



Should You Use Aeroplan Points to Travel Domestic or International?

Description

Aeroplan points are notoriously difficult to value. Under its new chart system, the value of a point can fluctuate based on where you're flying, when you're flying, who you fly with (Star Alliance versus **Air Canada**), and even how you're flying (business versus economy).

In general, you'll likely get more value when you fly domestically with Star Alliance (an average of 1.9 to 2 cents per point) versus flying internationally (an average of 1.2 to 1.5 cents per point). That said, you'll likely find examples that contradict this.

Perhaps, then, instead of looking for hard and fast rules, it's better to learn how to evaluate Aeroplan points as well as factors that might influence their evaluation. This will help *you* determine which is more valuable: domestic or international?

Factors that influence Aeroplan points

While we can estimate how much Aeroplan points are worth, you'll never know the true value of your points until you redeem them. Though it requires more diligence on your part, this loose valuation actually gives you more control: you determine how much value you get out of your points, not Aeroplan.

How can you optimize the Aeroplan rewards program to get the most value? First, recognize the factors that influence your Aeroplan points. These include the following:

- **Where you fly:** Aeroplan divides the world into four zones: North America, South America, Pacific, and Atlantic. Each zone has a different valuation system, with an estimated number of points required to fly based on distance.
- **Who you fly with:** Even though Aeroplan is **Air Canada's** rewards system, you typically get less value when you choose to fly with Air Canada. Again, this isn't a concrete rule. While you might get more value with Star Alliance, you do have to pay a \$39 fee to book a seat.
- **When you fly:** The value of your points depends ultimately on the price of your ticket (before taxes). If you fly during peak season, your ticket will be more expensive, and you'll get less value

for your points. Fly in the off-season, and you'll likely get more value.

- **How you fly:** Typically, business seats offer more value than economy. Take this with a grain of salt, however: business seats are more expensive, and if you're okay with economy, you don't have to use your points to fly in luxury.

In addition to these, remember that you'll always get more value when you redeem your Aeroplan points for flights (whether domestic or international) over gift cards, car rentals, hotels, and merchandise.

Should you fly domestic or international?

Again, you'll likely get more value when you fly domestic than international. But don't assume this is always true.

To find out which one gives you more value, you can always set a benchmark. For instance, let's assume that for domestic flights, you'll get around 1.9 to 2 cents for every point. If your international flight gives you 2.1 cents per point, you know (for this particular trip) flying international beats flying domestic.

The same is true for domestic. If we assume international flights give you around 1.2 to 1.5 cents per point, then a domestic flight that yields 1.3 cents per point would be about the same value as the average international flight.

And don't forget stopovers: under Aeroplan's new rewards program, you can add stopovers to international flights for 5,000 points. Stopovers can last 45 days, and they can help you see more of the world without spending more of your points. Depending on the year, flying from Toronto to London to Cape Town back to Toronto might give you more value than a round-trip from Toronto to Vancouver.

So, before you book your trips, be sure to do a cost-benefit analysis. I'd say, if the value of your points is below the benchmarks, you might want to wait to use your Aeroplan points.

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