

The Ultimate Guide to Lounge Access

Travel hack your way to free
airport lounge access around
the world!



Airport Lounge Overview

What Are Airport Lounges?

For the uninitiated, airport lounges are sanctuaries inside of airports that offer amenities like free food, free drinks, free wifi, comfortable chairs, free massages, free showers, and more! If you've downloaded this guide, you're probably already familiar with airport lounges, and you want to know how you can get inside. If you're being honest with yourself, you've probably suffered from lounge envy. That's the feeling you get when you watch other travelers waltz into the lounge while you're stuck paying too much for airport food and fighting the crowds for the one plug that exists in your plane's boarding area.

Who Are You?

Before we jump into this guide, let me introduce myself. My name is Nate Buchanan. My wife (Kara) and I are full-time travel YouTubers on a mission to visit 100 countries by 2020. As of writing this guide, we've visited 80+ countries and probably well over 100 airport lounges! We share every day of this crazy adventure on our [YouTube channel](#).

Before we left to travel full-time at the beginning of 2016, I became obsessed with collecting as many frequent flyer miles as possible. This hobby is known as travel hacking. In addition to earning millions of miles and points, I also learned how to access airport lounges around the world free of charge. Over the last few years, Kara and I have enjoyed some insanely nice lounges!

Below is a shot from inside the "Cabana Room" in the Cathay Pacific Wing First Class Lounge at the Hong Kong Airport. In addition to these incredible private bathrooms, the lounge has a sushi buffet and a champagne bar!



Kara looking super excited to enter the Pier First Class Lounge that's also located in the Hong Kong Airport. In addition to the free restaurant, this lounge also offers free foot massages!



This is the last image that I'll share with you. It's me ordering from the restaurant in the Qantas First Class Lounge in Sydney, Australia. I had the best calamari of my life in an airport?! This meal was followed by a free full body massage!



I don't show you these pictures to brag. Instead, I was hoping to establish some credibility and peak your interest enough to read through the rest of this guide.

To be fair, not all airport lounges are this fancy, and they don't all include free massages. However, almost all of them do include free food, drinks, and wifi. I can guarantee that you'll enjoy your next trip to the airport more if you get to spend time sitting in a lounge instead of waiting around at the gate with the rest of the people who have yet to discover travel hacking!

How Do You Get Access to Airport Lounges?

Ahh the million dollar question. Not really... You could buy your way into a lounge for way less than a million dollars. In this section I'm going to quickly cover all of the "normal" ways people obtain lounge access, just so you'll be familiar with the process. However, we won't spend a lot of time on these. Instead, the rest of this guide will be focused on "travel hacking" your way into lounges for little to no money.

1. Buying Airline Lounge Memberships

The three major U.S. airlines all sell year long lounge memberships. The price for one of these memberships is around \$500. So if you're a business traveler, travel often, and are loyal to one airline, you would buy a lounge pass that lets you enter your airline's lounge.

For example, American Airlines operates a network of lounges called the Admirals Club. You can pay \$550 for a year long membership to the Admirals Club. The membership allows you to access the lounge every time you visit the airport, even if you're not flying on American Airlines.

For the average person who only travels a few times per year, buying one of these passes is not a good value. However, many business travelers (especially the ones with a company credit card) may find value in one of these memberships if they fly with American Airlines on regular basis, or if their home airport has an Admirals lounge.

2. Flying International Business Class

If you book an international business class flight, you'll receive one-time access to an airport lounge in most cases. You normally receive access to a lounge in each airport that you transit through on your business class flight. So you'll receive lounge access at the departure airport as well as any airport where you have a layover.

3. Buying A Membership to a Network of Lounges

Priority Pass is a membership club that offers lounge access to over 1,000 airport lounges around the world. Any time you transit through an airport with a lounge that is part of the Priority Pass network, you can access it. Depending on your level of membership, there may or may not be a fee for entering the lounge. Priority Pass membership prices range from \$99 - \$399 per year.

4. Airline & Alliance Status

There would need to be an entirely separate guide written for the complexity of accessing airport lounges using your status. For now we'll just say when you

have airline or alliance status, sometimes you can access certain airport lounges and other times you can't. The point of this section is just to let you know that some of the people you're sitting in the lounge with could be there because of their status.

I believe that covers all of the traditional methods for accessing airport lounges. Now let's get to the good stuff! The rest of this guide is dedicated to teaching you how to hack your way into airline lounges for little to no cost - even if you aren't flying business class, you don't have airline status, and you're not a lounge member!

6 Ways to "Travel Hack" Your Way into Airport Lounges!

1. Priority Pass

In the beginning of this guide I told you that Priority Pass memberships cost between \$99 and \$399. What I didn't tell you was that there are several credit cards that offer free Priority Pass membership as a perk!

2. Ebay

Did you know it's possible to buy one time access to airport lounges at a discounted rate?

3. Credit Cards

There are several credit cards that offer the perk of free lounge access.

4. The Beggar Strategy

Yes, it is possible to beg your way into an airport lounge, but you have to know the right person to beg.

5. Lounge Buddy

Lounge Buddy is does not offer the most economical way to access a lounge, but they do have an awesome app that will help you decide which one to visit.

6. Diners Club

Last but not least, Diners Club is a membership club similar to Priority Pass who offers access to over 700 lounges around the world.

Priority Pass

If you live in the U.S. signing up for a travel credit that provides free Priority Pass membership is the easiest way to get free lounge access!

Kara and I use our [Priority Pass](#) membership to access 75% of the lounges we visit. A Priority Pass membership gives you access to over 1,000 lounges around the world. You can see all of the available lounges on [their website](#). However, membership doesn't come cheap. They currently offer three different membership levels:

- Standard - \$99
 - At this level you receive no free visits. You must pay \$27 for every lounge visit. Extra guests also pay \$27 for access.
- Standard Plus - \$250
 - At this level you receive 10 free visits, and you pay \$27 per visit for each visit after that. Extra guests pay \$27 for access.
- Prestige - \$399
 - At this level you receive unlimited lounge visits. Extra guests pay \$27 for access.

As you can see, if you want unlimited lounge visits, you have to cough up almost \$400. There's no membership that you can purchase that includes free guest visits. What if I told you that it's possible to get unlimited lounge visits for free, bring in an unlimited number of guests, free of charge, just by signing up for a credit card?

If you have the ability to get approved for U.S. credit cards, you're in luck! There are several premium credit cards that come with free [Priority Pass](#) membership. I'll explain each option below.

BEFORE YOU APPLY: If you choose to sign up for any of the cards mentioned below, Kara and I would be super grateful if you'd start your credit card application using one of our affiliate links such as:

<https://karaandnate.com/credit-cards/>

Thanks to the partnerships we've established with banks, we'll receive a commission if you sign up using our links, and these commissions enable us to continue providing high quality content to you and other travelers free of charge.

Chase Sapphire Reserve



The Chase Sapphire Reserve is Chase's premium consumer credit card. It has a \$550 annual fee, but the benefits you receive more than justify the annual fee! The Priority Pass membership you get for free when signing up for the card gives you unlimited lounge access. Plus, you can bring 2 guest of guests free of charge!

(Full offer details here: [Learn More](#))

The Platinum Card from American Express [\[Learn More\]](#)



The Platinum Card is American Express' premium consumer credit card. Similar to Chase's Premium credit it comes with a hefty annual fee of \$550, but once again the card offers many additional benefits that easily outweigh the cost of the annual fee.

The Priority Pass membership that you get for free with the card includes unlimited visits for the primary card holder, and you can bring two guest with you free of charge.

(Full offer details here: [Learn More](#))

American Express also offers a version of this card for businesses called the Business Platinum Card from American Express [[Learn More](#)]. It offers the same Priority Pass membership as the consumer version of the card.

All of the premium credit cards mentioned above offer a welcome bonus of at least 50,000 points. The points can be redeemed for between 1 - 1.5 cents each. So after meeting the minimum spending requirement, you'd receive a welcome bonus worth between \$500 - \$750 in free travel. Plus, all three of the cards offer travel reimbursements ranging between \$200 - \$300 per calendar year.

These are benefits you receive in addition to the free Priority Pass membership, which is value at over \$400. That's why I say the benefits you'll receive from these cards more than justify the high annual fee.

Credit Cards

If you live in the U.S., signing up for a travel credit card is the easiest way to guarantee yourself free lounge access!

BEFORE YOU APPLY: If you choose to sign up for any of the cards mentioned below, Kara and I would be super grateful if you'd start your credit card application using one of our affiliate links such as:

<https://karaandnate.com/credit-cards/>

Thanks to our partnerships we've established with banks, we'll receive a commission if you sign up using our links, and these commissions enable us to continue providing you with high quality content to you and other travelers free of charge!

The Platinum Card from American Express [\[Learn More\]](#)



We've already discussed this card in the Priority Pass section of this guide. However, I wanted to cover it again here. That's because in addition to free Priority Pass membership, the card also offers access to one of our favorite airport lounges, the American Express Centurion Lounge! There are currently only 9 [Centurion Lounges](#) located in the following cities:

San Francisco (SFO), Seattle (SEA), Miami (MIA), Philadelphia (PHL), New York (LGA), Las Vegas (LAS), Houston (IAH), Dallas (DFW), Hong Kong (HKG)

Kara and I frequently travel through the DFW airport, and we love visiting the Centurion Lounge for their taco bar, great drinks, and free massages! If you travel through any of the cities listed above on a regular basis, it's definitely worth getting the Platinum card to secure access to the Centurion Lounge!

AAdvantage Executive Card

(I can't provide a direct link to this card so you'll need to visit our [credit cards page](#) to learn more.)

The AAdvantage Executive Card is American Airlines' premier consumer credit card. The annual fee is \$450. The current sign up bonus is 50,000 American Airlines frequent flyer miles. I value AA frequent flyer miles at approximately 1.5 cents each. So the sign up bonus alone is worth approximate \$750 in free travel.

In addition to the sign up bonus, you also get [Admirals Club](#) access. If you have this card, you can get access to the Admirals Club even if you're not flying with American Airlines. If your home airport has an Admirals Club, you may want to consider signing up for the AA Executive card.

United Mileage Plus Club Card

(I can't provide a direct link to this card so you'll need to visit our [credit cards page](#) to learn more.)

The United Mileage Plus Club Card is United's premium consumer credit card. Like most premium consumer credit cards, it carries a high annual fee of \$450. The card comes with [United Club](#) access, which means that you can access the United Clubs any time you're flying. You don't have to be flying United to access the United Club.

In terms of additional bonuses, the United Club Card leaves a lot to be desired. You don't get any United Frequent Flyer miles for signing up for the card. The only bonus worth mentioning is a \$100 statement credit after making your first purchase on the credit card. This essentially brings the annual fee down to \$350. So you're basically buying United Club access for \$350. If you were to buy

United Club access through the United website, it would cost \$550. So you're saving \$200 by signing up for the credit card. Unless you travel often through an airport with a United Club, you probably won't get \$350 worth of value from your United Club Access.

Delta Reserve Credit Card

(I can't provide a direct link to this card so you'll need to visit our [credit cards page](#) to learn more.)

Similar to the United and American Airlines cards discussed above, the Delta Reserve Credit Card is Delta's premium consumer credit card. It also carries an annual fee of \$450, and gives you access to [Delta Sky Clubs](#) any time you fly.

Unless you're pursuing status on Delta Airlines, you probably won't get much value from the card apart from the lounge access. If you were to purchase Delta Sky Club access from their website, it would cost \$495. So by signing up for this credit card, you'd essentially be saving \$40 per year on Sky Club access. Is it worth it? Probably not unless your home airport has a Sky Club, and you fly often.

Most of the cards mentioned in this section (excluding the Platinum Card) are probably only worth signing-up for if you are a frequent flyer that needs access to a specific type of lounge in your home airport.

Ebay

This section doesn't need much explaining. However, I didn't know this method for obtaining lounge access existed until recently. Several lounges offer one time access passes. These passes are not memberships. Instead, they are passes that allow you to access the lounge one time for a set fee.

You can actually purchase one-time lounge access passes at a discounted rate from other people on Ebay. United Club Passes seem to be the ones that pop up most on Ebay. This is because each year card holders of the Chase Milage Plus Explorer card receive two free lounge passes. So when people don't plan to use them, or when they decide they'd rather have cash than lounge access, they put them up for sale on Ebay.

United Club lounges aren't available at every airport, so make sure your itinerary includes an airport with a United Club before buying a pass. You can see a list of all of the United Clubs on [this page](#).

Even though United Club Passes are the most popular, I've also seen Admirals Club Lounge passes, Korean Air Lounge Passes, and Air Canada Lounge Passes.

I don't want to see you get scammed on Ebay. So before purchasing a pass, make sure you can see the expiration date on the lounge pass in the pictures, and make sure the seller has good ratings.

The Beggar Strategy

One of the principles I live my life by is, "It never hurts to ask." In 99% of cases, the worst someone can say is, "No."

Kara and I spend a lot of time in lounges, and I have seen many people attempt the beggar strategy. However, almost everyone goes about it the wrong way.

The Wrong Way:

Do not beg the lounge attendant for entry into the lounge. It's their job to be the gate keeper. As the gate keeper, they have a responsibility to their company to only let people in who are carrying valid forms of entry. By begging the lounge attendant, you are essentially asking them not to do their job. From past experience, I've learned that most lounge attendants are good at their job. I've seen many people beg the lounge attendant for free entry, and I've yet to see anyone succeed.

The Right Way:

In the previous sections of this guide, we discussed multiple forms of lounge access. In most cases the person with lounge access can bring in at least one guest free of charge. So instead of begging the lounge attendant for free access, you can stand outside of the lounge and ask people entering the lounge if they would mind taking you in as their guest.

Not everyone will be able to bring a guest for free, and not everyone will be comfortable bringing in a guest. However, if someone were to ask Kara and I to bring them in as a guest, we'd be more than happy to share our free lounge access with them!

So if you have a long layover, you're not terrified of rejection, and you can't access the lounge any other way, this may be a strategy worth considering. If you are going to ask someone to bring you in as a guest, it will probably help if you don't look like a complete bum. Dress nicely when you go to the airport to give yourself a better chance at successfully executing this strategy.

Lounge Buddy

Lounge Buddy is my go-to app for getting information on airport lounges for upcoming trips!

The app allows you to enter your different statuses, credit cards, and lounge passes. Then you can enter your flight route, and it will tell you which lounges you can access in the airports you'll be traveling through. It shows you which amenities are offered in each lounge, and you can see lounge reviews from other travelers. For people who have access to multiple lounges, these reviews will help you choose the best lounge for your layover!

For example, if Kara and I are flying through the Dallas airport (DFW), we can access lounges three different ways:

1. Top tier OneWorld status
2. Priority Pass Membership
3. Platinum Card from American Express

There are 21 different lounges in the Dallas Airport. Based on the three criteria listed above, we have free access to 9 of them if we're flying on a OneWorld airline such as American Airlines.

The Lounge Buddy app allows us to review the different lounges we have access to before our trip, which gives us the opportunity to choose the best lounge for our layover. In this case, the Centurion Lounge is without a doubt the nicest lounge in the Dallas airport! If we didn't have the Lounge Buddy app, we may have spent our layover in a mediocre Priority Pass lounge instead of enjoying free massages and a taco buffet in the Centurion Lounge.

In addition to providing information on lounges around the world, Lounge Buddy also allows you to purchase access to select lounges. Lounge access starts at around \$25, but the average price is closer to \$50 per visit. Paying for lounge access through Lounge Buddy isn't a very economical way to enter a lounge, but if you're desperate for access it's an option.

Which Strategy Is Right For You?

How can you decide the best lounge access strategy for your personal situation?

Now that you've learned all of the different strategies for hacking your way into airport lounges, you need to decide which strategy is best for you to pursue. You can make this decision by asking yourself the following questions.

Do you fly one airline consistently?

If you fly one airline consistently throughout the year, and your home airport has a lounge operated by that airline, you may want to consider signing up for one of the premium airline credit cards we discussed such as the:

- AAdvantage Executive Card
- United MileagePlus Club Card
- Delta Reserve Card

Which airport do you fly through most often?

If there's one airport that you fly through most often, like the one closest to your house, I recommend using Lounge Buddy to see which lounges are available in your airport of choice. Then see which one has the best reviews.

After you've established which is the best lounge in your home airport, see which of the strategies we discussed can give you access to that lounge. It could be signing up for a credit card that gives you complimentary Priority Pass membership, or it could be signing up for a premium airline credit card.

Do you travel internationally often?

If you travel internationally on a regular basis, a membership to a U.S. Airline lounge may not be as valuable. For example, while there are many Admiral Lounges (American Airline Lounges) located around the United States, there are a lot of international cities that will not have Admiral Lounges or partner lounges, so you won't be able to access any lounges in some international airports using your Admirals Lounge memberships.

On the flip side, Priority Pass members have more options internationally than they do inside the U.S.. There tends to be more Priority Pass lounges available in international airports, and they tend to be nicer than those located in the U.S.

So if you travel internationally on a regular basis, you should consider signing up for a premium credit card that offers free Priority Pass membership. If you spend more time traveling domestically, it may be better to have a membership (through a premium airline credit card) to one of the U.S. Airline's lounges such as the Delta Sky Club, the Admirals Lounge, or the United Club.

How often do you travel?

If you only fly once per year. Your best bet might be purchasing a discounted one time lounge pass from Ebay or Lounge Buddy.

Want to save \$500 on your next flight?

Don't stop at free lounge access!
Why not learn how you can save
\$500 on your next flight too.

[LEARN MORE!](#)