer points to somebody until you're ready to book because I, I don't know about you, but I would forget. I don't have to keep track of that. I'm just transferring when I'm ready to book.

Once points are transferred to you, you can't then go transfer them to somebody else. You can't like create this chain of never expiring points. Like, "Oh, we'll just transfer them back and forth." No, you won't be able to share them again. So that's it for sharing and combining points. Kind of weird, but it is what it is. Okay, Mom is going to get into transfer partners.

Pam: Yeah, and they've got a lot of good transfer partners. By far, my favorite was when they added American Airlines as a transfer partner because there is none... no other currencies that you can transfer over to American Airlines. I personally have found great value with American Airlines in... sometimes they have some really good sales and just, you know, I just have... I've just... and we all love Qsuites, and we usually that's how we book our Qsuite flights. So it's really good.

I also, another partner I really like a lot, that they have is Turkish Airlines. I love Turkish... flying Turkish Airlines, and you can only transfer with Citi points or Capital One. So, you know, that's it. But let's... the ones... are the transfer partners... These are them.

Most of them, you know, are pretty typical ones that all the others have, but here they are. Aeroméxico one-to-one. Air France and KLM Flying Blue one-to-one. Um, American Airlines, yay, one-to-one. Avianca one-to-one. Cathay Pacific Asia Miles one-to-one. Emirates-five to-four and that's kind of what's happened with Emirates across the board, is that it's not transferring from any flexible currencies at one to one anymore. Uh, Etihad Guest one-to-one. EVA Air one. JetBlue one-to-one. Qantas one-to-one. Qatar Airways one-to-one. Singapore one-to-one. Thai Royal Orchid Plus one-to-one. Our lovely Turkish Airlines one-to-one. Virgin Atlantic, another one I like a lot, one-to-one.

And then we get into the hotels. I've never done any of these with Citi points, but there's the ALL... ALL, the Accor Live Limitless two-to-one transfer. Choice

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Privileges® one-to-two transfer. Leaders Club, don't even know what that is, five-to-one. Uh, Preferred Hotels & Resorts, one-to-four. That is something I would like to check out. That is... there are some really good deals with that. And then Wyndham Rewards, um, one-to-one

So, you know, some good transfer partners. I think most people are most excited about the being able to get more AA miles. And speaking of that, we're going to go on to some of our favorite ways to use these points or partners that we're excited about. I think I already said AA booking Qsuites.

Alex: That's a really hard one to find, though. I haven't seen it in a long time. So...

Pam: Oh, okay.

Jess: It's better... I mean, at this point, I think it's better... they also transfer to Qatar one-to-one. So I think... I think it's better to just transfer to Qatar and book it that way because usually by the time it gets to AA, the availability's gone.

Alex: Yeah. It is cheaper. If you can find it with AA, it's going to be cheaper. It's just... that's how I booked it when I went. But that was a while ago, and it's just gotten really hard to find.

Pam: So just don't bank on...

Alex: I'm going to get this and then book Qatar for 70,000 miles to the Maldives because it's... it's maybe not going to be super likely.

Pam: I find it difficult to find, um, flights to Australia or New Zealand that are not ridiculous. And so my last couple times that I've gone to either of those places, I've used AA miles, and it's, I'm still... It's not like I'm paying cheap, but I'm paying about 115,000 miles on AA, and that's a lot... has been a lot less than on, um, any other... with any other transfer partners. And so, um, that's kind of what I'm holding out and hoping that I can continue to find those flights because it's kind of been my bread and butter for getting to Australia and New Zealand. Alex, what about you?

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Alex: Okay, well obviously, AA is an exciting transfer partner. So we've kind of already talked about that. But I think that Preferred Hotels & Resorts is really interesting. I kind of want to explore this a little bit more. So they transfer one-to-four. So that's pretty... pretty cool.

The... what Preferred Hotels & Resorts is, it's a bunch of independent hotels, kind of all over, more luxury and boutique hotels. There's not like this huge footprint or portfolio, but there's a decent amount. I was looking, I saw some in like Santorini. Nights were like 100... so they start... the highest that I saw when I was just like looking around was 150,000 points a night. So for the one-to-four transfer ratio, that's 37.5 thousand points a night. I think that's a steal if you want to get a nice place to stay in Santorini, or, I mean, and they're all over the world. So...

Jess: I find their website difficult to navigate, and not all of their hotels accept points. And so you have to kind of like find the locations and then within that location, find the hotels that will even accept points. And so, I will say the website is a little bit... a little bit weird. Or maybe you have a secret for us, Alex.

Alex: I don't remember off the top of my head, but there's a different place. You don't search like you're searching for a regular hotel. You have to go to a different spot. Like, I think it either is like "I Prefer" or "award nights." Like, there's another... within their website, there was another place. I wish I could remember off the top of my head, but I haven't looked at it in a few days. But it was like then I could then click on a destination, and it would pull all the hotels, or I could search USA. It makes it so much easier because you can see all you're going to see are the places that accept points.

So it's actually really easy once you get to the right spot, but I will agree with you that it's like... was weird that I had to go find the right spot. So... if I... you know what I'll do? I will find the right spot, and I'll put the link in the show notes so people can just go right to that spot.

So the... people including me. The lowest was 50,000 points a night. So you're looking at just 12.5 thousand points. So I'm... there's like I said, there's not a ton of hotels, but I'm interested to learn more about this program. And the unique thing, too, is they're independent hotels. So a lot of these hotels I've never heard

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

of. So I would then want to like do my research on that. If I find a property that looks interesting, like, "Okay, let me read some reviews. How nice is this place? What are people saying?" There's also...

Jess: It kind of sounds SLH-ish.

Alex: Yeah, it kind of does. But I'm like, is it as nice? I guess time will tell. But, um, yeah, that's kind of the vibe I got, too, which I mean, we love SLH. So if it's like that, this would be a really, really cool way to use your points.

Pam: We need to go on a trip and check them out.

Alex: Yeah, but every property is going to be so different, though. The nice thing, too, is there's like I saw some just in like Texas. I think there was maybe one in Houston area, and I was going to text and be like, "Hey, have you heard of this hotel? Do you know anything about it?" So, I mean there was places in Cabo. They were in Cancun. They were in Europe, the US, like literally all over. So, pretty cool.

Jess: All right, well, Pam already kind of talked about the two that I'm excited about. So AA, obviously. I love AA... some of their sweet spots are great. That's what we have used to book Japan Airlines to Japan both times that we've gone. And so really, really great options for Japan through AA. And then obviously love my Turkish Airlines, US to Istanbul for 65,000 miles in business class, hard to beat that. And then, you know, you don't have to stay in Istanbul. You can just use it as a jumping-off point for somewhere else that you want to go.

One that I've also used Citi ThankYou Points for is Choice Privileges. Pam talked about how that transfer ratio is one-to-two. And so for every 1,000 Citi ThankYou Points, you're getting 2,000 Choice points. Choice hotels in the US aren't really anything to write home about, but abroad, they're actually really nice. So Ted and I stayed at one in Venice, the Hotel Aquarius. It was 20,000 points a night. So we only had to transfer 10,000 Citi ThankYou Points.

Alex: That's amazing.

Jess: And so you can find little sweet spots if you look for them within the Choice program.

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Alex: Yeah, that's a good tip.

Pam: I just realized that my very first transfer from a flexible currency way back when was when I went to Thailand, and my first really points and miles redemption, and it was with Citi points. I just ran... you know how I was at the beginning. I was just randomly applying for things, and I applied for, I think it was called the Citi Prestige then. And, um, got some points and I transferred those over to EVA Air, and we had a stopover in Taipei and then on to Thailand. Really a great airline. Um, I mean, I... I think I came back in, um, business class. That's the best part... that was the really good part of it.

But the only trouble then, and I'd... I'd be willing to give EVA another try, there, if you want to talk about a site that it was hard to use, their site was really hard to use.

Jess: Maybe they've improved it since then. I don't know.

Pam: I'm hoping because it was insane. In fact, I think it's the only time I've ever lost some points because I transferred, I think, more than I used, and I never could figure out how to get them back or what to do with them. So, but everybody thinks that the airline is great. So hopefully, cross fingers that their site has... that the site has improved because the site was one of the worst ever. But this was, you know, the beginning of my journey. So we're talking about, you know, seven, eight years ago, so.

Alex: Well, and I think they're the only ones that transfer to EVA Air, too. And so it's kind of...

Pam: Yeah.

Alex: ...if you want to try it, that's the way... way to do it. So I'd really like... I'd really like to try that too. I believe it was when we had, I think Kyle from Thrifty Traveler, when we had them on, said that was one of his favorite flights he's ever taken. I'm pretty sure that's what he said.

Pam: Yeah. Yes, I just listened to that and...

Ep #168: All About Citi ThankYou® Points

Alex: He mentioned something about it being really great. So I'm like, "I want to try that."

Pam: Yeah. Yep. So anyway, we are all really excited about AA becoming a transfer partner of Citi. And we're also super excited about the new Citi Strata Elite card. It is... has a place in all of our wallets, not mine yet, but it's going to have a place when they approve me. This program has made some great changes, and we are here for it. If you enjoyed today's episode, please leave us a rating and review, and thanks so much for listening.

Thanks so much for listening to *Points Talk*®. Make sure to hit the subscribe or follow button from wherever you're listening so you never miss an episode. Wanna start jet setting even faster? Follow the links in the show notes to learn about everything we discussed in today's episode. And to stay connected and follow along, follow us on Instagram @PointsTalkSquad. We can't wait to see where in the world points and miles take you.