

What Are the 3 Major Airline Alliances?

Birthed from codeshare agreements between carriers, airline alliances went big time in the late 1990s with the formation of the three leading partnerships we have today: StarAlliance, SkyTeam, and Oneworld. These alliances have rapidly grown to incorporate nearly every major airline on earth.

The goal of these coalitions is to provide travelers with access to more destinations, streamlined connections, and competitive pricing due to smaller operational costs. Of course, this has some benefits on the airlines' bottom line, by cutting down on overlapping operations in shared markets and by funneling travelers through partners instead of a competitor's plane.

To get you up to speed on the ever-changing world of airline partnerships, here's some background info on the three major alliances, including frequent flyer benefits, and current member airlines to help you choose which alliance is best for your travel needs.

Star Alliance



Founded by five airlines, United, Scandinavian, Thai, Air Canada, and Lufthansa (thus the five-point star logo), StarAlliance was the first major global airline alliance to takeoff in 1997. Originally promising to “take passengers to every major city on earth,” the airline has done its best to back up that mission statement with its industry-leading roster of 26 member airlines. Close to home, United, Air Canada, and Copa Airlines' networks cover hundreds of destinations in the Americas and the Caribbean; while StarAlliance's remaining 23 partners have just about every corner of the globe dotted within their flight network. You'll be hard-pressed to find a destination that the StarAlliance doesn't service with its nearly 19,000 daily flights to over 1,300 destinations in 195 countries worldwide. Serving 98% of the world's nations, StarAlliance is an excellent fit for flyers that need a robust network of travel options or those yearning for connections to hard to reach destinations.

Benefits of Star Alliance Status

StarAlliance breaks down its elite status into two levels: Silver and Gold. Gold status in StarAlliance's program is generally harder to reach for the average traveler, as it requires reaching the premium-to-highest levels of a member airline's frequent flyer program. Members who attain Silver and Gold membership within StarAlliance's elite program receive benefits like extra baggage allowances, preferred boarding, and seat assignments. With the most extensive network of members, StarAlliance also boasts the most airport lounges amongst the three major alliances. Airport lounge access varies per airline and is dependent on which level of status you have within the program, so it's best to check in advance if you qualify for entry.

Many flyers based in North America will be familiarized with the StarAlliance via United Airlines or Air Canada. Using United Airlines MileagePlus program and search feature on their website, it's effortless to view member airlines' award availability. Awards at the Saver Level will cost the same amount of mileage no matter which partner airline your flights are operated on. Business and First Class awards will require extra mileage than flying on award flights solely operated by United. Air Canada is planning to overhaul its frequent flyer set-up by ditching current Aeroplan for a loyalty program of its own starting in June 2020.

What Airlines are Star Alliance Members?

- [Aegean](#) - Greece
- [Air Canada](#) - Canada
- [Air China](#) - China
- [Air India](#) - India
- [Air New Zealand](#) - New Zealand
- [ANA](#) - Japan
- [Asiana Airlines](#) - South Korea
- [Austrian](#) - Austria
- [Avianca](#) - Colombia (with subsidiaries throughout Latin America)
- [Brussels Airlines](#) - Belgium
- [Copa Airlines](#) - Panama
- [Croatia Airlines](#) - Croatia
- [Egypt Air](#) - Egypt
- [Ethiopian Airlines](#) - Ethiopia
- [EVA Air](#) - Taiwan
- [LOT Polish Airlines](#) - Poland
- [Lufthansa](#) - Germany
- [SAS](#) - Sweden, Norway, Denmark
- [Shenzhen Airlines](#) - China
- [Singapore Airlines](#) - Singapore
- [South African Airlines](#) - South Africa
- [Swiss](#) - Switzerland
- [TAP Air Portugal](#) - Portugal
- [Thai](#) - Thailand
- [Turkish Airlines](#) - Turkey
- [United](#) - U.S.A.

StarAlliance Connecting Partners:

- Juneyao Airlines - China
- Olympic Air - Greece

Oneworld



Founded in 1999, by American Airlines, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Qantas, and then Canadian Airlines, which left the alliance after a merger with Air Canada. Oneworld was the second of the big three major airline alliances to form. Despite having the largest single carrier in the world (American Airlines) on its roster, Oneworld is a distant third when it comes to the number of member airlines and passenger volume. Outside of the Americas, the thirteen-member alliance does provide streamlined connections for customers in Europe, East Asia, and Australia, but with no African-based member (Royal Air Maroc set to join April 1, 2020), the coalition relies heavily on Qatar's network for connections to reach many destinations in that region of the world. While the alliance serves over 1,000 destinations in around 155 countries, there are too many underserved spots on the map for Oneworld to compete globally with the other rival partnerships.

Benefits of Oneworld Status

Oneworld's premium status memberships are structured into three levels. The top being Emerald, followed by Sapphire, and the lowest tier membership is Ruby. Similar to the other alliances, Oneworld elites receive lounge access and added benefits like free checked bags and occasional upgrades. Flyers that have elite status with any alliance member frequent flyer program will be granted the corresponding tier in the Oneworld program. Oneworld elite tiers are recognized on all flights ticketed by member airlines. For U.S. based frequent flyers, American Airlines is the gateway airline into Oneworld membership. However, those who accumulate miles with the airline will find it hard to redeem miles using the AAdvantage program on other member airlines. American only offers a snippet of available awards inventory on their site, and the amount of partner flights displayed is downright abysmal, with many airlines not displayed at all. Member British Airways is not much better. While it offers a better selection of flight options, they

come with astronomical fuel surcharges that generally wipe out any savings you thought you'd get by redeeming for a "free flight."

What Airlines are Oneworld Members?

- [American Airlines](#) - U.S.A.
- [Alaska Airlines](#) - U.S.A. - **Joining Oneworld in mid-2021.**
- [British Airways](#) - U.K.
- [Cathay Pacific](#) - Hong Kong
- [Finnair](#) - Finland
- [Iberia](#) - Spain
- [Japan Airlines](#) - Japan
- [LATAM](#) - Chile - **Leaving Oneworld on May 1, 2020.**
- [Malaysia Airlines](#) - Malaysia
- [Qantas](#) - Australia
- [Qatar Airways](#) - Qatar
- [Royal Air Maroc](#) - Morocco - **Joining Oneworld on April 1, 2020.**
- [Royal Jordanian](#) - Jordan
- [S7 Airlines](#) - Russia
- [Sri Lankan Airlines](#) - Sri Lanka

Oneworld Connect Member:

- [Fiji Airways](#) - Fiji

SkyTeam



The youngest of all three major alliances, SkyTeam was formed in the summer of 2000. Aeromexico, Air France, Delta Air Lines, and Korean Air serve as founding members of this alliance that now tallies 19 members. Being the new kid on the block hasn't hindered SkyTeam at all, as it's the fastest-growing association having tripled the number of member airlines over the last decade. This steady growth has leapfrogged SkyTeam into the second largest alliance in regards to members and global reach. In terms of passenger loads, SkyTeam's 730 million annual passengers lead all alliances, mainly due to its significant presence in the Chinese aviation market. As of 2020, SkyTeam's route network extends to over 1,150 destinations in 175 countries with upwards of 14,500 daily departures. With no dedicated member in Australasia, SkyTeam relies on codeshares outside of its member network and Asia-based carriers to serve the region.

Benefits of SkyTeam Status

SkyTeam splits its premium levels into two levels: Elite and Elite Plus. Status is awarded to frequent-flyers who have reached premium levels in a member airline. For example, a Delta Silver Medallion member will receive SkyTeam Elite, while Delta Gold or above flyers will receive Elite Plus. As with the other alliances, benefits for SkyTeam Elites are priority boarding, check-in, and preferred seating. SkyTeam Elite Plus members have additional perks, including extra baggage allowances and airport lounge access. Delta Air Lines is the carrier that the majority of U.S. customers will be introduced into the SkyTeam network. Delta's SkyMiles loyalty program doesn't publish an award chart for flight redemptions, creating a guessing game on how many miles are required for a particular award. With frequent devaluations and the removal of tables, the moniker SkyPesos is bandied about regarding the program in the frequent flyer community. Air France, KLM, TAROM, Kenya Airways, and subsidiary airlines, have created a unified

frequent flyer program titled Flying Blue. SkyTeam elite status is generally easier to achieve using Flying Blue over SkyMiles unless you're a Delta regular and dish out enough money with the airline to qualify.

What Airlines are SkyTeam Members?

- [Aeroflot](#) - Russia
- [Aerolineas Argentinas](#) - Argentina
- [Aeromexico](#) - Mexico
- [Air Europa](#) - Spain
- [Air France](#) - France
- [Alitalia](#) - Italy
- [China Airlines](#) - Taiwan
- [China Eastern](#) - China
- [Czech Airlines](#) - Czechia
- [Delta](#) - U.S.A.
- [Garuda Indonesia](#) - Indonesia
- [Kenya Airways](#) - Kenya
- [KLM Royal Dutch](#) - Netherlands
- [Korean Air](#) - South Korea
- [Middle Eastern Airlines \(MEA\)](#) - Lebanon
- [Saudia](#) - Saudia Arabia
- [TAROM](#) - Romania
- [Vietnam Airlines](#) - Vietnam
- [Xiamen Air](#) - China

How Knowing About Airline Alliances Can Help You

Beyond the extended route maps and service, airline alliances also benefit passengers with their loyalty programs, award mile earnings, and lounge offerings for qualified frequent flyers. In instances of delays or cancellations, member airlines often offer to re-ticket you on partner airlines to ensure you reach your intended destination.

For example, earlier this year, I rudely woke up to an email stating that my flight from Amsterdam to Boston via Philadelphia on American Airlines was delayed, which would cause me to miss my connection, forcing an overnight in Philly. Instead of accepting American's unfavorable rebooking offer, which would put me on the hook for the cost of an airport hotel. I hopped on my laptop and searched to see what other Oneworld options could get me into Boston that same day.

Partner British Airways had several flight options that would route me from Amsterdam via London and onward to Boston. Including one that would be quicker than my original itinerary. I jotted down the flight numbers and departure times and rang up the American Airlines reservation helpline. Luckily, I was connected with a very helpful representative who swapped my itinerary with the British Airways flight options that I found, and I no longer needed to worry about being stranded in PHL overnight. Headache averted, just for being astute and knowing which airline alliance members could help bail me out of my predicament.