

SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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TRENDSPOTTING

Can't always travel?

There are close-by places that can bring the world to you

BY JON MARCUS
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The days are short and the temperature cold, but the wood-burning sauna is cozy, scented by the smell of birch water poured over hot stones to make löyly, or steam. Sessions in the hot room are punctuated by invigorating plunges into the snow and end with socializing around a firepit over beer and makkarra, or sausage.

This kind of sauna-bathing is a Finnish ritual that dates back thousands of years. But experiencing it doesn't require flying to Finland — just going to West Newton.

The hidden-away Scandinavian Cultural Center there is among the close-by places, businesses, events, and clubs that can transport travel lovers to distant destinations, without leaving home.

These include not just such familiar spots as the North End Italian district or the Irish bars of South Boston, but the Latin Quarter in Jamaica Plain's Hyde Square; Little Saigon and the Polish Triangle, both in Dorchester; Nueva Esperanza, a Puerto Rican neighborhood in Holyoke; and a nascent Korea Town on Harvard Avenue in Allston.

"We have the known and celebrated parts of the state that people think about when they live or visit here, and that's all great," said Christian Kelly, spokesman and events manager for the Massachusetts Cultural Council. "But there are some other neighborhoods where you can feel like you're in a totally different place. You wouldn't necessarily even know you're in Massachusetts."

There are English-style high teas, supermarkets and convenience stores that stock imported foods, pubs that serve full Irish breakfasts, a European Christmas market at a German school in Allston, Japanese izakayas, or sake bars, and open-to-the-public cricket, Irish rugby, and Australian rules football competitions.

These aren't cheesy theme park knockoffs, but true representations brought by immigrants and

TRENDSPOTTING, Page N14



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Shrimp Spring Rolls with peanut sauce at Pho Hoa Restaurant in Boston's Little Saigon cultural district.



CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (LEFT); BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Left: Customers raise glasses of sake at The Koji Club in Boston in June 2022. Right: The Gaelic Athletic Association hosts a Gaelic football game at the Irish Cultural Centre in Canton in 2019.

How to get the most out of your credit card's mileage program

By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

In the past year and a half, I have flown from Seattle or nearby Vancouver to Kuala Lumpur, Buenos Aires, Kilimanjaro, and Boston — on my own or with a family member — using frequent flier miles mainly earned through credit card sign-up offers. That means I signed up for a new credit card — or three or four — met the minimum purchase requirement, then collected 60,000 to 100,000 miles on a specific airline (in my case, Alaska, United, and Delta) that covered our domestic and international flights.

I only signed up for a new card when I knew we had larger purchases to make: materials for a much-needed bathroom renovation, new home windows, our son's braces, and an expensive car repair. We didn't incur debt for these purchases — we pay off our credit card balances every



Travelers can sign up for airline-specific or other credit cards to earn valuable points — through sign-up bonuses or daily spending — that can be used to purchase flights, upgraded seats, or even hotels and rental cars.

month — but we took advantage of earning airline miles that paid for numerous trips and seat upgrades and saved us a significant amount of money.

Whether you're preparing for

a big one-time purchase or covering life's daily expenses — from groceries and gas to telephone bills — think about adding a new credit card to make those dollars

CREDIT CARDS, Page N13

Inside

THE VIP LOUNGE
TAPPING 'THE RESET'

Singer and sound healing artist Davin Youngs finds beauty in bad travel experiences

N12

HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

TRAVEL NEWS YOU CAN USE

The Boston Wine & Food fest, California dreaming, and travel gear for pets

N12



CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

A man passes the snow covered William J. Devine Golf Course at Franklin Park in Boston on Dec. 5, 2024.

Don't stay in this winter. We've got you covered.

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

Rain, sleet, snow, rising and plunging temperatures. Welcome to winter in New England. But that doesn't mean you need to burrow yourself indoors for the season. With the proper gear, you can endure — no, en-

joy! — whatever Mother Nature dishes out. Here's a roundup of some of the best cold-weather clothes that keep you warm and dry even when a nor'easter blows in. Listed prices are manufacturer's suggested retail.

You need a good base

Some call it baselayer; we call it long underwear. No matter

APPAREL, Page N14

Getting the most out of a card’s mileage program

►CREDIT CARDS
Continued from Page N11

work for you. Don’t forget to look beyond airline-specific credit cards. Consider getting an American Express Platinum, a Chase Sapphire Preferred, or a Capital One Venture X card, for instance; these cards let you accrue points for your purchases that can be transferred to airline, hotel, and car rental loyalty programs for travel-related savings.

When you sign up for a card with a high annual fee, such as the United Club Card (\$525) or American Express Platinum Card (\$695), you want to make sure you get your money back.

The Platinum Card, for instance, offers access to airport lounges, digital entertainment credits for streaming services, and hundreds of dollars in credits for Uber cash, to cover airline fees, and to book select hotels — all great offerings that could easily meet and exceed the value of the annual fee, but only if you benefit from these deals and services. These types of cards also offer significant point bonuses per dollar.

Nick Burgess, editor in chief at Trip Trend Setters, signed up for the American Express Platinum Card through Resy, a restaurant booking program, and earned 10 times the points for each dollar spent dining out in the first six months. That gave him 200,000 points, which he then transferred to Delta Airlines to buy international flights for himself and his wife in upgraded seats. Essentially, Burgess spent \$2,000 eating out and got free roundtrip Premium Select tickets from Atlanta to Rome (a \$2,700 value).

“I was also able to take advantage of the Platinum Card Fine Hotels and Resorts \$200 annual credit, as well as my leftover Membership Rewards points (the additional 100,000 Amex points earned as a sign-up bonus), to book a 5-star hotel for free for six nights,” he says.

Another good way to collect points, according to Jesse Neugarten, CEO and founder of Dollar Flight Club: Get a free Bilt Resorts loyalty card and use it to pay your monthly rent (without any transaction fees). Then transfer those points to hotel and airline programs.

“If you’re going to play the points game, you need to acquaint yourself with the potential value of your points,” says Michelle Couch-Friedman, founder of Consumer Rescue and a columnist for The Points Guy travel website. “Every month, The Points Guy releases what they think the points are worth for every credit card company. Right now, they have valued those Capital One Venture points at 1.85 cents and the Platinum Card at 2.1 cents — so if you play the game right, that’s what you could get, but if you don’t, you may only get .5 cent.”



STEVEN SENNE/AP/FILE

Earning airline miles through credit card purchases can pay for trips and seat upgrades.

When it comes to redeeming points, she adds, “you’ll typically get the most bang for your buck by transferring points to an airline program rather than getting gift cards or cash credit on your statement.”

If you ever decide to cancel your credit card, make sure you transfer your points to a loyalty program or redeem them for travel before closing the account or you will lose those points.

Once you’ve earned and saved enough airline miles, what’s the best way to spend them? You have multiple choices, depending on what you value the most. Some travelers prefer using their miles to buy economy class tickets and then paying fees — in dollars or miles — to upgrade their seats. Others would rather pay cash for cheap economy tickets and then invest miles in upgrading to premium or business class. Numerous approaches work, and the best deals are based on availability and cost.

One key strategy for spending your miles: Book flights on a partner airline. For instance, when traveling from Seattle to Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, last year, I used 85,000 Alaska Airlines miles to book a roundtrip flight, which was run by Alaska’s partner Qatar Airways (a flight that would have cost double the miles if booked through Qatar, and more in cash than I wanted to spend). My traveling companion spent 195,000 Alaska Airlines miles (equivalent to about \$2,500) for her roundtrip flight in one of Qatar’s palatial lay-flat business class Qsuite pods (a \$7,500 value).

Book reward travel as early as possible and during the off-season to help stretch your miles. Most airlines release award seats 330 days in advance (or up to 360 days for some airlines), according to Couch-Friedman, so that’s when you’ll find the best availability. Keep checking mileage flights even after you purchase them. I booked my Tanzania flight about four months in advance and then rebooked it the week I flew because I found the same flights for significantly less mileage points, due to availability. Travelers often cancel flights last minute (miles get re-deposited back into their account) or airlines release mileage seats if they’re unsold.

“One of the biggest mistakes I see travelers make is hoarding miles for a ‘perfect’ trip,” says Neugarten. “The reality is that airline programs constantly devalue their points, meaning your miles lose value over time.”

Time to start earning miles or begin spending those you’ve saved so you can get the most out of your mileage program and, most important, get out and have fun exploring the world.

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A JetBlue Mint suite category seat in its lie-flat position.

First-class upgrades: How to score a sweeter seat

By Debra Kamin

NEW YORK TIMES

Visions of Champagne and lie-flat seats danced in my head when Azores Airlines accepted my 500-euro bid to upgrade my husband and me to business class during our kid-free vacation in August.

But the reality was far less cushy: Our seats reclined only a few inches more than regular coach seats. There was no screen for TV or movies. We ate exactly the same meal they served at the back of the plane. And that bubbly? A bust.

There are more of us cabin climbers than ever, and many of us make the same rookie mistake I did, said Anthony Berklich, founder of the luxury New York-based travel agency Inspired Citizen. Access to first and business class, once almost exclusively reserved for big spenders or as a perk for frequent fliers, is now open to a growing number of travelers willing to bid for an upgrade, spend loyalty points, or shell out extra cash.

Two decades ago, Delta Air Lines typically filled much of its first-class cabin with high-status frequent fliers. But now, more than 70 percent of seats are taken by eager customers who have paid for the privilege of sitting up front, both through paid upgrades and the purchase of a full-price fare, according to Glen Hauenstein, president of Delta. Airlines are responding to this hunger by expanding first-class and business-class cabins — which in turn creates even more opportunities for upgrades.

But choose wisely: Not all premium cabins pamper the same, and “if you don’t have the facts, you absolutely can be robbed,” Berklich said.

Here are some tips for making your lie-flat dreams come true.

Research the routes

The quality — and extravagance — of your first-class experience is going to depend on where you’re flying to and from.

That’s because “there’s actually two types of first class,” said Brian Kelly, founder of the Points Guy, a website dedicated to maximizing airline and credit-card loyalty programs. If you’re flying within the United States, you’re almost definitely getting a “domestic first class” product that more closely resembles some international business class or premium economy.

In other words, did you book first class on Delta from Kennedy Airport to Houston? You might get a meal with linen, a bit more legroom, and a cocktail before takeoff, but don’t expect to be blown away. First class on Air France from Paris to Kennedy, however, comes with chauffeur service to the airport, a concierge to handle your luggage, amenities like pajamas and Sisley toiletries, and yes, Champagne.

On carriers like Etihad Airways, Singapore Airlines, and Emirates, a first-class ticket can unlock three-room suites, showers, and unlimited caviar.

Book in the next lowest class

Being bumped up from seat 47B to 1A is next to impossible, said Berklich, because airlines

allow upgrades one tier at a time. So set yourself up for success by first booking in business class if you want to make it to first class, or in premium economy if you want to move to business.

“That will be much less expensive, and then you can utilize credit card points or miles” to bridge the gap, Berklich said.

Combine cash and credit card points

Points, miles, and dollars can be combined to get into first class, as long as you use the right tools. Points from credit cards like Chase Sapphire and American Express, for example, can be transferred to airline mileage programs, often at a 1-to-1 ratio. You can combine those miles and points to book a first-class award ticket.

Websites like Point.me, Roame.travel, and Pointhound can help you search for a flight route and see which airline programs will give you the best deal if you transfer, while Points Path,

a free browser extension, will show you award pricing alongside cash pricing when you search for a ticket in Google Flights.

Check the seat map

Before you splurge, always peek at the seating chart for your aircraft. On some airlines, including Lufthansa, Emirates, and American, you can book first class and still end up with a neighbor directly next to you.

“You can have a wildly different experience depending on the plane you’re on,” Kelly said.

The type of plane will be listed in your ticket confirmation, and a quick Google search of that plane type and the airline name will reveal a seat map. Sites like SeatGuru give information about each seat, including whether or not it is lie-flat, if you hover the cursor over it.

Reddit threads and forums also offer plenty of tips about both first-class and business-class cabins: On Emirates Airbus A380s, for example, travelers say

the window seats in business class behind the bulkhead are the quietest; in United’s Polaris business-class cabin on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, travelers say seats 9A and 9L have the largest footwells, making them attractive for tall passengers seeking extra legroom.

Be patient, but ready to pounce

How much it costs to upgrade, and when those prices change, depends on a lot: route, demand, even how much people have historically been willing to pay.

So is it better to upgrade when you book, or wait until the day of your flight?

There’s no hard and fast rule, Kelly said. Instead, check in on your airline app every few days to see if costs have budged. And when they do, be prepared to jump at the offer — and to be spoiled for every future flight.

“You can’t unsee what you’ve seen when you get to fly in the front of the plane,” Kelly said.

Legendary warmth.





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