

Icelandair flies from Halifax, Orlando, Minneapolis, Boston, New York, and Baltimore – all good cities that are sometimes underserved with international flights. All flights land in Reykjavik, but then you can fly on to nearly 15 cities in Europe. A stopover in Iceland is free! The best part is the price, because flights on Icelandair are usually less expensive than those on larger carriers.

You should especially look at their vacation packages even if you don't usually book hotels with your flights. Because hotels are so expensive in Iceland, it is much better to get the hotel included for your free stopover in Reykjavik.

## FREE STOPOVERS

One of the favorite tools in my travel arsenal is free stopovers. Whenever you are traveling on an award ticket, and often even a paid ticket, you should fully research your stopover options.

If you thought that a ticket was only valid from one city to the next, you're often missing out on a very clever loophole. The loophole will allow you to see more cities, rack up more mileage, and possibly even save you money – even though you are flying more.

Yes, it's paradoxical. But just like with Circle Pacific fares, which we'll get to later, airlines are not usually known for making sense. You can sometimes arrange a "stopover" to a city that is actually nowhere near your intended destination.

Read that sentence again, because it really doesn't make sense. But on the majority of award tickets, and many

paid tickets, you can often stop over in a city that has no relation to your eventual destination, and you may even be able to take extra flights to get there. One of the important terms to be familiar with is known as *maximum permitted mileage*. This refers to the limit (yes, there usually is one) on the number of miles you are allowed to fly on one ticket—but this same limit often allows you to get a free stopover in a completely different location.

I have personally used this strategy several times with Delta award tickets from Europe. While flying to or from Brussels, Paris, or Amsterdam, I have been able to visit friends and family throughout the United States after beginning my awards trip. Even though Delta flies to Europe via Atlanta and New York, I've also visited cities like Nashville, Washington D.C., and Miami as part of the same award with no additional fee.

Even better, because a lot of my overseas award travel is in Business Class, Delta automatically upgrades me to First Class for the extra domestic flights. It's like a truly free First Class ticket.

You probably think it couldn't get any better than that, but actually it does. The "stopover" (I use quotes because it's really like a separate trip) does not always need to be done within a few days of either side of the trip. A couple of years back, I wanted to fly to Seattle from the East Coast *before* going back to Europe. Even though Seattle was all the way on the West Coast, and pretty much as far away from Atlanta as you could get, Delta approved the free flight. The timing for the extra flight was more than a month after I had

landed in the U.S. (on the first leg of the international ticket, from Europe) and several weeks before I would return.

I flew to Seattle in First Class, transiting through Atlanta airport just as I would a few weeks later on the way back. Does that sound like a stopover to you? Probably not, but the airlines will often consider it that way.

The free stopover strategy works with more than just Delta. I used similar routings with a United ticket earlier this year and will be doing the same with a Continental ticket in later on in the fall. The next time you plan a trip, be sure to check into stopover opportunities – it can literally help you save hundreds of dollars.

### Less-than-free HAWAII Stopover

This option is also exciting. It is possible to fly from the East Coast to the West Coast (either Canada or the U.S.) in First Class and get a less-than-free Hawaii stopover as part of the same trip. In other words, it will be cheaper for you to take the Hawaii stopover than to avoid it.

I'm grateful to Matthew Bennett at First Class Flyer for first analyzing what he calls the "Hula Loophole" by using this example:

On a flight from Boston to Los Angeles, the published First Class fare on American is \$1608. However, the Boston-Honolulu fare is \$1434 – less than the flight to L.A., and the flight to Honolulu allows a stopover anywhere in California. This particular stopover requires a fee of about \$50, but even with the fee, the fare is still more than \$100 cheaper

than the direct flight. You can think of it as American Airlines paying you \$100 to take an extra trip to Hawaii. Not bad, huh?

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## 5 CONTRARIAN TRAVEL

In short, contrarian travel refers to traveling against the crowds or traditional wisdom. You can go to popular destinations during unpopular times, or lesser-known destinations anytime. The ironic thing about traveling this way is that while you'll almost definitely save money by going against the tourist flow, you'll also likely enjoy yourself much more too.

In an upcoming essay on *The Art of Nonconformity* site, I'll provide a detailed list of a number of destinations that I find to be overrated, along with an alternative for your consideration. For now, though, here's a few ideas:

Instead of going to the **Bahamas**, try St. Kitts & Nevis or Dominica for two great, lesser-known Caribbean spots.

Instead of **Paris, London, or Rome** in the summer, try visiting any of them in the winter.

Instead of **Singapore**, take a 30 minute bus ride and head up to Malaysia for a more authentic Asian experience. (You could also head over to Indonesia by ferry.)