THE OVERSEAS PLAYER'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO EARNING FREQUENT FLYER MILES

How to Stack Points on Every Flight Your Team Pays For



Important Note: Airline loyalty program rules, earning rates, and partner agreements change frequently and sometimes with little notice. All information in this guide is accurate as of May 2026. Always verify current terms directly with the airline before traveling. OverseasX is not responsible for program changes made after publication.

OverseasX

THE COMPLETE MILES GUIDE

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With OverseasX, you'll never have to walk this journey alone.

Why This Guide Exists

Every overseas player who has ever sat in an airport knows the feeling. The team bought the ticket. You flew sixteen hours. You landed in a city you had never been to before. And somewhere in that journey, a few thousand frequent flyer miles disappeared into thin air because nobody told you to sign up for a loyalty program before the season started.

This guide exists to make sure that never happens to you again. The team will almost always pay for your flights. That is not the point. The point is that those miles belong to the person sitting in the seat, which is you. Teams book the ticket. You keep the points. That is free money, free flights home, free upgrades, and over the course of a career, potentially tens of thousands of dollars in travel value sitting unclaimed on tables all over the world.

This guide covers everything from signing up before your first flight to claiming miles you already flew without a number attached. It covers which programs make sense for which regions, which credit cards stack additional points on top of your flying, what to do when the team uses a budget carrier, and exactly how to talk to your team manager to make sure your number gets added to every reservation. No fluff. Just what you need to know.

Section 1: The Foundation

The One Rule Everything Else Builds On

You can earn miles when someone else pays for your ticket. Your club, your agent, your team's travel coordinator, it does not matter who swipes the card. If your frequent flyer number is attached to that reservation before the flight, the miles go to you. If it is not attached, the miles go nowhere. The team keeps saving money on flights and you keep getting nothing for sixteen hours in a middle seat somewhere over the Atlantic.

That is the entire game in one sentence. Everything in this guide is about making sure your number is on every single reservation, knowing which program to put it in, and understanding how to recover miles from flights where you already missed the window.

RULE #1	Sign up for a frequent flyer account before your first professional flight. Not after you land. Not when the season starts. Before you ever board a plane.

How Miles Work

Historically, airlines awarded miles based on the physical distance you flew. The longer the flight, the more miles you earned. Many international carriers still use this model, which is great news for overseas players who are regularly flying transatlantic and transpacific routes. A

Philadelphia to Paris flight is roughly 3,700 miles each direction. That is 7,400 miles round trip, minimum, before any bonuses.

Some US carriers have shifted to a revenue-based model where you earn miles based on what the ticket costs rather than how far you fly. Since teams typically book standard economy rather than the cheapest possible basic economy fares, this usually works out reasonably well for players on team-booked tickets.

Elite status multiplies everything. Once you reach a certain flight threshold within a program, you earn bonus miles on top of your base miles. A player with mid-tier elite status might earn 50% or 100% more miles per flight than a member with no status. Over a full season with 20 or 30 flights, that difference compounds quickly.

Section 2: Picking the Right Program

Match Your Program to Where You Play

This is the most important decision you will make and most players get it wrong by defaulting to an American carrier they have flown a few times domestically. The right program depends on where you are going to be playing and which airlines service those routes. Here is the breakdown by region.

Europe (France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Germany, Eastern Europe)

Most flights into European leagues route through major hubs like Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Istanbul, or London. The programs that make the most sense for European-based players:

- Air France/KLM Flying Blue: Strong for players routing through Paris or Amsterdam. Transatlantic business class awards start at a competitive rate and the program has solid partner coverage across Europe.
- Turkish Airlines Miles & Smiles: Istanbul is one of the best-connected hubs in the world. Turkish flies to more international destinations than any other carrier, making this program unusually flexible for players jumping between European and Middle Eastern leagues.
- Lufthansa Miles & More: Best for players in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, or anyone routing through Frankfurt. The program covers the Star Alliance network.
- British Airways Avios: Useful for players routing through London, particularly for shorter European hops where Avios can represent great value.

Asia (China, Japan, Philippines, Korea, Australia, New Zealand)

Asian leagues involve some of the longest flights in the world. Distance-based programs are your best friend here because you are covering enormous mileage on every trip.

- Japan Airlines Mileage Bank: Exceptional value for long-haul premium cabin redemptions, with a distance-based award chart that rewards exactly the kind of travel overseas players do. Players in the B.League should treat this as a priority.
- ANA Mileage Club: Outstanding redemption rates particularly for business class. Cannot book one-way awards with miles, which is a limitation to be aware of.
- Qantas Frequent Flyer: The default for players in the NBL. Massive domestic Australian network plus solid international partners.
- Air China PhoenixMiles or China Eastern Eastern Miles: For players in the CBA. Sign up for whichever carrier your team uses most frequently.

Middle East, Africa, South America

These markets vary significantly by team and league. The universal approach here is to identify the primary carrier your team uses for flights and sign up for that airline's program or its primary alliance partner before the season begins.

- Etihad Guest: Strong for Abu Dhabi and UAE-based leagues with excellent premium cabin redemptions and a rapidly expanding route network.
- Qatar Airways Privilege Club: Useful for players in Qatar or anyone routing through Doha. Uses Avios currency shared with British Airways and Iberia.

The Universal Default: American Airlines AAdvantage

If you genuinely do not know where you are going to be playing next season, or if you are still in contract negotiations, sign up for American Airlines AAdvantage as your home base. The oneworld alliance covers British Airways, Qatar Airways, Japan Airlines, Iberia, Cathay Pacific, and Finnair, which means AAdvantage miles accumulate on most major international routes regardless of which specific carrier operates the flight.

As of December 2025, AAdvantage no longer awards miles on Basic Economy fares. Standard economy tickets booked by your club are almost always eligible.

Region	Best Program	Alliance
France, Spain, Italy	Air France/KLM Flying Blue	SkyTeam
Greece, Turkey	Turkish Miles & Smiles	Star Alliance
Germany, Austria	Lufthansa Miles & More	Star Alliance
Japan	JAL Mileage Bank	oneworld
Australia	Qantas Frequent Flyer	oneworld
China	Air China PhoenixMiles	Star Alliance
UAE / Qatar	Etihad Guest or QR Privilege Club	Independent

Unknown / Multiple	American Airlines AAdvantage	oneworld

Section 3: Getting Your Number on Every Flight

Before the Ticket Is Issued

The single most important window is before the ticket gets booked. Once a ticket is issued, adding your number is possible but requires extra steps. Getting it right the first time is always easier.

The moment you sign a contract, create a template message on your phone that you will send to whoever books your travel. It should say exactly: 'Please add my frequent flyer number to my reservation. [Airline Program Name]: [Your Number].' Send this every single time a flight is being arranged. Do not assume anyone will ask. Do not assume your agent handles it. Take ownership of this personally.

PRO TIP	Save all your frequent flyer numbers in the Notes app on your phone. One note with all your program names and numbers. Paste it every time a flight gets booked. This takes thirty seconds and is worth thousands of dollars over a career.

After the Ticket Is Already Booked

The team booked the flight and nobody asked for your number. It happens constantly. Here is what to do.

- Online self-service: Go to the airline's website or app. Look for 'Manage My Booking' or 'My Trips.' Enter your booking confirmation code and last name. Most airlines have a field to add or edit your frequent flyer number directly. This works for American, United, Delta, Air France, Lufthansa, Turkish, and most major carriers.
- Call the airline: If you cannot find it online, call the airline's customer service line with your booking reference number and frequent flyer number in hand. The agent can add it to your reservation in under five minutes.
- At the airport: The check-in counter or gate agent can add your number at check-in before your boarding pass is issued. This is the last resort option but it works.
- If your team uses a corporate booking system: Some corporate travel platforms like SAP Concur do not automatically pass your frequent flyer number to the airline. Contact your team's travel coordinator or call the airline directly to add it to the reservation.

Claiming Miles From Flights You Already Flew Without a Number

You flew. Your number was not on the ticket. The miles were not credited. Here is the good news: most airlines let you claim those miles retroactively, and some programs will even let you sign up after the fact and still claim flights you took before you were a member.

What you need to file a retroactive claim: your boarding pass or ticket number (the 13-digit number in your booking confirmation email), your flight number, the date of travel, and your new frequent flyer account number.

Airline	Retroactive Window	Notes
American Airlines AAdvantage	12 months	Can sign up after the flight; flights 30+ days before enrollment may be denied
Delta SkyMiles	9 months	Can sign up after the flight within the 9-month window
United MileagePlus	12 months	Online self-service through My Trips
Lufthansa Miles & More	6 months	Works even if you were not a member at time of flight
Turkish Miles & Smiles	6 months	Submit via the Miles & Smiles app or website
Air France Flying Blue	6 months	Submit through your Flying Blue account
JAL Mileage Bank	6 months	May require original boarding pass for partner flights

ACTION ITEM	If you have flown in the last 6 to 12 months without a frequent flyer number on your reservation, sign up for the relevant program today and file retroactive claims immediately. You are likely owed miles you have not collected.

Section 4: Credit Cards Are the Multiplier

Why the Card Matters As Much As the Flying

Your team pays for flights. That means you are not personally charging those flights to a credit card and earning points on the purchase itself. What you can do is use a travel credit card for every other purchase you make overseas, groceries, restaurants, transportation, gear, everyday spending, and stack those points on top of the miles you are earning from flying.

Over a full season overseas, a player who uses a travel credit card consistently for everyday spending might put $15,000 to $30,000 on the card. At two to three points per dollar on travel and dining categories, that is 30,000 to 90,000 additional points on top of whatever you are earning from flights. That is multiple free flights home, business class upgrades, or hotel stays you would otherwise be paying cash for.

The Critical Rule: No Foreign Transaction Fees

This is non-negotiable. If your credit card charges a foreign transaction fee, it is eating 2% to 3% of every purchase you make overseas. That wipes out a significant portion of whatever rewards you are earning. Before you leave the United States, you need a card with zero foreign transaction fees. This is a baseline requirement, not an upgrade.

A secondary consideration is network acceptance. Visa and Mastercard are accepted almost everywhere in the world. American Express has strong international presence but is not universally accepted, particularly in smaller cities and local businesses in Asia and Eastern Europe. If you have an Amex as your primary card, bring a Visa or Mastercard as a backup.

Cards Worth Having as an Overseas Player

These are the cards most consistently recommended for international travelers with no foreign transaction fees and strong rewards on travel and dining spending:

- Chase Sapphire Preferred or Reserve: No foreign transaction fees, 2x to 3x points on travel and dining worldwide, transferable Chase Ultimate Rewards points that can move to United, Hyatt, British Airways, and others. The Reserve has a higher annual fee but includes a $300 travel credit and Priority Pass lounge access.
- American Express Platinum: Earns 5x points on flights booked directly with airlines, includes Priority Pass lounge access and a $200 airline fee credit, and transfers to over 20 airline partners including ANA, Delta, Air France, and Singapore Airlines. Annual fee is significant but the lounge access alone justifies it for a player doing 20 plus international flights per year.
- Capital One Venture X: No foreign transaction fees, 2x miles on every purchase, solid travel credits and lounge access. Simpler earning structure that works well if you do not want to manage multiple categories.
- Airline-specific co-branded cards: If you commit to one program, the co-branded card for that airline often includes a sign-up bonus worth one or two free flights, checked bag credits, and bonus miles on purchases with that carrier. American Airlines Citi AAdvantage, United Explorer, and Delta SkyMiles Gold are the main options.

WARNING	Do not use a card with foreign transaction fees overseas. Check your current card's terms right now. If it charges a fee, apply for a no-fee card before your next trip.

Section 5: Situation-by-Situation Breakdown

Every Scenario You Will Actually Face

Situation: My team books all flights and never asks for my frequent flyer number

This is the most common situation. Your solution is to be proactive every single time. When you find out a flight is being arranged, send your team manager or travel coordinator a message immediately with your frequent flyer number and a request to add it to the reservation. Save the message as a template so you can send it in under a minute. If you miss the window before booking, go to the airline website and add it yourself using the booking reference code they will have sent you.

Situation: My team uses a budget carrier I have never heard of

Budget carriers in Europe and Asia frequently do not participate in major frequent flyer programs. In this case, your strategy shifts to focusing on your credit card spending rather than flight miles. Check whether the carrier has its own loyalty program and evaluate whether the flights are frequent enough to make it worth joining. For one-off budget carrier flights, accept that no miles will be earned on the flight itself and make sure your credit card is covering all your other spending.

Situation: My team flies me through a hub city on a connecting flight using multiple carriers

Codeshare and partner flights are where alliance membership pays off. If your team books you on a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to your destination, you can credit those miles to your United MileagePlus account because both are Star Alliance members. If you are flying on a British Airways flight, you can credit to American AAdvantage because both are in oneworld. The key is to have your primary program account number entered as a partner number on the reservation, not just the operating carrier's program.

Always check the partner earning rate before crediting to a partner program. Some partner flights earn at a lower rate than flights on the home carrier. Sites like wheretocredit.com let you compare earning rates across programs for any given flight before you decide where to credit your miles.

Situation: I forgot to add my number and the flight already happened

File a retroactive claim immediately. You need your booking confirmation email or boarding pass. Most airlines accept online claims through your loyalty account within 6 to 12 months of the flight date. Do not wait. The window is real and it closes.

Situation: I was not a member of any program when I flew

Sign up for the program today and file a retroactive claim. Delta allows claims for flights taken up to 9 months before enrollment. American allows claims for flights taken less than 30 days before enrollment for most routes. Check the specific rules for each program, but in many cases you can recover miles from flights you took before you even had an account.

Situation: I have miles across multiple programs and do not know how to use them

Consolidating miles is the ideal strategy but not always possible since most programs only allow you to transfer miles between certain partners. The practical approach is to pick one or two programs as your primary accounts and route as much flying and spending through those programs as possible. Once you have a significant balance, research award availability for the routes you actually want to fly, usually home during the offseason or to see family during breaks in the schedule.

Situation: My team wants to use my miles for a club booking

Your miles are yours. Period. The team bought the ticket. The miles belong to the person in the seat. There is no legal or contractual obligation to share your personal frequent flyer miles with your club unless your contract explicitly states otherwise. Read your contract. If there is language about frequent flyer miles in your deal, consult with your agent or the OverseasX legal resources before signing.

Situation: I am upgrading from economy using miles and submitting a reimbursement to my club

Do not do this. If you use miles to upgrade to business class and then submit a reimbursement request to your club for a business class ticket price, that creates a taxable situation that the IRS has explicitly flagged as outside the normal exemption for frequent flyer miles earned on business travel. Keep your miles for personal travel. Do not mix them with club reimbursements.

Section 6: Taxes

What You Owe (Spoiler: Almost Nothing)

The IRS does not currently collect tax from individuals who use frequent flyer miles earned on employer-paid business travel for personal purposes. Your team buys the ticket, you earn the miles, you fly home on your own dime using those miles, and there is no tax event. This has been the official IRS position since 2002 and it has not changed.

The exception, as noted above, is converting miles to cash or using them in a way that amounts to compensation from your employer. Using miles for personal travel does not trigger this exception. Using miles to upgrade and then billing your club for an upgrade is a different story.

Note that tax rules vary by country. If you are earning income in a foreign country and paying taxes there, consult with a tax professional familiar with international athlete taxation about how foreign income rules interact with rewards programs in that jurisdiction. OverseasX is not a tax advisory service and this guide does not constitute tax advice.

Section 7: Building Your System

What to Do This Week

None of this works if you do not set it up. Here is the exact sequence of steps to get your miles system running before your next flight.

- Step 1: Sign up for American Airlines AAdvantage at aa.com. This is your default home base if you do not have a specific program already.
- Step 2: Based on where you are playing or expect to play, sign up for the regional program recommended in Section 2. It takes five minutes and is free.
- Step 3: Open the Notes app on your phone and create a note called 'Frequent Flyer Numbers.' Write down every program you have joined and your account number for each.
- Step 4: Write a template message to your team's travel contact. Something like: 'Hi, whenever you book my flights could you please add my frequent flyer number? [Program Name]: [Number]. Thank you.' Save it as a draft or a note.
- Step 5: Look back at any flights you have taken in the last 12 months. If you did not have a frequent flyer number on those reservations, find your old booking confirmation emails and file retroactive claims for the miles.
- Step 6: Apply for a travel credit card with no foreign transaction fees if you do not already have one. The Chase Sapphire Preferred is a strong default if you are unsure where to start.
- Step 7: Set a monthly calendar reminder to log into your frequent flyer accounts and confirm that miles from recent flights have posted correctly. Catching errors early is far easier than chasing them six months later.

BOTTOM LINE	The team pays for the flights. The miles belong to you. Set up your accounts once, add your number to every reservation, use a no-fee travel card for everyday spending, and the system runs itself.

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