



## **FAQ for the 2017 CarTrawler Reward Seat Availability Survey**

### **What does this survey measure?**

This survey measures only reward seat availability for low priced rewards. It answers the member question "How easy is it to get flights with this program?" The results also indicate how a single airline changes availability over time. The results most accurately compare similar programs such as American, Delta, and United. Comparing a mileage-based program, such as Alaska Airlines, to point-based programs such as AirAsia, does not represent the best application of the survey results. The survey is not intended to indicate which frequent flyer program is "best," which would be a very subjective assessment.

### **What are saver rewards?**

The seats we looked for represent comparable reward types across the programs in the survey. Saver-style rewards require the minimum number of miles (or points) and are limited in supply. Higher priced rewards are more available, and sometimes can be booked as the last seat on a flight; these are not included in the survey. Some programs offer ultra-low priced reward levels, which may represent special offer prices, very few available seats, or seasonal variations. These also are not included. The survey attempts to measure similar rewards for all airlines in the survey.

### **Why was a 25,000 mile cap placed on Southwest and JetBlue?**

Southwest and JetBlue use flexible pricing for rewards which is not the same as the low, medium and high price method used by their competitors American, Delta, and United. As these are all major US airlines, a method was developed to permit a relative comparison of availability. Today, the majority of airline miles (or points) are accrued through co-branded credit card spending in the US. These programs offer members 1 point or 1 mile per dollar spent on all purchases. In addition, members of these programs earn 5 miles or 6 points per dollar when buying lower priced tickets. This means their miles and points are largely equivalent. The saver-style reward level for American and United is 25,000 miles for domestic US travel; the equivalent for Southwest and JetBlue was set at 25,000 points roundtrip.

### **Why were booking queries made for two travelers?**

Average travel party size for air travel is 1.5 to 2.0 passengers. The number is lower for business travel and higher for leisure travel. Reward travel mostly represents leisure travelers, so the query size was set at 2 persons.

**When were the queries made?**

The survey has been conducted for eight years, always during March. This is intended to reflect a mid-winter planning cycle for summer vacation travel (yes, this largely applies to Northern Hemisphere travel).

**What dates were queried?**

With queries performed in March, travel dates range from June through October. This three to seven month advance booking window provides a good range of comparison. It allows the survey to determine whether booking in advance provides more reward seat availability. Departure dates are followed by return dates 6 days later. The very same dates were chosen for all airlines.

**What types of routes were selected?**

The top routes for each airline were chosen. As this is a global survey, it would be impossible to apply a single set of routes to the entire list of 25 airlines. In addition, we create a distinction between long haul and shorter routes. Long haul routes exceed 2,500 miles, while medium haul routes are 250 to 2,500 miles. Some airlines, such as Southwest, operate networks dominated by shorter routes. For these carriers, only the shorter routes were queried. Traditionally, reward availability is lower for long haul routes, and the survey method could be seen as favoring shorter haul airlines. However, in reality, the survey simply favors airlines which offer the best overall reward availability.

**How many queries were made?**

140 or 280 one-way queries were made for each airline. For airlines with long haul networks, the 280 queries were divided between long haul and shorter routes. For airlines without long haul networks (such as Southwest and GOL) 140 queries were made for shorter routes.

**Were all reward flights accepted?**

Yes, except that itineraries which required a change of airports during a connection were not included — for example, a trip through London which required the traveler to connect between Gatwick and Heathrow. But any other itinerary posted by the airline was accepted. This includes itineraries with long layovers and multi-city routings. Any departure time on the day queried was also accepted.