

Hotel Loyalty Programs – Tips for Savvy Travelers

Just like the frequent flier programs offered by airlines, hotel loyalty clubs have also been offering benefits to even infrequent travelers. A customer can easily join a program, and accrue some points over time. If you show some regular or annual account activity, these points won't expire.



Most major hotel loyalty programs have shifted and expanded redemption perks way beyond upgrades and free rooms. In the last few years, these programs have started giving excellent perks to members. Participants have a chance to trade their points for events, concerts, airline tickets and gift certificates.

With that being said, major benefits are still received by serious travelers who spend most of their time on the road or shuffling between one city to another. At Starwood, guests who spend at least 100 nights every year at the company's luxurious properties are upgraded to suites, check in and out anytime, receive twice as many points for the money they spend, and get personal concierge service.

However, this does not mean infrequent travelers can't reap some benefits from these reward programs. If you want to walk on the red carpet, use these rules to get the most of your membership.

Achieve Good Status

The best way to reap more benefits and maximize your points is to earn a solid status. Thus, you need to look for programs which have a relatively low requirement for elite levels. They should also be offering a wide range of hotels to choose from. This will make it easier for you to rack up some qualifying nights. With the Hyatt Gold Passport program, you will be elevated to Platinum status when you've completed just 15 eligible nights or 5 eligible stays in one calendar year.



Once you have Platinum status, you will get 20% off room charges, space available upgrades, 2 PM

checkout, free Internet access and more. The Starwood Preferred Guest program also offers the same kind of benefits for guests who achieve Gold status, including upgrades, 4 PM checkout, bonus points and more. In order to achieve Gold status, you will have to complete 25 eligible nights or 10 eligible stays in one calendar year.

For Hilton Hhonors program, you need to complete 40 nights or 20 stays in one calendar year to achieve Gold status. Once you're a Gold member, you will start receiving benefits like free Internet access, complimentary breakfast, free room upgrades and more.

Use the Right Card

In case you just make a room-night minimum, there are also other ways to reach a higher status. You can use a hotel branded credit card. For instance, a Citi Hilton Hhonors Reserve Card can get you automatic Gold status, along with certificates and bonus points for free rooms.

The Hyatt Credit Card also offers similar rewards. It upgrades basic level program members to Platinum status. Starwood Preferred Guest Credit Card is given by American Express. Although it won't elevate your status instantly, it can grant you credit for 2 qualifying stays and 5 nights every year, along with some bonus points for extra purchases. Similarly, Marriott Rewards Credit Card can give you night credits for Elite status.

Look for Smaller Companies

According to Brian Kelly, Founder, Points Guy Website (tracks airline and hotel loyalty clubs), occasional travelers should always consider loyalty programs from some smaller companies. In order to compete with big names in the hotel industry, smaller companies are often generous. Although you won't have a lot of choices around the world, you will still make up for it in benefits.



For joining most of these programs, free Internet access is standard. Some of these programs include Kimpton's In Touch, Fairmont President's Club, Omni Select Guest, Preferred Hotel Group's iPrefer and more. In addition to free Internet access, Kimpton also offers hotel bar, space vouchers and mini bar. Similarly, Fairmont offers free shoe-shines and spa discounts, Omni gives you free coffee delivery, pressing services and water.

Don't Go for Third Party Websites

Last but not the least, there's another important thing you need to understand. Most hotel loyalty programs don't recognize bookings made via third party websites. Therefore, discounted rates which you see on websites like Travelocity and Priceline won't help you build status or accrue points. However, websites like Expedia, Hotels.com and Orbitz have programs which offer customers some variation of coupons, free nights and vouchers when you book more. If you're able to achieve Elite status with Orbitz and Expedia, you may even receive other benefits like late checkout, room upgrades and free Wifi.

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