

Make your points fly further

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Manage and maximize rewards with an app

Even seasoned points collectors and experienced travellers can struggle with juggling multiple travel rewards programs and trying to maximize the benefits they provide.

Hotels, airlines, car rentals and credit cards are just a few of the loyalty programs used to collect coveted reward points and miles used for free flights, room upgrades and more. So how do you stay organized and on top of point balances?

Or even more important, how do you make sure these valuable collected rewards points don't fall by the wayside?

According to a poll conducted by Leger for CIBC in 2012, 70 per cent of Canadians own credit cards that earn them rewards for merchandise or travel. However, travel rewards website Rewards Canada, reports that less than 30 per cent of those enrolled in credit card rewards program have actually booked travel using accumulated rewards points.

But of course there's an app that can help for that – a few in fact, that assist travelers in managing multiple programs.

Consider the following tips from travel bloggers Dave Bouskill and Debra Corbeil. The Canadian-based duo have been travelling the world for the past seven years and sharing their adventures on their blog ThePlanetD.com (theplanetd.com).

Find an app that works at home

It used to be a real challenge to find such apps that worked well within Canada. However, a few on the market today, such as Trip It and Award-Wallet, include Canadian travel rewards programs.

Trip It Pro, an add-on upgrade to the app Trip It, which focuses on trip planning, tracks over 150 loyalty programs.

With reward accounts in nearly every travel program out there, having one place to find an overview of points balances is just one of many benefits Mr. Bouskill and Ms. Corbeil cite as reason enough for shelling out the \$49 (U.S.) upgrade fee.

A few of the programs the bloggers use the app for include Air Canada and at least 25 hotel rewards programs including Club Carlson, Fairmont, Marriott and Starwood.

Trip It Pro is an app well suited for frequent travellers. While other rewards programs offer alerts for points about to expire, Trip It Pro takes notifications to the next level

offering alerts on real time flight information, flight finders, refund notifications and more.

The Planet D bloggers say they love the in the moment appeal of the alerts. “Our phone notifies us of any change. We are given a heads up about delays and cancellations and even seat assignments,” says Ms. Corbeil.

Like Trip It, Award Wallet is a free app that includes paid add ons and upgraded features at varying price points.

Award Wallet supports a whopping 672 loyalty programs and allows users to manage most loyalty programs found in their wallets displaying balances, account numbers and passwords on one screen. The app also allows users to check balances even in locations where there is no Internet connection.

Keep it simple

It comes down to minimizing time and effort. Mr. Bouskill and Ms. Corbeil have been using Trip It Pro’s Point Tracker for three years to keep track of their points, miles and rewards. “We try not to use a lot of different apps. We like to keep things simple,” said Ms. Corbeil.

The Planet D bloggers also use Expedia.ca, which like Trip It Pro offers a reward tracking function. However since Trip It Pro even tracks Expedia, they don’t even have to log into Expedia.ca to check their balance.

Ms. Corbeil says for them there’s an even simpler reason they like the app: Like many of us amassing points, it helps them keep track of just how many rewards they have stockpiled.

Get started

Before committing to upgrades it’s a good idea to try the free version of any reward app.

“Apps can be intimidating for the first timer, but once you give them a try, you’ll realize that they save a lot of time and energy,” says Ms. Corbeil. “They do the legwork for you.”

And there’s a reward itself in finding a travel app that works for you. “Keeping up to date with our travel points offers greater opportunity for free travel,” says Ms. Corbeil.

After all, that’s what it’s all about. Travel rewards apps should make monitoring rewards and point collections easy, enabling travellers to actually take advantage of the great returns they offer.