

How to Become a Travel Ninja: Travel Hacking Anywhere in the World

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UNCONVENTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LIFE, WORK, AND TRAVEL

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Assumptions	5
2. Improving an Unfriendly Travel Environment	7
3. Round-the-World Travel	11
4. Creative Lodging	18
5. How to Go Anywhere in the World	22
6. Troubleshooting	28
7. Questions and Answers	32
8. Resources	34
9. Wrapping it Up	37

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Don't forget that this manual is only one part of the Travel Ninja product. You also get the audio download and free updates through email. If you purchased the Complete Version, you also get a number of sample Round-the-World itineraries and more info on Frequent Flyer Miles.

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Dear Future Travel Ninja,
First of all, thanks so much for buying this guide. I'm grateful that you found it worthy of attention, and I intend to provide incredible value for your money.

Second of all, I hope you're as excited about travel as I am. I do a LOT of traveling, literally all over the world. I've been to more than 100 countries so far, and fly at least 40 times a year.

Even if you're not a travel freak like me, since you have this report I'm going to assume that you also have a need for discount travel information. I'm here to help, and you'll find a lot of tips and strategies here that should help with your travel plans.

After you've read the report, could you do me one favor? I'd really like to know what you thought of the information, so that we can make this and future *Unconventional Products* even more amazing for you.

(And by the way, all future updates for this one will be completely FREE for you. We will be contacting all *Travel Ninja* owners by email whenever an updated version comes out.)

To send your feedback, write to feedback@chrisguillebeau.com, or follow the survey link at the end of the guide.

OK, that's all. Enjoy, and stay sane out there.



Chris Guillebeau

ArtofNonconformity.com

1

Introduction and Assumptions

Welcome, fellow ninja traveler. I'm going to assume a few things in this guide, so to avoid the problems that often come with assumptions, let's list them:

- » I assume you are somewhat used to booking travel online. You are familiar with Travelocity, Expedia, and similar sites.
- » I assume you know some of the most common airport codes, and know what to do if you come across an unfamiliar one. (Hint: You can [look them up here](#).)
- » I assume you have a need for some kind of unconventional travel. If all you do is fly to Iowa to visit Grandma at Christmas, you do not need this guide. Unconventional travel includes: Round-

the-World, regional or “open jaw” trips, general vagabonding, or flying far away to countries most of your friends have never heard of.

» Lastly, I assume that you want information you can't get anywhere else. This means that some of it may not be helpful to your specific situation. As usual, focus on the parts that *are* helpful, and I have no doubt you'll find this guide worth your small investment of time and money.

Sound good? Oh, one more thing:

Get the OneWorld and Star Alliance Round-the-World tools

At least 50% of my travel is with Round-the-World fares. As you'll see, you can do a lot with RTW travel, even if you're not crazy like me and trying to go to every country in the world. Thus, my final assumption is that you have already downloaded these two free tools:

[One World Planner](#)

[Star Alliance Planner](#)

[Note that the Star Alliance one has both an online and a downloadable version. They reference the same data, but the downloadable one makes it easier for you to save itineraries for future editing.]

When I was first learning about RTW travel, I got a hold of the Star Alliance tool and spent about 40 hours with it. I think it's safe to say I was fairly obsessed. You don't need to spend *that* much time with these tools, but if you're serious about ninja travel, it's in your best interest to be somewhat familiar with them.

You can read the whole guide without using those tools, and you should learn a number of other things. When you get a chance, though, crack those open and spend some time familiarizing yourself with them.

So far I've been on 3 Round-the-World trips, one Circle Pacific trip, and countless Awards trips. I've made a lot of mistakes, but I've tried to learn from each of them. I've found this is the best way for me to travel. It won't work for everyone or everywhere, but hopefully you'll find at least a couple of things that will rock your world.

Let's start with a look at how to improve a travel environment that can sometimes be difficult to overcome.

2

Improving an Unfriendly Travel Environment

In the summer of 2008, a perfect storm of high oil prices, rude airlines, and crowded planes created an unfriendly environment where it was difficult to find reasonable fares. It's no exaggeration to say that recent events created an increasingly difficult environment for travelers.

At the time of this writing, the environment has improved somewhat. Some fares are still high, especially domestic trips, but passengers are resisting efforts to raise them even further. A few fuel surcharges have been reduced, although as many of us predicted, once a surcharge has been added, airlines are extremely reluctant to let it go.

REDUCING SURCHARGES

First, understand that all surcharges and fees are somewhat flexible. Airline staff do usually have the authority to waive them, so you might as well ask about it if you feel you have a good reason. I've learned that being nice, asking for help, and acknowledging that a favor may not be possible is the best way to go.

Likewise, when you encounter a rude airline staff member (unfortunately, this does happen from time to time - it's a hard job that I certainly wouldn't want to do), I recommend you try to step away and try to deal with someone else if possible. Once in a while when calling for awards reservations, I get someone on the line that is either extremely unknowledgeable or simply not willing to help me. The solution is to avoid fighting a losing battle. Just hang up and call back. The time you lose doing this will probably be less than trying to put up with an unhelpful representative.

You can also exempt yourself from many of the surcharges by maintaining at least one elite status. I currently maintain three, although I suspect I may lose my United (Star Alliance) status if I don't requalify soon.

American Airlines (OneWorld)

I earned this status by completing the AA Platinum Challenge I wrote about in detail in the [Discount Airfare Guide](#). (You can also get some info [at this wiki](#).) Originally, I earned the Platinum status on the basis of *just one flight* from Hong Kong to Los Angeles.

Since then, I've flown more than 150,000 miles on AA and OneWorld carriers thanks to my RTW trips, so I can safely say I've earned this one. I moved up from Platinum to Executive Platinum a few months back, and this status will be retained for at least a year and a half.

United (Star Alliance)

I earned my entry-level (Silver) United elite status the old fashioned way – by flying a lot. Technically, it wasn't that old-fashioned of an approach, since I received it thanks to one extended Circle Pacific trip around Asia. (Most United elites earn their status by taking a ton of grueling domestic trips, something I try to avoid.) I only earned about 22,000 miles in 2008, so my status is scheduled to expire soon. I've heard rumors that United sometimes gives people another six months to requalify, so if that's true, that will help.

Northwest – now Delta (SkyTeam)

I used to fly Delta and Air France a lot, but I hardly ever do so anymore. Ironically, I now possess a Platinum status with Northwest Worldperks, despite flying a grand total of 0 miles with Northwest in 2008. How is this possible?

It works because of a little-known practice where many airlines will offer complimentary elite status based on your status with another airline. The

master list of airlines offering status matches is maintained in this Flyer Talk Thread:

[FlyerTalk – Status Match Overview](#)

As of the time of this writing, status matches are easily possible with **Alaska, Delta, Airtran, BMI, and Continental** – and with a bit more work, you can get a status match from a few other airlines as well. The only “catch” with status requests is that most airlines will only allow you to successfully request one match in your lifetime. It doesn’t do you much good to have a handful of elite cards if you have no plans to requalify and won’t benefit from them in the near future, so you’ll want to be conservative and not waste all your requests in one year.

For this reason, I had never tried to get my status comped with Delta, the SkyTeam carrier I usually fly. Northwest also accepted status requests, but since I almost never fly with them, I wasn’t interested.

However... that all changed when I learned of the Northwest / Delta merger. Northwest and Delta Airlines agreed to merge in 2008, a move that was subsequently approved by the U.S. government. This move meant that the Northwest brand would effectively die by becoming absorbed into either the Delta brand or a new “Northwest-Delta” brand.

A couple of travel writers correctly observed that because Northwest would cease to exist as its own entity, you might as well send in a status request to their WorldPerks department. Presumably, Delta would honor Northwest’s elites by integrating them into the SkyTeam program, and further, Delta would probably honor a future status match request (if needed) because the original one was made to a different airline (Northwest).

What a great idea! I can’t take credit for it myself, but I certainly took advantage of it and tried to spread the word to others, including the original customers of the Discount Airfare Guide. I was a bit worried that Northwest would stop honoring status

match requests due to the upcoming merger, but I received this email within five days (!) of sending in a letter with a copy of my AA statement:

Dear Mr Guillebeau,

Thank you for contacting Northwest Airlines in regard to upgrading your WorldPerks account, xxxxxxxxx293.

A variety of criteria, including information from your American Airlines mileage summary, is considered when evaluating requests from members to match elite status from another airline. After reviewing the information provided to us on your AAdvantage account, **your Northwest WorldPerks account has been upgraded to Platinum Elite status.** This one-time complimentary membership upgrade will remain valid through February 28, 2009.

Your credentials are now being processed and will be mailed to the address on file. You may expect to receive your

Platinum Elite kit in approximately three weeks.

In the interim, WorldPerks Elite members are now able to print off their temporary WorldPerks reference card through nwa.com, if a PIN is established.

If you have difficulties with the process, please contact our online support group at support@nwa.com or 1-800-692-6955 open 24/7.

Due to the timing of your 2008 complimentary Platinum Elite upgrade, please be advised that your Platinum Elite membership will be continued through the 2009 program year - March 1, 2009 through February 28, 2010.

You may expect your credentials for this program to be delivered to the address on file prior to March 1, 2009.

We sincerely appreciate the support we

receive from our members. [blah, blah, blah, etc.]

Manager
WorldPerks Service Center

(Note that the email is a bit confusing on how long my status will be valid for. At first, it says February 2009, only a few months after I sent the request – but later on, it says February 2010. Hopefully the latter statement is correct – we’ll see.)

The lesson here is that whenever an airline merges with another, which happens at least once a year, you can take advantage of the merger to get a new elite status. This will also help you ensure that you are a member of at least one elite program all the time.

Sound good?

3

Round-the-World Travel

The Round-the-World (RTW) journey is the pinnacle of serious traveling. Many adventurers heading out on long trips with the goal of visiting many places choose to go around the whole world, and for good reason: by traveling in one continuous direction and agreeing to follow a few rules, global travelers can usually save a great deal of money.

The benefits of RTW tickets are compelling. In addition to the money saved (probably the biggest benefit), you’ll enjoy:

- » A ticket valid for an entire year
- » Relatively high flexibility in date and flight changes

- » The ability to reroute the remaining segments of the ticket for a low fee
- » A very large number of Frequent Flyer miles, usually giving you the opportunity for at least one airline elite status if you're not already a member
- » Assuming you travel with an alliance (more on this in a moment), the coordination between several airlines for your whole journey. If something goes wrong with one flight somewhere, the airline *should* be able to help with your future flights
- » If you get super-creative like I've learned to be, you can combine multiple RTW tickets with Awards tickets and create a continual cycle of travel, which allows you to travel perpetually, divide your time between continents, take advantage of geographic arbitrage, and always have a way home

Even if you don't get super-creative, a RTW ticket may be a good fit for you. A simple RTW trip can provide better value than a couple of round-trip tickets, and if you enjoy premium travel, the value savings can be even greater.

GETTING STARTED

When I first started looking at RTW flights years ago, I always imagined that I'd go with an independent service. Can't travel agencies do a better job than the airlines themselves? After all, they have access to all kinds of flights, not just the ones that are part of any one airline alliance.

Well, many RTW travelers do choose to go the independent route, and while there may be reasons why any particular trip is better for any one person, I think a lot of these independent travelers would do a lot better with one of the airline alliances.

I'll tell you why in a moment, but first here are a couple of links to traditional, independent travel agencies that can help with these kinds of RTW trips. As I said, I'm not a big fan of doing it this way, but your mileage may vary.

[Air Treks](#)

[Air Brokers](#)

Now that we have that out of the way, let me tell what I learned to do instead.

THE TWO MAIN ALLIANCE PRODUCTS

We'll spend a lot of space looking at the RTW products from *Star Alliance* and *OneWorld*, the two primary worldwide alliances. Let's begin with a short list of "who's who" so you know which airlines are the main carriers in each alliance.

Star Alliance

United, U.S. Airways, Lufthansa, Austrian, Singapore, Thai, Air New Zealand, ANA

One World

American, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, LAN Chile, Qantas, Japan Airlines, Royal Jordanian

(Note that in forum posts and travel agent shorthand, OneWorld is referred to as "OW" and Star Alliance as "*A")

Each alliance offers its own RTW product. You can read the short synopsis of each at these links:

[Star Alliance RTW](#) - 24 airlines flying to 912 destinations in 159 countries

[OneWorld RTW](#) - 10 airlines (+ a few subsidiaries) flying to 675 destinations in more than 130 countries

By now, you should also have the two tools mentioned at the beginning of the guide. These will help you plan out possible trips. I'll cover some of the basic info here, but you may want to refer to the official documentation for more details. Since that info is publicly available, I want to focus on more advanced tips that are not provided by the airlines.

What About SkyTeam?

If you know your airline alliances, you may wonder why I haven't talked about SkyTeam yet. Well, that's mostly because SkyTeam does not "do" RTW products very well. They do have a product they will happily sell you, but most travelers prefer either of the other two alliances for worldwide travel. SkyTeam *is* good for a few other things, so if you're really set on using SkyTeam for RTW travel, [here is the info they provide](#). Note that itineraries will be fairly limited, due to the lack of coverage in several geographic areas.

Both Star Alliance and OneWorld have several things in common and several things that are distinct. The commonalities include:

- » One full year to travel
- » Date and flight changes are free (FYI, OneWorld makes this easier)

- » Any airline in the alliance can issue the ticket or make changes (theoretically, although this is not always possible in practice)
- » Lounge access policies are fairly consistent throughout each alliance

The primary difference is that OneWorld offers a segment-based product, and Star Alliance offers a mileage-based product. OneWorld limits your RTW trip to a maximum of 16 segments (broken into specific restrictions per continent), but doesn't care how many miles each segment is. This is very important to understand, so let's look at a few examples of different one-segment flights.

Hong Kong – New York (JFK): **8,068 miles, 1 segment**

New York (JFK) – Los Angeles: **2,472 miles, 1 segment**

New York (JFK) – Boston: **186 miles, 1 segment**

In other words, any particular flight counts as one segment. If you stop and change planes somewhere, then you'll use up another segment.

New York (JFK) – Los Angeles *via Chicago*:
2,481 miles, 2 segments

The reason this is so important to understand is that a good OneWorld RTW ticket is always designed to maximize as many segments as possible. In the above example, I would never choose a connecting flight (unless I needed to actually be in Chicago) over the direct flight.

With Star Alliance, you also have a 16 segment limit, but more importantly, you also have a mileage limit: either **26,000** miles (Economy only), **29,000** miles, **34,000** miles or **39,000** miles, depending on which fare you purchase. When you go with Star Alliance, you'll also want to carefully optimize the ticket, but the optimizing will be based on mileage and specific destinations.

COSTS

The cost for either product mentioned above varies from **\$3,000 to \$10,000** – largely dependent on travel class and where you begin the trip. My tickets are around **\$5,000** each. I purchased two of them last year, and I'm trying to set up a new one for the rest of 2009.

\$5,000 is a lot of money, of course, but when you consider all the flights that you can take, the price per segment goes way down. My price-per-segment is about **\$300**, and this includes many long-haul flights that otherwise would cost thousands of dollars.

For example, here is an itinerary I used for my first OneWorld RTW ticket:

NRT-HKG-LAX-SJO-LAX-ORD-SEA-JFK-SCL-IPC-
SCL-EZE-ORD-AMM-TUN-AMM-FCO-HKG-NRT

You don't need to understand all the airport codes to understand the value from this ticket. Among other highlights, this itinerary included:

- » A trip to Easter Island, usually quite pricey since there's only one easy way to get there (through South America on LAN Chile)
- » A visit to North Africa and the Middle East, another pricey region
- » A quick trip down to Costa Rica, which provided more miles than most U.S. flights would have
- » A return to Seattle (in between Asia and South America) where I could stop and break up the trip for a while
- » When combined with overland trips on location (to Uruguay from Argentina, to San Marino from Rome, etc.) the chance to visit **10 countries** from this one ticket

In short, I get tremendous value from my RTW tickets, and recommend them to others whenever possible.

Tax Cuts

There are a few things you can do to reduce the cost of RTW tickets. First, understand that the taxes on a monster ticket can be quite high. All of my tickets are 16 segments, so each airport takes a cut along the way. However, if you are in transit, then no taxes are charged - even if you stay for up to 24 hours.

Naturally, a real stopover you'll need more than 24 hours, but if you're just passing through somewhere, try to time the transit for under 24 hours to avoid the extra fees. I've done this many times and had time to meet up with friends and even stay the night somewhere before going on to my "real" stopover point another flight away.

(Black-hat info: if you book a RTW or otherwise complicated itinerary that includes a number of

transit points and later change the transit points to be real stopovers, the airlines are supposed to reprice the ticket to reflect the increased taxes. My experience is that this only happens about 50% of the time.)

Current Hot Spots

At publication time, the best spots in the world to buy OneWorld tickets are **South Korea** and **South Africa**. If you can get to either of those countries relatively easy (for less than \$1,000, let's say), you can potentially save thousands of dollars on the ticket.

A few other good departure countries are **Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Mauritius**, and (sometimes) **Sweden**. Remember, you can get the current fare from any country in local currency by visiting the [OneWorld site](#). For Star Alliance arbitrage opportunities, check the current version of the *Travel Ninja* spreadsheet. I use [XE.com](#) for help with currency conversion.

SINGLE-OR-DUAL AIRLINE RTWS

In addition to the RTW alliance products, you can also find some notable RTW products marketed by single-or-dual airlines. A few of the more intriguing options are listed below, and you can read about [a wider selection here](#).

[Singapore Airlines Round-the-World](#) – SQ has its own RTW product, which can be as low as \$2,200 from the U.S. or Canada. At the low end, routings are fairly restrictive, but if you want to fly one of the best airlines in the world and visit three or four continents, this is a nice deal.

[Virgin Atlantic \(and partners\)](#) – Another great airline, Virgin Atlantic, also offers its own product that can be combined with one of several partners. Partners include Malaysia, Singapore, or ANA (Japan). Fares start at about \$3,000 and go up quickly.

[Air New Zealand](#) – The airline's LAX-LHR flight allows it to offer a complete Round-the-World

service all on its own. Of course, there won't be many available side trips, but the fare is lower than a full-scale Star Alliance ticket – typically around \$3,000 for Economy class.

4 --- Creative Lodging

I stay in different places all over the world – hotels, hostels, guesthouses, on the couch of friends. Now that I've been traveling for a while, I have a pretty good idea of what lodging will be like in most major world cities. If I haven't been there before, I can probably compare it with somewhere I *have* been.

To get an overview of what the lodging is like in my next destination, I check these:

- a) [Kayak](#) or another travel search engine ([Expedia](#) et al). My goal in doing this is not usually to make a reservation, but to do some price shopping. I'd like to know the going

rate for low-end, middle-range, and high-end hotels before I do anything else.

- b) I check the guidebooks, usually in the bookstore or library. I don't travel with guidebooks very much at this point, but I do like to take a quick look through them. I have a love / hate relationship with Lonely Planet, but the love part comes from the fact that I have indeed found several good lodging opportunities through their recommendations. The hate part comes from the fact that a *lot* of other people have found the same recommendations, which leads to hanging out with other foreigners all the time (“With *Lonely Planet* you'll never be lonely,” a friend of mine says), and sometimes a decline in standards from the places that are highly recommended. Anyway, it's worth a look.

[Lonely Planet Guides](#)

[Rough Guides](#)

Note that you need to check the actual books, as these companies refrain from posting most of their content online. (Apparently they want people to actually buy the books – who knew?)

STARWOOD (SHERATON, LE MERIDIEN, W, ET AL) OPTIONS

Because I've been able to stay in dozens of free Sheraton hotels all over the world, I'm a big fan of [Starwood's Preferred Guest program](#). As far as I can remember, I've stayed in their properties in Brussels, Brunei, Cairo, Ft. Lauderdale, Johannesburg, Los Angeles, Montevideo, New York City, Vancouver -- and probably a lot more.

The trick with Starwood is to look for redemptions that require a low amount of points or redemptions in cities where paid lodging is especially expensive. A lot of Sheraton hotels cater to business travelers, and they tend to lower the amount of points required for weekend stays. I'm usually traveling both during the week and the weekend, so I've often been able to get a low-points redemption during the weekend.

If you can get a Sheraton stay for 3,000-4,000 points, that's usually a very good deal. If it's an expensive city (New York, Hong Kong, etc.) then you probably won't find anything less than 10,000 points – but since hotels are so expensive in cities like that, a 10k redemption can still be a good deal relative to paying \$300+ for a room.

To search for Starwood opportunities, log onto [SPG.com](#) and choose “Find Award” in the upper-left corner.

HILTON OPTIONS

For years, I only used Starwood as my exclusive “free hotel provider of choice.” I've recently added Hilton to the mix, mostly because they offer a great AmEx card that gave me a lot of bonus points (35,000) and no annual fee. They've now reduced the bonus to 10,000, but it's still worth a look.

[Hilton AmEx Card](#)

(This card is for U.S. residents. I am not sure if they have one for Canadians or international residents.)

To search for Hilton opportunities, log onto HHonors.Hilton.com.

HOSTEL & GUESTHOUSE OPTIONS

I'm not a huge fan of staying in a dorm with a roomful of strangers, but with 80% of the hostels I visit, that's not really a problem. At most hostels, you can now book private rooms that cost more than a dorm bed, but far less than a comparable hotel bed. Breakfast is sometimes included, although the quality varies widely. Free wifi is also becoming the norm, even at hostels located in remote corners of the world.

I usually start by checking out Hostels.com to see what's available. There are a few other hostel search engines, but Hostels.com is my favorite. Be sure you read the reviews before reserving a room, and when you do, print out the directions as not every taxi

driver or bus operator will be familiar with all the hostels on arrival.

If I don't see anything promising, I'll also Google the city name + hostel (or city name + guesthouse) to see what's available. This is because some cities do not have good coverage in the hostel databases, but that doesn't mean that no hostels exist.

HOTELCLUB.COM

Just before Christmas, the hotel consolidator HotelClub.com offered a variety of "free member dollars" promotions in different markets. This Australian-based company is affiliated with a large U.S. consolidator, and that's where the confusion began - HotelClub.com offered so many promotions through various regional web sites (hotelclub.com.au, hotelclub.co.uk, etc.) that many people started registering accounts in different regions to earn different member dollars.

At some point, someone noticed that HotelClub did not restrict users to a single account, so thousands

of people began registering tens of thousands of accounts to get the bonus. Confused yet? Well, the point is that for a short time it was possible to rack up a large number of hotel credits. I registered at least 15 accounts for myself and a few friends, and someone else showed up in Thailand with a stack of 30 prepaid vouchers (!) for the next month. Hilarious.

As of right now, the deal is closed, but I expect some version of it to surface again soon. [Follow this thread on FlyerTalk for the latest updates.](#) I still check the HotelClub.com web site whenever I travel, because sometimes I can get a deal I can't find anywhere else.

COUCHSURFING AND HOSPITALITY EXCHANGE

When I asked for free travel recommendations on Twitter recently, I received a flurry of replies that mentioned Couchsurfing. The “Couchsurfing Revolution” has allowed tens of thousands of travelers to stay for free all over the world. When

you join the site (also completely free) you'll create a profile and be able to view listings from all over the world. The listings contain info from people who are willing to host travelers for free in their homes for a few days. Yes, it really does work, and it really is safe.

Couchsurfing.com's main competitor is Hospitality Exchange, which attracts a slightly older crowd. Both networks are worth checking out.

[Couchsurfing](#)

[Hospitality Exchange](#)

OVERNIGHT FLIGHTS (RED-EYE)

I'm not a big fan of red-eye flights (I almost never sleep on planes, which inevitably leads to exhaustion the next day), but lately I've been taking more and more of them. If I'm going to take a red-eye, I'd actually prefer it to be longer rather than shorter - a 10-12 hour overnight flight is easier for me since it allows for much more of a natural sleep

cycle than a 4-hour West Coast – East Coast flight in the U.S. Anyway, if you’re looking to save money or if you have no problem sleeping on planes, look for red-eye flights on your next long-haul trip.

MAKING THE DECISION

If the above analysis sounds complicated, it’s only because I’ve tried to document the steps carefully. When I search for lodging for a trip, I can usually get a good idea of where I’m going to stay for up to 10 days at a time (including multiple stops) in less than an hour. Like a lot of principles in travel hacking, once you get over the learning curve, it’s usually fairly quick.

If I’m traveling for two weeks, my normal time period, I’ll likely book a combination of stays in different places. The current ratio is about 50% low-cost lodging and 30% hotel stays, with the remaining 20% being overnight flights or the dreaded airport sleepover before an early morning flight. I usually space these out over the course of a trip, so I effectively have a few nights in a budget

option, a better hotel stay, an overnight flight or airport sleepover, another hotel stay, back to budget lodging, and so on. I enjoy the cycle of changing things up and probably wouldn’t be comfortable with any one option repeated again and again.

5

How to Go Anywhere

Most of us who are able to read this guide are also fortunate enough to go anywhere we want with a relatively short amount of lead time for savings and planning. I accelerate this process through travel hacking, but even if you go the slow route and [save \\$2 a day for two years](#), you can find yourself pretty much anywhere in the world. The main question is, “Will you do it?”

I can’t help with that one, but when you’re ready to say “Yes,” the next question is “Where would you like to go?”

Here are a few regional specific tips that can help you get to almost anywhere you want to go.

CONTINENTAL EUROPE

The classic tip for getting to Europe cheaply involves flying to an intermediate city first, and then taking a budget airline to get to your final destination. Here's how it breaks down. The intermediate city is usually Dublin or Amsterdam, although there can be others depending on the city and which particular airlines are in the process of bankruptcy. The point is, you check fares for all major European cities and book the cheapest one *instead of booking the flight all the way to where you want to go.*

To do this, it helps to check with [Aer Lingus](#), an airline that usually charges lower fares than the others because it sucks. If you are used to flying in the U.S. or Canada, this should not be a problem for you.

(Fares are also lower to certain places because of how taxes are calculated differently in different countries, and even at different airports within the same country. For example, taxes at London's Heathrow airport are very high, as are departures from several airports in Canada.)

Then, you use a budget airline to get to your final destination. The largest budget airlines are Ryan Air and EasyJet; however, there are now many more (literally dozens in Europe alone) to choose from. Use these links to explore:

[RyanAir](#)

[EasyJet](#)

[Attitude Travel](#)

When dealing with budget airlines, note that a lot of the smaller airlines tend to come and go. Accordingly, when traveling on a budget carrier I

tend to avoid purchasing a ticket too far in advance. And of course, I use a credit card when purchasing so that I know I can get my money back in case the airline disappears.

(Additional free tip: It is easier to dispute charges with an American Express card than with Visa or Mastercard. This is because AmEx generally puts the burden on the merchant to prove the charge, whereas Visa/MC puts the burden on the consumer. Some merchants do not accept AmEx for this very reason, but whenever I have the option when buying a flight, I'll use the AmEx card.)

As mentioned, the strategy of flying in to one city and then hopping around on a budget airline is hardly new. However, there are a couple of clarifying points that are usually missed when the advice is given. When pursuing this strategy, many would-be travel ninjas fail to consider the total cost of the flights. You need to factor in **luggage fees** (most budget airlines charge to check anything), **any additional transit costs** you'll incur (for

example, if you have to change airports or spend the night at a hotel), and **any elite status benefits you forego** by choosing the budget airline.

The point is that using budget airlines is sometimes a good idea and sometimes not. My feeling is that if I have a choice, I am going to fly a legacy carrier where I earn miles, put my elite status to good use, and get into lounges. If there is a significant price difference, then of course I'll choose the budget airline – but I want to make sure the price difference is real.

ASIA

You can also use this strategy in Asia, and it is sometimes even easier than in Europe. Note also that budget airlines do not usually offer transit or interline services. What this means in practice is that you may need to go through immigration in your transit hub before checking in at the main departures area. This adds a bit of a time to your transit.

My (current) preferred budget airline in the region is [Air Asia](#). Fares can be quite low, and service is good. Others include [Tiger Airways](#), [JetStar Asia](#), and [NokAir](#).

CANADA

I've always wanted to travel on VIA Rail Canada – the classic route is Ontario-British Columbia in either direction – but the fares are quite high. Train travel in Canada is somewhat more developed than in the U.S., but with fares high and such a far distance between cities, it is usually much more affordable to fly.

[Amtrak](#)

[Via Rail](#)

Until the train prices drop, I'll remain a big fan of WestJet – the Canadian Southwest, as they have worked to become known. Fares are frequently much lower than Air Canada's, and even if you like Air Canada, WestJet has helped to lower fares

across Canada by forcing the larger carrier to drop its fares on routes operated by both airlines.

[WestJet](#)

LATIN AMERICA

Once you've learned a fair amount of Spanish, Central and South America is an easy region to travel in. Fares to lower South America (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile) are often fairly expensive from the U.S. or Europe, but after you arrive, you'll find that expenses are quite low.

If you're going to Uruguay, you'll likely find it much cheaper to fly into Buenos Aires, Argentina before crossing over on a ferry. I did that trip recently and was amused to note that the onboard safety briefing was offered only in Spanish, but after we left the dock, an announcement was made to open the ferry casino – in both Spanish and English!

Airfares to Central America are usually more reasonable, and once you're there you can easily get around the region on a series of buses that run from Panama to Guatemala. Also, COPA and TACA Airlines (two separate carriers) provide good service and reasonable prices within the region and to a few cities in the U.S.

[Tica Bus](#)

[Hedman Alas](#)

[COPA Airlines](#)

[TACA Airlines](#)

ANTARCTICA

If you want to go to a remote location, you can't get much further away than Antarctica. The frozen continent is hard to get to and requires a significant investment of both time and money. If you're up for the challenge, the best way to do it is to head to Tierra Del Fuego (Argentina) or Ushuala (Chile).

Those cities are the southernmost points of South America, and ships regularly leave from there to head down to Antarctica.

The cost begins at \$4,000 and goes up quickly – and that's after you've made it to down to the bottom of South America. Here are a few of the recommended Antarctica operators:

[Expedition Trips](#)

[National Geographic](#)

[Regent Seven Seas](#)

CARIBBEAN

There are a few ways of getting to and around the Caribbean, so you should select the option that most closely relates to your own travel goals. By far the fastest and easiest way to visit several places in the region is by cruise ship. Affordable flights are sometimes available (check Air Jamaica in addition

to the major U.S. airlines and Air Canada), but the cheapest flights are often tied to a required hotel stay.

Once you've made it to the islands, you can travel by ferry between islands that are close to each other (St. Martin and Anguilla, for example), but there are less ferry options than you might expect. Instead, a network of airlines including both small and big carriers provides service throughout the region.

AUSTRALIA

If you're traveling from Europe or North America, it takes a long time to get to Australia - and fares are usually quite high. I've previously written about the great AussieAir pass from Qantas Airlines, which allows you to visit Sydney or Melbourne *plus* three domestic flights after you arrive.

The price changes from time to time, but you can often get it for about \$1099, which is a great deal since tickets to Australia can sometimes climb

up to \$2,000 without any free flights once you get there. Read the details here:

[Qantas Airpass](#)

Also, Virgin Australia recently moved closer to flying between Australia and the U.S., breaking up the long-held monopoly by Qantas and United. Like the other Virgin airlines, V Australia is off to a great start with lower fares and better service than the competition. I definitely recommend you check with them if you're headed that way:

[Virgin Australia](#)

EVERYWHERE ELSE

Information on countries and regions not covered in this manual will be covered in the free email update series. As long as you're on the list, you can expect to learn more about the Balkans, Baltics, the Middle East, and other places soon.

TROUBLESHOOTING (AND PROBLEMS TO AVOID)

From time to time (well, frequently), things will go wrong when you start flying around the world. For me this is usually a result of a) changing flights often or b) not allowing much time in between stops. Since I've been traveling for so long, it's fairly easy for me to hop from place to place. If you're just getting started or are a "slow" traveler in general, you can avoid a lot of these issues. However, it's good to be aware what to do when problems crop up.

WAITLIST

When requesting a reservation with a RTW or Awards flight, or also when making a change to any flight, you may hear that the airline has no seats available at the moment, but they can "wait-list" you for the flight you want. When you hear this from an

agent, this is your cue to start asking questions. The best questions to ask are:

How full is the flight?

How many other people are on the wait-list?

What do you think my chances are?

(In other words, what you are really asking is, "Will this work out?" but sometimes you need to be more specific.)

About half of the time you'll be reassured that the wait-list will likely clear, in which case you can just sit tight and hope the information proves true. To be safe, you can ask the agent to confirm you on another flight (the day after, for example) while you are waiting for the one you really want to clear. Airline policies vary on whether this is allowed and whether you'll be charged a fee for doing this, but most airlines won't be very clear on how the process works unless you ask.

If the chances don't look good, then you need to be a bit more aggressive in getting a confirmed seat. Once you're on the wait list, call back every day to check on it. Ask if the agent has any advice – “Do you see any other flights I can take?” is a great question to bring up.

A good agent can work wonders in opening up a space for you, and if you call often enough, you'll probably find one. Also, if your flight is operated by a different airline than the one you're speaking to on the phone, request the operating airline's record locator from the airline you're dealing with so you can call them directly.

Again, if all of this sounds somewhat stressful or complicated, you can avoid much of it through good planning. Some day I'll take my own advice about this, but in the meantime, life happens. This is how you deal with it.

NO AVAILABLE SEATS

As mentioned about 50% of the time I've been on wait-listed flights, the flight has cleared with no difficulty. Another 25% of the time, the flight has cleared due to persistent follow-up on my part. This leaves approximately 25% of the times when you really are stuck, and the flight won't clear.

When there are truly no available seats and you find out you have a real problem, you need to be proactive. No one will do this for you. I have the highest level of elite status in two alliances, and while the status is helpful in being able to talk to nice people on the phone with minimal wait time, I've noticed that the burden is usually on me (the traveler) to find or suggest a remedy when I run into big problems.

In this case you'll need to step back and look at the bigger picture. You can risk it by showing up at the airport, but if you've asked the right questions, you'll already know the odds of success. In this case, you may simply need to book a different

flight or wait another day. If you do choose to book another flight, you may be better off doing this in person at the airport or ticket office. If you show the (new) airline a copy of your other ticket, they will sometimes agree to charge you the discounted, advance-purchase fare instead of the exorbitant last-minute price.

NO VISA, NO PROBLEM (MAYBE)

If you have a passport from a rich country, you won't need to worry too much about getting visas. Most countries you are likely to visit will either waive the requirements for visas (up to 30, 60, or 90 days depending on the country) or allow you to apply for one at the airport upon arrival.

The more you go off the beaten track, however, the more you'll need to plan ahead to receive visas. When things go wrong, you can *sometimes* travel to the country anyway and try to sort it out upon arrival. Be aware that this is definitely a high-risk activity. If you can avoid it at all, you should do so. However, if you're stuck, here's what you do.

There are two barriers to clear: first, the airline, which will inspect your documents at check-in and sometimes again before boarding the plane; second, the immigration officials of the country itself. My strategy is to print out lots of papers in hopes of overwhelming the agent or officials. When I arrived in Pakistan without the requisite visa, I printed copies of the embassy's web site, my hotel reservation, my return plane ticket, an email I had sent to the Pakistani-American Friendship Organization, and so on.

If that sounds a bit desperate, well, consider that almost no Westerner drops into Karachi without a good reason. Dress nice, act slightly impatient (while still being polite, of course), and distract the person with random questions.

(By the way, this is roughly the same strategy you can use for smuggling liquids or anything else you're not supposed to take through airport security. Don't say you heard it from me, OK?)

Again, this does not always work. I have seen people turned back after flying 10+ hours to get somewhere. They are put in a holding room and then flown out on the next available flight. Yes, this really does happen, so be careful out there. Try to get the visa before you go if it's at all possible. If not, be confident, put on your nice clothes, and hope for the best.

MULTIPLE AIRLINES ON THE SAME ITINERARY

When you choose to travel with multiple, *unrelated* airlines on the same itinerary, you can sometimes run into trouble due to the lack of communication between the airlines. If one of your flights is late, no responsibility will be assumed by either airline.

The issue I've run into several times is that budget airlines in many countries don't have a transit counter in the airport, meaning that travelers will need to clear immigration and check in (again) at the main departures area. Sometimes this adds 10 minutes, sometimes it adds more than an hour. And

of course, if you're traveling with checked bags, you'll need to collect them and check them in again, which adds more time.

It doesn't mean you shouldn't do this; you just need to make sure you have plenty of time. If you do miss a flight somewhere, plead ignorance and show your original ticket. Also, remember that this only applies to *unrelated* airlines. If your airlines have any kind of partnership agreement, you won't have any problems – and you can usually request an onward boarding pass when you check in at your original departure point, saving a bit of time at the next stop.

INTERNATIONAL DATELINE AND POST-MIDNIGHT RED-EYE CONFUSION

Every day, travelers arrive in Japan to discover they are a day late for the room they booked. Oops! Keep in mind when you fly to Asia from North America, you will “lose” a day due to the international dateline. Plan your schedule and any reservations carefully! This works in your favor when you go the

other direction (Asia-North America). Even though the flight may be an overnight flight, you'll show up on the same day you left. Funny how that works.

Likewise, remember to arrive the evening before the date of travel for red-eye flights that depart after midnight. Every time I've traveled at 1am, there are always people queuing up at the check-in desk on the wrong day. The airlines are somewhat used to this, but since they can't guarantee to give you a seat when you show up a day late, be sure you pay careful attention to the *local* date and time on the ticket.

If you can avoid these really big mistakes, you're better than me. My biggest travel mistake ever came about this summer when I double-booked myself on two non-refundable tickets coming back from Asia. It was a completely dumb mistake for which I have no good excuse. Anyway, I'm sure you won't do something like that... right?

7 Questions and Answers

HOW DO I BOOK A RTW TICKET?

[Read this detailed post](#) for more info. Summary: figure out where you want to go (it will take a couple of hours minimum) and then call in the trip to the airline. Don't use a travel agent unless that agent explicitly understands how Star Alliance and OneWorld products work.

WHAT IS THE DEAL WITH AIR COURIER FLIGHTS? CAN I FLY FOR FREE AS A COURIER?

In short, no. Air courier flights are largely a thing of the past, before 9/11 and back when airlines were profitable. These days, it's better to focus on a) building elite status and travel hacking, b) using budget airlines to piece together a series

of point-to-point trips, or c) a combination of these two strategies.

SHOULD I USE MY FREQUENT FLYER MILES FOR A RTW TICKET?

No, not usually. The exception would be if you really have a huge pile of miles (300,000+) that you won't use for anything else. Otherwise, you can get much better value out of your miles by using them for high-value (international business class) round-trip flights.

HOW CAN I TRAVEL TO CUBA?

If you're not a U.S. citizen, it's easy – you just book a flight. Common entry points are Jamaica, Canada, or Mexico. If you are a U.S. citizen, the Cuban government welcomes travelers, including Americans. It's the U.S. immigration on the other side that makes things difficult. If you decide to go, make sure they don't stamp your passport! Also, read the post on traveling to [rogue states and other interesting places](#).

WHAT SHOULD I USE AMEX MEMBERSHIP REWARDS POINTS FOR?

AmEx points are especially useful because they can be transferred to so many partners. At press time, the partners included:

Delta, Virgin Atlantic, Cathay Pacific (limited), ANA, Qantas (limited), Air Canada, South African Airways (limited), Air Tahiti Nui (limited), Singapore, El Al, AeroMexico, AirFrance/KLM, Continental, Swiss (limited), Mexicana, Frontier, Hawaiian, Iberia (limited), Alitalia, JetBlue, Southwest, AirTran

To maximize value, I recommend a) ignoring the limited awards offered directly by a few of these airlines, b) transferring points in 1,000 blocks to carriers like ANA, AirFrance, Virgin Atlantic, and sometimes Air Canada.

Also, ignore the awards from U.S. budget airlines (JetBlue, Southwest, etc.). You can usually get better value for awards trips from legacy carriers, although

of course budget airlines are good to fly with on paid trips.

WHAT ARE THE BEST RESOURCES FOR CAR RENTAL?

I don't rent cars often (I try to use public transportation whenever possible), but when I do I check two main resources:

#1: [Nova Car Hire](#) – This European car rental agency almost always beats the other quotes I see on Kayak et al. Give them a look.

#2: [Priceline](#) – Priceline is mediocre for flights, but sometimes good for hotels and frequently good for car rentals. Just remember that all bookings are non-refundable and charged upon reservation.

8 Resources

ART OF NONCONFORMITY STORE

The AONC store is being built *carefully* and *deliberately*. I want to make sure that each product provides tremendous value far greater than the purchase price. As of right now, I offer only two additional products:

[Discount Airfare Guide](#) – The original airfare guide. It's more basic than this one, but 80% of the content is unique. Among other things, you'll learn:

- » How to Hitch a Ride on an Airplane
- » Alternative Routings, Free Stopovers, and Unusual Trip Ideas
- » The Less-than-Free Hawaii Stopover
- » The Contrarian Travel Strategy

- » Surviving *Euroshock* in Europe
- » Discount Airlines in Europe, Asia, and North America

This one has a truly budget price – just \$24.95.

[Working for Yourself](#) – How to create freedom through a very small business. Among other things, you’ll learn:

- » Truth and Lies of Affiliate Marketing
- » 8 Ways to Earn (At Least) \$200 a Month
- » Strategic Microbusiness Building
- » 3 Separate Ways of Selling on eBay (including one that 98% of eBay sellers ignore)
- » The Truth about Blogging for Dollars
- » How to Get Paid for Things You Currently Do for Free
- » Where to Start from the Beginning
- » Scaling Up to a Business Empire
- » Affiliate Income 2.0
- » Logistics for Getting Paid

- » 6 Top Mistakes of Entrepreneurship
- » 4 Overrated Businesses You Should Avoid

In addition to a lengthy manual (50+ pages), the *Working for Yourself* guide includes several audio sessions and an ebook bonus on Search Engine Optimization.

Of course, both of these products come with a complete “rock your world” satisfaction guarantee. Stay tuned for more products as the store grows!

OTHER BLOGS AND FREE RESOURCES

I try to read these other travel-hacking blogs on a regular (at least weekly) basis:

- » [View from the Wing](#)
- » [One Mile at a Time](#)
- » [Frugal Travel Guy](#)
- » [Global Traveller](#)

I also spend time on the great FlyerTalk forum almost every day. The experts there have helped me through a lot of difficult travel issues:

[FlyerTalk Forums](#)

ITA SOFTWARE

ITA Software does a lot of things. Most Travel Ninjas just need to know about one of them – the airfare search. You can access that here:

[ITA Matrix Search](#)

Choose “Login as a guest” (no need to create a profile), and proceed to the search screen. ITA search is like Kayak, only with even more options. The best thing is that you can search several months out and find a huge variety of flights and connection times.

ITA searches will also display flight results you would not usually see with other travel search

engines. You can’t book your flights directly with this software, but I go there to get a good overview of fares before booking elsewhere. It’s almost always worth a look when planning a big trip.

By the way, if you find a good deal but aren’t able to book it on an airline web site, you may need to do it over the phone. This will incur a \$10-25 reservation fee with some airlines, so if you have a choice, of course you’ll want to book online.

DOZENS OF PASSWORDS

If you get busy travel hacking, you’ll probably end up with a large number of accounts to keep track of. I have Frequent Flyer accounts (at least 8 at last count), hotel accounts (4-5), credit card accounts (don’t ask), travel forum memberships (3), and untold number of other places I need to log-in on at least a weekly basis.

I save at least 20 minutes every day by using [Roboform Password Software](#). This great tool remembers all my log-in and password info and

then automatically logs me in wherever I go. I have one master password for Roboform, and then the software does the rest. Highly recommended.

LANGUAGE LEARNING

I'm not especially skilled at learning languages, at least not compared to many people from Europe, Asia, or Africa. Still, I do try to learn enough to be polite wherever I go. I use free podcasts and [Pimsleur](#) software (available from the library or through purchase on Amazon). I haven't spent much time with [Rosetta Stone](#) products, but I hear good things from most people who have used them.

9 WRAP-UP

You can join the *Travel Ninja* Owner's list here:

<http://www.unconventionalguides.com/tn-confirm>

Why should you do that? Because you'll get free updates and additional content I did not want to put in the guide. I can also send complimentary alerts whenever something important happens. For example, right after the *Discount Airfare Guide* launched, I found an opportunity to earn a free one-way flight within Europe through a major European airline

At last count, more than 40 people were able to use the info to book a FREE FLIGHT. This did not involve Frequent Flyer Miles, although I send

mileage deals sometimes too. Anyway, if you want to get info on future deals like that, join the list.

Note: if you're already on the [Discount Airfare Guide](#) list, there may be some duplication, but you should only receive one email each time something new comes along.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE GUIDE? I'D LOVE TO KNOW

Please take a moment to complete a short survey at the link below. It's quick and painless, and will help me improve the guide in the future. (All updates will be free for you.)

<http://www.chrisguillebeau.com/travel-ninja-survey>

ONE FREE EMAIL

I want this guide to provide far more value than the small fee you exchanged for it. If you're stuck on a travel dilemma, or if you need some travel tips for an upcoming journey, I will do my best to reply to one email inquiry for all *Travel Ninja* owners.

This is an unadvertised benefit that I may withdraw in the future, but for now, feel free to write me at 3x5@chrisguillebeau.com with the subject "Travel Advice." Please remember that I am frequently overseas, so email responses may be delayed.

That's all, folks... thank you!

I really appreciate you checking out this guide. Remember that while the travel industry continues to get more expensive, there will always be an alternative for dedicated travelers.

Get out there and do some planning for your next trip! I'll be right behind you.

Happy Travels,

A blue, handwritten signature that reads "Chris".

Chris Guillebeau

ArtofNonconformity.com