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## ROAD WARRIOR Managing Business Travel

# Airline Travelers Choose Alternative Rewards: Space Travel, Anyone?

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By: Darren Booth

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Having trouble finding available flights when you redeem your frequent flyer miles? Well there are some out-of-this-world options — pun intended.



Mark Ralston | AFP | Getty Images

Virgin Galactic VSS Enterprise spacecraft

While frequent flyer programs are a hugely profitable part of the airline business, unredeemed balances that members hold represent a large liability on balance sheets. So airlines are getting more creative in offering options to get those miles off their books.

I recently wrote about the **United Airlines [UAL 21.55 ▲ 0.51 (+2.42%) ] MileagePlus Headliners program** where members can bid their miles in auctions for experiences including golf experiences at low mileage levels. But there are considerably pricier options, too. The higher the mileage rate, the higher the "fun factor."

One French getaway includes roundtrip business class tickets for two, 1-night accommodation in Paris and train tickets to Normandy for a 2-night stay at the castle, Chateau de Balleroy. It was completed in 1636 and is owned by Forbes magazine publisher Malcolm S. Forbes. The current bid as of this posting is 236,000 miles.

But if bidding isn't your thing, other airlines offer incredible items at fixed mileage rates.

IdeaWorks, a consulting firm focused on the airline and travel industry, **recently published a report** of, "40 alternative rewards ranging from the extravagant to everyday comforts."

At the low end are rather pedestrian options such as a "happy marriage cake" on Icelandair for 650 miles or an evening at a bowling alley or sauna for 8,000 Finnair points. But which airlines do you think really step up the game to offer truly extraordinary options? None other than Virgin Australia and Virgin Atlantic, two of Sir Richard Branson's many business ventures that are known for personality and flair.

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Other items on the list include:

- A round of golf at Coral Creek Golf Course in Hawaii for 15,000 **Hawaiian Airlines** [HA 5.17 ▲ 0.21 (+4.23%) 📈] miles.
- A beer tasting tour of Brussels for 14,700 American Airlines miles.
- For 177,000 Air Canada Aeroplan miles, a leather vest autographed by George Clooney.
- If you're a Broadway buff, 22,500 **Delta** [DAL 10.41 ▲ 0.50 (+5.05%) 📈] SkyMiles will get you theater access to a choice of current productions.
- Front row seats for an upcoming Madonna concert in New York for 1,007,573 **Southwest Airlines** [LUV 8.116 ▲ 0.166 (+2.09%) 📈] points.

Topping out the list, though, is a \$3.5 million yacht for a mere 385,806,128 Etihad Airways miles. I'm definitely a **road warrior**, but can guarantee I'll never rack up that kind of mileage balance — can anyone?

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### Road Warriors Editor



#### Darren Booth

Darren flies more than 100,000 miles annually, staying at everything from five-star hotels to budget motels. Having worked for a major airline and various travel companies, he provides an inside perspective on business travel.

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