

Million miler perks not quite as obvious outside the US market

UNLIKE carriers in the United States, major airlines in the Asia-Pacific keep a tight lip on how generous they are with their best flyers — those who have acquired frequent-flyer miles in excess of one million.

In the US, 'million milers' — a select group of business travellers who go by another name — get perks from some airlines.

Unknown to many travellers, American, United, Delta and America West have 'quiet' programs that reward their best flyers with lifetime perks and special privileges.

All the million-mile programs are extensions of airlines' elite-level frequent-flyer programs.

According to million-milers, the primary benefits are free upgrades to business or first class seats. Other perks include bonus miles, special phone numbers for reservations and priority boarding and seating.

It's estimated that 70 per cent of more than 300,000 frequent-flyer club members worldwide live in North America.

American Airlines makes it easier than other carriers to become a million-miler. Its frequent flyers can accumulate miles with credit card purchases. Other airlines count only miles flown on paid tickets.

But in Asia-Pacific the big airlines were reluctant to reveal how generous — if at all — they are to their best flyers.

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has lifetime members of its Priority Passenger Service (PPS) Club, but declined to reveal how many and what perks they receive, if any.

Solitaire status is awarded to PPS Club members who have accumulated at least 500,000 credited flight miles on 250 flight sectors in first or business class with SIA or SilkAir. Life membership is offered to Solitaire PPS Club



members who have flown at least 1,875,000 credited flight miles or 1000 flight sectors with SIA or SilkAir in first and business class since joining the program.

Life members enjoy all the benefits given to Solitaire PPS Club members without the need to renew their membership every year.

Qantas also said it did not disclose information on the number of million-milers in its frequent flyer club.

However, the Australian flag carrier said top tier members enjoyed complimentary membership of the Qantas Club program (Platinum and Gold members), providing access to more

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Complexity and frequent changes on way

A TRAVEL management firm in the UK has warned that air fares for business travellers are set to become more complex and varied in 2005 as intense competition leads to carriers repeatedly changing their price structure.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel points out there are now three additional fare options in Europe — those from low cost carriers, dynamic fares from traditional carriers and lower fare options in long-haul business class.

The low cost carriers have forced the mainstream airlines to offer an increased number of cheaper fares in return for constraints, such as booking a week to 10 days in advance.

Carlson Wagonlit believes an even wider range of fares will be offered in 2005. "There will not only be an increase in the variety of fare type and levels this year, but there will be additional complexity," said a company spokesman.

"For example, there will be constant changes route by route, caused by increased emphasis on yield control and competition."

Another major trend predicted in 2005 is that airlines will charge different prices by country, following a change to the International Air Traffic Association rules.

Companies are now allowed to make their purchasing decisions based — among other things — on the most advantageous exchange rates.

Overall inflation of fares is expected to run at around five per cent unless there is a significant dip in jet fuel prices.