

Value of airline reward miles falling

By Justin Bachman, Bloomberg

The number of award miles needed to snag a seat in the premium cabin will rise dramatically next year at Delta and United – and airline mile collectors are fuming.

The biggest changes in both airlines' loyalty programs will be for international travel in first and business class, where some award levels on United will jump as much as 87 percent. To be awarded a first-class ticket now from North America to the Middle East, for example, a traveler has to spend 150,000 frequent-flyer miles. Beginning Feb. 1, that award seat will require 280,000 miles when flying on one of United's partner airlines. The same trip on United's own planes will require 180,000 miles, up from 150,000. From North America to Europe, first class on a partner airline will rise 63 percent, from 135,000 to 220,000 miles.

Delta is introducing increases on June 1, with round-trip business class from the U.S. to Europe rising by 25,000 miles, to 125,000 miles; round-trip flights to Asia will increase 20,000 miles, to 140,000. (Delta plans smaller award level hikes from Feb. 1 to June 1.) The new award levels for coach seats are largely unchanged, with only minimal, 5,000-mile hikes on some routes.

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