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united-plus-points-versus-paid-miles-upgrade

Cruising Review

Upgrading on United using cash and miles versus the elusive plus points



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Upgrading on United using cash and miles versus the elusive plus points

PDF Version of the webpage (first pages)

<https://cruisingreview.com/topics/united-plus-points-versus-paid-miles-upgrade.html>

Comparing United Airlines Business Class Upgrades: Plus Points vs. Cash and Miles

When flying with United Airlines, passengers often have the option to upgrade from their economy class seats to the luxurious business class. This upgrade can be achieved through two primary methods: using PlusPoints or using a combination of cash and miles. Both options offer unique advantages, and the decision ultimately depends on the traveler's preferences and priorities.

1. PlusPoints Upgrade:

United Airlines introduced the PlusPoints system as a flexible way for frequent flyers to enjoy enhanced travel experiences. PlusPoints are earned by elite members of the MileagePlus loyalty program based on their tier status. Here's how the upgrade process using PlusPoints works:

- Advantages:

- **Simplicity:** The PlusPoints system streamlines the upgrade process. Eligible passengers can request upgrades online or through the United app, making it convenient and hassle-free.
- **Flexibility:** PlusPoints can be used to upgrade not only the ticket of the traveler but also those of their travel companions, offering a degree of flexibility.
- **Clear Priority:** Elite members with higher status levels have priority when it comes to securing upgrades using PlusPoints.

2. Cash and Miles Upgrade:

United Airlines also offers passengers the option to pay for their upgrades using a combination of cash and miles from their MileagePlus account. This approach provides more control over the payment process, especially for those who might not have accumulated enough PlusPoints.

- Advantages:

- **Customization:** Passengers can decide how many miles they wish to redeem and how much cash they want to contribute, giving them more control over the upgrade cost.
- **Availability:** Unlike PlusPoints, which depend on the traveler's elite status, cash and miles upgrades are available to all passengers, ensuring that more people have access to the business class experience.

Choosing the Right Option:

Deciding between using PlusPoints or opting for a cash and miles upgrade depends on individual preferences and circumstances:

- **For Frequent Flyers:** Elite members of the MileagePlus program who accumulate PlusPoints might find it more convenient and rewarding to use these points for upgrades, especially considering their priority status and the simplicity of the process.
- **For Occasional Travelers:** Passengers who do not have a significant number of PlusPoints but have a decent mileage balance might prefer the cash and miles option as it allows them to tailor the upgrade cost to their budget.
- **For Group Travel:** If traveling with companions who are not eligible for PlusPoints upgrades, the cash and miles option could be a better choice, as it provides flexibility to upgrade multiple tickets.

In conclusion, both PlusPoints and cash and miles options offer United Airlines passengers a chance to elevate their travel experience from economy to business class. The decision between the two largely depends on the traveler's elite status, mileage balance, and individual preferences. Regardless of the method chosen, the allure of a more comfortable and luxurious journey awaits those who opt for a business class upgrade.

My Experience with Plus Points

Last year I paid for the 1K status. Waste of money. Aside from faster on-phone customer service and boarding first, the upgrades via plus points was virtually non-existent.

Then, just a month ago, they all expired. Even though I had lots of Plus Points, the seats in Business Class never appeared, even with plenty of seats available. If you check flight status, you will see a waiting list for who is above you on the list. Surprise, you are usually just below the available seats versus people waiting to be upgraded.

A Better Way to Upgrade

1. Book economy.
2. Go to the web-based online United page to lookup upgrades. For some reason, using the App would not show this option.
3. Select your trip.
4. Select Upgrade options.
5. Select Miles (or Miles and Cash).
6. For a trip from ORD to AMS, my option was 20,000 miles and \$550 cash. This includes access to the now overcrowded Polaris Lounge.

One Way Miles for Business Class

My new strategy is to buy a round-trip ticket, which is always less than one-way.

Then for the way back from Europe, find a flight with lots of Business Class seats available.

Search for miles (not cash purchase).

Look for 80,000 miles or less one-way ticket purchase. Typically a Business Class miles ticket is about 250,000 for one way.

Purchase that ticket with miles.

Cancel round trip flight after you have used the first segment, to get a refund or credit for unused portion.

The other option is above (miles and cash).

Check In Upgrade Option

If seats are available in Business Class (see by checking flight status prior travel), then check-in immediately at 24 hours prior flight departure.

This allows the United algorithm to offer you a upgrade to Business Class for around \$1,500 which is a great deal. This go quickly and immediately bump out the Plus Points waiting list people.

But it is a better deal to try to upgrade in advance for \$550 plus the 20,000 miles.
