

Ep #187: Mid-Year Check-In: Points and Miles Changes



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Alex: We're only about halfway through 2026, and there have already been some major changes in the world of points and miles. Keep listening to hear all about them.

Jess: Hey, everyone. We recorded today's mid-year check-in episode before all of the refresh changes to the Chase Sapphire Preferred® came out. So if you want to hear all about those, tune in to last week's episode, where we covered that plus a couple of new offers.

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. All right, 2026 is about halfway over, so it is time for our mid-year check-in. Today, we're diving into some of the changes in the points and miles world that have been announced or have already gone into effect in 2026 so far. We have a lot to cover. Unfortunately, every year I hope, "Okay, we're going to do our mid-year check-in, I hope there's not much to say," and every year I'm disappointed, and we have way too much to say.

I want to just give a disclaimer. This is not an exhaustive list of all of the changes in 2026. We chose a handful of the ones that we think have been the most impactful to our audience. And so Alex is going to kick us off with some of the big Chase changes that have happened this year.

Alex: Yeah. I mean, Chase, wow, Chase was really, 2026 was the year they really wanted to shake things up, and they did. So they, just a lot of rules completely changed in overhauls. So now, this is a good change. We'll start with the good news. You can now hold both the Sapphire, the Sapphire Preferred,

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and the Sapphire Reserve®. You can have a, earn the welcome offer on both of them. No more 48-month rule, but now there's some lifetime language that we're seeing. That is definitely the downside. I know Jess, you tried for Ted to get the Sapphire Reserve, right?

Jess: Yeah. So he hasn't had, we both got the Sapphire Reserve when it first came out. I think it was like 2016. We both got the Sapphire Reserve, and I tried. You know, I'm on my third Sapphire Reserve. I got in, I got in before this lifetime language rule took effect, but Ted didn't. You know, Amex®, their lifetime language is more like a seven-year rule. And so I, in my head, I'm thinking, "Okay, he hasn't had this card since 2017. That was nine years ago." But no, I tried for him, and he got the pop-up saying that, you know, he's had the card before. I'm hoping that eventually this might change.

I think the most frustrating thing is they just did a complete refresh of the Sapphire Reserve. It's not even the same card it was when it first came out. You know, so that's what's frustrating to me. It's like, this is a completely different card than when it first launched. It just seems a little, it seems really strict to not allow anyone to earn the welcome. I mean, he could still get the card; he just wouldn't get the welcome offer. But y'all.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: You know we're not paying \$795 and not getting a welcome offer. So for now I'm holding off. I'm hoping that maybe they adjust their approval algorithm in the future to allow you to get it again.

Alex: I think the thing that is somewhat promising is when the Reserve, like the refresh came out, they, you couldn't have both the Sapphire Preferred and Reserve. Well, you could hold both of them, but you couldn't earn a welcome offer on both of them. And that rule has changed. And so hopefully, I'm really hopeful that they're still just working it out and they're still figuring out, "Okay, what works best? What, what should we be doing here?" And it's not like, "Well, this is it and we're never going to change it." Because I do think that was an amazing change for the better to let people earn a welcome offer on both of them. And I've never had the Sapphire Reserve, so I will be getting it.

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And then other big change, I think this one was kind of hard on all of us. There's new rules with the Ink Cash® and the Ink Unlimited®. You guys know we are obsessed with these cards. So this, this was a bummer. The new rules state that new card member bonus may not be available to you if you have ever had this card or any Chase for Business card without an annual fee. So, seemingly, it sounds like a once-per-lifetime type of rule.

The keyword here, though is may not be available. We are seeing them being less strict if you're applying with an EIN, an LLC, or an actual business. So if you're not a sole proprietor, then your odds of getting approved are much higher. Like getting approved for a second one or even a third one. I know Jess has, you recently got approved for an Ink Preferred®, which has the same rule.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: But theirs is just if you've ever had this card.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: I know you have got one again by using your EIN and LLC to be approved, right?

Jess: Yeah, I think what's hardest about the Ink Cash and Ink Unlimited is that if you do have a sole proprietorship, it sort of seems like they're making you choose between one or the other. And that is tough.

Alex: Which it's so unfortunate because they have different benefits. And I think a lot of business owners, not even for, not people who are doing what we were doing, that actually want these cards for their business, because they're both great cards. These are both cards that I've had, and I've kept because I like the 1.5x on everything with the Unlimited. That's actually the business card we use for our business for the three of us. And then the Ink Cash is great for the 5x at office supply stores. And so it's just really unfortunate that people have to choose.

Jess: Yeah. And so it seems like you have to, if you've never had these cards before, you have to kind of choose which one you want to start with. I would personally choose the Ink Cash because a lot of us have like a Freedom

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Unlimited® that also earns 1.5x on everything or a Capital One Venture or Capital One Venture X that earns 2x on everything. I think the Ink Cash's benefits are a little bit more unique.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: But you know, you used to be able to get both. You used to be able to get multiple of both. And so to go from that to this was a bummer.

Pam: That's the thing that was disappointing. I think that's the hardest thing that's happened this year. That was just a bummer.

Alex: Yeah. It's just to go from being able to get both multiple times to now you can get one of the two, and you can only do one is really hard. So I think that's just a really big push for people to, if you've been considering starting a business, creating an LLC, getting that EIN, which an EIN is free to get, that right there is a very strong motivator to get those things in order so you can get more of these cards.

Jess: I think 2026 is going to be the year that Ted gets an LLC.

Alex: There we go.

Jess: Congrats, Ted, you're getting an LLC.

Alex: Yeah, I probably should be doing that for Mitch as well. Another change was the Ink Business card referrals. So now business owners must be new Chase for Business card customers. So, for example, if I'm wanting to refer a business card to Mitch, like the Ink Preferred, and he already had an Ink Cash, and now he's wanting the Ink Preferred, I'm not going to earn a welcome offer from referring him because he's not a new customer.

Jess: You mean you're not going to earn referral points?

Pam: Referral bonus.

Alex: Yes. Yes, I'm not going to earn referral points because he's already a customer with them. So that was really unfortunate because we would do a lot of opening an Ink Cash, referring, or whatever Ink card, and referring each other

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back and forth to earn a lot of points. So you know, we still love these cards. These are keeper cards for us. They're great, great cards. So definitely worth getting these cards and, you know, you can still earn a lot of points by opening them, but it's not what it used to be.

Jess: Well, and just to note on the referrals, we have, if you want to support Points Talk® Squad, we have affiliate links that do not have these referral rules. We earn a commission from the banks, not referral points. And so if you're in that position where you're like, "Well, there's no point in me referring my spouse because they're already a business account holder." We would love it if you would use one of our links. That's what I, all of our, all of us and our spouses now just use the Points Talk Squad links.

Pam: Yeah. Okay, well, I've got more of the bad news and changes for this year. This one hit pretty hard. And that's a Hyatt award chart. On May 20th, it went from three redemption level tiers to five. Okay, honestly, this hurts my brain. I can't even wrap my head around this. Now you've got, maybe, when I start using it, it will not hurt so much, but right now it's bad. We, we went from low, we, from three, we went to five. We now have lowest, low, moderate, upper, top. I mean that's just way too confusing. I mean, why did we have to go to, why is that necessary? Keep the three, change all you want, but don't do five. I mean that's just like, oh, it just, these kind of changes just drive me crazy because there's a lot in credit card points and miles that can hurt your brain. And we didn't need, we didn't need something else.

It's not fully dynamic pricing, but the range of points required really is, varies wildly. So peak nights used to top out at 45,000 points a night at a category eight property. They now top out at a whopping 75,000 points. Now, that is huge when we're talking about Hyatt properties. But then I try to keep it in perspective and say, "Okay, a Marriott property is going to be about 150,000." So you know, it's okay that they're doing this, but we just, you know, loved our Hyatt so much.

Alex: We've been treated so good by Hyatt for so long.

Pam: So spoiled.

Jess: Yeah.

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Pam: Treated so good. And we just counted on Hyatt. And even now, it's not that bad, but we just wanted it to stay the same.

Jess: No, it's actually really bad. That's how I feel.

Alex: Well, no, I see what you're saying, Mom, where it's like, Hyatt and Marriott are charging insane prices. IHG can really vary widely. But the difference is, is the welcome offers on the Marriott and the Hilton cards are comparable to their nights. Hyatt is doing terrible welcome offers. They have for years, even when their award chart was what it used to be. So I just feel like they really need to bump up their welcome offers to offset how terrible this is.

Pam: Yeah, they really do. And honestly, I've never used a Hyatt welcome offer thinking, "Oh, wow, this is really going to fund my Hyatt stays." I've always used my cards that earn Chase Ultimate Rewards®, transfer them over to Hyatt, and that's what funds my Hyatt stays. But yeah, that does make it worse.

You know, and the thing that's hard is the most aspirational properties are the one, the ones that we love the most, are the hardest hit. And I think the take-home message here is that I need to quit going after every aspirational property. Find some properties that no one knows are great, you know, some out of the way, off the beaten track hotels, and find the next new aspirational property while it's cheap.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: Yeah.

Pam: So we could, we all agree that we can still find amazing value with Hyatt. We are not abandoning them, but we are definitely diversifying with other hotel credits, other chains, take advantage of hotel credits. I have actually always, when I'm going somewhere, I go straight to Hyatt. Where am I staying? I'm, what Hyatt Place am I staying? Of course, I'm trying to earn Globalist, too, which is one of the reasons.

But right now, I'm starting to, when I think of somewhere to say, I'm looking, "Okay, what FHR property is there that I can still get my Elite status and use that

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credit, or what Edit property can I stay at?" Instead of automatically going to Hyatt. So it's making me open up my eyes a little bit to other possibilities.

And we'll see, as the year comes, as the year goes, you know, for me it's not going to hurt me as bad as it will hurt a lot of people because I can probably still find a lot of the lowest or low because I have so much flexibility when I travel. So, you know, I think this year it'll be interesting when we do our year-end and we're, you know, six months into all of this to see how impacted and how upset we are then.

Jess: All right, if you love supporting women-owned businesses, Points Talk Premium is a great way to support three moms building something we love. Join us at pointstalk.supercast.com or click the link in the show notes.

All right, another one that I think is like a mixed bag of positive. I mean, I think it's like maybe mostly positive, but a lot of people were not happy with the rollout, and that is Bilt 2.0. That launched in February, and so it used to be that with Bilt 1.0, you could earn points on rent. Now you have the ability to earn points on both rent and mortgage. You will want to check out Episode 181 for the complete breakdown. We did an entire episode just about Bilt.

But the ability to earn points on mortgage is pretty great, and I think, I think where they went wrong is that, you know, they touted, "Oh, you can earn points on mortgage." And everyone was really, really excited about that. There was a lot of anticipation about this card. And then the rollout of the card was a hot mess. The way that you can earn your points on your housing payments is confusing, as you will see, as you will hear if you listen to that Episode 181. And so I think that people were just kind of really annoyed and aggravated with the way that this was rolled out. I will say, though, that all three of us did get the Bilt Palladium card and have been happy with it and the earning potential that comes with it.

Bilt also is the only program that transfers 1:1 to Atmos, Emirates, and Japan Airlines. They had a transfer bonus to Japan Airlines in March that a ton of people took advantage of. A lot of people transferred all of their Bilt points to JAL, myself included.

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And so the downside of that, though, is that it is now harder than ever to find those really great business or first-class flights on Japan Airlines because everyone has a huge stockpile of JAL miles. Booking JAL through a partner like American used to be a really great way to get to Japan in business class. That award space on American has virtually dried up because everyone is booking through JAL directly, and then there is no award space left once those partner calendars open. And so, you know, a little bit of positive and negative associated with that, I guess.

Bilt also transfers to Hyatt. And as you heard, it is now harder than ever to accumulate lots of Chase points with all of the new rules that they've enacted in 2026, and even, you know, not getting referral points if you're, if your player two is a current business card holder. And so being able to rack up a ton of Bilt points to transfer to Hyatt has become one, one really important strategy for the three of us.

Alex: Yeah, I think you nailed it with people were so excited about a mortgage option coming available, and then they told us how we would have to earn points on our mortgage, and everybody's was like, their mind was spinning like, "How do I do this?" So, yeah, it definitely wasn't as simple as we all expected.

Jess: Right.

Alex: But I will say we've all been happy with at least the Bilt Palladium card.

Jess: Yeah.

Alex: All right, next up is United changes. So, United cards and their program, they did an overhaul. So as of April 2nd, it pays even more to be a United cardholder. So cardholders now earn 6x on United flights. General members earn 3x. If you have status with United, you're going to earn even more points. You won't earn miles on basic economy unless you have status or you're a United cardholder.

I personally stay away from basic economy as just a general rule of thumb because there's times where I might be canceling or making changes. Especially when you're traveling with kids, like there's just unpredictability there.

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And so I don't, I want us to be able to choose seats. I don't like leaving it up to the airlines to hopefully have them put us all together. I will say, though, I think basic economy is one of the most annoying things that there is. Like, I don't think it should exist. I think it's terrible and annoying, and I miss the days of air travel when you would just buy a ticket, and you would choose your seat, and it was great.

Pam: Well, you know, I get irritated now because I pay for a lot of my United flights because I like to keep my points and miles for business travel. And so they'll list how much it is in economy, and I go, "Okay, I'm going to pay \$300 for this flight." But then, when I click it, it's actually basic economy.

Alex: And Delta does the same thing.

Pam: And I'm not, I'm not going to fly that. I'm not going to fly that. So I'm going to fly the next one. It's like, don't list that when you put, it just irritates me because it's actually going to be \$50 more for me. And it's like, don't,

Alex: If it's \$50 would be a deal sometimes for how much different the price is. But, you know, if you're ever searching on Google Flights, I noticed they have a button you can click that it says exclude basic economy. So I always try to click that because I'm the same as you. As soon as I see the price, I'm like, "Oh, cool." And then I'm like, "Oh, they got me again. This is basic economy."

And it is really frustrating because if you're, you know, using, if you're buying tickets for multiple people, that once that was maybe \$50 just turned into \$300 because you had to buy so many tickets. So it's super frustrating and annoying, and it's annoying too because they market it as, "We're giving you more options and things like that." And it's like, "No, you're not. You're just being scammy."

Jess: You're increasing prices.

Alex: Yeah. You're increasing prices. Yeah.

Pam: You know what? But I think this is a really smart move for United, you know, to when people see that being a cardholder has such benefits. And so it's like, you know, when you see that. Yes, so it's like, this is pretty smart, are all the

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other airlines going to start doing this? Because it's a really smart move on their part to push their cards.

Alex: Well, I'm just going to give a plug for Delta because I think they copied Delta.

Jess: Yeah, they copied Delta.

Pam: Well, they did. Yeah, they did.

Alex: But, yeah, if the other air, like, if, and Southwest does have something similar, it's just not well advertised where you can get a percentage off your flight, like depending on which card you have, you can get like 10% or 15% off, but it's a one-time coupon that you get each, like, I think it's every card member year or something like that, which is really nice, but it's a very forgotten-about perk. You can use it with points or with cash bookings, which is nice.

So, but with the United cards, and this is by far the best perk we think of having a United card, is that cardholders get 10% off award flights. Premier Elite status gets 15% off award flights. So really, really nice option. GatewaySM cardholders need to spend \$10,000 a year before that benefit kicks in. Now, I don't know about you, but I'm not spending \$10,000 on a Gateway card to get these benefits. So if you want to have this perk, I would get and keep the United Explorer card. That would be my choice.

The other benefit is you get access to more award space inventory, including United Polaris. So that's a really great perk as well. I do, it's interesting, like, I only have the Gateway card, and I do see a little bit of a discount, but it's not the full 10%. And there's been times where, you know, then I'll ask my mom who has status, who has United cards, her discounts are way better than mine.

So my goal at some point is to try to get that UnitedSM Explorer card or worst case scenario, if I can't be approved for it, I would, I'd be willing to upgrade my Gateway card to an Explorer card. I won't get the welcome offer, but if I can't be approved, because I do have quite a bit of Chase cards and it's been difficult for me to get approved, it might be my only option.

Pam: Shows you how smart they were to do this.

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Alex: I know, yeah. The thing that's unfortunate though is Mitch had the Explorer card, and then a few months, maybe even a month after we downgraded his to the Gateway, it, these changes came out. And I was like, "Dang it, I would have just kept his Explorer card."

So anyway, it's, it's fine. It'll all work out, but the nice option is that I don't think both of us need to have the card because now United has the family points pooling option. So as long as one of us has it, we could move the points around and book flights at that discounted rate for everybody in the family. So that will be nice.

The other big change is they've, they have an unbundled Premium Plus and Polaris. So they have base pricing, standard and flexible pricing. Now, this is just for if you're paying cash. Like if you're doing points, this should look the same as it does right now. But for base, you're not going to get seat selection, you're not going to get access to the Polaris Lounge, which, hello, that's like our favorite thing about Polaris, is going to the Polaris Lounge and getting a cookie skillet. You'll go, you can visit the United Club, no refunds or changes, one checked bag instead of two. If you purchase the standard fare, it brings back those other things, but it's not fully refundable. And then if you purchase the flexible fare, you get everything, plus it's fully refundable.

So I just feel like this cheapens business class experience, and you're already paying a premium to have this experience. Nobody wants a watered-down business class experience. And so I hate these changes, and I think they're terrible.

Pam: But at least, but we won't use that because we don't pay for, we don't pay for business class. We only do it with points and miles, so we're good.

Alex: We're good. But if there was a crazy good deal or something, like a mistake fare, or just every now and then, I actually did pay business class. I ended up canceling it because the dates and everything didn't work out. But I did purchase Polaris business class from New Zealand to Dallas on Polaris, and I would have been really annoyed if I had to pay extra to, like, choose my seat for my family of six.

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Pam: Well, that's the thing that just really irritates me for business anyway. If they, you want, you've got a business class seat and, you know, I'll use points and miles, like British Airways, and then you got to pay for your seat. It's like, "Huh? It's business class." Okay, that's a whole, whole different, you know, note though.

So let's go on to another change. I don't think this was a huge upset for people, but on May 17th, Citi ended the ability to share points between Citi cardholders. So they used to allow sharing up to 100,000 points a year and receiving 100,000 points per year. It really wasn't the best deal to begin with.

So I don't think it's going to really affect people a lot because those points that you transferred expired 90 days after transfer. So the only thing that you could do really was to transfer those points to partners. And so that's, you know, it's just was kind of speculative. And I think that, you know, a lot of people thought that, "Oh, wow, this is really sad. We can't share points anymore." But that is a crazy rule to begin with to make them expire after 90 days. You had to have a plan for how you were going to use them to begin with. So it wasn't huge.

Alex: Well, that's this is kind of why I think it's funny that they're getting rid of it because it was so bad to begin with. Not like, I don't know...

Pam: It was actually, actually made it good for them.

Jess: For, for Citi?

Pam: Yes, you know, because if somebody transferred and didn't realize that they would have that expired, then they'd lose those points. And they, you know, it was actually a good rule in their favor.

Alex: Yeah, they were probably making money on that.

Jess: I will say I used this in the last year, so I'm a little sad to see it go. I had, I used it because I had a friend, we are going to London together, and she had opened the Citi Strata EliteSM, but she hadn't earned her welcome offer yet. And so I booked us flights on American with my Citi points, and then she paid me back.

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Alex: Okay. And then did you just put them right back in your AA account?

Jess: And then I just transferred them to AA because I was like, "I'll use them eventually, you know."

Alex: Yeah, and that was the nice option to be like, "Okay." Especially if you have a player one and a player two and you're like, "I, we don't both need to keep this card long term." It is nice to be like, "Okay, I want the AA points in my account instead of their account, maybe."

But in this situation, for myself, I'll probably just move my points to my AA account and not keep the card. I'll have one of us keep it probably long term because I do think the benefits are pretty good with like the Citi Nights, they have good earning potential on the card, like the everyday spend is really good, but it's not something where we both need to keep this card.

Pam: Right. Yeah, exactly. Okay, so that midpoint is some of the changes that have occurred.

Alex: Whoa, that's only half the year, you guys. What in the world?

Pam: I know, and we, and we were not, this is not an exhaustive account either.

Alex: That's actually mind-blowing.

Pam: So, you know what, though? I mean, people freak out about changes. You know, people say, "I'm done with points and miles. I'm not doing this anymore." You know, it just freaks them out. But you know what? We have been in this for at least 10 years. We've seen changes every single year, and has it, are we disappointed sometimes? Oh yeah, absolutely. It's a bummer sometimes, and some changes, you know, are devastating for a day or two. But we still travel on points and miles, we still use credits, we still manage to survive.

I feel like, you know, there is, points and miles travel is going to continue. You just have to pivot, you just have to adapt. And despite these changes, there's still so much value to be had in this wonderful world of points and miles. There will always be changes to award charts, programs, new credit cards available,

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etc. We just have to adapt a bit and move on. If you enjoyed today's episode, be sure to leave us a review. We appreciate your support so much.

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