



Do you make the most of your airpoints - both gathering them and using them? Have you caught up with the changes to the scheme since November 2003? Liz Shaw - known to her friends as 'Queen of the Airpoints' - explains the system and how you can get 'more for less'.

Making the Most of Your Airpoints

I have been known as the Queen of the Airpoints, and admittedly we have done pretty well over the years with our Air New Zealand airpoints.

The last time we went to Europe we paid for one fare only and managed to get upgrades to Business Class on one leg up and one leg back.

Although sadly, the days of upgrading Companion fares are gone and things are a bit trickier than they used to be. So here are a few tips on making the most of your Airpoints.

Earning Your Airpoints

- Firstly make sure you earn as many airpoints as possible. Use your credit card when ever possible - we just pay the balance monthly.

Amex Turbo Points

- At the moment and until next May the best value for obtaining airpoints is American Express which has the Turbo Points scheme running.
- You enrol in the scheme for \$50 and then each dollar spent earns 2 airpoints (can be used on either Air NZ or Qantas). Like Global Plus points these points can only be transferred to the Principal Card Member's Airpoints account.

Global Plus

- Global Plus points can be maximised with a gold card - spend \$15 get 10 points, compare with silver card spend \$15 get 7.5 points.

Flybuys transfer to Air NZ Airpoints too!

- Flybuys transfer to airpoints (many people don't know this) far more effectively than using them to acquire seats - each Flybuys point is equal to 12 airpoints.

Changes in the Scheme

- Since last November the way you can use Air New Zealand airpoints has changed - on the positive side full airpoints tickets include the flights to and from your nearest domestic to the international airport.
- Also, you can purchase top up airpoints once you have 80%.
- On the negative side you can no longer move points around between accounts, we always moved points from one account to other to make up a difference. Although you can gift full Rewards tickets to members of your household - that person must also be a member of Airpoints.
- Only a fully paid fare can apply for an upgrade, ie no upgrading of companion tickets.

Companion Fares

- In the past we have found that the most effective use of airpoints for two people travelling together is the Companion Fare - *one passenger pays, the other travels on airpoints.*

- However the difference in points between Full Reward and Companion is dependant on distance so for NZ to Sydney a full reward requires 30,000 points and a companion 21,000, of NZ to Los Angeles 100,000 Full Reward and 70,000 for companion.
- The two passengers must have identical itineraries for a valid companion flight but bear in mind the companion ticket may not go as far as the revenue ticket - see below.
- These companion tickets can be a bit of a fiddle to book oneself, as first you need to find out when there are companion seats available through Airpoints, then back to Booking to get the Paying seat, then back to Airpoints to confirm the companion and give them the booking reference for the revenue ticket.

Applying for Upgrades

- The other, and not guaranteed use of airpoints, is to apply for upgrades using your points.
- Upgrades relate to revenue tickets only and for example to upgrade from economy to business class one way to Sydney is 10,000 points.
- You will not know if you have your upgrade until you arrive at the airport and sometimes not until you are boarding will you hear your name called out - Hurray! If you plan to apply for an upgrade do it at the earliest time, if you do not get the upgrade your points will be re-credited.

Plan Well Ahead

- Plan ahead to ensure you access Airpoints seats - these are limited. Be flexible about your travel dates.
- Airpoints staff are very helpful and will hunt around your dates to see if there are seats - give yourself every opportunity of getting the seats by planning ahead and having a variety of departure and return dates.
- Airpoints seats are hard to get these days - for example a friend trying to book in May for first week of Sept could not get a return out of Brisbane (before school hols too) using airpoints either economy or business class, in fact the first available airpoints seat out of Brisbane was 15 Oct!

Companion tickets

- Companion tickets are only available on Air NZ (as far as I know) so if you have a paid ticket to San Francisco, or say Paris. Air NZ will only go to LAX or London. The rest of the journey is with a partner airline - fine for the paying ticket but the Companion ticket does not get you a seat on the partner airline.

Be Wary

- Be wary of then using points to get that extra sector as for example LAX to San Francisco return on United uses 50,000 airpoints - it may be better to pay for a seat. Whereas with British Midland, London - Paris return uses 25,000 points, which isn't too bad.

I do hope these few pointers are helpful in making the best use of your Airpoints because nothing feels nicer than flying for less or for free!