

Ep #175: Using Points for Kids' Sports, Road Trips, and Family Travel



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Alex: Of course, we love points for beachy getaways, visiting a new country, and luxury flights. But we also love them for more practical things, like traveling for kids' sports. Listen in as we share some tips and tricks for using points for road trips, kids' activities, and overnight airport stays.

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.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. So when I got started traveling on points, my goal was to visit family in Chicago. I was looking for Southwest flights there, hopefully with a Companion Pass, somewhere clean and nice to stay. It did not need to be I was not staying at Park Hyatts at this point. A Hyatt Place, a 5,000-point-a-night Hyatt Place, was perfect for what I needed it for.

So if you're in the same boat, whether it's road tripping or like Alex, traveling for kids' sports, listen in as we share some tips to help you save.

Pam: Okay, so we're going to talk about some of the best hotels for these sorts of stays. Truth be told, this is all I stayed in raising a family. This was all we stayed. We even stayed in Motel 6s. I think they still have them. They look they look kind of scary now, but I remember there was a time it was like you could pay \$39 to stay there. And so these are...

Alex: My friend actually recently paid like \$45 to stay somewhere, and she like sent me a video and I said, no, this is not acceptable. You need to be using points. You can stay somewhere way nicer for zero dollars instead of paying \$45 to stay somewhere that maybe isn't safe.

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Pam: Exactly. No, they I look at them now, and I feel like they're all in unsafe locations. So yeah. So the good news about this is that every single brand of hotel has something to offer. There are always budget or not even budget, just family-oriented stays.

And so when we're trying to look for hotels like that, we're looking for complimentary breakfast. I mean, it's expensive taking kids anywhere. So if you can get complimentary breakfast, that's great. Maybe rooms that sleep a little more than, you know, four people or the two people. A kitchenette, if possible. I loved it when we stayed somewhere where I could go get some shopping, and I we didn't have to buy all the soda at the hotel. In those days, it was a motel. You know, all that. And definitely had to have a pool. I mean, how do you take kids anywhere without having a pool?

Jess: Pam, I think I speak for everyone listening right now. I was a little sad when you said breakfast. So, can you just give the people what they want? So you love staying at hotels...

Pam: That offer for free breakfasts. Yes.

Jess: There we go. That's the Pam we know and love.

Pam: I have grown up.

Alex: You'd gotten really good. You have. Like, you never say it anymore.

Pam: I know. I don't know where I got it to begin with. I mean, I have no idea. I said it all the time. I have no idea. And I'll probably still say it sometimes.

Jess: Okay, well, it's my favorite. It's like one of my favorite things you say. So you can't, you've got to at least throw it in there every once in a while.

Pam: Yeah. Okay. Okay. Okay, so some of these hotels, we're going to go through the different hotel brands and talk about the brands that you're looking at. So Marriott. So what you're looking at there, you're looking at SpringHill Suites. They'll get that word suites. That's a huge green flag that it's a perfect hotel for families.

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So SpringHill Suites or TownePlace Suites. I mean, they're not fancy, but they're they're nice. My favorite of all time when we were raising our kids, I thought this was luxury staying, was a Marriott Residence Inn. I thought this was this was our luxury stay. And I remember their breakfasts, that's for you, Jess, were amazing. I mean, they were so much better than, and they still are. I well, I don't know, I haven't stayed in one for a long time. I think what got me with their breakfast were the was the oatmeal with all the different toppings. And it just seemed elevated.

And they also would have a evening, they were kind of trying to get more business travelers. So they'd have this evening little offering of some food. Lots of times it was pizza and a salad, perfect for my kids, so I didn't have to pay for dinner too. So I loved Marriott Residence Inns.

Alex: You know, I have this memory of being a kid, and we must have been, so when I was younger, my mom's side of the family is from Arizona. We were in California. We would all meet up in San Diego area. Seems like we did that a few different times. I remember staying in a Residence Inn and I feel like they were kind of like, not like normal hotel rooms. They were kind of like little individual, almost like condoey things. And there was I remember eating dinner in there. I remember they had like a basketball court. They had a pool.

Like to me, I thought this was a fancy resort even as a kid. I was like, this is so cool. They've got basketball hoops and we can play basketball here and then go swimming and then go get pizza at night. Like, I was living the life on those trips to San Diego and staying at whatever Residence Inn it was down there. Like, I don't even know if it's still there, but we, I loved it.

Yep, that's, you know, Residence Inn life, oh, those memories.

Pam: Yep, that's, you know, Residence Inn life, oh, those memories. Okay, and then so let's move on to Hilton. Another one that I always loved, and I thought I was really living it up was when we stayed at Embassy Suites. I mean, they were always pretty nice. And again, you're talking about suites. I mean, for a parent to have a bedroom or two bedrooms and then have a living area, or even if the kids are sleeping on the couch out there, and you've got your own

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bedroom, two TVs, it's like crazy. I mean, it's so nice. I mean, it really is. It's getting me kind of psyched up to want to do those again. You know?

Alex: Well, it's like it's just kind of nostalgic, too.

Pam: It is.

Alex: I remember, I haven't stayed at Embassy Suites in a long time, but I so they I don't know if they do this anymore, but I've stayed at one in like the San Francisco Bay Area for like a basketball tournament when I was in high school. And I remember they had an egg station with made-to-order eggs.

Pam: Yes, the ones I stayed at, too.

Alex: And I was like, this is a good breakfast at a place like this.

Pam: No, they are. They're really good. And usually it was the ones that I've stayed at, it's like the um, you looked down into the main part of the hotel. So all the doors were on the inside, but they're kind of in a circular thing. I thought they were amazing. I thought I was they even as a young adult, or I thought they were pretty cool.

Home2 Suites, I like those. They're really nice. I've stayed at a couple of those that are really nice. Homewood Suites, Hilton Garden Inn, Hampton Inn, those are the hotels that you're looking at for these sorts of stays. And then IHG has the Staybridge Suites, Candlewood Suites, Holiday Inn Express.

I mean, for me, if I'm taking these kind of stays, I'm looking at something that has the word suites in it. I once had a granddaughter tell me, this is just kind of a side.

Alex: I knew you were going to go with this story, and it's so funny.

Pam: You know this story.

Alex: Yes.

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Pam: It's the funniest story. So we were walking in Hawaii, and let me just say that this little granddaughter has had quite the life of staying in hotels that I didn't even know were around until a couple years ago. And she says, well, grandma, when it comes to hotels, my dad told me, never stay in a hotel that has in a place that has the word inn in it.

Alex: And she said that has I-N-N. I think she spelled it out.

Pam: Yeah. And I'm like, really? I said, why, Alexa? She says, oh, they have really scratchy sheets. And I just said, I said, Alexa, if I could tell you some of the hotels I've stayed in and all the inns I've stayed in, I said, and some scarier hotels that I've stayed in, you would be shocked.

Alex: I think she was what, like 10 or something? Like she was young, so it was so funny.

Pam: Yeah, yeah, it was so funny. It became a big joke in our family. Okay, and then on to one of our favorites is Hyatt. And love a Hyatt place. There is a Hyatt place near Denver airport, and I can stay there and I don't need sleeping for six people, but it just has really good decor. It's a newer one, and it costs me like \$100 if I don't want to use points for it. So it's really a great stay.

So Hyatt places are just amazing. Unfortunately, not every one of them has complimentary breakfast anymore, but a lot still do. And then Hyatt House. And we stayed at a Hyatt House just recently, my husband and I, when we were up in Anchorage, when we went on our Alaska cruise this last summer. And you know, it was great.

You know, I mean, I love a bougie hotel. I mean, I really do love a bougie hotel, but there are nights where I could save a lot of points because if I'm just going somewhere and I'm just going there to sleep at night and I'm not going to be spending a lot of time in the hotel, you know, and now with some of the Hyatt changes that are coming, I might be doing this more often. I may be looking at some of these stays instead of, you know, kind of limiting my bougie stays, just because I won't have that many Hyatt points.

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Alex: Especially if you can find one that's newer. They're nice hotels. They're clean, they're nice, they're comfortable.

Pam: It's a bed.

Alex: Like, I mean, we all know how bougie Pam is, and she's fine to stay at these places. So if it's good enough for Pam, it's good enough for me.

Pam: That's right.

Jess: That's my motto. That's my life motto. If it's good enough for Pam, it's good enough for me.

Pam: One thing I do want to mention is that Marriott, Hilton, IHG are a lot easier to find these hotels across the country and across, internationally. Hyatt has a smaller footprint. So, but you know, you know us, we stayed at a lot of Hyatts predominantly, so they don't have that small of a footprint.

So anyway, so these are, you know, really look at these hotels. And honestly, guys, I promise you, I'm going to be staying in more of these in the future because I am going to be very having a lot of scarcity about my Hyatt points and wanting to save them for my aspirational stays in aspirational areas. So, okay, Jess is going to tell us how we can how you can book these stays.

Jess: Yeah, so obviously you can use points. You can just use straight up points. Like we always say, you do you. But we try to kind of leverage our free night awards that we get with various credit cards for these stays. The exception to that is Hilton, because Hilton's free night awards do not have a cap on them. So like you can redeem a Hilton free night award for the Maldives or Bora. So like that's an instance where we're not going to redeem a Hilton free night award for an Embassy Suites, for example.

But the other three brands, we really do try and like save our free night awards for this exact type of stay. Now, points can vary greatly. So, Marriott or Hilton, you're looking at like 50,000 to 70,000 points probably for a more basic or mid-tier stay. Hyatt, I don't know what it's going to be once the new changes come out. I would say probably like 15,000 Hyatt points is a safe estimate.

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Maybe less, depending on when you're traveling, but that's probably a safe estimate for some of these stays.

And so with Hyatt, for example, you get they have those category one to four Hyatt free night awards. And so those are really nice because you can redeem them at any Hyatt category one to four. So not as valuable as Hilton, but you can still find some great properties, especially if this is your, you know, if traveling, staying in an airport hotel, following kids around for their sports, like this is the perfect type of stay to redeem this type of free night award.

So you get one of those every year on your card member anniversary if you hold the Hyatt personal card. If you spend \$15,000 on the Hyatt personal card in a calendar year, you get another free night award. You get one if you hit, we call it Hyatt Bingo. What is the..?

Alex: I think it's the Brand Explorer.

Jess: Brand Explorer. So once you've stayed at five unique Hyatt brands, you get another one. You get another one. It's a milestone reward at 30 elite nights. And so you get another one then. What my husband and I did, we've had the Hyatt cards for a very long time at this point, but when we originally opened them, we opened them around the same time, so that our annual free night award consistently hits the same time every year. And then we can kind of now you can gift them. So he can send his free night award to me and I could book a two-night stay or vice versa, I send mine to him, he books a two-night stay. So that's a really good trick.

Alex: Hey, do you want to say real quick like how you book a two-night stay with free night certificates with one reservation? 'Cause that sometimes can be confusing for people.

Jess: Yes. So Hyatt has what's called a Pay My Way feature, and this you can use this anytime. Like, if you want to use a combination of cash and points, a combination of cash and free night certificates, a combination of points and free night certificates, basically any sort of combination you can think of, you can book it through Hyatt Pay My Way.

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And so let's say I wanted to book a two-night stay, I would have my husband gift his free night award to me. I would go into my account, put in the hotel, put in the two nights that I want to stay, and then instead of searching for a point a point stay, you would just search like you're searching for a cash stay. But when you look at the rates, there will be like a little box option that says Pay My Way under the standard rooms. And so we want a one king room. I click Pay My Way and then I'm able to kind of select the combination that I want. So I could select my free night award and then his, which would now be my free night award. And then I'd be able to book both nights under one reservation.

I will say it's a lot easier to do this from a laptop or a desktop. I find sometimes the mobile app doesn't always have that feature available. So if you go on your app and you don't see it, I suggest like trying from a desktop or a laptop.

Alex: One thing I would say too, one other thing about that is make sure when you're doing Pay My Way, you're choosing like the rate. So like member rate, standard rate, whatever. Make sure you're choosing the rate that has even though you're using points, has the cancellation policy that's like the best one. So like 48 hours or something like that.

Because there was one time when I did this and I accidentally chose the first one that came up, and it was the non-refundable, and I ended it wasn't actually the right dates. So I quickly, like instantly got on Hyatt chat, and I was like, hey, I literally just did this, and I did the wrong thing. Can you please fix this? And they were like, oh yes, no problem. We'll fix that for you. And then I rebooked it at the right one. But so just something to keep in mind, don't make the same mistake I did.

Jess: Don't click the advance purchase rate. That's a good that's a good suggestion. I never do that because I'm like things are too with a family, things are too unpredictable to book a non-refundable rate.

So I feel like Hyatt has made a lot of improvements in recent years for being able to gift an award, being able to use the Pay My Way function, and so it's a lot easier than it used to be to do all these things.

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So that's it for Hyatt. And then for Marriott, there are a couple of cards that also come with free, well, a lot of their cards come with free night awards, but they have different levels. So they have like a 35k free night award, a 50k free night award, an 85k free night award. By K, I mean that's how many points each certificate is worth. And so, like you could if you have a 35,000 free night certificate, you could redeem that at a hotel that runs up to 35,000 Marriott points a night.

And today they announced that you can now, you used to be able to top up your rewards with 15,000 Marriott points, now it's 25,000 Marriott points. And so a 35k free night certificate could be really worth up to 60,000 points if you use some of your own points to top that up. I would say the 35k free night certificates are probably going to be the ones that you're using most for these types of stays, for like airport hotels or traveling with your kids or anything like that. And so you can get those with the Marriott Bonvoy® Boundless card or the American Express® Bonvoy Business. And so just, if you have any Marriott cards, that's a great one.

There's also, I feel like pretty regularly, maybe once a year, they have the offer for five free night awards with the, which one is that one? I thought that was the Boundless.

Alex: It's the Boundless.

Pam: Usually the Boundless.

Alex: Chase Bonvoy Boundless.

Jess: Yeah. So the Boundless around once a year will have an offer where instead of getting points as your welcome offer, you can earn five free night awards. They are 50k free night awards, but again, you can top them up so each could theoretically be worth up to 75,000 points each. And so if you're really, if you are like a road tripper or a sports parent, I think that offer is really popular with that subset of people within our community.

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Alex: Especially if you want to stay somewhere that's a little bit nicer too. Like, now that you can get up to 75,000 points, that just made that... like it's not, I hope it doesn't mean a Marriott devaluation is coming

Pam: Exactly. I know, because that's the biggest

Alex: 'Cause when do we ever get good news? Do you know what I mean?

Jess: Hey, how could Marriott devalue any more? Ok?

Alex: That's true. I think that maybe they're like oh, you know what, we're going to do something nice since Hyatt just blew up their award chart. Let's... or, you know, devalued, let's give people some goodness here. I don't know.

Jess: So that's a really popular one with the road trippers and the sports parents and the Disney people in our community.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: The other the other hotel chain is IHG. I actually think IHG is a great option for this type of stay. And with the IHG personal or the business premier credit card, you get a 40k free night certificate every year on your card member anniversary. That can also be topped up with IHG points and I don't think there is a limit for those. So you could use that for, you know, a 70,000, a 100,000 point stay with IHG, you would just have to make up the difference with your points.

I, so I have the personal IHG card, and I consistently use my free night award to stay at airport hotels just because sometimes if I am flying out early, if I'm flying out really early in the morning, or if I'm arriving really late before my next flight, I just want the convenience of staying by the airport. And so those I have found to be really valuable when it comes to those airport hotel stays.

I think it's worth keeping a lot of these cards because the annual fee, you can often offset the annual fee completely just by redeeming these free night awards. Like for example, my personal IHG card, it's either, I think it's a \$99 or a \$95 annual fee, but I'm getting a free night award every year that I'm redeeming

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to stay at these airport hotels that would cost me more than that if I paid out of pocket. And so, and that's the case like with the Hyatt card too, the free night every year.

So I think with a lot of these, these are keeper cards for us. And we're not these aren't like these aren't daily spend cards that we're that we're whipping out at the grocery store, but they are cards that we're using when we stay at these properties or that we're benefiting from with the free night awards that come with them.

Pam: Yeah, I don't see my I haven't yet got rid of one of these cards. I keep thinking, oh, if there's some, you know, great offer, but the other thing too is with some of these cards, is I applied before there were a lot of rules. So, for me to get rid of some of them, I wouldn't be able to get them again. So I'm just enjoying my free night stays.

Jess: You're like, I'm too scared to close it because what if I apply and I get denied and I and then I lose out on my free night award every year?

Pam: Exactly, yeah.

Alex: Okay, so another way that you can book these stays, let's say you maybe you don't have some of these hotel cards yet or you've used your free night awards for other stays. One really good way to pay for these types of stays is through your hotel credits that come with some of your higher annual fee credit cards.

So first of all, the Citi Strata EliteSM. This is one of the best ones, I think, for stays like this. So if you have the Citi Strata Elite, that comes with a \$300 hotel credit every calendar year. So how this one works is it's for stays of two nights or more, which in most cases, like when we're traveling for kids, my kids' sports, we're usually staying two nights. Occasionally, it'll be a little bit more. Every now and then we've gone up to Idaho for a tournament for maybe one night, but typically it's a two-night stay.

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These have to be booked in the Citi travel portal. And what's really nice is at checkout, that's when your \$300 comes off, like right away. There's no statement credit. You will see those savings instantly. And what's really cool is this is a calendar year credit. So you can double-dip that credit that first year. So if you open the card, let's say you open it now, you could use that credit as soon as you get the card, and then come January 1st, you could use it again before your next annual fee hits. So that's kind of a nice little trick with some of these types of credits.

I really like this one because it doesn't matter where you stay. There's no stipulations of, oh, this has to be like a the Edit credit, The Edit Hotel or a Fine Hotels + Resorts®. Like, I recently used this credit actually for I wasn't using it for myself, what's really nice too is you can use these for anybody. I already had a hotel or an Airbnb planned for going to my niece's wedding, but my sister was getting hotels for some of the bridesmaids. And so I was like, hey, I have this credit that I have me and Mitch both have the card. I don't have a plan for it if you want to, I can book it for the girls and you could just pay me back the difference. And so we were able to do that. They stayed at a La Quinta. So nothing super fancy.

So it was it's really great for those types of stays because there's no... you can use it at the cheaper hotels, which are usually staying at for like road tripping or your kids' sports. So I really like that one.

The other one that we really like is the Delta Stays credit. You guys, I have had a Delta card for years and I think this is a fairly newish, like in the last few years, maybe the last two to three years, this they revamped the Delta cards and that's when this came out. And I was always like, a Delta Stays credit or like a Delta vacation. Like I was thinking you had to use them for like a Delta vacation with like a combination of flight. Yeah, and I'm like, I'm never doing that. And then I learned more about it. I was like, oh, I can use this for just a normal hotel stay. Okay, this is actually pretty cool.

So, depending on your Delta card that you have, that will depend the amount of the amount your credit is. So for example, like the American Express® Delta

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Gold card, it's a \$100 credit. The Platinum's \$150, the reserve is \$200, and then the business cards also have this credit. And what's interesting is though they have a higher credit. So I guess they're really wanting those business travelers to be able to get a hotel stay on their travels. So the Delta Business Gold, it's \$150. The Delta Platinum is \$200, and the Delta Business Reserve is \$250.

So what's really great about this one is it can be used on a one-night stay. Like, you, I'm actually planning on using this one pretty soon. So Mitch has the Delta Gold Business. I have the Delta Gold or the Delta Platinum Business. And I have a trip coming up soon where I have a really, really early flight out of the airport. And so I was thinking, hey, I'm just going to book a like a Hyatt Place or something like that right by the airport. It's like a mile away, and then I can sleep in a little bit longer and not have to get there so early, and I won't even have to pay for it.

So really, really nice that it's a one-night stay. You do have to do a pre-paid booking. So make sure you're doing pre-paid. Same thing with the Citi hotel credit. It has to be a pre-paid booking. But you can book refundable. It's not like it's non-refundable. You just got to make sure you're doing pre-paid booking, and you're paying with your Delta card.

This is also a calendar-year credit, so you can also double-dip on this one. So I, I mean, I personally think this is the easiest hotel credit to use. Like one-night stay, and it's it's the Delta stays their interface, it's basically Expedia. So if you find it on Expedia, like everything's available there. So it's pretty great.

And then the last one we're going to talk about that would be good because personally we don't feel like The Edit credit and the Fine Hotels + Resorts, those aren't the kind of traveling for your kids' sports, road trips, those really aren't the ideal time to use those.

Jess: Those aren't even going to be, there's no The Edit hotel for like Middle of Nowhere, Utah.

Alex: We're not going to find an Edit credit in Idaho Falls, Idaho. So the next one though is the Bilt \$400 hotel credit. So if you have the Bilt Palladium card, that

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comes with two \$200 hotel credits. One from January to June, another from July to December. It has to be a two-night stay.

I am much less impressed with this one than the other two because \$200 for a two-night stay is kind of meh in my opinion. Like, I feel like the other ones, like the \$300 Citi one, you could almost cover a whole two nights, depending where you're staying. The Delta one you can cover a night. This is like, I don't know, it's I'm not too excited about it.

And if you just gave me straight \$400, sweet. If it was one credit, that would be awesome. But two \$200, I'm I don't get too excited about it. But it's there if you want to use it.

Jess: You can redeem \$100 of Bilt cash to offset another \$100. So that's just a tip.

Alex: So you could get like a \$300.

Pam: Jess has become our resident Bilt expert. This is the funny thing is that I've paid my rent with a Bilt card for forever, but their whole rollout has me completely boggled. I still don't get it. And Jess has got it down. So she is always schooling us on how what we can do with Bilt. Thank heavens one of three of us knows that program well.

Alex: Hey, I know a lot, I just don't just didn't know that.

Pam: I don't.

Jess: Yeah, so you can redeem \$100 of Bilt cash and get like an additional \$100 off.

Alex: So it'd be like a \$300.

Jess: It would be like \$300 off twice a year.

Pam: That makes it much better.

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Jess: And like for someone like me, like I have more Bilt cash than I need, and so I'm like, well that's an easy decision to redeem that \$100. Other people may not have as much overflow, but you know, it's an option.

Alex: Yeah. Well, that is helpful to know. So anyway, so that is kind of our favorite ways to book these stays are through those hotel credits or using your free night certificates. Of course, you can always use your points. I've used points for these days too. There's nothing wrong with doing that.

I just think like for me, it's shocking the amount of people that I travel, like that are other parents, like teammates of my kids' parents who are going to these tournaments and either they're maybe they're getting an Airbnb or they're staying at a hotel and I'm like, how are you guys? Like literally you guys, I know people who go down to St. George, Utah three times in one month for the for either like a football tournament, like a seven-on-seven football tournament or a baseball tournament. And then the next week they're at a soccer tournament.

I'm like, how are you spending so much money doing this? One, and two, even if you can afford it, why would you want to spend your money on something you don't have to? Like there's it's so easy to get a hotel card. Literally, if that's all you do. You're like, I'm going to open a Hyatt card and I'm going to use the free night certificate to get a free night every year. Like that is something worth doing in my opinion, if you do nothing else is getting a few of these hotel stays covered a year.

Pam: That is something, Alex, that boggles me every time I go to one of your kids' tournaments. I'm looking around at all these parents and, you know, it's not that they don't just have one or two kids. They're bringing all the kids. They've got to feed all these kids. They've got to entertain them.

Alex: They're taking work off to go down there.

Pam: They've got gas, they've got snacks. If I, you know, it's like people, if you're out there doing that, at least get some cards so you don't have to pay for your stays. It's just, you know, and get free breakfast. Get a complimentary breakfast. It's mind-boggling.

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Alex: Yeah.

Pam: That's my rant.

Jess: Pam is the one who's providing all the snacks for the kids at the tournament with her DoorDash credits.

Alex: All right, so next we're going to all share like our go-to hotels and our favorite ways to book stay these sort of stays. So Jess, why don't you go first?

Jess: Yeah, so I don't have I don't have the kids travel sports issue in our household, but I do have the airport hotel issue like I've talked about. Another thing is, we my mom is from Louisiana. We drive to Louisiana every year for Thanksgiving, and the town that she's from, there are no Hyatt options. And so that's one where we are consistently having to find another option. And we actually use a credit.

We have been using a credit that wasn't mentioned. It's the \$50 annual hotel credit that comes with the Chase Sapphire Preferred®. So that's where you book through the Chase portal, you charge it to your Chase Sapphire Preferred, and then you get a \$50 statement credit and that's available annually on your card member anniversary.

And so that has come in really handy for these types of days because we're normally staying at a Home2 Suites, that's our go-to, which is a Hilton brand. And, you know, it's only \$90, \$100 for a night. And so getting \$50 off, like I'm saving 50% on this hotel stay that I would anyways.

Alex: And it's a one night too. And so that's what's nice about that credit is you're just using, you know, a one-night stay.

Jess: But I did do something a little creative for this Thanksgiving. We're going to see how it works out, but I actually used my Citi Strata Elite \$300 credit and that's a minimum of two nights, but I was like, well, I could use the \$50 credit and it would still be like \$50 to \$60 out of pocket or I could book two nights with my city credit and it would be covered completely even though we're not staying two nights. So I'm just going to go one night and then hopefully just check out on

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the app the next day and we're not actually going to stay the two nights, but I'm getting a free stay. So, that's an option.

Alex: And that works out really good too if you're like, I didn't I don't know another way I'm going to use this credit. Like 'cause you don't want it to go to waste.

Jess: So yeah. Well, and then and then we have the hotel room for the whole day. You know, and so it's like we don't have to like rush out and be out by 11 a.m. or 12 for checkout. We can kind of take it easy and then take our time, you know.

Alex: Yeah. I think that's a smart idea. Yeah. I really like that idea sometimes of having that extra hotel night if it's cheap for that very reason. Like there's times where we've been in at a soccer tournament and the last game has been championship game is maybe at 4 or 5. And if I'm not at a Hyatt place and I don't have my Globalist 4 p.m. checkout, I'm like, great. Now what are we going to do all day long till this game that doesn't start till 4 or 5? So that is a really a good point of, you know, making it so you can have that extra time in the hotel room. Ok Mom, how about you?

Pam: Okay. Well, for me, I'm primarily using it for airport stays, again, live an hour away from Denver airport. If I've got a really early morning flight, I will sometimes have a certificate where I can stay at the Westin, which is really nice, really, really convenient, walk across.

Alex: Yeah, that one's so they it doesn't get better than that one with the convenience.

Pam: Yeah, it doesn't, but the price to stay there is like \$400. So that doesn't, you know, jive with my budget.

Alex: Yeah, for a one-night stay where you're literally just sleeping there, it doesn't make sense.

Pam: So, unless I'm staying there with someone and they'll pick up half of it or something like I think we've done before, Alex, or I've done with Kelly. But, so I

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will usually stay, like I said, there is a Hyatt Place that I do really like that's close, and I can take the shuttle over in the morning. So that's primarily what I do or wherever the grandkids are staying for their tournament. We went last year down in St. George, and we've been gone up to Idaho Falls with a tournament. I think that was Idaho Falls, we went with...

Alex: Yeah, it was.

Pam: Yeah. And so just wherever they're playing, it's like it's just so nice. It's such an easy yes when you don't have to pay for the hotel that you're that you're staying at too.

So Alex, tell us, you're probably the queen of doing this. So tell us all about what you do.

Alex: Okay, so it depends on where we're going and what hotels are available. So, I have between Mitch and I, we get four Marriott free night certificates a year. I kind of think maybe we could the hard part is sometimes these St. George tournaments, that if you depending what day your team is assigned to play, you could be there for four nights or three nights. So I like to keep four and then we use those. I like for any of these options, usually if there's a SpringHill Suites and I haven't used my Marriott free nights, I like to use those for that.

SpringHill Suites, I like it because we'll get two queens, and then they have like a couch, but then it has a trundle bed. And so that's nice. My younger two will sleep on that and then the older two get a bed and Mitch and I get a bed.

What I like about SpringHill Suites is I have found that I like their breakfast a little bit more than Hyatt Place. And not like it's this huge difference by any means, but they'll like have like real potatoes, not like hash browns, or like the little frozen cubed hash browns. They'll have actual real potatoes and they'll have tortillas with salsa and you can make like a breakfast burrito or they'll have like, what's the other thing? Biscuits and gravy. Like they have the waffle station where the kids can make their waffle. And my kids really like that more so than here's a plate of waffles that have been sitting here and are soggy. You know, they get like a good fresh waffle. So we like that for that reason. We also do a lot

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of Hyatt Place, obviously, when we can. And partly staying at Hyatt Place so I can earn elite nights to keep my status.

So we'll do that. But a lot of times if there's the toss up between the two, sometimes I'll pick SpringHill Suites instead of Hyatt Place. It depends on the city too and like, okay, I know this one is a little nicer or this one's newer. I'll sometimes I'll Google and I'll look up like when was this hotel built? And then I'll be like, ooh, this hotel was only built a couple years ago. We're going to stay here versus this one that was built in 1997, you know.

Occasionally, like we've done a Holiday Inn Express or we recently stayed at a Home2 Suites in Phoenix using I actually used my Sapphire Preferred credit for that one too, Jess, my \$50 one. But like and I really like Home2 Suites. I feel like the rooms are pretty spacious and they have like little kitchens in them. The but I'm not going to use Hilton my Hilton points for that. That is strictly like, okay, I'm using a hotel credit from somewhere, like my Sapphire Preferred credit or my Citi credit or Delta Stays credit when I stay at a place like that.

Yeah, I, that's pretty much how I do it. I try to use my free night certificates when I can. If I can't, then I'll use points. But I don't use Marriott points for these days. The only points that I because Marriott charges so much and I don't have a huge surplus of Marriott points, it's like if I'm using Marriott points, I'm going to save them for an aspirational stay.

But I will use Hyatt points for these types of stays because hopefully it stays this way, you they're my stays could be like 12,000, 15,000 points. I can get a pretty decent return cent per point when I'm doing, you know, using my Hyatt points for a stay like this.

The other thing too is it is shocking. You would think like, you know you're talking about airport hotels like, oh, a \$100, \$100, a night or so. Tournament hotels are not \$100, a night. Like, sometimes the SpringHill Suites has been, I'll look it up and it's like \$300 a night. And I'm like, that's insane. So for a \$95 annual fee and I'm staying somewhere for \$300, that's an amazing return.

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And I'm actually super excited about the ability to top it off with 25,000 points because there are some Residence Inns in some of these locations that we go to that are brand new. And I'm like, oh, we can stay there instead of the SpringHill Suites and we'll stay at the brand new place. So I'm excited about that change. But yeah, that's that's kind of the route that we go when we're traveling for kids' sports.

Pam: Well, both of you and everybody out there listening, you are so lucky that you can use points and miles, credit card benefits, free night certificates, all these things for your sports, your tournaments, whether your kid has a dance recital, whether you're road tripping, whatever. I mean, I was reduced to a \$39 Motel 6. So, you know, you guys are getting to stay in a lot better places.

Just don't forget to utilize these credits and all of these things. Make them work for you. And don't forget to share this episode with your fellow road trip warriors and travel ball families to help them save more, too.

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