

Our first experience with frequent flyer miles was in the early 1990s, when we had to pay our daughter's tuition at a very expensive Ivy League university. We had the bright idea of paying on an American Airlines credit card. This earned us enough AA frequent flyer miles for an annual trip to Europe for four years. That didn't make the tuition any easier to pay, but it gave us a sort of satisfaction in thinking we got the flights for free.

Since then, and during the thieving oil company robbery rise in prices during recent years, airlines have been cutting back on the value of frequent flyer miles. They're still worth accumulating, but they don't go as far as they did ten or 20 years ago. Back then, earned airline miles were worth about two cents each. For instance, we accumulated about 50,000 miles each to pay for round-trip New York to London flights.



Today, the value is about one and a half cents per earned mile. So, it takes several more domestic flights and more credit card purchases to earn an overseas flight. Further, it is much more difficult to use frequent flyer miles, because airlines have squeezed down the number of free seats per flight. Several times when we wanted to use our miles on specific, most convenient schedules, we were told there were no free seats available on flights we wanted. To get our freebees, we had to sign up for some very inconvenient puddle-jumping, one- and two-stop schedules.

There are still many ways to use frequent flyer miles. Some airlines allow combination deals, where flyers can pay with both mile credits and cash. Sometimes this can magically open seats that had been unavailable for those who wanted to fly free. For more information on those deals, check with Delta for Pay With Miles, and Northwest's PerkChoice offers as well as with

similar programs at other airlines.