

Frequent flyers: just pie in the sky?

By John Wright September 01, 2008 12:00am

Find the value ... amassing and using frequent-flyer points wisely can be an artform / Reuters : SPENDING frequent flyer points seems easy, right? You build up points on your credit cards, you transfer them to your frequent-flyer scheme, you pick a trip and, if you have enough points, off you go for just the cost of the taxes.

But wait a minute. How do you know your credit card is giving you the best transfer deal on frequent-flyer points? Is blowing those points on a return trip to Perth the best value you can get out of them, or would they be better saved for an international flight?

Wise frequent-flyer travellers don't build up their points by spending haphazardly on a range of credit cards, and they never use those points indiscriminately. And, surprisingly, when they want the best travel deals on points, they'll often ignore the internet and let a professional – a travel agent – handle the transaction for them.

Amassing and using frequent-flyer points wisely can be an artform, according to Max Najar, a man who knows the frequent-flyer industry intimately and who runs a business that tells travellers how to use it properly.

He is the principal and a director of [Frequent Flyer Club](#), a service that not only shows people how to maximise their memberships of frequent-flyer schemes but also provides other travel services and related advice.

"Our members are people who have frequent-flyer points or who want to amass them but who don't understand the complexities," he says. "By coming to us, they're getting advice from thoroughly trained personnel."

Najar says frequent-flyer schemes used to be more worthwhile for the traveller than they are now, citing the new "any seat, any day" points redemption scheme operated by Qantas as an example.

"Under the old scheme, you could travel Brisbane-London for 140,000 points; under the new scheme, it is 600,000-plus. Even people with millions of points are saying that's ridiculous."

But, Najar says, everyday Australian travellers who don't count their points in the millions can immediately begin to improve their returns from frequent-flyer scheme membership by following a few simple rules.

- Don't use too many different credit cards if you want to build up your points. By consolidating your cards to two or three, you will have more control over your points.
- Do some research before signing up for any credit card. Some cards will be linked directly to a scheme – for example, an Amex-Qantas Frequent Flyer card – and will offer a minimum of one point per dollar spent on the card. Ask the card supplier what the net points result per dollar spent will be, and reject the card if it offers less than 1:1. If possible, all your credit cards should be linked to your frequent flyer scheme.
- If you travel overseas regularly, choose frequent-flyer schemes on airlines that are included in the major alliances, for example OneWorld (Qantas) or Star Alliance. Buy as much as you can repay comfortably on your credit cards and try to maintain a frequent-flyer points balance. But use the points as soon as you can.
- Don't use points for trips which don't offer a good miles-for-points return. Short-haul domestic flights and long-haul international flights often can present the best value for your points, but you can waste points if you use them for flights that are being offered as low-fare specials on the internet.
- Don't assume that using the internet to book trips will be cheaper than booking through a travel agent.
- Good agents know how to help you maximise your frequent-flyer points and are in a better position to know about special points deals.

For more information about the Frequent Flyer Club, access www.frequentflyerclub.com.au