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Best (& Worst) of 2014

A look at this year's best news for frequent flyers along with the changes that were real "dogs"

The words of Maya Angelou, "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude," could have been the mantra of the year for the frequent flyer. Changes to frequent flyer programs have been, as usual, the bane of the road warrior in 2014. You can complain, but you can't always do anything about it.

Changes that travel loyalty members faced this year included new—more expensive—categories for hotel programs, rising award costs and diminished elite perks, among other bad news. In fact, when asked if compared to a year ago the value of your favorite loyalty program has gone up, down or stayed

about the same, 52.4 percent of those who responded said the value has "gone down".

However, as always, it wasn't all bad news. If you lived in Washington state, you could take advantage of some really good offers not available for anyone else in the country simply because two partner airlines decided to go for the throat of the other.

And there are always reasons to celebrate these programs that have offered so much to frequent travelers for so many years. Enjoy this look back at 2014—it might best be remembered as the last year that Delta and United were mileage-based programs. So, here's to the good, the bad, the surprises—the best, and the "dogs".

January

▼ UP UP & AWAY TO CATEGORY 7

On Jan. 7, Hyatt Gold Passport added a new Category 7 at 30,000 points (up from Category 6 at 22,000 points) and increased point requirements for Category 5 and Category 6 hotels. The increases ranged between 11 and 14 percent at Category 5 and 6 and 35 percent for the new Category 7 properties.

▲ **CASH IS KING** Also on Jan. 7, Hyatt introduced Points + Cash award nights, allowing members to pay 50 percent of the points normally required for an award night plus a cash amount between \$50 and \$300. These awards count toward elite status and members earn points on the cash portion of the stay. James Larounis, The Forward Cabin, noted "At the Andaz Amsterdam, for example, rates can run close to \$400 a night. By combining 15,000 points with the \$150 nightly co-pay, you save several hundred dollars off your stay." Hyatt Gold Passport also changed its point expiration policy from 12 months to 24 months. Elite members were offered a new My Elite Rate of 20 percent off the Hyatt Daily Rate, good through 2014.

▼ **MORE MILES** Alaska Airlines Mileage Plan introduced changes to its award chart effective Jan. 14. The increases were mainly targeted towards refundable awards, requiring an extra 5,000 miles roundtrip in economy and an extra 10,000 to 20,000 miles roundtrip in first class on refundable award bookings.

▲ MEXICO AWARDS GO SOUTH

There was some good news from Alaska Mileage Plan effective Jan. 14—roundtrip Saver awards in first class to Mexico decreased by 5,000 miles.

▲ **100K WITH \$10K** American AAdvantage members could earn up to 100,000 miles when getting the Citi Executive / AAdvantage World Elite MasterCard. The catch was that you had to make at least \$10,000 in purchases within the first three months of account opening.

▼ **BATTLE FOR SEATTLE EARLY STAGES** Alaska Mileage Plan upped the cost for partner airline Delta

flights for business class travel to Europe on Feb. 12—from 90,000 miles roundtrip to 100,000 miles.

▲ **DOUBLE ELITE CREDITS ARE ALWAYS GOOD** Starting Jan. 14 and through March 3, JetBlue TrueBlue members could earn double base points that also counted toward elite Mosaic status on all JetBlue flights.

▼ **CROWD CONTROL** Delta raised the rates for airport lounge membership and announced a cutback on guests. To get lounge access for a member and up to two guests, the new cost is \$695 annually. And when you purchase an individual annual membership at \$450, you must pay \$29 per visit for your guest. As of May 1, all customers who get complimentary Sky Club access as a benefit of their credit card will no longer receive complimentary guest access. Gary of View from the Wing titled his blog post to announce the changes, "Delta's Astonishing Arrogance in Jacking Up Lounge Access Prices." Also as of May 1, all Delta third-party operated international lounges became business lounges—and no longer available for SkyTeam Elite Plus members.

February

▼ MILEAGEPLUS MASSACRE

Changes to United MileagePlus awards that were announced in November 2013, came into effect early February, with partner award flights in premium classes being significantly more expensive. Summer of Mommy Points called it the "massacre of the United award chart." Lucky of One Mile At A Time noted that Star Alliance premium cabin awards went up as much as 87 percent.

▲ SURE BEATS A TOASTER OVEN

New Southwest Rapid Rewards members could get 2,000 points for joining the program, an additional 25 points for signing up for Rapid Rewards email summaries and another 250 points for signing up for email updates, up to 2,500 bonus points.

▼ **DEFLATED TRANSFER** Effective Feb. 6, transfers from Virgin Atlantic miles to Hilton HHonors points were

“Hyatt introduced Points + Cash award nights ...”

devalued from 1 mile to 2 points to 2 miles to 3 points (or another way to look at it is 1 mile to 1.5 points).

▼ **WE TOLD YOU YESTERDAY** In particularly bad form, Wyndham Rewards cut their mileage transfer rates and instead of giving members advance notice, the program gave them "retro" notice. On Feb. 1, the Wyndham Rewards website stated the transfer ratios changed as of Jan. 31. As Lucky at One Mile At A Time stated at the time, "Any devaluation without advance notice is horrible, but this one is even worse than that, because they're cutting the transfer ratio in half."

▼ YOU KNEW IT WAS COMING

Delta announced that they will introduce a revenue-based frequent flyer program in 2015. The biggest changes came on the earning side, with miles earned based on five new levels framed on your level of membership in SkyMiles with more bonus and earning power given to the most valuable members.

▲ ACTUAL ENHANCEMENT?

In February, Delta announced the introduction of one-way flight awards priced at half of the roundtrip ticket redemption amount to be launched Jan. 1, 2015. (This is good news, but will this be the death toll for award stopovers?)

▲ BATTLE OVER SEATTLE

CONTINUES Delta offered double redeemable miles and double Medallion Qualification Miles (MQMs) starting in February until the end of the year when members fly Delta or Delta Connection domestic nonstop flights from Seattle. But only for SkyMiles members registered in the state of Washington.

March

▼ **IN TEARS OVER TIERS** Club Carlson introduced a new Category 7 tier (a 40 percent increase from the former top category), upped

award prices on many hotels and announced Silver members would now get a 15 percent point bonus on stays instead of 25 percent and Gold would get 35 percent instead of 50 percent. Top Concierge members would continue to earn a 75 percent point bonus.

▲ DRINK UP! Along with the bad news for Club Carlson members in March, the good news was that award nights will now count toward elite status and food and beverages charged to the room on award nights will earn points.

▲ UPGRADED UPGRADES On March 1, Delta replaced their Systemwide Upgrade Certificates (SWU) with Global and Regional Upgrade certificates, and blogger Frequent Miler sees this as one of the best events for Delta SkyMiles members in 2014. The new Global and Regional Upgrades are more flexible and useful compared to the previous SWU certificates because they can be used on nearly every fare class. While complimentary upgrades on transcontinental flights were discontinued, elite members flying to Hawaii gained free upgrades on flights to Hawaii from the West Coast.

▲ FEWER DOLLARS = MORE MILES In defiance of frequent flyer programs that reward members who spend the most on their tickets, Spirit Airlines offered FREE SPIRIT members who booked flights for less than \$100 each way the chance to earn up to 1,000 bonus miles. The promotion claimed "The cheaper your flight, the more miles you'll earn." One-way flights of less than \$36 earned 1,000 bonus miles; \$36-\$65 earned 500 bonus miles and \$66-\$99 earned 250 bonus miles.

▲ FACEBOOK CHALLENGE American Airlines launched the AAdvantage Facebook Challenge where members could earn up to 10,000 bonus AAdvantage miles by answering trivia questions and playing games through the American Airlines Facebook page. Lucky at One Mile At A Time said, "I value 700 AAdvantage miles at \$13, which isn't bad for playing 10 minutes worth of games."

▼ GOOD AWARD COMES TO AN END When US Airways left the Star Alliance to join oneworld on March 31, US Airways Dividend Miles members lost the ability to book what Lucky at One Mile At A Time called, "one of the single best award ticket values in the industry"—US Airways' 90,000-mile business class award between the U.S. and North Asia using Star Alliance carriers. What made the award even better, was that flyers could stopover in Europe enroute to Asia—if you flew only to Europe and back, the award would be 10,000 more miles.

▲ NOT AS BAD AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN Starwood adjusted the points required for stays at their hotels on or after March 4, and the news was generally good for SPG members. Only 20 percent of the hotels changed category and 56 of these hotels moved down categories and 44 moved up—so overall, good news.

▼ HELLO HUDDLED MASSES As of March 22, American Express Platinum cardmembers no longer have access to American Admirals Clubs.

▼ WOULD YOU LIKE A FEE WITH YOUR GOLD STATUS? As of March 31, British Airways Executive Club Gold members no longer get a waiver for change and cancellation fees and the program made the change without advance notice to members.

▲ WHEN AIRLINES ARE BAD, IT'S GOOD The Battle for Seattle raged on between Delta and Alaska Airlines when Alaska offered double miles between March 24 and June 15 when flying partner British Airways to London. This, just as Delta launched new nonstop service between Seattle and London.

▼ BURN BABY BURN In one day, March 31, Southwest Rapid Rewards devalued its currency by 15 percent when it declared that Wanna Get Away award flight bookings made on or after that date would require 70 points per dollar, an increase from 60 points per dollar. The only good thing about this change is that members were given six months to burn their points before the new rule came into effect.

▲ NOT THE LAST RESORT Starwood Preferred Guest offered resort stays for a 35 percent point discount ending March 1, but SPG extended the offer through March 3, 2015. The promotion can be used with the fifth night free benefit.

April

▼ IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU DO, IT'S HOW YOU SAY IT American Airlines announced a new five-tier award chart, eliminated stopovers on award flights and discontinued oneworld Explorer awards in early April with no advance notice to members. James Larounis rated this as the worst change of the year along with the change to American's international gateway policy, reducing a stopover to 24 hours or less. Previously, flyers could stay several days to several months at an international gateway. Also, the US Airways 90,000 business class flight to North Asia was raised to 110,000 miles, and AAnytime awards would be more expensive starting June 1. AAdvantage members were particularly upset about the way in which the changes were communicated. (To American's credit, after the communication fiasco, Suzanne Rubin mentioned to InsideFlyer, "We quickly heard from customers, as well as media, that we missed the mark ranging from the length of advanced notice that we provided, to the level of detail, all the way to the tone of the communications. We have absolutely taken these suggestions and comments into account as we move forward.")

▲ NOT TOO BAD Hilton announced award adjustments for 2014 in April with 25 hotels going up an award category and 14 moving down—a fraction of Hilton hotels worldwide (over 4,000).

▼ NOT TOO GOOD The Hilton HHonors program also announced that it will no longer make award category adjustments just once per year, but will adjust hotels periodically throughout the year—the downside is that members will need to keep up with all of the changes.

▲ A VIRTUOUS WAY TO EARN MILES

The Milepoint Kiva Lending Team passed the \$7 million mark in funding microfinance loans to poor and underserved populations through Kiva. The Milepoint team has ranked third overall of all the lending teams on Kiva for the past few years. By November, that number grew to over \$8 million.

▲ EVERYDAY POINTS

American Express launched two new cards that offer Membership Rewards points, the no-fee Amex Everyday Credit Card and the Amex Everyday Preferred card with a \$95 annual fee. The Amex Everyday card has a bonus of 10,000 Membership Rewards points after you make \$1,000 in purchases in the first three months and the Amex Everyday Preferred card has a bonus of 15,000 points after you spend \$1,000 in the first three months. Summer of Mommy Points, said during the launch, "The best part of these cards, in my opinion, is not the sign-up bonuses, but rather their usefulness in everyday earning. They both earn fully transferable Membership Reward points ..."

▲ GOOD NEWS ON TAX DAY

IHG Rewards Club reduced the cost of 100 hotels by 5,000 points during their annual award category adjustments on April 15. No hotels went up a category.

▼ APRIL IS THE CRUELEST MONTH

Marriott Rewards announced category changes for 27 percent of their hotels for stays booked on or after April 8, and 78 percent of the changes were hotels increasing by one category.

▲ #EASYPPOINTS

Club Carlson handed out 1,000 Gold Points to the first 15,000 people who followed the club on Twitter.

May

CHIP, CHIP, HOORAY!

Delta American Express co-branded SkyMiles credit cards eliminated the foreign transaction fees as of May 1, and added EMV chip technology (chip and signature).

▼ TAKE ONLY TWO InterContinental announced changes to their IHG

Rewards Club terms and conditions restricting PointBreaks bookings to two PointBreaks award night reservations per hotel. Previously there were no limits on PointBreaks award night reservations.

▲ UNIFICATION POINTS AirTran A+ Rewards members who verified their A+ Rewards account and enrolled in or linked to a Southwest Rapid Rewards account by May 23 earned a 750 Rapid Rewards point bonus.

▼ MILES NO MORE In an unusual move, Lufthansa Miles & More opted to no longer sell miles to members. The program quietly, and rather quickly, ended the purchase option after offering a final 20 percent bonus promotion on purchased miles.

▲ SUMMERTIME AND THE EARNING IS EASY

American AAdvantage offered a summer promotion where members could earn up to 100,000 bonus miles for roundtrip travel between the U.S., Canada or Mexico and Europe on American Airlines, US Airways, British Airways, Finnair, Iberia or OpenSkies through Aug. 31.

▼ NO MORE R&R Red Lion R&R Club announced that as of May 31, Red Lion R&R Club members would no longer be able to earn points or miles for stays and that those members with a minimum of 10,000 points had six months to spend their points or lose them.

▲ MILES FEAST Dining programs offered members generous bonus mile promotions for the summer. American AAdvantage members could earn 2,000 bonus miles for enrolling in the AAdvantage Dining program and spending at least \$30 on a qualifying dine within 30 days of joining. US Airways and Delta offered the same promotion for Dividend Miles members and SkyMiles members. United offered up to 3,000 bonus miles for creating an online profile and completing up to five dines within 30 days of enrolling.

▼ ONE DAY [BURIED IN FINE PRINT] NOTICE Wyndham once again drew criticism for not enough advance notice when members received an email on May 21,

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In an unusual move, Lufthansa Miles & More opted to no longer sell miles to members.”

announcing that tier levels would be adjusted the following day, May 22.

▼ BATTLE FOR SEATTLE

CONTINUES Alaska Mileage Plan raised the cost in miles for Delta award flights for tickets booked on or after May 6. This followed Delta cutting elite benefits for Alaska MVP elite members traveling on Delta and Alaska cutting elite benefits for Delta SkyMiles Medallion members flying on Alaska.

▲ BAD BEHAVIOR, BUT GOOD

FOR YOU In the continuing saga of two airline partners in a struggle for customers, Delta started offering residents of Alaska special perks similar to the benefits of Alaska Mileage Plan's Club 49, including two free checked bags through the end of the year along with a fast-track to Delta Medallion status and other perks.

▼ CAN I PRETEND I CAN'T

REMEMBER? As of May 2, those applying for American Express cards can no longer receive a sign-up bonus if they have ever owned that card in the past (this is different from offers where you could sign up and get a sign-up bonus after a designated period of time had lapsed). Summer of Mommy Points sees this as one of the worst events for travelers in 2014.

June

▼ MONEY MATTERS AT UNITED

TOO On June 10, United announced that MileagePlus is moving to a revenue-based frequent flyer program. Beginning March 1, 2015, members will earn award miles based on revenue rather than distance flown. The

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new MileagePlus earning structure will apply to most United and United Express tickets as well as tickets for flights operated by Star Alliance and MileagePlus partner airlines that have been issued by United.

▲ MORE MILES FOR SEATTLE

Starting June 1, Alaska Mileage Plan members were offered double miles on select routes from Seattle until the end of the year including Anchorage, San Diego, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Jose, Oakland and Vancouver, Canada.

▲ I'LL UPGRADE YOU IF YOU'LL UPGRADE ME

In a move toward the airlines' final merger, American and US Airways elite passengers began receiving reciprocal upgrades at check-in. Gary of View from the Wing said the offer is "good enough for now." And, "This half-step of first-come first-serve upgrades if available at check-in is absolutely better than what we had before (no reciprocal upgrades)."

▲ ANOTHER GOOD REASON TO CROSS THE POND

British Airways Executive Club members residing in the U.S. or Canada could earn up to 100,000 bonus Avios for roundtrip transatlantic flights through Aug. 31.

▲ ONE STAY = PLATINUM Omni Select Guest Gold level members were offered the opportunity to upgrade to a Platinum level membership by booking a stay by June 30 and completing it before July 31.

July

▲ 10 FOR 1 IS BETTER THAN 2,000

As of July 1, IHG Rewards Club made changes to the points earning structure for InterContinental hotels worldwide, replacing the earn rate of 2,000 points per stay for hotels outside the Americas with a new earning structure of 10 points for every \$1 charged to your room including the nightly room rate, food and beverages and other services charged to your room. As Lucky at One Mile At A Time said regarding the old earn policy, "So if you made a one night stay at an InterContinental for \$100, or a 10

night stay in a presidential suite at an InterContinental for \$100,000, you'd earn 2,000 points." Obviously, the new earn structure is better.

▲ CHOW DOWN TO EARN UP

American AAdvantage members enrolled in the AAdvantage Dining program could earn 10,000 bonus miles when completing 10 dines by Aug. 15, 2014.

▲ NOW CONNECTING EUROPE

In July, IHG Rewards Club added free Internet access for members at hotels in Europe, making the benefit worldwide for all members.

▲ NOW BOARDING BoardingArea launched a newly redesigned site and introduced a new sister site, Prior2Boarding.

▲ 3X FOR WEEKENDS In July, Hilton HHonors members could earn double or triple points for registering and staying at a participating Hilton property through Oct. 31. Through the "Triple Your Trip" promotion, Hilton HHonors members could earn double points for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights stays. Triple points were awarded for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights in your stay.

▼ BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU BOOK

Although the up to triple points offer from Hilton HHonors could be lucrative, the list of hotels opting out was extensive. LoyaltyLobby reported that 1,362 hotels chose to opt out of the promotion, equating to 33 percent of all Hilton family properties.

▲ FREE STAY TO START You could get 70,000 Marriott Rewards points when signing up for the Marriott Rewards Premier Credit Card and spending \$2,000 in the first three months along with one free night at a Category 1 through 4 hotel at account approval—and the \$85 annual fee was waived for the first year. The same deal was available in February with only \$1,000 spend in the first three months.

▲ GOOD KARMA Kimpton Karma Rewards was introduced as the new program for Kimpton Hotels and they offered a 20 percent discount

“ Kimpton Karma Rewards was introduced as the new program for Kimpton Hotels ...”

on stays and double elite night and stay credits from July 23 through Sept. 30. Inner Circle status could be earned with as few as seven stays or 20 nights during the promotion.

▲ THANK YOU! In July, Citi ThankYou points announced that holders of Citi ThankYou Premier, Citi Prestige and Citi Chairman cards can now transfer points to a select list of airline programs including Cathay Pacific, EVA Air, Etihad, Garuda Indonesia, Qatar, Singapore and Thai and also Hilton. They have since added Air France/KLM and Malaysia Airlines.

August

▲ GOLDEN WEEKEND Club Carlson offered 20,000 bonus Gold Points for members who registered for the "Weekend Special" and completed a stay of two or more nights at participating Radisson Blu or Park Inn by Radisson hotels in Europe, the Middle East or Africa through Sept. 15.

▲ WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD AWARD SALE? Alaska Mileage Plan ran an award sale starting Aug. 30 through Oct. 31, offering deals as cheap as 5,000 miles one-way on select domestic routes such as San Diego to Salt Lake City.

▼ ANOTHER SKIRMISH IN THE BATTLE FOR SEATTLE Although good for the residents of Washington state, Delta was up to no good when they offered select members in Washington Gold Medallion status for two months plus a two-month Sky Club membership with the added incentive of Gold Medallion for 10 months, a Sky Club membership for an additional two months and 25,000 bonus points if they booked and paid for two roundtrip Delta or Delta Connection flights on select fares

within two months of registering for the promotion.

▲ ONE (OR MORE) FOR THE ROAD National's One Two Free offer allowed Emerald Club members to get one free car rental day after every two rentals in the U.S. of at least two days—with no limit to the number of free rental days you earn. The promotion is valid from Aug. 20, 2014 through Jan. 31, 2015 and the free rentals can be redeemed through June 15, 2015.

▲ SOMETHING TO AIM FOR The InterContinental Royal Ambassador program, the invitation-only top tier for guests of InterContinental Hotels, announced their qualification requirements, making it easier for guests to aim for the exalted status that comes with complimentary beverages from the minibar among other benefits. Although still listed as invitation only, now guests know that they must stay at least 60 qualifying nights in IHG properties, with at least 20 of those nights at InterContinental properties, and these stays must include at least three different InterContinental properties.

September

▲ PERSONALIZED POINTS IHG announced Into the Nights, offering registered IHG Rewards Club members individualized offers and the opportunity to earn at least two free nights and at least up to 50,000 points for completing specific activities through Dec. 31.

▼ CRACKED GOLDEN EGG Star Alliance members heard the news that new the Aegean Miles+Bonus program would no longer offer the easy path to Star Alliance Gold that the program featured in the past. The new program started Nov. 24 and now, the path to Star Alliance Gold through Miles+Bonus includes not only more elite qualifying miles at 24,000 compared to 20,000, but at least four of those have to be on Aegean or Olympic flights—that, or you'll need 48,000 miles to achieve the status.

▲ EASY POINTS Club Carlson offered members an easy 3,000 bonus points

when booking hotel stays through the Club Carlson app from Sept. 8 through Nov. 16. And the best part? Members could earn the bonus multiple times. Doesn't get much easier than that. Another Club Carlson point offered starting in September was 7,500 American AAdvantage or Aeroplan miles after two stays at Radisson hotels through Dec. 15.

▲ LOWERING THE BAR In September, JetBlue announced that TrueBlue members can now spend their points starting with 3,500 points instead of the previous 5,000 points. This was good news, especially for less frequent TrueBlue members.

▼ THE NEW FRONTIER Frontier EarlyReturns broke the news that the current two-tiered elite program will become one tier starting Feb. 20, 2015. The new elite level, called Frontier Elite, will require members to earn 20,000 miles or 25 segments. Frontier also did away with free beverages and the free checked bag benefit for elite-level members.

▲ WISH WE'D BEEN TARGETED In September, targeted US Airways Dividend Miles members received emails offering triple Preferred Qualifying Miles through Dec. 13. No registration was required and the offer was available for travel on US Airways, US Airways Express, American and American Eagle.

▲ GET YOUR MILES HERE In September, United MileagePlus, US Airways Dividend Miles and Avianca LifeMiles all offered up to 100 percent bonus miles when purchasing miles.

▼ LAST CHANCE LifeMiles members had an extra incentive to buy miles and earn a bonus because as of Sept. 30, the cost of miles in that program went up 10 percent, from \$30 plus taxes for a block of 1,000 points, to \$33.

October

▼ WHAT HAPPENED? In October, IHG revised the Into the Nights promotion, changing the requirements for some offers and upsetting members who had already

booked or completed stays based on the original offer. IHG sent an email to members stating, "During a recent update to our Into the Nights website, we experienced some technical issues that resulted in an unexpected change to one of your offers. We apologize for the confusion and for any inconvenience it may have caused you. We have fixed the issue and we have restored your original offer."

▼ FEE-FI-FO-FRONTIER On Oct. 31, Frontier began charging an award redemption fee for all flight awards booked less than six months in advance of flying. This award redemption fee will be waived for all Frontier Elite members.

▲ FREE-FI-FO-WIFI In October, Marriott Rewards customers heard that free WiFi access will be complimentary for all Marriott Rewards members regardless of their status starting Jan. 15, 2015. The caveat is that members cannot book their stays through a third-party website to get the benefit, and unfortunately, some hotels have opted out to offer free WiFi.

▼ TAKE THIS, AND THIS Oct. 1 brought a "double blow" to the Amex Rewards program according to Summer at Mommy Points. As of Jan. 1, 2015, American Express will be dropping the annual 15,000 Membership Rewards points bonus on the American Express Rewards Gold Card after spending \$30,000 in annual spend, and also as of Jan. 1, 2015, American Express is putting a 250,000 Membership Rewards points limit that members will be able to transfer out of a single Membership Rewards account for Delta SkyMiles, the last-remaining major U.S. airline transfer partner for Membership Rewards.

▼ AMAZON MILES EARNING SHUTS DOWN As of Oct. 13, Amazon Payments eliminated person-to-person payments. What this means is that all of the frequent flyers who had been earning miles/points through credit card spend using Amazon Payments to send money to their spouses for goods and services (wink, wink), would no

longer have this option. As Lucky at One Mile At A Time said, "Frankly I'm surprised it lasted this long ..." Summer at Mommy Points on the last day this was available said, "... I know many will miss Amazon Payments!"

▼ AROUND THE WORLD ENDS IN A WHISPER

In October, Delta announced that as of Jan. 1, 2015, the SkyMiles program would no longer offer Round The World Awards. But the way they "announced" it was a bit of whisper—they simply updated their membership guide.

▼ THEY FIGURED YOU DIDN'T WANT A STOPOVER

At the end of October, Delta SkyMiles members starting noticing that they could no longer book stopovers through the Delta website on international awards (or more specifically, the awards price out as cumulative one-way flights instead of a stopover). Delta responded by saying, "A recent change in IT at Delta.com discontinued the ability to book intl. stopovers online. You could still book them via reservations agents." But Lucky at One Mile At A Time isn't buying into what Delta is saying. He says, "Delta SkyMiles is changing their IT in preparation for the 2015 SkyMiles program. On the plus side, one-way awards will be permitted for half the cost of a roundtrip, though clearly stopovers will be eliminated."

▼ ACCOR SAYS NEVERMIND In October, Le Club Accorhotels offered a generous 10,000 points per stay until the end of the year that would automatically be converted in 5,000 Aeroplan miles. But the offer was so generous, Accor decided to end the offer in October instead of December.

▲ GOOD DEAL, LUCILLE American AAdvantage announced more details for the 2015 AAdvantage program and AAdvantage program members everywhere could be heard breathing a sigh of relief. No revenue-based program, no major award chart devaluation and no major changes overall.

▼ BAD ALTITUDE Air Canada announced changes to their elite Altitude program for 2015 including

increased qualifying miles that must be earned on Air Canada metal. And as of March 1, 2015, elite members will no longer earn a 500-mile minimum for flights, among other changes.

▼ MQD = MORE QUALITY DOLLARS, PLEASE

Delta announced changes to the Medallion Qualification Dollar (MQD) requirements for elite status in 2016. You will now have to spend \$500 to \$2,500 more depending on status level.

November

▲ ALMOST, OR EVEN MORE THAN, HALF-WAY THERE

Southwest Rapid Rewards members can get 50,000 bonus points when signing up for the Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards Premier Credit Card and spending \$2,000 in the first three months. And those 50,000 points count toward earning a Southwest Companion Pass at 110,000 points per year. If you also get the Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards Premier Business Card, you can take advantage of the same offer, to get a total 100,000 Rapid Rewards points.

▼ BUT WE LIKE TO BE

CHALLENGED! Hyatt Gold Passport has historically continued their lucrative Diamond Challenge to elite status even though there has been an end date. But this year, as of Oct. 31, the challenge has ended and thus far, Hyatt has not renewed it. A Hyatt representative stated, "We are currently evaluating the best path forward with these types of promotions."

▲ PETER PIPER PICKED HIS

PROMO Hilton HHonors members were asked to vote and "Choose Your Reward" for Hilton's year-end promotion. Members chose double points starting with your second stay through Jan. 31, 2015, over a promotion offering 1,000 bonus points every night Thursday through Monday.

▲ LOYALTY RESTORED Red Lion introduced a new loyalty program called Hello Rewards to replace the Red Lion R&R Club program they

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... frequent flyers who had been using ... Amazon Payments to send money to their spouses for goods and services (wink wink) would no longer have this option ...”

discontinued. The new program will offer personalized experiences including a welcome gift at check-in, special rates of at least a 15 percent discount from the best available rate, member-only offers and a free night on your birthday.

December

▲ NINE IS A LOVELY NUMBER

Club Carlson members can get enough points for nine award nights when signing up for the Club Carlson Premier Rewards Visa Signature Card. You'll get 50,000 Gold Points after your first purchase plus 35,000 points when you spend \$2,500 on the card within the first 90 days.

▼ ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK

Spirit announced that in order to make sure they have room for everyone's bags, they are introducing an incentive to pack lighter ... a new bag fee of \$2 more per bag for holiday flights between Dec. 18, 2014 and Jan. 5, 2015. The airline encourages everyone to "spend less time packing and more time laughing." (While Spirit is laughing all the way to the bank.)

▲ INSTANT ELITE

With just one stay, VOILA Hotel Rewards members will be welcomed to Platinum tier status when staying at a VOILA Hotel Rewards hotel by Dec. 31. Platinum status comes with a 50 percent tier bonus on all stays as a Platinum member and more.