

PRIORITY  
ACCESS

# UPGRADE UNLOCKED

THE UNCONVENTIONAL GUIDE TO LUXURY TRAVEL ON A BUDGET



# Foreword

## Greetings, traveler!

Welcome to Upgrade Unlocked: *The Unconventional Guide to Luxury Travel on a Budget*—and welcome to a new world order of travel possibility. By purchasing this guide, you've taken an important step toward gaining access to something priceless: the ability to have amazing travel experiences at the drop of a hat, without paying anywhere near the retail rate.

As you'll find in reading this guide, travel hacking isn't new. For more than twenty years, Stephanie Zito has been wandering the world, visiting islands, crossing continents, and making discoveries. What has changed is the access to information and sheer number of opportunities available through frequent flyer miles, credit cards, hotel status, and other strategies you'll learn about here.

In short, there's simply never been a better time to gain access to your own set of worldwide discoveries.

## Our Stories and Yours

This Unconventional Guide is packed with stories. Over the past decade, both Stephanie and I have had the privilege of flying high on the world's best airlines

and staying in amazing properties on a low budget.

From a career as an aid worker and communications consultant, Stephanie has traveled to more than 115 countries. As part of my quest to go everywhere, I've been to all 193. We've each had our share of dorm room hostel nights and middle seats in coach, but we've also learned to work the system to our advantage and upgrade our travel experiences.

It's not just our stories you'll find here. Throughout the guide and in the accompanying resources, you'll hear from many other people just like you who've been able to create their own incredible experiences!

We'd love to feature *your* story (yes, yours) in a future edition of this Unconventional Guide. To make that happen, read and take action.

Upgrade your bucket list, fellow traveler! The future is bright, and it's filled with miles and points.

Onwards,

**Chris Guillebeau**

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Unconventional Guides

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# Welcome

**Travelers near and far are taking the globe by storm and advancing the art of seeing the world for nearly free to a whole new luxurious level. Points, miles and loyalty programs have handed you the power to go further than you've ever gone before, taste the life of the elite, and open your world to experiences you've only dreamed of.**

You want to fly first class and drink bottomless champagne in the sky? *Done.*

You want to sleep in an overwater bungalow on a remote South Pacific island? *It's possible!*

You want to check the "I'll-never-afford-this destination" off of your bucket list? *Yep, you can do that too.*

The depth of your pockets or breadth of your budget no longer defines your travel experiences. The ability to travel wherever you want in whatever class of service you desire can be achieved. Welcome to the game of travel hacking.

Every day, regular people just like you are living out their dreams of adventure. We'll introduce you to a few of them throughout the course of this guide and show you how they've turned their destination dreams into been there, done that realities.

▶ Meet Marv and Josephine. This duo moves across Asia like fancy flyers. They love lounges with free massages and can often be found sharing cabin space at 35,000 feet with high-powered Singapore bankers and Hong Kong executives. Their secret

is that they are budget savvy world travelers with more than a million miles in their award wallet. They work from the road as online entrepreneurs and use the power of points to make luxury travel affordable.

- ▶ Newlyweds Jes and Josh spent an entire year celebrating their nuptials as they traveled around the globe, visiting 25 countries. Their dream honeymoon wasn't funded by wealthy parents or a trust fund, but by the 500,000 miles they earned from actively pursuing big credit card bonuses.
- ▶ Mike is newly retired and exploring the world in luxurious style with his wife Debbie. After 35 years and more than a million miles flown in economy class for work, he's done with the back of the plane and average business hotels. He hasn't gotten rich since retirement—he's made the comfortable travel he desires possible by earning miles for everything he already spends money on.
- ▶ Austin spent his college breaks doing things most students could never afford. As a third year university student he not only flew to the Bahamas with his mother to celebrate their birthdays together, he paid for both of their tickets—which cost only \$6 plus tax! Since he had money and miles to spare, he dropped another \$32.50 and took the spring break trip of his dreams to see the Northern Lights.

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**It doesn't matter if you're a college student, business traveler, family of four, retiree, or lifestyle nomad with an unquenchable thirst to see more—travel is more accessible today than it has ever been. Five star travel on a backpacker's budget?**

***Yes, that too.***

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If you know how to play your cards right, whatever travel you dream of is yours for the taking.

I will never forget *my* first luxury travel encounter. I'd been working as a volunteer in Africa for four years (read: penniless) and was flying standby on a connecting flight from Brussels to Atlanta. When a seat finally opened up after three days, I got doubly lucky. My seat was in the *front* of the plane. Business class? *Yes, please.*

I ate warm nuts, lounged in my roomy seat and devoured the most amazing pretzel bread I'd ever had. I was the luckiest person in the sky. Later I came to understand that the luxury amenities weren't the most valuable thing that Delta had provided me with on that flight. The golden ticket I'd truly received was the realization that luxury travel wasn't actually out of my reach as I'd always believed. Little did I know that this flight would open my eyes to a lifetime of increasingly amazing travel.



**Once you believe that luxury is accessible and you've gotten a taste of the good life, you'll never have to be served a pre-packaged sandwich in the back of the plane again.**

The same holds true for you. Traveling in style isn't out of your reach. Once you believe that luxury is accessible and you've gotten a taste of the good life, you'll never have to be served a pre-packaged sandwich in the back of the plane again.

## **But How?**

How do you get to travel like this—and how can you do it without breaking the bank?

**Here's the secret: Traveling well is a game, and the game is rigged.**

People just like you from all over the world are taking advantage of the system of earning and spending points and miles

every day. All it takes to play is a little effort to learn how the game works and as much time as you're willing to invest (warning: this game can be addictive). Our mission is to help you unlock the secrets of the game and score big travel experiences.

If you're just starting out with mileage earning (or travel hacking), you'll catch on quickly. If you need more help mastering the basics, check out the resources section of this guide—we'll point you in the right direction to obtain all the information you'll need to level up your points earning skills.

Here's what we'll cover in our journey to unlocking luxury travel:



## What's in the Guide:

### **Game On: Strategy and Principles of Luxury Travel Hacking.**

**We'll dive right into the basics of building your travel hacking strategy and decipher the mystery of how luxury travel can really work on a shoestring traveler's budget.**

#### ▶ **LEVEL 1: EARN, EARN, EARN**

The key to the game is getting as many points and miles as possible. We'll teach you the best tricks to optimize your life so that everything you do turns to earning miles on autopilot. You'll be on your way to mastering ongoing deals, big bonuses, credit cards and spending strategies to maximize your mileage earning. We'll even share a few black hat tricks.

#### ▶ **LEVEL 2: FLY HIGH**

We'll teach you how to fly around the globe on the world's best airlines for less than the cost of a tank of gas. You'll learn how to find and book the best travel awards, and we'll answer your burning questions about elite status, upgrades and how to get into airline lounges.

#### ▶ **LEVEL 3: SLEEP IN STYLE**

You'll learn to access accommodation on the road—whether you prefer a hostel or a five star hotel. We'll explore the secret world of hotel groups and show you how to land a room with fantastic amenities without breaking

your budget. We'll also throw in a few unconventional strategies to show you how to visit the world's most splendid hotels even when you can't afford to stay at them.

#### ▶ **LEVEL 4: LIVE THE DREAM**

Access the travel experiences you dream about on your next trip. We'll show you how to take advantage of dozens of travel deals once you've arrived at your destination. You'll learn all about car rentals, concierge services, and travel insurance. We'll even tell you how to score luxury experiences like spa treatments and golf outings for next to nothing.

#### ▶ **LEVEL 5: UPGRADE YOUR BUCKET LIST**

This is where we put it all together and show you how to use your accumulated points, miles and travel hacks to build a deluxe dream itinerary. You'll upgrade your travel goals and be ready to make the goals on your bucket list a reality.

**Onward traveler. Once in a lifetime experiences don't need to be limited to only once in a lifetime anymore. This is the journey you've been waiting for.**