



## Travel Brand Loyalty – How it Benefits YOU!

### Description

#### A conversation on why travel brand loyalty makes sense

**“A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer’s decision to choose one product or service over another.”**

*seth godin*

Travel brand loyalty is a phrase thrown around in the travel industry, but not many people have hands-on experience with the concept. It is surprising how little brand loyalty is mentioned in the travel blogging world, as it is an essential element of our travel experiences. It could be that the average age of most travel bloggers is on the younger side. With many decades of travel under our belts, we learned early on that brand loyalty provides substantial benefits, resulting in a higher quality product, a more exceptional experience, tons of money saved, lots of freebies, and a feeling like a valued customer.

Let us explore the benefits of brand loyalty.

#### What is brand loyalty?

Brand loyalty is when customers prefer and use a brand over their competitors. Loyal customers are so impressed with the care and perks provided that they are not interested in the competitors' options because their needs are fully met.

The characteristics of brand loyalty are all about perception. How customers view the brand influences how loyal they'll be. If the brand has perceived brand value, customers believe they're getting a good deal on a quality product. They are made to feel special, but more importantly, they are dealt with promptly and professionally when issues arise. As a result, they will sometimes fly that airline, book stays, or rent that car, regardless of the convenience or price.

**Investment by travel companies in brand Loyalty is at its peak; don't miss your chance to benefit.**

The travel industry took a significant hit during COVID-19, and customer loyalty will be critical to the industry's rebirth. After dramatic declines, the travel industry has the unique opportunity to bring new customers and attain their loyalty in this post-COVID world. The benefits and incentives have never been better. Social media plays a massive role in this as well. People become exposed to new travel destinations through social media and are inspired by those who post about their travels. A travel brand wished to harness that and direct consumers in their direction. This is why many travel brands are now more visible than ever on platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

**Why should it matter what brand you are using?**



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Perceived brand quality means the product and service meet customer expectations. As a result, they will most likely come back again and again. The trickle effect is good word spreads when those loyal customers recommend them to others and write excellent reviews online.

In the case of business colleagues, the advantage becomes even more significant. If you stay someplace due to brand loyalty, the other team members may also choose to stay there as well. That is how we came to use Hilton properties primarily. Are you having a family gathering? The whole family

may also stay at that hotel or book flights on that airline. Now, these family members see the perks you enjoy, and now they choose to use that brand moving forward.

This drives the brand's business and boosts its bottom line. Loyalty programs are only there because they work, period.

**If it sounds too good to be true, it must be a trap. No one gives away stuff for free without benefiting.**

That is correct, and they benefit in significant ways. Travel brand loyalty dramatically affects your business's profit and revenue. Loyal customers typically outspend more than other customers, especially throughout the customer's lifespan. Loyal customers are also less price-conscious than other customers, so retaining them is easier if your prices increase or less pricey alternatives hit the market.

Brand recognition also aims to capture and keep customers' attention. That love of the brand often expands into the customer getting a travel brand credit card, having large events such as weddings at a property, or maybe buying a vacation time-share property (never a good investment).

This requires the brand to know its primary demographics and strategically market to them. Brand recognition plays a significant role in brand preference since how the product is packaged or marketed can influence customers buying decisions. Once you've achieved brand loyalty with customers, you will also have achieved brand preference. They are integrally connected.

### **How do we retain travel brand loyalty?**

It is simple: ensure the brand represents quality, trust, and values. Essential factors in the travel industry that help create brand loyalty are excellent customer service, high-quality products, benefits only given to loyal customers, and the customer feeling valued. All these translate to a pleasant overall experience; the customer feels they are getting good value for their dollar.

What we consider vital to the travel brands we are loyal to is that when problems occur, they are handled quickly and responsibly and that they listen and take appropriate action. No brand is perfect; bad things happen. The corporate side has limited control over face-to-face customer experiences. This is the real world, after all. In our case, how problems are handled is right up there with the perks.

[\*\*Want to learn how to travel for free? Click here\*\*](#)

### **Our favorite brands and the reasons we stay loyal**

Four travel brands earned our loyalty long before we started a blog. Much of that comes from Joelle's

long history of using these travel brands during her previous career, which involved lots of business travel. She had the unique opportunity to choose her hotels, rental cars, and airlines if the price was comparable to other options.

We will share our four favorite travel brands and give examples of the benefits we experience. When speaking with friends, we are often asked how much of a difference it can make. The bottom line: A LOT! The goal is to portray the extended benefits loyalty can provide, often at no added cost and saving you money. The list is extensive and may surprise many.

Though we recommend these travel companies, the lesson here is about staying loyal to the brand, no matter which you choose. There are several excellent travel brands, and based on where you live and what your company requires you to use, there may not be a choice. The key is to stay with the brand. During Joelle's years of business travel, those loyalty programs provided excellent and well-priced options for family vacations that they could not have afforded otherwise.

## The travel brands that have earned our loyalty

Trust us when we say we are discriminating against travelers. Not in much have the luxury or be catered to way but to excellent customer service and reliability. Who we choose is based on many years of experience and a consistent product.



### **Alaska Airlines**

This was an easy one up front as [Alaska Airlines](#) is the local airline with a reputation for excellent service. It had limited destinations in those early days but has expanded substantially since. In the 30 years since becoming a loyal flyer, they have blossomed into a major airline with nonstops throughout the continental U.S., Hawaii, and beyond. Over time, the quality of their service only improved. They partner with many prominent international airlines, so the miles earned on Alaska can take you anywhere in the world. Recently, when I became part of the One World Alliance, the benefits only improved.

In the end, Joelle calls this “her airline.” It is because she feels rewarded for her travel brand loyalty. They have earned it, and they will always be her first choice.

*As all frequent airline flyer programs work, each elite level gains added benefits. Here are some of the benefits enjoyed by being an MVP Gold (there is one grade below MVP and two grades above that, 75K and 100K)*

- 100% Elite bonus miles (if you fly 2,300 miles, you will get 4,600 miles after your flight).
- Complimentary First Class Upgrades in specific fare categories if available when booking.
- Premium Class Upgrades for free at the time of booking in specific fare categories (seems to be allowed most of the time)
- First and Premium Class upgrades on all fares 72 hours before departure (historically, Joelle is upgraded to First Class about 50% of the time)
- A Companion flying with you can be upgraded to First and Premium Class at no additional charge.
- 4 First Class guest upgrades annually
- International Upgrade certificates on American Airlines
- Complimentary adult premium beverage when seated in Main Cabin, Bloody Mary, anyone?
- Priority check-in and boarding
- Two free checked bags
- Preferred seating (always choose the Exit row)
- Standby by and waitlist for full flights
- Discount to their fantastic airport lounges (higher levels get you four free lounge passes a year)
- Priority call routing in call centers
- Elite leave for new parents
- Complimentary same-day flight changes.
- Oneworld Sapphire Status when flying Oneworld Alliance members.
- Priority baggage handling

#### The Million Mile Club

Sticking to one airline as much as possible has provided a benefit that seemed unreachable all those years ago: the 1,000,000-mile club. Crossing 965,000 miles flown in August 2024, Joelle is now down to the final stretch. These are actual miles flown on Alaska Airlines and do not include bonuses or travel overseas. Once achieving 1,000,000 miles, these customers are awarded lifetime MVP Gold status. That is a club that Joelle can't wait to “join.”

#### Other perks



After over 965,000 miles flown on Alaska Airlines, we have never been bumped.

Their dedicated line for priority members is exceptional. They seem to go above and beyond to assist if something unexpected has occurred.

On every flight, the flight crew acknowledges and thanks you personally for your loyalty. You are also given one free alcoholic beverage of your choice and a lovely chocolate bar.

It is hard to quantify, but they make you feel valued and cared about in almost every interaction.

When issues arise, they step up and will do all they can to address your case. Once, during a delay out of their control, the airport would not provide a gate in a timely manner after landing; Joelle received credit for a future flight in her email, though she made contact about the issue. They take keeping their most loyal fliers seriously; you know that in every interaction.

If we have two larger carry-ons when boarding, it has never been an issue or commented on when doing priority boarding, even on full flights. We were never required to check our carry-on due to limited space.

In 2024, our loyalty to Alaska Airlines reaped two significant rewards: a trip to Easter Island from Santiago, Chile, on LATAM Airlines and another to Tokyo on Japan Airlines. Remarkably, we secured business class seats for both journeys at a fraction of the miles we have used for coach flights back east in the U.S., paying under \$100 in taxes. These two trips alone saved us over \$10,000, showcasing the incredible value of our loyalty program.

[View the complete list of Alaska Airline Elite Status perks here](#)



## Hilton Hotels and Resorts

After trying several brands, including Hyatt, Holiday Inn, Marriott, and Wyndham, Hilton was the preferred choice. There are great hotels in all of those brands, but the reliability and consistency of a stay with Hilton gave them the edge. You can count on quality from Waldorf Astoria to the Hampton Inn line. It does not need to be fancy but well maintained, clean, safe, and professional. Colleagues' love for the brand got Joelle to start using Hilton. Almost a thousand nights later, we can say Hilton has greatly benefited from that suggestion. Once they reach 1000 nights, loyal customers get Hilton Diamond status for life, which is their highest level.

In hotels, the perks are a bit more undefined vs. airlines. So many things happen along the way that constantly reinforce this fantastic choice. From a dedicated check-in line at the property, incredible upgrades, free drinks, handwritten welcomes, and treats in the room such as chocolate or wine, daily check-in via text to ensure all is well, free spa entry, turn down service, free parking, etc. It never ceases to be a surprise.

### Europe does it better

In Europe, they excel at this, and you often feel like royalty. One hotel pressed our clothes daily and offered complimentary high tea during our stay. The most impressive part of that stay was we were using points, paid nothing for the room, and got upgraded to a suite. Each property has the leeway to add to the services, and it is fun to see what will be offered. But just the standard perks are great.

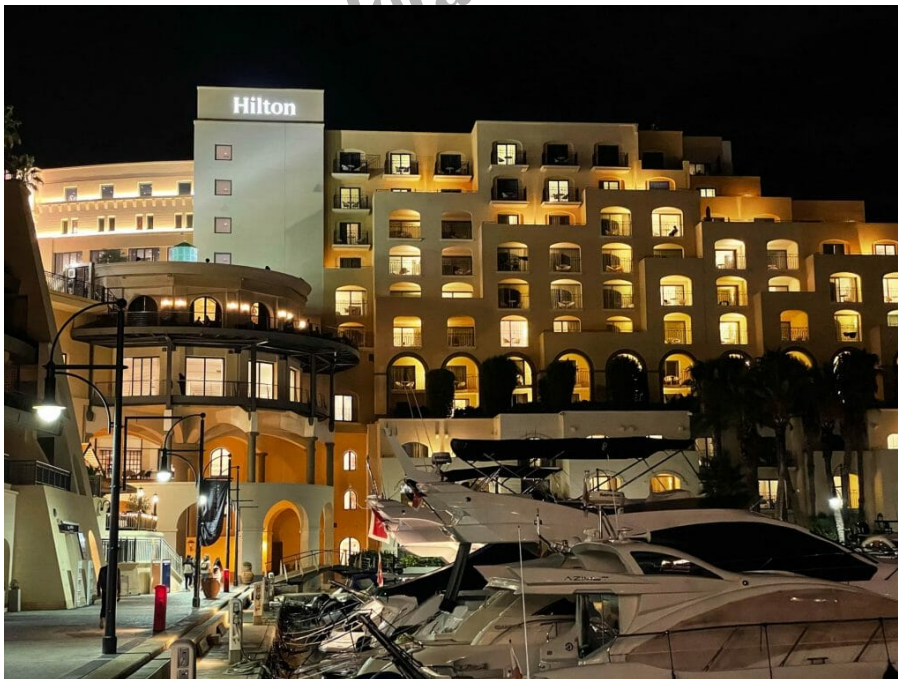
If Hilton has a downside, their lower-end properties, such as Hampton Inn and Hilton Garden Inn, do not tend to provide room upgrades even if there is a ton of space. If you ask if a nicer room exists, some will, but not by default. But the overall perks make that insignificant.

### *Here are some of the listed benefits for Diamond Members*

- Hilton Honors Discount Rate
- Points toward free nights
- There are no resort fees when using reward points for a room
- Digital check-in and checkout
- Choose your room 24 hours in advance
- Premium Wifi at no cost
- 48-hour room guarantee
- Elite status gifting (for example, you can give your sister a Hilton Elite Status).

- Points toward free nights, travel partners, and experiences.
- Free Bottled water
- Fifth night free on reward stays
- Elite rollover nights
- Spa discounts or free entry
- Late checkout
- If you arrive early, they will do all they can to accommodate you at no added cost.
- Daily food and beverage credit (U.S.) or complimentary breakfast based on region. (The money this saves, especially in Europe, is enormous!)
- Milestone Bonuses
- 100% points earning bonus
- Space available for room upgrades
- For every dollar you spend, you get 10 points.
- Hilton also has a dedicated line for Honors members.
- Executive lounge access is available even if your room is not on the Executive floor. (In Europe, those lounges frequently provide various food options throughout the day and evening, which can save a ton of money eating out. We have been to lounges that offer a full hot dinner. There are also open bars with free alcohol.

#### Other notable perks



What has stood out to us is when things don't go right, all efforts are made to make it right. Though the overall brand is consistent, we have had some bad experiences; luckily, they are rare. Still, when they occur, corporate takes it very seriously when a frequent guest calls and takes action, even during your stay.



In one case last year, we had a four-night reservation at a Doubletree, and it was awful on so many levels, including safety. That night, we called Hilton's main Honors line and explained the situation. They found another of their properties locally and said, "No worries; check out in the morning; we will handle it from here." They did.

#### **Example of how brand loyalty benefits translate to dollars**

Here are some examples of money saved as a result of travel brand loyalty: We attended Oktoberfest in Munich for the first time in Fall 2023. The Hilton property closest to the site had standard rooms for nearly \$500 a night. As a Hilton Honors member, we could get that room for 50,000 points a night. We reserved three nights and will pay nothing to stay close to the festivities. Right there, we saved \$1,500!

In Tokyo in the Fall of 2024, we stayed at the gorgeous and luxurious Conrad Tokyo for the lowest points we have ever used for a Conrad. The rooms were incredible; we had a large, expansive breakfast and executive lounge access. Our room went for over \$1000 a night. It's crazy what you can get for free!

#### **But I will never earn enough nights for these perks?**

That is not true in many cases. Through their higher level, Hilton Honors Aspire credit card Diamond status is automatic, so you do not need a minimum stay per year. The fee is \$550 a year for the card, but you would then get complimentary breakfast with each stay, upgrades, and lounge access when available. During recent Hilton stays in Japan, between the enormous complimentary breakfast and the evening cocktail hours, we did not spend a dime on food on some days. If you travel a lot, that is well worth the fee.

[View the complete list of Hiltons Honors Elite Status perks here](#)



## **Avis Car Rental**

This one is a bit simpler. Avis has been our go-to for car rental for decades. Our loyalty is based on how well they treat their loyal customers. Avis has three tier levels: Preferred, Preferred Plus, and Presidents Club (we never reached this level). What keeps us coming is how easy they make the

whole rental process.

- As Avis Preferred Plus members, we rarely need to go to the airport counter (at smaller locations, this is not always the case). We are spared the heavy-handed sales for added features that so many complain about from all car rental companies.
- Before arriving, you are notified of the car you are renting and the space number. In many cases, you are offered the option to switch to another vehicle at no added cost.
- When we arrive on-site, our name and space number are on a board. We bypass the lines and head straight to the car—there are no contracts to sign at the counter.
- When getting to the car, with secured exits, the keys are in it.
- We can request a fast pass sent to our phone that we scan on the way out. No license is needed, no ID check is required, etc., as it is all in their system and previously verified.
- The average time from reaching the Avis location to driving out of the lot in the rental is 5 minutes.
- There is a dedicated line or, in some locations, a separate building for Avis Preferred customers.
- The biggest reason we are loyal is that they reward us with incredible upgrades, like free WOW upgrades, which are offered at the Preferred Plus and Presidents Club levels.
- If you have [CLEAR+](#), you get Avis Preferred status automatically with no minimal rentals.
- Redeem points for rentals and accessories.
- There are special email offers monthly.
- Save your rental preferences and track your activity and rewards anytime.

Our favorite Avis brand loyalty perk



In almost all our European rentals, we reserved a standard four-door and were upgraded to a Mercedes or similar-level car in every case. When in Monaco, we got a Jaguar (that was a blast). In U.S. rentals, we are often assigned brand-new cars, gorgeous SUVs, luxury cars, and specialty cars like convertibles. If a vehicle is not to our satisfaction, usually, a visit to the counter gets us an alternative option.

[Learn more about the Avis Preferred Program by clicking here](#)



## United Airlines

Alaska Airlines does not fly to Europe. We needed to pick an airline that serves the main airport from which we fly. United Airlines in our early years made the most sense; that was the only reason. We did not have much history of flying United. What made the experience from the get-go was they participated, as most U.S. airlines do, in a program called Elite Status Challenge. If you have elite status on another airline, they will match it, and you have three months to meet a set minimum of miles to keep that status. Joelle used her Alaska Status and was given Gold on United Airlines.

You may ask why they would do that. Our example is precisely why. Once we got word, they matched the status; we bought two sets of round-trip tickets to Europe in the next few days and two more domestic tickets. We have maintained that level for years, and United has significantly benefitted. One year, they offered Platinum status after flying so many additional miles. Now, that was a sweet perk since we were planning those trips anyway.

*The United Airlines perks are similar to Alaska Airlines above, so we won't repeat the whole list except for what is unique to United Gold Status (silver is one grade below, and there are two grades above Gold: Platinum and 1K. The perks get amazing at those upper levels)*

- Checked bags can be up to 70 pounds.
- Complimentary access to economy plus seats at booking, including a companion.
- Complimentary first-class upgrades on domestic flights
- When flying internationally, you can access United and Star Alliances Lounges for free (This is what we love. Oh, the food and drinks!)
- Access to most sold-out flights
- CLEAR discounted annual membership

- NO blackout dates for reward flights
- Stand by for international flights
- Complimentary Marriott Gold Elite Status
- Extra benefits when booking a VIP Access Property with United Hotels
- Complimentary access to time shifters. The Jet Lag App.
- Complimentary Avis First Plus Elite status
- Gold Track Priority Screening where available

**Added note: In 2024, we expanded our international travel airline network. We have used Delta, Latam, and Japan Airlines, primarily because of where we were flying, with no issues. We enjoyed all the airlines and feel they are right up there with United, if not better, in business class in the case of Japan Airlines and Latam.**

A story that reveals the importance of status



Joelle and her husband are taking a trip to Morocco, and regrettably, United Airlines had few good options. The best flights were with Delta. In the weeks before the flight, a significant change in departure (six hours later) caused them to miss their connecting flight to Paris. The options offered by Delta were ridiculous, and Joelle spent hours on the phone with Delta, who was being completely unreasonable when there was an easy and obvious solution. They insisted on turning a one-stop trip into multiple stops with excessive long layovers and twice the time in transit. The Delta agents were rude and lied outright. Eventually, after hours of dealing with this, a supervisor took care of it in less than a minute. Joelle was still waiting for her Elite status to be accepted. That occurred a week later.

There was another significant flight change after the Elite status was in place. This time the contact was made on the dedicated elite status line, and the experience was night and day. No long time on hold, the agent was kind, professional, and supportive and quickly handled the matter. It was hard to believe the two experiences were from the same airline.

Why? Travel brand loyalty status.

[Learn more about United Airlines Elite Status by clicking here](#)



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### **Does sticking with one brand cost you more in the end?**

It could be if you aren't careful. Before purchasing, we still compare prices to other airlines and hotels. The difference is minimal compared to the benefits. Please be careful here; sometimes the flights are hundreds of dollars less on another airline, but instead of a nonstop connection, you are making

several connections, and that 9-hour flight has now become a 32-hour flight. That is never worth a few hundred dollars, in our view.

## **Travel brand loyalty pays**

Ultimately, as we closely examine our decades of travel, we do not doubt that brand loyalty has served us well. It has provided us with incredible perks and luxurious experiences that we could never have afforded otherwise. The stress alone saved when problems occurred was priceless. Those trips we share with our families and friends when they travel with us have made them even more special and memorable without added expense. Also, with over a million miles earned on Alaska Airlines alone and all the points accumulated over the years with Hilton, the number of free flights and rooms received has saved us well into the tens of thousands of dollars. The Hilton complimentary breakfast alone on the international level has saved us a ton of money on every trip!

The incentives go beyond that, too. These travel brands will have special promotions, incentives, and events for loyal customers. Hilton will offer deals that allow you to purchase extra points at half price. That is handy when booking a reward trip if you are shy of what you need for all four nights. The fifth night is free on a four-night reward stay, and the money you save can be substantial. Or it could be a special offer on a new hotel, a more rapid way to achieve a higher elite status as United Airlines did when they offered a fast track to Platinum status.

*Want to see the travel gear we never leave home without? Check out our [Wanderers Compass Travel Blog Amazon Storefront](#)*

## **Should you pick the travel brands you listed?**

The real message here is not really about the brands themselves. It is about having brand loyalty so you can enjoy all that goes with it. We know people who swear by Marriott and Hertz and have great stories. Our stories speak to our experiences with these brands. We do, though, highly recommend them.

## **What if you don't travel much?**

Frequent travelers will enjoy most of these perks. However, traveling often is not the only way to gain status. There are credit cards that, by default, give you some status on airlines and hotels. United Gold status gives Marriott and Avis higher statuses just for being part of their program. Some hotel or airline credit cards automatically give you an elevated elite status and the perks that come with it.

## **Final thoughts**

Why let only others benefit when you can as well? Both sides gain here; there are no losers. Of the programs above, there is no cost to participate. The importance of travel brand loyalty is everything to

these companies, so much so that they continue to expand what they offer as perks to their most loyal customers rather than reduce them. They are recovering well with this marketing plan, and hopefully, you understand how you can benefit.



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