Cathay Pacific Visa Card Review

By Matt Alderton
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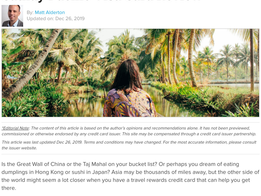

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Is the Great Wall of China or the Taj Mahal on your bucket list? Or perhaps you dream of eating dumplings in Hong Kong or sushi in Japan? Asia may be thousands of miles away, but the other side of the world might seem a lot closer when you have a travel rewards credit card that can help you get there.

One such card is the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card, issued by Synchrony Bank on behalf of Cathay Pacific Airways, a Hong Kong-based airline that serves approximately 250 destinations in 54 countries and territories, including the United States.

The Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card caters to international travelers, and it can be especially attractive to anyone who either frequents Asia or has put it at the top of their travel destination list.

In exchange for a $95 annual fee, the card offers numerous benefits, including the ability to receive Asia Miles, the airline's mileage currency. For instance, cardholders receive 2 Asia Miles per $1 spent on eligible travel and in-flight purchases with Cathay Pacific, 1.5 Asia Miles per $1 spent on purchases outside the United States, 1 Asia Mile per $1 spent on all other purchases made in the US, 4x for foreign transaction fees? There are none.

For example, if you spend a week in Hong Kong for business, flying out of Los Angeles to Hong Kong in an economy class seat will cost approximately $1,600; but you'll earn 12,640 Asia Miles just for being an Asia Miles member. If you purchase your ticket using your Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card, you'll earn another 3,200 Asia Miles. If you then charge another $5,000 to your card while in Hong Kong — on hotel, meals, transportation and sundries — you'll earn another 7,500 Asia Miles. That amounts to more than 23,000 Asia Miles for a single trip.

According to Cathay Pacific's Asia Miles award chart, which is distance-based, you'll need 60,000 miles in economy class, or 140,000 miles in business class, for a round-trip ticket between L.A. and Hong Kong. If you factor in the sign-up bonus, you'll qualify for an economy class ticket after just one trip abroad, and for a business class ticket after just four trips abroad — and for frequent international travelers, that might take less than a year.

Marco Polo Club membership. Marco Polo Club is Cathay Pacific's loyalty program. There are four tiers of membership — Green, Silver, Gold and Diamond — that offer various privileges and benefits. When you are approved for the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card, you receive complimentary Marco Polo Club membership for one year at the Green level, which affords you priority boarding and up to two pieces of free checked baggage, among other benefits. Membership typically costs $100.

Although not super valuable, these small perks can make a big difference in convenience if you're a frequent flier aboard Cathay Pacific.

Award partners. Travelers who don't frequent Cathay Pacific should have no trouble redeeming miles, as Cathay Pacific is a member of the oneworld alliance; this partnership includes American Airlines, Qantas, Finnair, Iberia, Qatar Airways, Alaska Airlines and British Airways, among others.

When you earn Asia Miles with your Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card, you can redeem them for travel with any oneworld partner. Furthermore, those who redeem Asia Miles for travel with either Cathay Pacific or other oneworld airlines typically are allowed one or more stopovers and/or open jaws, which could make it possible to plan complex itineraries that involve multiple stops, carriers and modes of transit. (An open-jaw flight is a round-trip flight that has different origin/destination pairs. For example, if you fly from New York to London, take the train from London to Paris, then fly home to New York from Paris, your round-trip flight — New York/London one way, Paris/New York the other way — is an open-jaw flight.)

One note of caution: Asia Miles passes on fuel surcharges to travelers when they book awards. Because they can be significant, depending on your destination and carrier, it's important to scrutinize such charges before redeeming your rewards.

Redemption options. Even if you're not a frequent international traveler, the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card has numerous and diverse options for redeeming travel rewards. Options include redemption offers and opportunities for travel (including hotels, rental cars, experiences), dining (restaurants), lifestyle (fashion, merchandise, restaurants) and entertainment (concerts, events). You can even donate your miles to charitable causes.

Additional benefits:

- A 10% discount on Asia Miles Gift Miles™, Mileage Renewal and Mileage Transfer Fees online
- A 10% redemption discount on hotel, car rental and experiences awards purchased through travel.asiamiles.com
- Occasional two-day priority redemption for discount flight award booking tickets online
- Visa Signature concierge
- Warranty Manager Service
- Travel and emergency assistance services
- Lost luggage reimbursement (maximum $3,000, carry-on and checked baggage)
- Trip cancellation/interruption (maximum $2,000)
- Travel accident insurance (maximum $250,000)
- Auto rental collision damage waiver
- Cardholder Inquiry Service
- Emergency card replacement
- Emergency cash disbursement
- Lost and stolen card reporting service
- Roadside dispatch

Where the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card falls short

Sign-up bonus. Through Dec. 31, 2019, the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card is offering a welcome bonus: earn 40,000 miles when you spend $3,000 in the first 90 days of opening an account. Although not insignificant, the sign-up bonus is inferior to that offered by many other competing travel cards. Both the Chase Sapphire Preferred® Card and the Citi Premier™ Card, for example, offer a more generous sign-up bonus, although you do have to spend slightly more to receive it.

Annual fee. The Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card comes with a $95 annual fee. Although that's on par with comparable travel cards, many of those cards waive the annual fee for new cardholders in the first year. The Delta SkyMiles® Gold American Express Card, for example, charges an identical $0 introductory annual fee for the first year, then $99.

Domestic rewards. With the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card, you earn just a single Asia Mile per $1 spent in the United States. If you do most of your spending domestically — as most Americans do — that's leaving a lot of rewards on the table relative to other cards.

With the Amex EveryDay® Preferred Credit Card, for example, you receive 50% extra points as long as you swipe it 30 or more times in a billing period. That's like 1.5x points on everything you spend. Plus, it earns 3x points at US supermarkets, on up to $6,000 per year in purchases (then 1x); 2x points at US gas stations; 1x points on other purchases.

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Compare it to the Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card card

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If your goal is earning rewards that you can apply toward bucket-list travel — to Asia or anywhere else in the world — the Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card could potentially be a better option.

See how the cards compare side-by-side in the table below:

	Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card	Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card
Annual fee	$95	$0 intro for first year; $95 after that
Signup bonus	Earn 40,000 miles when you spend $3,000 in the first 90 days of opening an account.	One-time bonus of 50,000 miles once you spend $3,000 on purchases within 3 months from account opening, equal to $500 in travel
Rewards	2 Asia Miles per $1 spent on eligible Cathay Pacific travel and in-flight purchases, 1.5 Asia Miles per $1 spent on dining in the US or abroad and $1 spent on purchases outside the US, and 1 Asia Mile per $1 spent on all other purchases made in the US	2 miles per dollar on every purchase, every day
Purchase APR	17.74% or 20.74% variable	17.24% - 24.49% (variable)
Foreign transaction fees	None	None

In exchange for an annual fee of $0 intro for first year; $95 after that, it offers a one-time bonus of 50,000 miles once you spend $3,000 on purchases within 3 months from account opening, equal to $500 in travel; plus an unlimited 2 miles per dollar on every purchase, every day spent on your card, regardless of where you spend it or on what.

Miles can be redeemed for travel that's booked on any site or through any service, as well as for statement credit, gift cards and even Amazon.com purchases. Or, you can transfer miles to the mileage programs of any of 15 Capital One airline partners — including Cathay Pacific's Asia Miles program.

Although neither card charges foreign transaction fees, the Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card offers a popular travel perk that the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card doesn't: up to $100 credit for Global Entry or TSA Precheck.

The bottom line

If you're an aspiring traveler who's looking for a rewards card to help you make your travel dreams come true, the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card is a poor choice compared to alternatives like the Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card. The latter provides a better welcome bonus and a more generous — not to mention simpler — rewards structure that will make accumulating and using miles both faster and easier for the average traveler.

If you're already an avid traveler, the Cathay Pacific Visa Signature® card certainly has benefits — especially if you're someone who travels abroad regularly, and prefers to do so aboard Cathay Pacific. In that case, you might enjoy the card's complimentary Marco Polo Club membership and the fact that rewards are automatically earned and accumulated in your mileage currency of choice: Asia Miles.

The information related to the Amex EveryDay® Preferred Credit Card has been independently collected by CompareCards and has not been reviewed or provided by the issuer of this card prior to publication. Terms apply to American Express credit card offers. See americanexpress.com for more information.

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