

What is United Airlines elite status worth in 2023?

(Courtesy of Kyle Olsen, The Points Guy)

Editor's note: This is a recurring post, regularly updated with new information.

When selecting an airline to earn most (or all) of your business, many factors come into play.

Fee waivers, upgrades, lounge access and other valuable perks can turn a stressful travel experience into a smooth one, but have you crunched the numbers to see if your current carrier makes the most sense for your travel patterns and your wallet?

In this guide, we'll dive deep into one of the major U.S. carriers to identify how well it rewards loyal flyers by evaluating the most important benefits provided at each elite status level. We'll put a specific value on each benefit.

So, if you're considering pursuing Premier status with United, how rewarding can the [MileagePlus](#) program be? Let's take a closer look.

Methodology

Before we get to the details of the United elite status tiers, here are a couple of disclaimers.

First, it's important to note that these mathematical analyses represent just one way of calculating the value you'd get from a given elite status level.

Everyone has their own way of valuing the various benefits of loyalty programs; some may always pay for business class and thus not need complimentary upgrades, while others may travel exclusively in the U.S. and don't care about free lounge access on international itineraries. Feel free to adjust my numbers to make them more relevant to your valuation.

Second, these numbers are based on the benefits you'd enjoy after achieving the given status level and continuing to qualify each year. If you're starting from scratch, these values are skewed since the first several flights you take will provide no benefits. I've provided some analysis for those in that position toward the end of the post.

This brings me to the third and final, critical part of this analysis: the underlying assumptions I'm making. To hit a value for benefits, I have to assume a certain amount of flying and a corresponding amount of spending.

It's worth pointing out that United changed [how it awards status](#) a few years ago. Distance flown is no longer a factor, except in the case of [lifetime status](#). Instead, you must fly a certain number of segments (known as Premier qualifying flights, or PQFs) and spend a certain amount of money (to earn Premier qualifying points, or PQPs), or you can just spend a certain amount of money (to earn PQPs).

For the sake of this analysis, I'm making the following assumptions:

- You reach United Premier status through the combination metric (PQFs plus PQPs).
- You earn 10% more PQPs than the minimum required for the given status level.
- You complete at least the minimum number of PQFs to earn the given status level.
- At least four of your PQFs are operated by United or United Express (a prerequisite for earning *any* level of United Premier status).

Be sure to adjust these numbers based on your given travel patterns. Those who travel in paid first or business class internationally will likely spend significantly more and thus earn more PQPs across fewer PQFs. At the same time, some domestic road warriors purchasing low-fare economy tickets may need dozens of PQFs to achieve entry-level Premier Silver status.

Two final bits of information: For this analysis, I'm valuing any bonus miles earned based on [TPG's most recent valuations](#), which peg United miles at 1.21 cents apiece. In addition, I'm rounding all of the individual benefit valuations to the nearest \$5.

With all that said, let's hit the friendly skies.

United Premier status tiers

United offers four status tiers besides its unpublished ultra-exclusive tier, [Global Services](#).

	Premier Silver	Premier Gold	Premier Platinum	Premier 1K
Qualifications	4,000 PQPs + 12 PQFs or 5,000 PQPs.	8,000 PQPs + 24 PQFs or 10,000 PQPs.	12,000 PQPs + 36 PQFs or 15,000 PQPs.	18,000 PQPs + 54 PQFs or 24,000 PQPs.
Star Alliance status	Silver.	Gold.	Gold.	Gold.
Premier mileage bonus	40%.	60%.	80%.	120%.
Priority check-in, security and boarding	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Premier Silver	Premier Gold	Premier Platinum	Premier 1K
Free checked 70-pound bags	One bag.	Two bags.	Three bags.	Three bags.
Preferred seating for up to nine travelers	✓	✓	✓	✓
Economy Plus seating	At check-in (up to two travelers).	At booking (up to two travelers).	At booking (up to nine travelers).	At booking (up to nine travelers).
First-class upgrades at the time of booking	Y and B fares.	Y and B fares.	Y and B fares.	Y, B and M fares.
Clear membership	\$109.	\$109.	\$109.	Complimentary.
First-class upgrades on select routes as early as	Day of departure.	48 hours before departure.	72 hours before departure.	96 hours. Highest waitlist priority.
PlusPoints			40.	280 (in addition to the 40 once you meet Platinum requirements).
One free drink and one snack in economy				✓

	Premier Silver	Premier Gold	Premier Platinum	Premier 1K
Boarding group	2.	1.	1.	Preboard.
United Club membership discount			\$50.	\$100.
Better award availability in economy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Better award availability in select premium cabins			✓	✓

This raises the question of how much each United Premier status tier is worth. Here's our analysis:

United Premier Silver: \$475

The lowest tier in United's program is Premier Silver status, which requires at least 12 PQFs plus 4,000 PQPs, or just 5,000 PQPs. For this analysis, I'll base my numbers on earning 4,500 PQPs (total spending of \$4,500) plus taking at least 12 PQFs to ensure you satisfy the hybrid qualification criteria.

	Benefit details	Value
Complimentary access to Economy Plus/preferred seats	Premier Silver members can select Economy Plus seats for themselves and one companion (only available at check-in) and select preferred seats for them and up to eight companions (at the time of booking). Economy Plus seats are available on most United-operated flights and offer additional legroom near the front of the coach cabin. However, they don't provide additional benefits (like you'd get with Delta's Comfort+), so they're most similar to Alaska Premium-class seats — but Economy Plus seats don't include free drinks, so I'll value this perk a bit lower.	\$50.

	Benefit details	Value
Complimentary Premier upgrades	You'll also be eligible for complimentary upgrades to first class as a Premier Silver traveler, which applies to domestic flights and flights to Hawaii (from the West Coast only), Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America. These typically won't clear until the day of departure, and you'll be prioritized behind all other elite members. Complimentary Premier upgrades also don't apply to award tickets unless you also have a cobranded card like the United Explorer Card , so I'll peg this perk just below the value we assigned to the comparable benefit on Delta . Unfortunately, with long waitlists, many Premier Silver members are unlikely to receive any complimentary upgrades.	\$100.
Mileage bonus	United utilizes a revenue-based scheme for awarding miles, and Premier Silver flyers will earn 7 miles per dollar spent, 2 more than a non-status member; \$4,500 in spending equates to roughly 9,000 additional miles, worth \$108.90.	\$110.
Priority check-in, security, baggage handling and Group 2 boarding	Unlike American and Delta, United provides its lowest-tier elite members with priority security and baggage handling (in addition to preferred check-in and boarding). As a result, I'll bump the value a bit compared to those carriers.	\$50.
Priority phone line	This can be a nice perk to have in case of a significant issue but typically isn't the most valuable benefit out there.	\$25.
Waived baggage fee	Premier Silver members can check a bag for free when traveling in economy class, saving up to \$60 per round-trip flight. This is similar to the benefit offered to holders of the Explorer Card (though you'll need to purchase the ticket using the card for that perk to apply). As of September 2018, however, the weight limit was increased from 50 pounds to 70 pounds, so I'll peg this at the same value we assigned to Delta Silver Medallions.	\$50.

	Benefit details	Value
Award travel benefits	One way United stands out from the other carriers is the collection of benefits it offers Premier members when it comes to award tickets. Even Premier Silver travelers enjoy priority waitlisting for award flights, can stand by if their ticketed class of service isn't available on one or more legs and will gain access to "better" availability of United Saver awards in economy class.	\$75.
Star Alliance Silver status	Premier Silver travelers will be designated as Star Alliance Silver when flying on a Star Alliance carrier. However, this only includes priority waitlisting and priority standby, neither of which is worth much.	\$5.
Avis benefits	Finally, Silver members will enjoy perks with Avis thanks to the company's partnership with United — including automatic Preferred Plus status in the Avis Preferred Rewards program and an additional 500 United miles per rental. This could be quite valuable if you frequently rent from Avis, but I'll peg this at a conservative \$10 for Premier Silver travelers.	\$10.
Total value		\$475.

United Premier Gold: \$1,520

The second tier in United's program is Premier Gold status, which requires at least 24 PQFs plus 8,000 PQPs, or just 10,000 PQPs. For this analysis, I'll base my numbers on earning 9,000 PQPs (total spending of \$9,000) plus taking at least 24 PQFs to ensure you satisfy the hybrid qualification criteria.

	Benefit details	Value
Complimentary access to Economy Plus/preferred seats	Premier Gold members can also access Economy Plus seats for them and a travel companion plus preferred seats with up to eight companions. The big difference from Silver is	\$250.

	Benefit details	Value
	that both of these perks are available at booking. Given the additional flying and earlier availability, I'll bump this to \$250.	
Complimentary Premier upgrades	Again, it's harder to get upgrades as a mid-tier United elite member nowadays. Still, as a Gold member, you're eligible for complimentary upgrades to first class on paid domestic and short-haul international flights. These will be prioritized ahead of Silver travelers and will start clearing 48 hours before departure but aren't applicable on award tickets without a United credit card. I'll boost the value due to the additional travel and higher priority, but don't pursue Premier Gold status only for this benefit.	\$200.
Mileage bonus	Under United's revenue-based accrual scheme, Premier Golds will earn 8 miles per dollar spent (3 more than non-status flyers). Spending \$9,000 will give you 27,000 extra miles, worth \$326.70.	\$325.
Priority check-in, security, baggage handling and Group 1 boarding	Same benefit except with Group 1 boarding and more frequent utilization.	\$125.
Priority phone line	Same benefit and more frequent utilization, though you'll also likely have more knowledgeable agents than Silver members.	\$50.
Waived baggage fee	Premier Gold members can check two bags weighing up to 70 pounds apiece on domestic United flights when traveling in economy, a decent step up from Silver travelers.	\$100.
Award travel benefits	Premier Gold travelers have the same award travel benefits as Premier Silvers, including greater availability of economy	\$100.

	Benefit details	Value
	awards at the Saver level. However, you probably wouldn't use them twice as frequently, so I'm just bumping the value slightly.	
Star Alliance Gold status	United Premier Gold members will be recognized as Star Alliance Gold travelers when flying on any Star Alliance carrier. This provides many benefits above Star Alliance Silver status, including priority check-in, extra baggage allowances, priority security/immigration (where available) and priority boarding. However, the most valuable perk is lounge access, which is included when you're ticketed on any Star Alliance flight (the lone exception is traveling on domestic United flights, where you won't have access to United Clubs but will be able to get into Star Alliance lounges in the U.S.). This means that you could get into a Senator Lounge on a Lufthansa flight within Germany, a United Club on a United flight from the U.S. to the Caribbean or a Turkish Airlines lounge on a United-operated domestic flight. This is a nice step up from comparable status tiers on American and Delta.	\$250.
Marriott Gold status	Another benefit offered to Premier Gold members is Gold status with Marriott Bonvoy , thanks to the RewardsPlus partnership launched in 2013. Unfortunately, this isn't equivalent to the Gold Elite status you previously enjoyed with the legacy Marriott program. However, it still includes perks like bonus points and upgrades to preferred rooms after you link your United and Marriott accounts. The true value of this benefit depends on how frequently you stay at Marriott properties, so I'll assume a conservative \$100. Feel free to adjust this if you have more frequent Marriott stays.	\$100.
Avis benefits	Like Premier Silver flyers, Gold members will enjoy Avis Preferred Plus status plus 500 additional bonus miles when compared to a non-status holder. With the additional travel, I'll double the value of this perk to \$20.	\$20.

	Benefit details	Value
Total value		\$1,520.

United Premier Platinum: \$2,700

Premier Platinum members can use their 40 PlusPoints for a round-trip international upgrade from economy to Premium Plus.

The third tier in the MileagePlus program is Premier Platinum status, which requires at least 36 PQFs plus 12,000 PQPs, or just 15,000 PQPs. For this analysis, I'll base my numbers on earning 13,500 PQPs (total spending of \$13,500) plus taking at least 36 PQFs to ensure you satisfy the hybrid qualification criteria.

	Benefit details	Value
Complimentary access to Economy Plus/preferred seats	Premier Platinums can also access Economy Plus and preferred seats at booking, extending to up to eight companions, even if they're on separate reservations. You'll need to call United if you want to arrange for Economy Plus or preferred seating for your companions if they're on a separate reservation.	\$250.
Complimentary Premier upgrades	As a Platinum member, you have higher upgrade priority, but don't expect upgrades on all your flights with Platinum status. Upgrades could clear as early as three days before departure. Given the additional flying and higher likelihood of clearing, I'm bumping this to \$400.	\$400.
40 PlusPoints	You'll receive 40 PlusPoints as a Platinum member. That's enough for a single upgrade from some economy fares to United Polaris . Alternatively, you could use these for two regional upgrades to first class or two upgrades from any standard economy-class fares to Premium Plus. You can use PlusPoints to upgrade a friend or family member, even when you aren't traveling together.	\$400.

	Benefit details	Value
Mileage bonus	Premier Platinum members will earn 9 miles per dollar spent, a bonus of 4 miles over the earning rate for regular members; \$13,500 in spending gets you an extra 54,000 miles, worth \$653.40.	\$655.
Priority check-in, security, baggage handling and Group 1 boarding	Same benefit, more frequent utilization.	\$190.
Priority phone line	Same benefit, more frequent utilization and more knowledgeable agents.	\$90.
Waived baggage fee	Premier Platinum members can check three bags of 70 pounds each for free when traveling in economy on United, though most flyers probably won't utilize the full extent of this benefit.	\$150.
Award travel benefits	As a Premier Platinum member, you'll have access to the same award travel perks listed above for Silvers and Golds. Still, you'll also see greater availability for United Saver awards in premium cabins.	\$125.
Phone service charge waiver	In addition to the discounted or waived fees above, you'll also avoid the \$25 direct ticketing charge when making a reservation over the phone. However, I've frequently been able to get this waived without elite status when I couldn't book a ticket online. I'll assume that you utilize this once per year.	\$25.
Star Alliance Gold status	Same benefit, more frequent utilization.	\$275.

	Benefit details	Value
Marriott Gold status	Platinum members will also be able to link their United and Marriott accounts to earn Gold status with Marriott Bonvoy, but this value depends on how frequently you stay at these brands.	\$100.
Avis benefits	As a Platinum traveler, you'll enjoy automatic Avis President's Club status in the Avis Preferred Rewards program and enjoy 750 additional miles over a non-status flyer. As a result, I'll double the value of these perks compared to Premier Gold.	\$40.
Total value		\$2,700

United Premier 1K: \$7,455

Premier 1K members can use their 320 PlusPoints for eight single upgrades from economy class in a W or higher fare to Polaris business class.

The final tier in the MileagePlus program is Premier 1K status, which requires at least 54 PQFs plus 18,000 PQPs, or just 24,000 PQPs. For this analysis, I'll base my numbers on earning 20,000 PQPs (total spending of \$20,000) plus taking at least 54 PQFs to ensure you satisfy the hybrid qualification criteria.

	Benefit details	Value
Complimentary access to Economy Plus/preferred seats	Same benefit, more frequent utilization.	\$625.
Complimentary Premier upgrades	Premier 1K members enjoy the highest upgrade priority (aside from Global Services travelers , who are likely traveling in paid first class anyway). They will begin clearing into first class as early as four days before departure. Still, as a Premier 1K member, I seldom receive complimentary Premier upgrades, so I'm decreasing the value of this benefit compared to previous years.	\$500.

	Benefit details	Value
280 PlusPoints	<p>Premier 1K members earn 280 PlusPoints when qualifying for status. You'd also take home 40 for reaching Premier Platinum, and for every additional 3,000 PQPs, you'll enjoy another 20 PlusPoints.</p> <p>As a result, a Premier 1K member with the above travel activity (20,000 PQPs and 54-plus PQFs) will have a total of 320 PlusPoints. This would be worth \$3,200 based on the above valuation for Platinums, but I'll add \$50 thanks to the added Skip Waitlist feature.</p>	\$3,250.
Mileage bonus	<p>Premier 1K members earn 11 miles per dollar spent, 6 miles more than regular members. By spending \$20,000, you'll take home an extra 120,000 miles, worth \$1,452.</p>	\$1,450.
Priority check-in, security, baggage handling and Group 1 boarding	<p>Same benefit, more frequent utilization. Premier 1K members are also invited to preboard.</p>	\$300.
Complimentary snack and drink in economy	<p>In 2016, United announced that Premier 1K and Global Services travelers would enjoy a free drink and snack item if they didn't score the upgrade to first class.</p> <p>Snack boxes and Bistro on Board items cost around \$10 each, and you can expect to pay \$5 for an alcoholic drink. This benefit can save \$15 per flight, but since you might not use it on each flight, I'll value it at \$5 per flight.</p>	\$270.
Priority phone line	<p>Same benefit, more frequent utilization and more knowledgeable agents.</p>	\$120.
Waived baggage fee	<p>Same benefit, more frequent utilization.</p>	\$200.

	Benefit details	Value
Award travel benefits	Same benefit, same limited usage.	\$175.
Phone service charge waiver	Same benefit, same limited usage.	\$25.
Star Alliance Gold status	Same benefit, more frequent utilization.	\$300.
Marriott Gold status	Same benefit.	\$100.
Avis benefits	Same benefit.	\$40.
Complimentary Clear membership	In mid-2019, United announced a partnership with Clear , the popular expedited security program that has expanded to more than 40 cities (in both airports and event venues). The U.S. membership normally costs \$189 per year, but non-status United members will pay \$119. The yearly price for United credit card holders and lower-tier elite members drops to \$109, but Premier 1K travelers can enjoy a complimentary membership. Given that this is currently available at United's U.S. hubs, I'll value this benefit at \$100.	\$100.
Total value		\$7,455.

What if I'm starting from scratch?

These numbers are based on the benefits you'd enjoy by spending a full year with the given status. However, suppose you're starting from scratch. In that case, the calculations become a bit more complicated since you won't start to enjoy any benefits until you hit the PQF and PQP (or just PQP) requirements to earn Premier Silver status.

To help modify the analysis for those individuals, I've taken the above valuations and converted them to a value per PQP, as follows:

- United Premier Silver: \$475 / 4,500 PQPs = 10.56 cents per PQP.

- United Premier Gold: \$1,520 / 9,000 PQPs = 16.89 cents per PQP.
- United Premier Platinum: \$2,700 / 13,500 PQPs = 20 cents per PQP.
- United Premier 1K: \$7,455 / 20,000 PQPs = 37.28 cents per PQP.

Is it worth pursuing United Airlines status?

United Premier Gold and higher members enjoy special perks when traveling on partner airlines like Lufthansa.

So, given these values, is it worth pursuing elite status (or the next tier of elite status) with United?

Like any analysis we undertake here at TPG, there isn't an easy answer to this, as it depends entirely on your situation. However, here are a few overarching questions that can help you arrive at a decision:

How much will you travel in the future?

If you earn United elite status in 2023, it's valid through Jan. 31, 2025. It's critical to think about how much you'll be traveling in the future. If you push hard to earn Premier 1K, the valuable perks outlined above only apply when you travel.

What's the incremental value of one tier over another?

Many of you may wind up within striking distance of the next tier, so consider whether the benefits are worth pushing for it. There's no sense in [going out of your way](#) for perks that don't matter to you.

How well does United's route map match your typical travel patterns?

It's not worth pursuing status when you can't enjoy the benefits. Be sure to consider United's service from your home airport(s) and how easy it is to get to your desired destination.

How sensitive are you to price and convenience?

There are many trade-offs in this hobby, and one of the most common is deciding whether to use your preferred airline or hotel chain when it's not the most convenient or cheapest.

Would you book a one-stop United flight if Alaska had a cheaper nonstop option? If the answer is no, it may not be worth going out of your way to earn United elite status ([or any elite status](#), for that matter).

Could you enjoy elite-like perks with a credit card?

The final consideration involves travel rewards credit cards. Many [airline cobranded cards](#) offer perks to cardholders that can mirror what you'd enjoy as an elite member.

For example, the [United Explorer Card](#) includes a free checked bag, priority boarding and two one-time [United Club passes](#). The [United Club Infinite Card](#) provides a complimentary United Club membership and two free checked bag fees (among other perks).

If you can pay a flat annual fee for one of these cards and gain access to perks that matter to you without going out of your way to earn elite status, that may be a better option.

These questions are also not easy to answer, as many different factors come into play with each of them. Nevertheless, evaluating your situation is worthwhile as you determine if United elite status is for you.

Bottom line

As someone who has been a Premier 1K member for about half a dozen consecutive years, I have grown to be very familiar with the ins and outs of United's sought-after Premier status.

Premier perks can make the travel experience less stressful and (dare I say?) even enjoyable. Every traveler has their own set of benefits that make it worthwhile to pursue elite status, and it's gotten noticeably harder to receive complimentary upgrades and redeem PlusPoints for Polaris flights.

If you're in the market for a new preferred carrier in 2023 and have United on your shortlist, we hope this post has given you some great information to help you decide.