

Ep #197: How to Find Saver Award Availability and Book Flights for Fewer Points



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Alex: Have you ever wondered how some people book the exact same flight as everyone else but pay way fewer points? Today we're pulling back the curtain on saver award availability, showing you where to find it and sharing some of our favorite sweet spots that can make your points go so much further.

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.

If you've ever wondered how people book flights for what seems like an unbelievable number of points, chances are they found saver award availability. In today's episode, we're breaking down exactly what saver awards are, how to find them, and we're sharing some of our favorite sweet spots so you can start booking that dream trip of yours for fewer points.

All right, so what is saver award space? It's like a store is having a sale. It's like the airline is having a sale. Okay, so you're getting the exact same seat as other people but for a very different, often lower price. These are typically the lowest-priced award seats issued by airlines. They are also limited in inventory, so usually if you know you want to book a flight and you search and you see saver award availability, you want to lock it in because chances are it is not going to be available for very long.

The sweet spot that partner airlines can usually access, okay? So, you know how we talk about booking American Airlines through British Airways? We talk about booking Alaska Airlines through British Airways because it's a lot easier to

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get British Airways miles than it is to get American or Alaska miles. If you were to search British Airways for a flight from L. A. to Maui and there was an American Airlines flight that appeared, that's a saver award from American Airlines that they have now made available to partner airlines like British Airways. So that's just one example. There are so many examples when it comes to partners and alliances. That's why it's important to know which airlines are in alliances with which other airlines. And here is why it matters.

Alex: Which plug for our transfer partner cheat sheet.

Jess: Yes.

Alex: Which we should, we'll put a link to that in the show notes.

Jess: We have a transfer partner cheat sheet that is free, that lists all the airlines, their alliances, what banks transfer to them. So it's your one-stop shop when you're thinking, can I transfer my points from this bank to this airline? Now you know.

All right, here is why it matters. It makes business class seats a lot more attainable for people. If you can find a saver business class fare, it's usually a really great deal. And so if you're new to business class or if you're like, I don't have enough points to pay 100,000 miles for every business class flight I fly, saver awards are going to be your best friend. Like I said, it gives you access to partner bookings, and it can often save you tens of thousands of miles.

So another example is United, especially, has really incentivized people to hold their credit cards, and a lot of that is because if you hold a United card, you get access to more saver award space than non-cardholders. So, as an example, a Polaris business class flight from Houston to London, I've seen those for 295,000 United miles, okay? I would never pay 295,000 United miles. Ted has a United QuestSM card. Log into his account, do a search, exact same flight, 80,000 miles.

So at 295,000 miles, that flight is a non-starter for me. At 80,000 miles, that just became a lot more doable. Some people may see that and think, okay, I'm still

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not paying 80,000 miles, but I'm assuming you'd rather pay 80,000 than 295,000. So.

Alex Yeah, I'll pay 80,000 for United Polaris.

Jess: Heck yeah. 80,000 miles for an ice cream sundae in the sky, it's a deal.

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Okay, what if you can't find saver awards? Because they're the hot commodity out there. They don't just pop up all the time. They're when we find them, we jump on them. So, if you can't find them, like I said, they are harder to find. Inventory is controlled by management. So the airlines, they are wanting you to pay the most amount for their flights. They're, this is a business. They're trying to make money. So if they can sell the seats for cash, that's what they're going to do. They're going to, if they can sell them for a higher amount of points, that's what they're going to do.

So those factors are really going to affect the availability. It depends on I don't know how the airlines figure it all out, but they've got some major algorithms that they work with to help them decide, should we drop this price or should we make saver awards available for this route or this flight? And it all comes down to them.

Now, some things that will impact that are the route popularity. It is going to be more difficult to find saver awards maybe on the most popular route that they fly. If they're consistently able to sell those at a cash rate, they might not open as much saver award availability. I think it also will happen like, for myself, if you're flying out of a smaller airport and there's not very many of those flights, you can have the opposite where they're like, this is the hot commodity because there's not very many options. There's not competition.

And I think that's why we find so much more saver award availability out of airports like JFK is because there's so many flights going out of there. You have

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a lot of competition between the different airlines, and so they're all trying to get everybody's business, whereas me coming out of Salt Lake City, I've got one option if I want to get a direct flight to Paris, and that's on Delta. And they know that. They know like, okay, this person, if they want to get this, they're going to have to pay a pretty penny for it. So those will depend, you know, factor things in there.

Time of year is going to be an important factor. That's why you see a lot more saver award availability off-peak, holidays, days of the week, how full the flight is. I've noticed myself that I feel like whenever I'm trying to travel home on a Sunday, whether I'm paying cash, whether it's points, it's usually more because everybody's like, I got to get home for work on Monday. And so I try, when possible, to not fly on Sundays to save either money or points. That's even for a simple domestic flight. I've run into that.

So just keep in mind if you're not finding saver award space, it does not mean that you're doing something wrong. It's very up to the airline gods up high in their towers deciding, all right, how much are we going to work this out for?

So another thing that could be helpful for you when you are trying to snag saver award space is knowing when airlines release their saver seats. So for most airlines, the first seats, maybe for example, Qatar releases two saver awards on Qatar Qsuite when their schedule's released. So knowing when these seats become available and booking them right when the schedule comes out is really going to help your odds of snagging these saver award seats. So it varies by airline when they open up those seats, but it's around 330 to 360 days before departure.

And then as the departure date gets closer, if they're not selling out and they still have a bunch of seats available, that's when they will open up additional seats. Like if you listened to last week's episode, Jess talked about how she got that Thrifty Traveler alert for 60,000 miles for business class to Paris, when before she, that was not an option. And so it's they realize, hey, we have a lot of seats available, we need to start filling this plane. And so you can have good luck as you're getting closer into your flight. So keep a look on things or keep a look at

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those fares and those rates, and you could possibly rebook. I know you've done that a lot, Mom, lately.

Pam: Yeah, I've done. You know, I wanted to tell you one time that it didn't work for me because I was positive that this was going to work. So I was flying from to when I, on my last trip, going over to London for the Harry Styles concert. That sounds so weird for me to say. But it was.

Alex: Things you never thought you would be doing.

Pam: Things I never thought I'd be doing, yes.

Alex: 70-year-old woman.

Pam: So anyway, yeah. Anyway, I had a flight that I had was positioning to, well, I was going from Denver with a stop in LAX and then on. And my daughter Kelly was on this flight from Denver direct to London. I thought, I know I can get on that. I'm just going to wait till the last minute. I'll be able to get on it. And I kept looking and I saw all this, I mean, she was flying economy, I'm planning to fly business. I'm looking and I'm looking, there's tons of business class flights, and I'm going, they're going to, you know, release these. I know they will. And we get, you know, closer and closer even to the last day and there's still a fair amount of business class seats and they never released them. And I'm going, what the heck?

And then I suddenly realized that, you know, I guess they just didn't on this route. And so you can't always plan that it that they're going to release them at the last minute. Maybe this is there, this is the only direct flight they have from Denver. Maybe historically they do sell a lot at the last minute. I think I did finally check that morning and they had sold a few more. So I, you know, there was, there was my thing that just totally bummed me out.

Alex: Well, and also too, that could be a situation where maybe they're releasing them for people to upgrade to paying cash to upgrade their economy seat or something like that.

Pam: Right.

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Alex: Which is also an option too, but the points availability wasn't there, but maybe it's like, hey, upgrade to business class for \$800 or something, and that's a possibility.

Pam: But I was not willing to book that economy class and hope.

Alex: No, no. Then you run the risk. Yeah. You run a risk for sure.

Pam: So I was not willing to do that. So yes, so sometimes all the things that we think, the way that we think the saver award will manifest, sometimes everything we know, it still doesn't. And that was my time.

Alex: Yeah. I think it's just one of those things you don't, don't just assume the price today is the final price and never check back. You know, I'm in the process right now of trying to get flights for next summer for my family to Croatia, and the flight prices right now, they're economy, and they're not, they're fine. They're fine. But I'm like, I have a full year. You know, maybe I'm running, maybe I'm rolling the dice here, and I should just book these economy flights, but I'm like, we have a year. I can, I'm hoping that premium economy or business class will drop in price.

And if not, then hopefully economy will stay or go lower because it's not it's around 40-something, maybe even 50,000, and I think that's kind of a lot to pay for a KLM flight. It's through KLM, and I'm like, I'm going to wait and see if more saver award availability opens up because I'm giving myself a full year. If this was in a couple of months, I'd be like, sheesh, I better book this. Even six months, I don't have the chill to wait at that point. I'm like, I just want it done and over with. But that's the nice thing too about when you start planning early: you give yourself that flexibility to keep watching and see if that saver award availability pops up.

Pam: You know, just a little side thing, just since you brought this up. I did book our trip, our flights to there, but I used a Thrifty Traveler alert that talked about Iberia to Madrid. So, I mean, it's a little longer flight, but it's just your dad and I. I'm not dragging, you know, four little boys around. So we actually, I have that one part booked and there was a transfer bonus too. So I think we're paying like

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40,000 from- I'm trying to think where we're flying out of. I have a blank on that now.

Alex: Well, thanks for sharing the news. We maybe could have gone with you guys. Well, we'd go on a different flight that maybe gets in a day later.

Pam: It's still, it's still, still available. We're going, you know, a few days early, but so we paid like 40,000 business class on Iberia; I can't remember. I think we're flying out of Dallas or Houston to Madrid and then having to fly. So, I mean, it's a few stops, but.

Alex: It's a few stops, but if you were like, well, I guess we could just tack on a trip to Spain for a few days.

Pam: Yeah, we fly into Madrid and we're going to spend the night there.

Alex: Yeah, that's fun. Okay, so if you're thinking this sounds confusing, like, how do I know how to find these and there's so many airlines to search, so many websites, this sounds like a headache. I am with you. I do not want to be searching each individual airline's website to find saver award availability.

Now, I will say there are times where you start to learn your own home airport, and you realize, like for myself, I know that KLM has a flight from Salt Lake City to Amsterdam, and then from there, I can connect. I can either book straight to where I need to go in Europe. That's a really great way for me to get to Europe. So you will do kind of learn what works for you and your home airport.

But if you're open to positioning, if you're, you're flying out of a big airport that has a lot of options, then this is where some tools can come in very handy. So PointsYeah, [seats.aero](#), Roame, [point.me](#), those are all tools, award flight search engines that will help you find flights and, you know, you can see the varying prices. You can be like, okay, these are terrible, the prices are awful. I'm not seeing saver award, but you saved yourself the time of checking each individual website. And if you do find the good, a good price, that's great.

Now, I will say, some of these are similar. PointsYeah, Roame, [point.me](#), those are similar. It's basically you put in where you're going, when you're going, it

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finds all the award flight options out there for you. The interesting thing is sometimes they don't all find the same results. And that's why I think it's good to check more than just one of these. And they also, you also always want to then verify on that airline's website that it is truly there. Never look on these sites, find a flight and just transfer your points. You always want to go to the website or the airline site and make sure it is truly there.

So, some of these, like we like PointsYeah because it's free. You just get a free account and you can you can search for free. Roame, point.me, they all have free options, but then they all have paid options. [Seats.aero](#) works a little differently. It's a different it does the similar it's does the same thing, but it's just a different user interface than the others. I think [seats.aero](#) is probably my favorite. I have a pro subscription. I do think you need a pro subscription to really, you can't search very far out if you have the free version. But.

Jess: That one is my favorite also. I feel like there's more of a learning curve when it comes to figuring out how to use it, but I, but that's my favorite of all those.

Pam: And it's my second favorite after PointsYeah. And I, those are the two that I use whenever I'm searching. I look at both of them.

Alex: Yeah. So the other thing I was going to say is for some of these too, you can set alerts. So like, in my case right now, I have an alert set on [seats.aero](#) for our flights to Croatia next summer. So that is really nice.

The other one that I didn't include first on the list, but we've already mentioned before, is Thrifty Traveler. Now, Thrifty Traveler is different than all of these. I do not think it's sometimes people will be like, should I get Thrifty Traveler or should I get [seats.aero](#)? And I'm like, they do two different things. I would recommend both. So Thrifty Traveler finds the deals. It's not a search engine. You're not doing any legwork. They find deals across all airlines, all cities, cash flights, award flights, they send them to your email, and then you can be like, okay, nope, not interested. I'm not planning a trip here or, wow, I wasn't thinking of going to Iceland this year, but this is a great price. Maybe I'll book these flights.

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And so it's you're just getting emails. It's a subscription service, and you're just getting flight deals sent right to your inbox. You can like, put in some filters so you get, get different types of deals. So you're like, hey, I don't want the cash deals or this is my home airport, please send me more deals from here. They send so many deals, you might want to turn filters off or do some filters because you will get so many emails because there's so many deals. But I think that is from a beginner standpoint, if you have flexibility, if you have not really, if you're someone who's more like, I'm chasing the deal, that's a great way to get saver award availability just sent right to you.

Jess: So I think I agree, and I think Thrifty Traveler is the best way to find saver availability. You don't have as much control. You do not have any control, but I would say this the big saver award flights that I have booked in recent years have all been a result of Thrifty Traveler alerts.

Alex: Yeah, like your one from last week's episode to Paris was Thrifty Traveler. Mom, you just booked that Iberia deal on Thrifty Traveler. So we'll put a link in the show notes to Thrifty Traveler. If you sign up using our link is an affiliate link. We do get a little kickback, but you also get a discount too on your first year. So go and check that out if you're interested in learning more about Thrifty Traveler.

Pam: Okay. So the biggest thing about finding award, saver award availability are three things. Flexibility, flexibility, flexibility. That is the thing that's key. If you are looking and you live in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and you want a direct flight to Rome at Christmas time, good luck.

Jess: It probably doesn't even exist. I'm going to, I don't know.

Pam: Probably doesn't.

Jess: Maybe there is a direct flight from Tulsa to Rome. But I think Houston just got, I think we just got our first direct flight to Rome. So I'm going to go out on a limb and say Tulsa probably doesn't have one.

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Pam: Yeah. So if you don't have flexibility, if you're like, I will never take a positioning flight. I do not, I'm never taking a connecting flight. You're going to be paying more points and miles than we pay. So.

Jess: You're going to be going to Orlando.

Pam: Yes. So flexibility is really key. You've got to have, you've got to be flexible in one of these five areas, I always say. You've got to be flexible with your dates. If you've got to fly on July or December 24th to get somewhere for Christmas, you're going to have less luck.

You've got to have flexibility with your airports. Like I said, Tulsa is probably not going to have near the direct flights to or any flights to Rome as going from New York City or Chicago or Boston.

If you only like to fly on Delta because you live in Utah, you're not going, you're going to be stuck paying some high Delta miles because you know, you've got, you've got to look at other airlines. You've got to look at other things to find these deals.

Maybe you're set. I've got five family members. We have to travel in business class. That's the only way that we'll travel and you know what? We are slaves to what they give us. They don't always get, you can't always find. In fact, often you can't find five business class seats. It's pretty easy to find two business class seats. And certainly people have been able to find more, but it isn't not the easiest thing.

So you've got to be flexible. You've got to say, okay, we're probably not going to get our whole family is not going to get in business class, but maybe we have teenage kids and they can sit in economy, and mom and dad, we can sit in business class or maybe we can all sit in premium economy. But you've got to have some flexibility and then you've got to be flexible about, you know, possibly taking a positioning flight and going to fly to another city.

So what this looks like as far as, you know, some of the flexibility that where I found better flexibility is to not be set that I'm going into Rome and flying out of

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Rome. Maybe I go into Rome, I take a train to Milan and I fly out of Milan. Maybe you start and this is even me, I live in Denver. It's a huge, huge airport, but I can't always find saver availability there. But if I'm willing to start from Chicago, Boston, Dulles, JFK, I'm going to find a lot more availability or on the West Coast, San Francisco, Seattle or LAX, definitely going to have find more availability.

You need to be able to change your dates. You've got to have, if you're looking for saver award availability, you're going to have a lot more results if you say, okay, I can travel, I can depart anywhere between this week. But it's not like I've got to travel on Tuesday. This is the only day I can travel on. You're just going to have less luck. And so if you can travel anytime that week, you're going to have a lot better luck.

So we're going to go on to some of the airlines that we often find good saver space availability. One of the best ways that we find to get to Europe is through Air France KLM the Flying Blue program. Alex flies KLM quite often out of Salt Lake City. One of the best.

Alex: Jess, I feel like you've been using Air France a lot and KLM out of Houston a lot lately too.

Jess: There are, yeah, there's a direct flight from Houston to Paris on Air France and from Houston to Amsterdam on KLM. So it has gone up on my radar lately.

Pam: Yeah. And if you're and one of the things that we really, really love is that they have monthly promo rewards and we always tell you what these are every month, right at the beginning of the month. We write a post about these and so you can look consistent saver award availability, especially in economy class. Some premium and some business, but boy, if you're looking to get your whole family over to Europe in saver class availability, you're going to find some great deals. Usually you're going to find 18.5 thousand miles to get over to Europe in economy class.

Alex: For the, for the promo rewards, right?

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Pam: For the promo awards, yes. Yeah, that's amazing. That's such a good deal.

Alex: I think the thing too with Air France and KLM with Flying Blue program is the pricing can vary greatly. One day, you can, it can be, you know, 25,000 points in economy for each person. The next, if you fly the next day, it could be 110,000. Like, just wild numbers. And so that's where what you were saying before, Mom, the flexibility of even going one day before or one day after can be the difference of saving you so many points. So keep that in mind with Air France and KLM.

Pam: Or anybody. And really honestly, that's a great hint for you as you're planning all of your trips and wanting to save more on your points and miles, just get into that flexible mode. Just say, we kind of would like to go around this time. Yeah. And then you're just going to find, you're going to save so much in points and miles. I mean, I'm never fixed on anything. Well, I guess sometimes I am. We've got our student meetup. It isn't wasn't like I there was, you know, dates that I could look for a full week unless I want to spend a week in Chicago.

Alex: Or if you are going on a cruise or, you know, like when Jess had her safari. It's like, you can probably go by a couple of days and be like, I guess we'll get a hotel for a couple of days if we have to. But ideally, there's those times, occasions where you have pretty specific dates. But when you can, it's really good to have some flexibility.

Pam: Yeah, but then you can have flexibility with your airport or your airlines or your cabin or you can position. So there's always, you don't have to be flexible on everything, but you've got to be flexible on one or two things.

Okay, Virgin Atlantic is another place, another airline where we get some really good saver awards. I have flown to London countless times in business class from Boston for about 39k, and then when you find a transfer bonus, it's like cray-cray what it can be. Europe, 9k. I mean, that's unreal. Those are some really good deals, and they, you know, you can find them quite often. It isn't like it's like a once in a blue moon I can find these. It's like these are, I can find quite often. Again, it does mean I have to be flexible about what airport I'm flying out

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of, but they are there. You can also find some really good Delta deals on Virgin Atlantic too.

On United, we can, it has really good Star Alliance access. I think Jess, you just, you just told us about flying on Lufthansa to from Munich. Yes. And a great, got a great deal, you know? So you can find some really good deals on their partners. I think United is a, for me, at least, and for Jess, it's our number one thing to use for positioning flights. So United just has some really good saver award availability if you have their card. And to me, the saver award availability for United in business class is going to look like 88k, having the card is going to be 80k. But there's just a lot of availability there.

Jess: They also have really good, I have found, they have really good economy saver availability too, especially if you're a cardholder and you're booking pretty far in advance; you can get some really great saver award deals with United.

Alex: And I and as someone who doesn't live in a United hub, I have found it to be really great too. Yes, I have to do a connecting flight, but from Salt Lake City, anywhere, I'm probably going to do a connecting flight if I'm coming home from Europe. So I've had a really good luck getting saver award availability in economy flights home from Europe to Salt Lake City.

So if you're good with economy, it's just nice because sometimes you don't want to go through the headache of finding things or it's like, man, this is, this is hard, these dates are not like, you know, you just run into some issues sometimes when you're trying to book award flights, and I find consistently that United is a good fallback option. Like, you know what, I'm fine flying economy, just have one stop and then I'll be home and it's usually a pretty not too painful of a journey because they're I feel like their flight paths are usually makes sense.

You know, sometimes you'll book these things and you're like, I'm trying to fly business class home, so I'm positioning to here and then I've got to get here and then I've got to stay the night at EWR and then I'll take another positioning flight home and it's like, if I just book the United Economy flight, I get home, one stop and I'm home all in one day, you know? So that's something to consider too is

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what work are we going to try to get the perfect flight when a cheaper flight that's maybe an economy will make a lot more sense.

Pam: Yeah. I have also found really good saver space on American Airlines. I've gone to London a few times for like 57.5 thousand miles, which is really good. You can also book AA, as we've talked before, by looking on Alaska or British Airways. In some cases, you are, British Airways, you know, you could be paying, you know, a lot more in taxes and fees. But yeah, AA is a great airline to get some saver space.

I find great deals on Alaska. They have great partner awards, excellent value to Asia and Europe. I have flown quite often to Europe for 55k Atmos miles. Now, I will add that the taxes and fees on these are usually higher, but I just know that going in. I'm okay sometimes with paying, you know, \$800 or so for a business class seat. Not everybody is willing to do that, but I look at, you know, what I would be paying for an economy and it's usually more than that, and I'd much rather fly in business class. So I make that work.

Iberia, great for flights to Spain and onward. Just got an alert from Thrifty Traveler. I think we talked about that in this episode, where I'm flying 40,000 miles from Houston to Madrid. My husband and I are in business class. I mean, it's just that's just a great deal. Love Turkish Airlines. We all love Turkish Airlines. We can find 65k business seats to Istanbul quite often from major cities. And then you can add on where you really want to go and it will usually be about 85k. And you know, those are, that's a great deal and a great airline. So we're really happy to do that too. So those are some of the ones that we fall back on all the time. And do you guys, can you guys think of any others that...?

Alex: No, I mean, I feel like some of these, like the Turkish one, can be tricky to find, but that's where Thrifty Traveler comes in handy is they will, they are good about sending those alerts. And so I'm like, if I'm flying Turkish, I just wait till they send me an alert.

Pam: Or you book way out too. I think if you book way out, then.

Alex: Yeah, wait right when the schedule is released.

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Pam: Right when the schedule opens up, that then you can find those 65k, you know, pretty easily.

Okay, so Jess is going to talk to us about some of the mistakes some people make and why they can't find any of the saver award availability.

Jess: All right, and this goes for economy and business class. It's just waiting too long. Like we said, there's typically a set number of saver seats and then once they're gone, they're gone. There was someone actually, so it's currently August. There was someone in our Facebook group yesterday, they were like, I'm trying to find flights for five people for Thanksgiving and I can't find anything. And I'm like. Thanksgiving 2027? Because...

Pam: There's only so much we could anybody can do. There's no magic wand that makes some things happen.

Jess: I'm like, you're a... I'm like...

Alex: And these were international flights? I'm assuming.

Jess: I don't remember, but I feel like even, I mean, domestic might be a little better, but even domestic at this point,

Alex: Domestic, you're going to be paying more. You can find it; it just might cost you some, some pretty penny.

Jess: I'm going to guess you're not going to find saver availability at this point for five people. So just waiting too long to book. I think it's helpful if you're just getting started, like start searching before your dates are even open. Like just start searching, try to get a feel for like trends you see or like, you know, what dates around yours are going for, like what routes are going to work best for where you want to go. Just do some practice searches.

Another big thing is transferring your points first. Like Alex said, you always want to confirm directly with the airline that there is actually availability. You don't want to just go on points.yeah, do a search and see, okay, I can I can fly this route on United for 20,000 miles, and then just go transfer your Chase points to United,

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and then you go to United, and it's not actually available. So always want to confirm availability first.

Another thing is giving up after one search. This is not what you want to hear, okay? But I rarely, I don't know if I've ever, ever sat down, done one award search, booked my trip done in one day. That is typically not...

Alex: Maybe a domestic flight. Maybe a domestic Southwest flight.

Jess: Like if I'm flying Southwest and I know exactly where I want to go, then maybe.

Alex: There's a lot of times where we have a trip planned for spring break. I haven't booked those flights yet. Because, you know what Southwest is wanting to charge me? 80,000 points each way. Like, and you know, Southwest opens their schedule later. And so I feel like lately what they've been doing is they don't even open the basic. They don't even open sometimes the saver awards right away. They play a lot of games with their with their stuff lately. So I'm like, you know what? I'm just going to wait and we'll figure it out, you know?

Jess: But yeah, availability changes pretty consistently. I will say, if you search and there is saver availability and you know this is the flight you want to book, go ahead and jump on it. But I don't think just because you're searching on Saturday doesn't mean it's not going to become available the following Wednesday. You know? So I wouldn't take one day of searching or one search as gospel for like, that's what it's going to be from now on, okay?

Alex: Yeah, like there's a lot of times where we will search, we do search for a day, and it's like, okay, nothing there. Come back to it in a couple, a few weeks because that's the thing. We're usually booking things pretty far out. So like, okay, I'll check again in a couple of weeks. Check again. All right, nothing's really changed. All right, I check again. Like there's times where we're checking once every few weeks for a few months until something pops up. Like, it's sometimes you got to pack your patience with some of these sometimes.

Pam: Definitely.

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Alex: Especially, and that's that's pretty much only if I'm trying to fly business class. If I'm flying economy, it's going to be so much easier for you than trying to fly business class.

Jess: Another mistake is searching only one airline. As we have said, you can often get the same or better deals with partner airlines. You just want to, you know, make sure that you know that partner's cancellation policy. Like there have been times where if there is United saver availability, I can book that same flight through Singapore Airlines for fewer miles, okay?

Now this is like a more intermediate trick. But then you have to think, you have to think like, okay, if I book it with United on miles and I want to cancel, I cancel. United deposits those miles right back in my account. They give me my taxes right back to my credit card.

If I book it on Singapore and then have to cancel, I got to pay a cancellation fee. I got, you know, and I would rather have miles stranded with United than I would rather have miles stranded with Singapore. So these are just, you want to check partners, but it's often not exactly apples to apples when you're comparing these redemptions. So you're going to want to make sure things like cancellation policies, change fees, cancellation fees are that you're comfortable with those.

And then the last one is ignoring nearby airports. So if you just drive, this is this is mostly for people who are in the northeast. I am jealous for how close all these airports are to you. For me personally, like Dallas is the next closest big hub, and I have never flown or driven to Dallas to take a positioning flight from there. I would. I wouldn't drive there. I'd fly to Dallas to take a, to take a positioning flight. But especially if you're in the northeast and you've got like JFK, Newark, Washington, D. C., Boston, all like relatively close to one another, then, you know, just changing that airport that you depart out of could be the difference between finding really great availability and not.

Alex: All right, so here are some quick tips that save us the most miles. We've kind of touched on some of these, but one, searching often, setting alerts, knowing your favorite programs. So for example, I know if I'm going to Europe, Air France or KLM, Air France Flying Blue program is going to be a big one for

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me. Collect flexible points instead of only airline miles. I think that's a huge one. We've done an episode previously about airline miles. There's definitely a place for both of them. And the more flexible points you have, additionally with airline miles, the more flexibility you have to book all these different airlines. You're not just stuck like, I've only got United miles. I have to book on United. If you have a variety of flexible points, you just went from, you know, one airline you can book on to 20 different airlines you could potentially be considering.

So then book when you find a great deal. If you find the deal, there have been numerous occasions where people will be like, and you guys, it actually kills me. Like it hurts me inside. I'm uncomfortable for even to talk about because I just feel for these people.

There was one time I was helping a girl that I know in real life, and she, I was helping her get to Europe. I'm like, okay, here's the flight. Like, this is a great deal. She transfers the points. She didn't book right away. She, like, went, she like, had to go do something and left her stuff. She went to go book the next day, and the flight was gone.

And so do not transfer your points until you are ready to book in that same sitting. Like if you find the flights, you transfer the points, you book it immediately. Do not be like, oh, I've got to go pick up my kid from school. If you're going to have to pick up your kid from school, you don't start the process. You wait until you have a chunk of time where you can get this done in one sitting.

Because nothing is worse than transferring your, well, there's a lot of things worse, but it's painful to transfer your points to a random airline like Singapore Airlines, for example, and you're like, I don't have any plans to go to Singapore. When am I going to use these points now? You know, and especially if you don't have a big old stockpile of points. If you've only opened, you know, maybe two or three cards at this point, and then you have these points stuck with this random program. So be ready to book. When you start the booking process, finish it. Don't transfer your points and then plan on coming back to it later.

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So, and then if your plans are flexible, continue checking back because a later or a better redemption could appear later. So those are just our quick little tips to help you save your points and miles.

Pam: Okay, so I just wanted to, I know there's people out there that have just booked maybe one or two trips that just, you know, this really stresses them out, finding this saver award availability. My hint for you is to do practice searches. Don't just decide that, oh, you know, next year we're going on this great trip we want to go on and, you know, I'm going to book it. This is where we, you know, all we have all these things that we're inflexible about. Start doing some practice searches on it. So someone that wants to go to Bora Bora next year or they want to go to Paris next year. Okay, do some practice searches.

So pick two different award search tools and start looking for it with the days that you're thinking of going in. Even if it's way out there and you can't, you know, like if it's for 2028, you know, just pick the month and just do some practice searches and see what you can find. You know, then try being more flexible, changing your the airport that you're going to fly out, changing some of the dates, changing the cabins, just get used to doing a flex, doing searches, being very flexible and compare the prices across at least three different airline programs.

And pretty soon, you're just going to get a feel for how searching for saver award works. You're going to get a feel for how flexible you need to be and you're going to feel much more confident. I think this is one of the things that's biggest for people. I tell people all the time, practice makes perfect. Start practicing.

You don't have to be waiting for the real deal. That's when it's tough. That's when you start you get the deer-in-the-headlights, you know, feeling when you're not finding what you want because you've waited till the last minute. You're trying to do this. Start practicing now. You know, when you've got some downtime, just say, hey, I wonder how if I can find us a flight for my husband, business class to Paris during the month of May. I'm going to check this out and

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see how to do it. That is one of the best tips that I can give you is to do practice searches.

Jess: This is Pam's challenge for you. Pam is challenging you.

Pam: That's right.

Alex: But what I, what I think is funny is we'll have people in our community that they start doing these practice searches and they love it and it like becomes their new hobby. And they're like, I found this and I found this and so it is kind of, it can be kind of fun. It's like putting a puzzle together. So if that's kind of your jam, like you like the puzzles, you like doing things like that, you might have a lot of fun piecing together award flights.

Pam: Yeah. Okay, so each of us are now going to share a couple of our favorite saver award redemptions that we've done in the past.

Jess: Well, these are technically booked, but I haven't taken them yet. They are timely. They're timely. So we are flying from Houston to Peru later this year, and I got 29,000 miles saver awards through United. Again, it helps that Ted has the United Quest card. And so 29,000 miles nonstop from Houston to Lima in economy. I thought that was pretty good on United.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: And then Singapore Airlines, my dear Singapore Airlines is one of the last remaining airlines that still has an award chart. So if an airline has an award chart, you can often get good deals, especially during peak times. So we are flying to Frankfurt for the Christmas markets later this year over the holidays. And I got business class from JFK to Frankfurt for 89,000 miles each in business.

And then on the way home, we're flying premium economy Frankfurt to JFK for 57,000 miles each in, yeah, premium economy. So, again, not stellar deals, but considering they are over the holidays and they are like a premium airline on a premium product, I'm happy with the prices of those.

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Alex: And how many are, how many of the kids are coming on this trip? How many total travelers?

Jess: There will be five of us total.

Alex: Okay, so that's really great. You found those prices.

Pam: And all in business?

Jess: All are in business and all are in premium.

Pam: Whoa, that's really good. So it can be done, people.

Jess: It, well, and the thing is, I booked it right when it opened. I feel like Singapore often has...

Pam: Yes, that's the thing.

Jess: Singapore often has around six, I've noticed, six saver awards. So a couple of things: I booked it right when it opens, and I've got kids who are now old enough to be earning their own points and miles

Alex: Yeah, that's nice.

Jess: And they are contributing for themselves.

Pam: Good. Good.

Alex: Perfect.

Jess: And I give them the choice. I say, you can you can go in economy, and you can pay me back a lot fewer miles. And they're always like, no, we want to do business. And I'm like, okay, cough them up.

Pam: Okay.

Alex: All right. So mine was Qatar Airways Qsuite. So you can fly in one of the best business class in the world for 70,000 miles to Doha or onward to like Jess did to Tanzania or to the Maldives for 85,000 miles. They only release two seats

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of the saver awards at this price. I think after this it jumps to 140,000 if I remember correctly. It's 361 days out. I believe it's 3 a.m. Doha time. So you will have to factor that in where you live, what, compare it to, you know, what time it is for you at that time, and for and it'll change, you know, based on daylight savings and all that.

But this is something I booked personally. I've done this twice now. Jess has done this. I know my mom's flown Qsuite. I did exactly what both my mom and Jess were saying is days before I planned booking this, at least three or four days ahead of time before that 361 days, I went on at the exact moment that these flights become available. I think for me, I don't remember what month it was, but I believe it was 6:00 p.m. for me. And I would go on and right, I was ready. I had an alarm, 5:55 p.m. I'm on my computer. I'm, you know, tracking everything. I'm seeing, okay, here's the airports that have availability. Okay, SFO, not looking good. DFW, it's looking good, you know?

So you it helps to know too, you know, I knew in this case I was going to be doing a position flight because Qatar does not fly into Salt Lake City. But it helps you to know what are the hubs of this airline. If you have a specific product you want to fly, you're going to want to know what hubs they service in the U.S. So where you can be flying out of.

So I was seeing the trends and I also had Jess who had already booked this a couple of months before me who was like, these are the trends that I saw and we were able she was kind of able to help me know, okay, I probably shouldn't even look at SFO. I'm just going to skip that one. ATL, I'll look at Atlanta, see how it looks there. And so that can be really, will be really helpful.

So then when the time came, and it was the day of, I already knew, okay, I'm finding these seats. Like, I can do this. And so I had my points transferred and ready to go so that when it was time to book, and I did have flexibility with dates. Like if I didn't get it the first day, the next day I could have tried again. So that I hadn't booked my hotel yet.

So that's just an important thing too with some of these really hard-to-get flights. You might want to have your points. Well, I would say, definitely in the case of

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this, if you're trying to book Qsuite, you want to have your points already in your Qatar account and ready to go. So I know you did the same thing when you booked Japan Airlines, Jess, you had your points ready to go. You've got to be quick, quick, quick with booking some of these flights.

Pam: Yeah.

Alex: So the more you practice, the better you will be.

Jess: Yes.

Pam: Yeah. Okay. So one of the, my favorite, favorite flights I've ever taken wasn't really saver award redemption. But you know, I knew I was going to.

Alex: Wait a minute here. This is an episode on saver award redemption.

Pam: No, but I'm talking about...

Jess: You made this outline, Pam.

Pam: I know, but I had, but it leads into my next one that was a saver.

Alex: Okay, all right.

Pam: So, so I went on Singapore Suites, it was really important. I wanted to fly Singapore Suites so bad. It's really difficult to find that availability. So I had to be completely open. I knew it was going to cost me 143k to fly them and I was willing to pay that. And I still, we would pay that again. And so, but I had to be completely flexible on everything. And I did find them out of, where did we fly at, Alex?

Alex: JFK.

Pam: Yeah, I don't even know if they fly that route anymore with Singapore Suites.

Alex: They fly the route. Oh yeah, yeah, but I don't know if that, yeah, the plane that has the suites, the enclosed suites.

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Pam: The plane doesn't, doesn't have Singapore Suites anymore on it. But so we flew to Munich?

Jess: Frankfurt, right?

Alex: No, we flew into Frankfurt.

Pam: Frankfurt, Frankfurt. And then on to.

Alex: It's the same exact flight Jess is taking for her Christmas markets.

Pam: Yeah. And so anyway, so I, you know, but so I had to be completely flexible, but I loved that so much that I was like, now I need to do Etihad apartments. I need to do something similar.

Alex: We need to do all the most extreme, like bougiest flights in the sky.

Pam: Yes. And so I think again, a Thrifty Traveler alert or some alert came out, and I saw that you could book Etihad had apartments for 60k. I mean, this is unbelievable. I mean, I'd pay that in economy sometimes, you know? This was booked on Air Canada, London to Abu Dhabi. I booked my daughter and myself. We had no plans of really going to Abu Dhabi, only it was, it was winter, so we knew it would be warm. And then there was a lot of talk about whether these, some people were getting these tickets canceled. We never got ours canceled. I went on that trip. That is probably the very best one that I've ever done. That was amazing.

And then, like I said, also earlier, I have flown Virgin Atlantic from Boston to London many times for under, for right around 29k, 33k. Many times found good saver award availability there. The thing that I love about that is not only I like VA, it's a great airline. I get it for so cheap, but you also get to go to the Delta One Lounge there. And that is like the fanciest, bougiest restaurant. So they have.

Alex: In Boston.

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Pam: Yeah, in Boston. They have the lounge, but then they have them this Delta One part where you go and it's like a sit-down fancy restaurant. Really good food. I am, I mean, I love that just, just for that. So, me and my food.

Okay. So, bottom line, this is what we want you guys to know, that finding saver awards isn't about luck. It's about understanding how airlines release award space, knowing where to search, and staying flexible. So if you've enjoyed this episode, please leave us a review and share it with your friends and family.

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