

# NOMADIC MATT'S PRIMER ON TRAVEL HACKING

NOMADIC  MATT

# Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1: Is Travel Hacking Really A Scam?</b>	<b>4</b>
Myth #1: Points and miles are hard to get.	5
Myth #2: It's complicated.	6
<b>CHAPTER 2: How To Pick A Travel Credit Card</b>	<b>8</b>
Step 1: Know there is no perfect card	9
Step 2: SIX important things your card must have	10
Does opening a lot of credit cards hurt my credit?	13
What if I have poor credit?	13
<b>CHAPTER 3: How to Get Free Flights &amp; Hotels</b>	<b>16</b>
Step 1: Meet the minimum spending requirements	16
Step 2: Be smart with spending	18
Step 3: "Rinse and repeat" the manufactured spend	20
Step 4: Sign up for every contest, survey, and deal	21
Step 5: Buy points/miles.....sometimes	22
Step 6: Get a second round of credit cards	23
<b>CHAPTER 4: Putting This E-Book into Practice</b>	<b>24</b>
Step 1: Get your finances in order	24
Step 2: Determine a goal	25
Step 3: Find the credit cards that meet your criteria	25
Step 4: Hit the minimum spending requirements	27
Step 5: Keep collecting points/miles	28
Step 6: Search redemptions	28

Step 7: Consolidate any of your points	28
Step 8: Book using your points	29
<b>CHAPTER 5: Credit Card Deals</b>	<b>30</b>

# CHAPTER 1: Is Travel Hacking Really A Scam?



People often think travel hacking is too good to be true. “Free travel? Impossible!” I often get emails and comments on my blog that look like this:

*“Matt, like some people have mentioned before me in the comment section: not everyone has miles or bonus points. You know I'm a travel writer...and yet I have never joined a frequent flier program. I don't have miles or points to redeem, and likewise, there are also people who might not have saved up enough points to fly entirely free.”*

This person's mental image of travel hacking and its complexities has led him to think it's not feasible to do unless you're a road warrior like me.

But that's not true!

Travel hacking (collecting points and miles for free travel) is an indispensable tool in the budget traveler's arsenal.

In this guide, I'm going to show you how you can begin to collect credit card points and airline miles so you too can travel for free (or, at least, ridiculously cheap).

But, before we get into that, let's talk about two myths about travel hacking that are that you need banish that from your mind right away so you don't end up like the commenter above:

### **MYTH #1: POINTS AND MILES ARE HARD TO GET.**

Many people think that (a) points and miles are difficult to accumulate, (b) you have to do shady stuff to get them, and/or (c) you have to spend lots of money you don't have.

None of that is true. In fact, the point of travel hacking is to avoid spending money you don't have.

Travel hacking is a form of financial arbitrage.

I'm a terrible travel hacker compared to my friends. I don't do some of the crazy things they do to earn points and miles. I don't buy \$10,000 USD in debit cards at once, resell furniture or gift cards, or give up my Saturdays to go buy stuff in bulk to then sell it online for a profit.

I simply go about my life, spending what I normally would, taking part in some card bonuses and contests, and just making sure I get the most points and miles per dollar I spend.

Through all this, I earn a million or more miles per year (a small number compared to some travel hackers). If I was like everyone else and only earned one point/mile per dollar spent, then I would have to spend one million dollars a year to do this.

But that's not the case.

I sometimes can get 10 points per dollar spent! The world is awash with points and miles. And they are super easy to get.

If you want to travel more, accumulating points and miles has to be something you do (providing you live in a place where they are an option). Even if it takes you a year to accumulate enough to reach your goal, they help you unlock your dreams by drastically reducing the cost of travel.

## MYTH #2: IT'S COMPLICATED.

When I ask most people why they don't travel hack, they just shrug and say, "I don't know. Seems hard, I guess." I think people believe that because travel hacking seems complicated, therefore it must be so. (Actually, it's not.)

In addition, travel hacking seems to run counter to everything we have learned about finance. We're taught to think of money and credit in one way:

*"Credit cards are bad. Credit card companies are bad. Never pay a fee. Your credit score is sacred – doing things like this hurt it, and you'll never get a loan."*

But that is just bullshit. It's a myth perpetuated by... well, I don't know who exactly, but people keep believing it.

By travel hacking, you earn points and miles for everyday purchases you would have bought anyway, and the perks outweigh any credit card fees. For example, for my \$550 USD USD per year Chase Sapphire Reserve card, I get:

- \$300 USD in airline credit
- 3x points on travel and restaurant purchases (so I can earn points faster)
- Global Entry (\$100 USD every five years)
- Purchase protection, so I can get refunded if things I buy are lost, damaged, or stolen
- A priority pass for lounge access (about \$100 USD a year)
- Trip insurance

My \$49 USD-a-year IHG card gives me a free night at a category 1-5 property (around \$200 USD a night), and my American Airlines card comes with free checked bags, saving me hundreds of dollars a year!

Additionally, my credit score has only gone up because of this, as now I have more credit and less debt, as well as a good payment history. (And, as my friend Gary says, "What good is a credit score if you don't use it?")

If you pay your bills off each month and are reasonable with your spending, not collecting points and miles is saying, "I don't want to be rewarded for my good spending habits." It's saying no to free money.

And "free" is the best word in travel.

When you don't travel hack, the only person you are hurting is yourself. You aren't hurting the banks or the airlines: they are in on the game. And this can be done in a lot of countries around the world!

\*\*\*

In my view, [travel hacking is something to be embraced](#). It reduces the cost of travel. Even if it takes you a year to earn it, why not take a free flight? One free flight is better than no free flights.

Anything that saves money and reduces the cost of travel is something every traveler should do.

So let's get into the details.

How do you travel hack?

## CHAPTER 2:

# How To Pick A Travel Credit Card



Credit cards are omnipresent in modern society. People use them to pay for everything from cars to groceries to sticks of gum. The US is a credit card-loving country: you've probably seen all the ads for bonuses if you sign up for this or that credit card advertised by some celebrity, and I can't count how many unsolicited card offers I get in the mail – and no matter how often I tell them to stop sending them to me, they still continue to arrive like a never-ending deluge.

There are *hundreds* of credit cards to choose from. With so many on offer, it's hard to know which are actually good for travel and which are total BS. It can be especially confusing trying to navigate all the sign-up bonuses, loyalty programs, perks, special offers, arcane rules, and hidden fees.

It seems so complex that most people just give up and end up using a debit card or just a simple, no-fee card.

But that's a terrible idea. When you do that, you leave money on the table.



Travel credit cards are a great opportunity to earn free points or miles that can be redeemed for airfares, hotel stays, or cold, hard cash. In the race to get customers, credit card—issuing companies partner with various travel brands (or just simply offer their own cards) that entice consumers with sign-up bonuses, loyalty points, special discounts, and more. Their desire to get you, the consumer, is really your gain.

By milking the system and paying off your bill in full, you can get tons of free airline tickets, hotel rooms, vacations, and cash back for free.

Here's how to pick a card that is right for you (and gives you boatloads of points and miles)!

## **STEP 1: KNOW THERE IS NO PERFECT CARD**

There is no perfect travel credit card – only the perfect one for you.

Every card offers different benefits that fit different people and purposes. For example, I use an AMEX Platinum card for booking flights (5 points per dollar spent), a Chase Sapphire Reserve card for my everyday spending (3 points on food purchases), a different Chase card for my phone bills (5x points), and a Marriott Bonvoy card for my hotel stays!

To begin, ask yourself what your goal is.

Are you interested in loyalty to a brand, free rewards, or avoiding fees? Do you want to get free flights, or do you just want a card that won't charge you a fee for using it at that restaurant in Brazil? Is elite status the most important perk for you? Do you want points you can use for anything, like cash?

For example, if you're a loyal flier with American Airlines, the best cards to start off with would be the Citi American AAdvantage card and the Marriott Bonvoy American Express card (you get a 20% transfer bonus that you can use with your AA account).

If you just want points that can be transferred to multiple companies, get a Chase or American Express card. They each have their own rewards programs (Chase Ultimate Rewards and American Express Membership Rewards, respectively), and points can be transferred to multiple airlines or hotel partners and used to book travel directly through their sites.

Just want free hotel rooms? Sign up for a bunch of hotel cards.

By focusing on what you want, you can maximize your short-term goals and get the hang of travel hacking.

For example, I tend to avoid hotel cards, since I rarely stay in hotels. Moreover, I dislike Hilton and never fly United so I don't waste time getting their cards either. I don't like cash-back cards because I travel so often that miles are more useful to me than cash back. As a Delta loyalist, I have the Delta cards so I can gain elite status through my everyday spending.

Come up with a goal and then find the cards that match it. (I explain how to do this at the end of the guide.)

## STEP 2: SIX IMPORTANT THINGS YOUR CARD MUST HAVE

Credit cards come with a plethora of perks these days. The market is highly competitive, and issuers are throwing more and more perks in with each new card. But whatever card you end up with, I recommend getting one that includes at least the following things:

### A HUGE SIGN-UP BONUS

A big sign-up bonus (after you meet the minimum spending requirement) is what jump-starts your mileage account and gets you closer to a free flight or hotel stay. Sometimes these bonuses even get you a few free flights. Don't sign up for a card unless it offers a substantial sign-up bonus.

Bonuses work like this: in order to get them, you must make either a single purchase or meet a minimum spending threshold in a certain time frame. After that, depending on the card, you can earn 1–5 points per dollar spent.

Typical travel credit card bonuses are around 50,000 points/miles, though sometimes they can be as high as 100,000. That's why cards are so great: you get an instant balance of tens of thousands of points for very little work.

## **AN ADDED CATEGORY SPENDING BONUS**

Most credit cards offer one point for every dollar spent. However, I don't want one for one. I want to get two or three (or more) per dollar. The good credit cards will give you these extra points when you shop at specific retailers, in certain spending categories, or, if it is a branded credit card, with a particular brand. This will help you earn points much more quickly. For example, with the Chase Sapphire Reserve card you get 3x points for travel expenses and dining at restaurants, the Chase Ink card gives you 5x for office spending, and the American Express Premier Rewards Gold card gives 3x on airfare purchases. There's a hundred examples but always make sure your card has bonus category offers.

## **A LOW SPENDING MINIMUM**

Unfortunately, in order to get the great bonuses these cards offer, there is usually a required spending minimum. While there are ways to "fake" your spending, it's best to get the bonus using your normal, day-to-day spending. I typically sign up for cards with a minimum spending requirement of \$1,000–3,000 USD in a three- to six-month period. My favorite spending minimums, though, are those that require you to make just one purchase in order to unlock the bonus.

While you shouldn't necessarily avoid high-minimum-spending cards, it's a good idea to start small, because you don't want to get stuck with so many cards that you can't meet all the minimum spending requirements combined. Once you get a card, you can't reapply for it, so don't overextend yourself and miss out on the sign-up bonus.

Managing your ability to meet the minimum spending requirements is key, because if you are spending more money than you usually do just to get these points or miles, they are no longer free. Only spend what you normally would and not a penny more!

If you're looking for ways to meet your minimum spending requirements by "faking" your spending, [there are plenty of creative ways to become a travel hacker!](#)

## TRAVEL PERKS

All of these travel credit cards offer great perks, such as elite loyalty status. I also want cards that offer free checked baggage, priority boarding, free nights, etc. It's not just about just getting miles—it's about what else comes with the card that makes my life easier!

## NO (OR LOW) ANNUAL FEE

No one likes paying annual fees for credit cards. Many of the fees for company-branded credit cards can range from \$50 to \$95 USD per year. Some of the premier cards have \$500 USD fees! For those who travel a lot and fly a lot, I think it is worth it to get a card with a fee, since they tend to give you a better rewards scheme, through which you can accumulate points faster, get better access to services and special offers, and get better travel protection. I have saved more money on travel than I have spent on fees.

However, when you are just starting out, get cards with no or low fees. You don't want to bite off more than you can chew.

## NO FOREIGN TRANSACTION FEES

Credit cards are great to use when you are overseas, because you get the best possible exchange rate. But if you are paying a fee every time you use the card, then that's not so good. Nowadays there are so many cards offering no foreign transaction fees that you should never, ever, ever get a credit card that does charge such a fee. NEVER!

## DOES OPENING A LOT OF CREDIT CARDS HURT MY CREDIT?

While it's true that "churning and burning" (i.e., opening and closing a lot of credit cards at once) can hurt your credit score, applying for a few cards over a period of time won't. Your credit score will slightly dip every time there is a credit inquiry (whether for a credit card or home loan or car loan) – that's how the system is set up. But so long as you space out your applications and pay your bills on time, you won't see any long-term damage to your credit. Your credit rating will rise over time as long as you maintain it.

You aren't going to have a bank officer tell you years from now, "Sorry, because you canceled three credit cards in 2012, your loan is denied." I once canceled four credit cards in one day. The impact on my score? Nada.

Actually, having lots of credit cards helps your credit, because you improve your debt-to-credit ratio.

## WHAT IF I HAVE POOR CREDIT?

There's no magic bullet to suddenly fix your credit score. If you have a low one, you need to build it up. There are ways to do that and point-earning cards that can get you there.

Here are five ways to improve your credit score:

1. **GO TO ANNUALCREDITREPORT.COM AND GET A FREE COPY OF YOUR CREDIT REPORT.** [This site](#) lets you know what your credit score is so you can see what areas you need to work on.
2. **DISPUTE ANY INCORRECT INFORMATION ON YOUR CREDIT REPORT** with the credit reporting agencies (Experian, Equifax, and Transunion). Don't let mistakes bring your score down.
3. **GET A SECURED CREDIT CARD.** These cards require you to put down a cash deposit. Think of them like prepaid credit cards (or credit cards-in-training). If you decide to put a \$500 USD deposit on a secured credit card, you can

charge up to that amount each month and then pay it off. Paying off your balance in full each month is a good way to build up your trustworthiness and thus your credit score. Over time, you can raise the limit; this will also raise your credit score, allowing you to move to a regular credit card. A good secured card will include automatic reporting to the three major credit bureaus, which will also help you build a good credit history and increase your score. Check with your local bank or any credit card issuer to see what kinds of secured credit cards they offer. For example, HSBC offers a secured Visa card with a \$0 USD annual fee for the first year and \$200 USD minimum deposit.

4. **BECOME AN ADDITIONAL CARDHOLDER (AUTHORIZED USER) ON THE CARD OF SOMEONE WITH GOOD CREDIT.** By doing this, it's like they're vouching for you, and you will be associated with their score, which will instantly improve yours. Warning: Your missed payments will also appear on their account, so don't have someone add you if you aren't on top of your finances. (This works both ways: don't add someone who doesn't make their payments.)
5. **PAY YOUR BILLS ON TIME AND DON'T GET INTO MORE DEBT** (and move your current debt to low- or zero-interest cards). I love the Discover and Chase Slate cards for this as they often have a lot of 0% interest offers that come without any fees.

Capital One, Barclays, and Discover all offer cards for people with bad credit. Contact your local credit union to see if it has any secured cards, or call up the major banks (or walk into a branch and ask the teller). All financial institutions have products for people with poor credit — get one and constantly work at it improving your score. If you're passive, nothing will happen, but if you can prove you're not a risk, you'll soon be getting the good cards with the good bonuses!

\*\*\*

Getting a travel credit card is simple and easy to do if you follow the steps above. Once you know your goal, you can easily find a card that matches it and the perks you want.

The process outlined in this article will help you get the best credit card for you. Don't leave money on the table! Get a card, collect points and miles, save money when you travel, and travel for free!

.....

**NOTE:** For the latest credit card offers and deals and on what cards to consider for those with low credit scores, [check out my list of favorite cards!](#) This will show you the best and biggest sign up offers happening right now so you can get the most points right away!

.....

## CHAPTER 3:

# How to Get Free Flights & Hotels



Now, let's go into detail. What do you do after you sign up for all those credit cards?

Below I provide the step-by-step breakdown of exactly what I do to earn around one million points/miles a year – all without traveling!

### **STEP 1: MEET THE MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS**

Each of these cards comes with a minimum spending requirement before you can earn that sign-up bonus. You don't just get it for nothing!

Since the purpose of travel hacking is to not spend extra money (you should absolutely not go into debt for this!), here are some ways I meet that minimum spend:



- In the US, you can pay your federal tax bill on a credit card for a fee of 1.87%. I choose not to pay my taxes in installments during the year so that at the end of the year, I have to pay them in one large chunk. I then time that tax payment with a credit card sign-up so I can get the bonus. Yes, there is that additional fee, but if you work out the math, it's worth it. That takes care of a big chunk of the spending requirement.
- I time my big purchases and sign-ups. If I have to move, buy furniture or a computer, or join a gym, I sign up for a card and then charge my big purchases to the new card.
- I go out to dinner with my friends, pay, and ask them to reimburse me. I used this technique in Las Vegas, and that took care of the entire minimum spending requirement for the Amex EveryDay card. This is especially easy with apps like Venmo nowadays, where people can reimburse you easily at the exact moment of payment.
- I ask friends and family if they have a big purchase they wouldn't mind letting me put on my card. This doesn't always work, and it isn't always needed, but often friends and family will let me put it on my card as a favor, and then they'll pay me instead of the store.
- I manufacture spending for the remainder. This is when you move money around so that you artificially create spending through gift cards and money orders. You can buy prepaid debit cards (I buy them in \$500 USD increments), turn them into money orders, put those money orders in your bank account, and then pay off your credit card. You have to pay a fee for the cards and money orders, but when doing this for sign-up bonuses, it's worth the cost. *(If you're looking for ways to meet your minimum spending requirements by "faking" your spending, [there are plenty of creative ways to become a travel hacker.](#))*

## STEP 2: BE SMART WITH SPENDING

### USE CATEGORY BONUSES

In the movie [Up in the Air](#), George Clooney's character never wastes an opportunity to earn points. I'm the same way. I never, ever, ever just earn one point or mile per dollar spent if I can get two, three, or six instead.

Certain cards have what are known as category bonuses, where you receive 2–5 points/miles per dollar spent. It varies by card, but generally, you get 2x points on restaurants, 2–3x miles on airfare, and 5x points on office supplies. Here's a list of the cards I use regularly and their spending bonuses:

- Amex EveryDay Preferred: 3 points per dollar spent on groceries (up to \$6,000 USD annually)
- American Express Premier Rewards Gold: 3 miles per dollar spent on flights
- Citi Premier Card: 3 points per dollar spent on groceries; 2 points per dollar spent on hotels
- Chase Sapphire Preferred: 2 points per dollar spent on food
- Chase Ink Bold: 5 points per dollar spent at office supply stores or business expenses (up to \$50,000 USD annually); 2 points per dollar spent on hotels

For example, if I am buying an airline ticket, I'll use my American Express Premier Gold and get 3 miles for every dollar I spend. I buy gift cards at Staples on my Chase Ink card to get 5 points per dollar spent. I pay my cell phone bill on that card too!

Why get one point at a time when you can get five?

But there are also a few other ways to get bonuses, too:

### USE AIRLINE SHOPPING PORTALS

All airlines, hotels, and travel brands have preferred merchants. These companies — ranging from clothing retailers to sporting goods stores to office supply businesses and everything in between — partner with airlines' (hotels,

etc.) special shopping malls. By ordering online through these malls, you can earn additional points.

You can use [Evreward](#) or [Cash Back Monitor](#) to discover the current best deals across various programs. Simply type in the merchant or product you want, and it will compile a list of bonuses the various point programs are offering at that moment so can you maximize the points you earn.

Say, for example, you want new clothes from the Gap. Going into the Gap store gets you 1 point per dollar spent. By using Evreward, you can see that by going to the United shopping portal, signing in, clicking the link to the Gap, and purchasing online, you can earn 3 points per dollar spent. Suddenly, you get 300 points instead of 100 for your \$100 USD shopping spree!

## SHOPPING PORTALS 2.0

While purchasing online is great and can lead to earning multiple points or miles per dollar spent, you can stack offers to get double and triple that amount! For example, if you go to Sears through American Airlines' portal and buy a \$100 USD gift card, you get 3 AA miles per dollar spent. Go back through the portal to use the gift card for \$100 USD in merchandise and get another 3x miles – for a total of 6x points. This way you earn 600 AA miles instead of the 300 you would have gotten if you had just made your purchase directly through the online portal in the first place. (Remember, if you just walk into a Sears store, you'll only get 100 miles for that \$100 USD purchase!)

## USE DINING REWARDS PROGRAMS

Just like shopping portals, airlines also have dining rewards programs. You sign up with your frequent flier number, register your credit card, and get extra miles when you dine at participating restaurants in the airline's network (which rotate throughout the year). It's important to note that while you can sign up for every program, you cannot register a credit card with more than one. That means that if your Chase Sapphire Preferred card is tied to your American Airlines account, you can't earn miles on your United Airlines account with that same card.

Join one of the programs in the [Rewards Network](#) (which runs all the dining programs) so you can get 5 miles per dollar spent once you become a "VIP member," which happens after 12 dines. So if you get those 12 under your belt (so to speak) early in the year, for the rest of the year you'll be racking up 5x miles!

**A note on keeping track of all this:** As I was writing this, I went to dinner with a few friends. My friend Noah was like, "This is too much to keep track of." That's a common feeling among people looking to start travel hacking. However, it appears more complicated than it really is. Once you know what cards give you what bonuses, the next step is to simply use the cards that get those bonuses and meet your goals.

For example, as I mentioned above, all my airfare goes to my American Express Gold card. I get 3 points per dollar spent, and this is what provides the bulk of my yearly Amex points. For restaurants, I use Chase Sapphire, since I get 2x points. For online shopping, I tend to go to the AAdvantage shopping portal as a way to "juice" my AA account.

### STEP 3: "RINSE AND REPEAT" THE MANUFACTURED SPEND

Sometimes your regular spending doesn't cut it and you can't hit your minimum spending requirement for your new card bonus. If you have very low living expenses and a credit card minimum to hit that is so high it would require you to spend extra money just to get the bonus, what do you do?

What do you do if you have a high minimum spending requirement to hit? Want to open 2-3 credit cards in the same month? Want to earn points faster than normal?

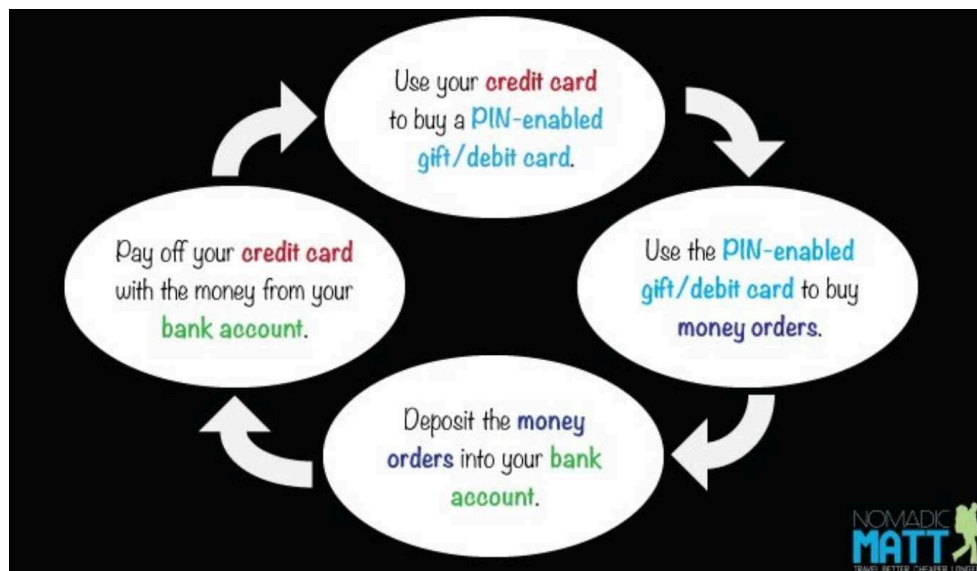
There are techniques to help you with that.

[In the guide](#), I'll explain how to earn points when you pay your taxes, rent, or mortgage - big ticket items that most people don't earn points from. I'll also explain how to manufacture your spending using gift cards, PayPal and pre-paid debit cards so you can maximize the points you earn regularly.

**Note:** The rules on these processes keep changing, especially as travel hacking becomes more popular, so make sure you do some extra research before you dive into one of these techniques and always start small to test it out.

### **EXAMPLE: MANUFACTURING SPENDING WITH GIFT CARDS**

There are some people in the travel hacking world who manufacture spending like it's their job. I have a friend who processes \$10–20,000 USD a month in gift cards. That's too much work for me. I'm busy and don't feel like putting that much effort into it. However, I do a small amount of this in order to "juice" my point accounts, especially those with category bonuses at Staples via my Chase Ink card, which helps offset the \$4.95 USD fee per card. Here's a diagram of how this works:



I don't do this every month but this helps me offset minimum spending requirements on cards and earn a few extra miles each year.

### **STEP 4: SIGN UP FOR EVERY CONTEST, SURVEY, AND DEAL**

Airlines and hotels often offer miles, points, and bonuses for signing up for a deal, taking a survey, filling out a form on Facebook, etc. They are small (100–1,000 at a time), but over the course a year, they can add up. United recently gave 1,000 miles to anyone who signed up for its dining program. American

Airlines gave people 350 miles just for entering a contest to win more miles! You can sign up to various sites that earn you miles and/or points just for taking surveys or answering some simple questions.

You can also earn money taking surveys (which is just as good as miles/points!). Again, this doesn't have to take a lot of time and can be done while you Netflix and chill. The most lucrative companies are these:

- [Swagbucks](#)
- [Pinecone Research](#)
- [Inbox Dollars](#)

## STEP 5: BUY POINTS/MILES.....SOMETIMES

Airlines and hotels sometimes offer really good deals for points/miles; if I know I am going to use the points, I'll buy them at a discount. These deals, since you have to buy the points, basically allow you to buy fares at a discount (rather than use everyday spending to get the flights for free). For example, LifeMiles (Avianca's membership program) often conducts a promotion through which you can get a 135% bonus on bought miles. If you max the promotion out, you get 352,000 miles for around \$4,900 USD. At that rate, you're buying miles for 1.4 cents per mile instead of around the 2 cents a mile they normally go for. (The closer you get to 1 cent per mile, the better the deal!)

It may sound crazy to spend that much money on miles (and you certainly don't need to do it at all), but let's put it in perspective. For 90,000 miles, you can book a one-way first-class flight from the US to Asia. If you spent 1.4 cents per mile, that ticket works out to be \$1,260 USD. Not too bad for a first-class ticket, huh?

Buying points and miles is a way to pad your balance and buy tickets at a steep discount. I do this *sometimes* if I'm traveling soon and know I'm going to pay for the ticket anyway (I don't always use miles when I travel). It's not free, but I would rather buy a first-class ticket for \$1,260 USD than an economy ticket for the same price.

Sometimes travel hacking is about finding value and doing a bit of arbitrage to get more for less!

Follow websites like [View from the Wing](#) or [One Mile at a Time](#), which alert you to all these point offers, break them down, and basically tell you if they are a good deal or not.

## STEP 6: GET A SECOND ROUND OF CREDIT CARDS

Twice a year, I go on a big credit card splurge and start the cycle again. I'll look at what I cancelled and what I need. Since many operators require a waiting period between bonuses, I'll aim for cards I haven't had in a long time, as well as which have another sign-up bonus.

Then after I get the new cards, I'll repeat step 2 to meet any minimum spending requirements.

\*\*\*

A lot of this stuff requires time and effort. If I got more credit cards, I could earn more. If I spent more money, I could earn more. I just don't care enough. I have more miles than I need. I fly myself anywhere miles. I fly my team around on miles. I give miles to my mom.

The sky's the limit on how many miles you can earn. It just depends on how much you want to ramp up each step.

It is possible to earn more miles than you will need to travel and fly for free. Even if you travel only once a year, just want to visit your parents, or aspire to take your family on one trip, you can do it.

Travel hacking doesn't have to be complicated. It's simple and accessible to everyone.

## CHAPTER 4:

# Putting This E-Book into Practice

There's a lot of information in this e-book, and it might seem hard to distill all that down into an actionable, step-by-step plan. There are numerous places to start, right? Well, fear not!

Follow my step-by-step plan below to put everything you've learned in the previous chapters to use.

### STEP 1: GET YOUR FINANCES IN ORDER

This is the most important step. You don't want to go into debt just to earn miles and points, and you don't want to be stuck holding the bag if you miss a payment. That means doing the following things:

- **SURVEY YOUR BANK ACCOUNTS AND CURRENT CREDIT CARDS.** Who do you bank with? Who are your credit cards with? What are their limits? What are their interest rates?
- **CONSOLIDATE.** Move any debt to the card with the lowest interest rate you can get, ditch the high-interest cards, and consolidate your bank holdings.
- **PAY OFF YOUR DEBT.** If you are currently in debt, reduce your debt load as much as possible before you start travel hacking. It will be easier to get the better reward credit cards if you have less debt.
- **GET AND MONITOR YOUR FICO (CREDIT) SCORE.**

Once you've audited your finances and paid down your debt so that you can meet the minimum spending requirements for your new travel credit cards, we can really get started!



## STEP 2: DETERMINE A GOAL

What do you want to work toward first? Flights? Hotels? Cash back? Don't overreach. Start slow. Aim for one thing at a time. Write your goal(s) out.

For example, they might be something like:

- *"I want to take my family on a trip to Disney World."*
- *"I want to fly first class in a Singapore Airlines suite."*
- *"I want to stay in an overwater bungalow on my honeymoon."*
- *"I want free flights for my round-the-world trip."*

## STEP 3: FIND THE CREDIT CARDS THAT MEET YOUR CRITERIA

Once you come up with your goal, it will be much easier to find the cards and loyalty programs that will help you reach it. If you want United miles, get the United credit card plus a Chase card.

Want US domestic flights? Go with Southwest or JetBlue or Alaska.

Need hotel rooms? Look for the current best sign-up bonus on a hotel card and get that card.

Always make sure everything you do relates to your travel goals.

For example, if I wanted to go to Japan on Japan Airlines because you heard they were great, I would sign-up for the American Airlines credit cards (AA partners with JAL) and the Marriott Bonvoy card from American Express (Bonvoy points transfer to AA) and focus my spending on those programs in order to earn enough miles to book a flight to Japan.

If I were a Star Alliance fan (and I am because it has the most airlines as members), I would get the Chase Sapphire Preferred card and United card so I could book Star Alliance partner flights via United. (If I lived in Canada, I would focus on Aeroplan so I could book Star Alliance partners via Air Canada.)

Let's look at some goals from Step 2 and discuss how to achieve them:

- ***"I want to take my family on a trip to Disney World."***  
Here's what I would do: I would get a JetBlue or Southwest credit card for free domestic flights, then get the Disney credit card for 10% cashback in the park and a \$200 USD statement credit. Finally, use the Capital One VentureCard for statement credits on hotels and park tickets as their points can be used for cashback.
- ***"I want to fly first class on Singapore Suites."***  
I'd get the Chase Sapphire card as well as any American Express card, since their points can both be transfer partners to Singapore Airlines.
- ***"I want to stay in an overwater bungalow on my honeymoon."***  
Get lots of hotel cards for the brand you want to stay with.
- ***"I want free flights for my round-the-world trip."***  
Here I'd simply go with whatever the biggest sign-up bonuses are. Since your goal is to just amass miles for cheap economy flights around the world, find the cards with the biggest bonuses!

Remember, when applying for credit cards:

- **APPLY FOR CARDS THAT CAN MEET YOUR CREDIT SCORE.** For example, if this is your first credit card, you're going to get rejected for an American Express Platinum. Don't ding your credit score by aiming too high.
- **FIND CARDS WITH LOW MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS** so you aren't on the hook for more spending than you can handle. If you miss your sign-up bonus by failing to meet the spending requirement, you can't get that same card again, so make sure you start small enough so you score that bonus.

Get denied? Credit card companies deny applications all the time for a number of reasons, but don't give up.

Call one of the reconsideration lines below, play nice with the agent, and ask to be reconsidered. Ninety percent of the time they will approve you if you call them up personally.

<b>American Express Credit Card Reconsideration</b>	1-866-314-0237 (application reconsideration department) 1-877-399-3083 (new accounts)
<b>Bank of America Credit Card Reconsideration</b>	1-866-458-8805 (credit analyst and reconsideration) 1-877-721-9405 (application status)
<b>Capital One Credit Card Customer Service</b>	1-800-227-4825 (existing customers) 1-800-695-5500 (application phone number, best for new customers)
<b>Chase Credit Card Reconsideration</b>	1-888-270-2127 (reconsideration line for personal cards, open daily) 1-800-453-9719 (reconsideration line for business cards, open weekdays)
<b>Citibank Credit Card Reconsideration</b>	1-800-763-9795

## STEP 4: HIT THE MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS

Now, with your credit cards in hand, go spend your way to the minimum requirements so you can get your bonuses. What makes a credit card worth getting is the sign-up bonus, so it's really, really important to get the bonus!

- Make big purchases during the minimum spending window to get the bonus.
- Manufacture your spending as needed.
- Ask friends or family if you can buy things for them so you can get the points/miles (trusting that they will pay you back).

If I am signing up for a lot of cards, I set my cards to autopay, so I never forget to make a payment. I also write in a spreadsheet the card names, credit limits, and due dates of the cards so I don't forget.

## STEP 5: KEEP COLLECTING POINTS/MILES

Just keep earning them via your everyday spending, surveys, online shopping, manufactured spending, etc. To start out, I would focus on the following (and in this order):

1. Maximizing category bonuses
2. Using shopping portals
3. Using dining portals
4. Asking friends and family to put purchases on your card
5. Gift card stacking
6. Paying your taxes with the card
7. Manufactured spending through gift card purchases

## STEP 6: SEARCH REDEMPTIONS

Where do you begin to figure out what points you need and what is available to reach your goal?

Figure out what airlines fly to your destination or what hotels are available and search on those companies' websites to see how many points you need to redeem for your goal.

## STEP 7: CONSOLIDATE ANY OF YOUR POINTS

If you have points and miles spread out over multiple accounts, consolidate them into one program if you can, so you can redeem them for the best reward possible. Remember, you can only transfer Chase, Capital One, Citi, or American Express points to their travel partners. You can't transfer points between banks or one airline to another.

For example, if you're looking to fly a Star Alliance flight (let's Lufthansa) and you have Chase points as well as American Express points, you can transfer BOTH of those to Air Canada or Singapore Airlines (both of which are part of

the Star Alliance) and then use their loyalty program to book the Lufthansa flight you want.

This is also why it's important to have a goal in the beginning so you don't want to just chase after card bonus offers and end up spread out too thin over too many companies.

## STEP 8: BOOK USING YOUR POINTS

Now that your points are in your chosen account, book your award ticket and enjoy your free travel!

That's it! Earning the points is the hard part. Spending them is easy!

\*\*\*

I know travel hacking may seem confusing – all those reward programs, redemptions rules, flight alliances, credit card bonuses, and promotions! It can seem overwhelming and time consuming to figure out. Too many people look at this and think, "I don't know where to start – so I won't bother."

But if you don't start, you are missing out on travel experiences that can change your life.

To make travel hacking simpler, I created an easy-to-follow, step-by-step guide that helped people like Rusty earn two first-class flights (saving him over \$10,000 USD) and taught Esteban how to save thousands and fly his wife to South America. It helped Matt and A.T. earn enough miles for flights around the world... and it will help you do the same!

## CHAPTER 5: Credit Card Deals

Credit card offers are always changing, so I cannot accurately list them here.



.....  
For the latest credit card offers and deals and on what cards to consider for those with low credit scores, [check out my list of favorite cards!](#) This will show you the best and biggest sign up offers happening right now so you can get the most points right away!  
.....



# READY FOR MORE?

# GET MY ULTIMATE GUIDE TO TRAVEL HACKING

Step-by-Step, 130+ Page Guide

Get the Complete Guide



NOMADIC  MATT