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Southwest Companion Pass Basics: How to Earn and Enjoy the Pass

By: Matt Alderton
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Do you believe that the best way to travel is with a beloved friend, partner or relative by your side? Good news – you can show your travel companion some love with a free flight — or better yet, free flights for a whole year (and perhaps even longer).

Although you might assume this is a benefit that's reserved for airline employees, here's a secret: You also can enjoy this benefit if you're a passenger on Southwest Airlines and have earned the Southwest Companion Pass, which is one of the best offers to be had for domestic travel listed on our site.

In this article:

- How does the Companion Pass work?
- How to earn the Southwest Companion Pass
- What activities don't count toward a Companion Pass?
- Which credit cards can help you earn the Companion Pass?
- How to use the Southwest Companion Pass
- How to change your companion
- Tips and reminders

If you've never heard of the Southwest Companion Pass, here's the gist: Once you earn it, you can bring a companion with you for free on all your Southwest flights for over a year. (Well, almost free: You still have to pay taxes, fees and "other government or airport-imposed charges," which adds up to a little over $5 for one-way, domestic flights.)

You earn this coveted benefit by accumulating Southwest Rapid Rewards® Companion Pass Qualifying Points, which can be accrued by flying, spending money with a qualifying credit card and more ways that are discussed below.

How does the Companion Pass work?

The Southwest Companion Pass can be a great value for anyone who's interested in domestic travel, or travel to the international destinations that Southwest serves in Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America.

As mentioned above, the Southwest Companion Pass allows the passholder to designate a companion who can fly with the passholder on the same flight for only the cost of taxes. This applies to both paid flights and award flights booked with Southwest.

There are a few reasons why this is one of the best offers available on our site if you typically fly with a companion:

- **You can use the pass as many times as you want for the entire time the pass is valid.** If you wanted to fly somewhere new every single week or weekend, that is allowed! It is a great way to see a lot of the United States and a few international destinations for about half of what it would otherwise cost.
- **The pass can be valid for up to two years.** When you earn the pass, it's yours to use for the remainder of the current calendar year and the entire following calendar year. If you earn the pass in March, that means the pass is good from March until December of the current year, and remains good from January through December of the next year — a total of 22 months. If you earn the pass in December, however, it is only good for December of the current year and January through December of the next year — a total of 13 months. For this reason, it is best to earn the pass as close to the beginning of the year as possible so that you can enjoy it for almost two years.
- **You can change your designated companion up to three times per calendar year.** If you don't travel with the same person all the time, this gives you the ability to bring a couple of different people along as your companion over the course of the time you have the pass. Each time you change the name of your designated companion, it counts toward your allowance of three changes, even if you revert back to someone you already had as a companion earlier in the year.
- **The pass works for both paid and award tickets.** With the Southwest Companion Pass, as long as there is a seat available for the flight, you are able to book it for your companion. It doesn't matter if the availability is in the same fare class, it doesn't matter what type of fare you originally booked, and it doesn't matter if you booked the ticket with cash or with points.

How to earn the Southwest Companion Pass

To earn the Southwest Companion Pass, you must earn 125,000 Qualifying Points or fly 100 one-way qualifying flights within one calendar year.

Although this sounds difficult, you might be surprised as to what counts toward the qualifying points, and the many ways you can earn them without flying.We have a full rundown of all the points that count (and don't count) toward Companion Pass status here, but here are some of the more useful ways to accrue points:

Top Airline Cards from Our Partners

American Airlines AAdvantage MileUp℠ Card
★★★½☆ (51)
Apply Now
on Citibank's secure site

Avianca Vida Visa® Card
★★★★☆ (0)
Apply Now
on Avianca LifeMiles's secure site

Capital One® Venture® Rewards Credit Card
★★★★½ (575)
Apply Now
on Capital One's secure site

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Best Balance Transfer Cards
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Best Cards for Excellent Credit
Best Small Business Credit Cards
Best Travel Credit Cards
Best Student Credit Cards
Best Gas Rewards Cards
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Best Secured Credit Cards
Best Airline Credit Cards
Best Rewards Credit Cards
Best Credit Card Sign-Up Bonuses
Best Grocery Credit Cards
Best Credit Cards With No Annual Fee

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1. Sign up for a Rapid Rewards credit card

Perhaps the easiest way to amass a lot of points quickly is to apply for one — or two — Rapid Rewards credit cards. For more information about what cards are available, see the list below. Long story short, however: When you sign up for a consumer Rapid Rewards credit card, you receive bonus points when you spend a required minimum amount on the card within a specific time frame, which is typically three months of opening your account. If you sign up for a consumer card and a business card, for example, you may have your 125,000 Qualifying Points as soon as you meet the minimum spending requirements. And if you just get one card? You'll still be well on your way to earning a Companion Pass.

2. Shop using the Rapid Rewards Shopping Portal

Any points earned through the Rapid Rewards Shopping Portal are Qualifying Points for the Southwest Companion Pass. Depending on the store, you may see offers for one to five Rapid Rewards Point per dollar spent — and sometimes even more.

At a rate of 1 point per dollar, you would need to spend $125,000 through the Rapid Rewards portal to earn the Southwest Companion Pass. This is probably not going to be reasonable for most people unless you have a lot of business/personal spending for which you are reimbursed. Even at a rate of 5 points per dollar spent, you would need to spend $25,000 through the portal to get the Companion Pass, which is still a stretch for most people. Therefore, earning Qualifying Points through the shopping portal typically is best for topping off the remaining points you need to get the Companion Pass.

> *Read Southwest Rapid Rewards Guide: Great Ways to Use and Earn Points*

3. Fly Southwest

Although this is definitely the toughest and most expensive way to acquire it, most people earn their Companion Pass by engaging in at least some regular travel.

If you always buy Wanna Get Away fares (Southwest's least expensive fares), you will earn six Qualifying Points per dollar spent. If this is the only method you use to earn Southwest Points, it will cost you about $20,833 to earn the Southwest Companion Pass.

If you always buy Business Select fares (the most expensive), you will earn 12 Qualifying Points per dollar spent, and it would cost you about $10,400 to earn the Southwest Companion Pass. All segments would need to be flown within one calendar year in order to qualify for the Companion Pass.

You can also fly 100 segments — again, all in one year — on Southwest to qualify for the Companion Pass.

4. Book qualifying hotel stays and car rentals

When you travel, you can maximize your points by not only by flying Southwest and purchasing a Business Select fare, but also by staying at hotels and renting cars from Southwest partners.

What activities don't count toward a Companion Pass?

It might sound like any points that post to your Southwest account will be Qualifying Points for the Southwest Companion Pass, but that isn't the case. For example, Southwest allows you to transfer points from its partners' rewards programs into your Rapid Rewards account — but it does not let you apply those transferred points toward earning a Companion Pass. Approved partners, for example, include Marriott International, which allows you to transfer Marriott Bonvoy rewards points to Southwest, and Chase, which allows you to transfer Chase Ultimate Rewards® earned from a Chase Sapphire Preferred® Card. Although points from both programs can be transferred to Southwest, they do not count as Qualifying Points for the Companion Pass.

There are also a few other rules governing what points do and don't count towards qualifying for a Companion Pass, which you can read about here.

SAPPHIRE
PREFERRED
D. BARRETT
VISA
Signature

Chase Sapphire Preferred® Card

★★★★☆ (289)

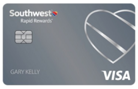
Apply Now

Expand Details +

Which credit cards can help you earn the Companion Pass?

As stated above, you can earn Rapid Rewards points toward a Companion Pass by making purchases with a Southwest Rapid Rewards credit card. There are five cards to choose from:

Southwest Rapid Rewards® Plus Credit Card



Southwest Rapid Rewards® Plus Credit Card

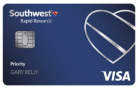
★★★★☆ (0)

Apply Now

Expand Details +

Earn 40,000 points after you spend $1,000 on purchases in the first 3 months your account is open. Cardmembers earn 2 points per $1 spent on Southwest® purchases and Rapid Rewards® hotel and car rental partner purchases. 1 point per $1 spent on all other purchases. Additionally, cardmembers get 3,000 bonus points on their cardmember anniversary. The annual fee is $69.

Southwest Rapid Rewards® Priority Credit Card



Southwest Rapid Rewards® Priority Credit Card

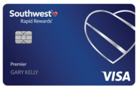
★★★★☆ (2)

Apply Now

Expand Details +

Earn 40,000 points after you spend $1,000 on purchases in the first 3 months your account is open. Cardmembers earn 2 points per $1 spent on Southwest® purchases and Rapid Rewards® hotel and car rental partner purchases. 1 point per $1 spent on all other purchases. Additionally, cardmembers get 7,500 bonus points on their cardmember anniversary, four upgraded boardings per year, a $75 Southwest annual travel credit, 20% cash back on all in-flight purchases, $0 foreign transaction fees and 1,500 Tier Qualifying Points per $10,000 in purchases toward A-List and A-List Preferred status. The annual fee is $149.

Southwest Rapid Rewards® Premier Credit Card



Southwest Rapid Rewards® Premier Credit Card

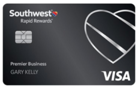
★★★★½ (0)

Apply Now

Expand Details +

Earn 40,000 points after you spend $1,000 on purchases in the first 3 months your account is open. Additionally, cardmembers earn 2 points per $1 spent on Southwest® purchases and Rapid Rewards® hotel and car rental partner purchases. 1 point per $1 spent on all other purchases. Also, 6,000 bonus points are awarded every year on their cardmember anniversary, $0 foreign transaction fees and 1,500 Tier Qualifying Points per $10,000 in purchases toward A-List and A-List Preferred status. The annual fee is $99.

Southwest Rapid Rewards® Premier Business Credit Card



Southwest Rapid Rewards® Premier Business Credit Card

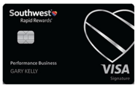
★★★★½ (1)

Apply Now

Expand Details +

Earn 60,000 points after you spend $3,000 on purchases in the first 3 months your account is open. Cardmembers also earn 2 points per $1 spent on Southwest® purchases Additionally, cardmembers get 6,000 bonus points on their cardmember anniversary, and 1,500 Tier Qualifying Points per $10,000 in purchases toward A-List and A-List Preferred status, $0 foreign transaction fees. The annual fee is $99.

Southwest Rapid Rewards® Performance Business Credit Card



Southwest Rapid Rewards® Performance Business Credit Card

★★★★☆ (0)

Apply Now

Expand Details +

Earn 70,000 points after you spend $5,000 on purchases in the first 3 months. Plus, earn an additional 30,000 points after you spend $25,000 on purchases in the first 6 months. Cardmembers also earn 3 points per $1 spent on Southwest® purchases. 2 points per $1 spent on social media and search engine advertising, Internet, cable and phone services. 1 point per $1 spent on all other purchases.. Additionally, cardmembers get 9,000 bonus points on their cardmember anniversary, Global Entry or TSA Precheck application fee credit, four upgraded boardings per year, in-flight Wi-Fi credits, no foreign transaction fees and 1,500 Tier Qualifying Points per $10,000 in purchases toward A-List and A-List Preferred status. The annual fee is $199.

How to use the Southwest Companion Pass

Once you have the Southwest Companion Pass, it's time to put it to use! The first step is to book a flight as you normally would. Once you have booked your itinerary, visit the "My Trips" section of your Rapid Rewards account. Find your flight in the "Upcoming" section and click on "Add Companion." Click "Continue" to review your companion's information, then "Purchase" to complete your companion's reservation. You also can book through a customer service agent by calling 1-800-248-4377 and notifying the customer service representative that you're booking a Companion Pass ticket.

To make sure that your companion is added correctly, return to your reservations, where you should see two different confirmation numbers: one for you and one for your companion. You should also receive an email with confirmation of the purchase for the companion ticket.

How to change your companion

You can change your companion up to three times per calendar year when you hold the pass. The easiest way to change your companion is to do it online: In your Rapid Rewards account, click the "Snapshot" tab, locate "Choose Your Companion," click "Enter Companion Info" and then follow the instructions. You also call Southwest customer service at 1-800-435-9792 to have your companion changed. Your new companion will be effective immediately, and a new Companion Pass will be sent out in the mail.

Tips and reminders

1. **You can book any seat that is for sale** — it doesn't just have to be the cheapest "Wanna Get Away" fares.
2. **The Companion Pass can be used for both flights booked with cash and flights booked with points.**
3. **You can add your companion any time**; you don't have to do it immediately after booking the flight. And the fare you originally bought doesn't have to be available — there just has to be an extra seat available on the flight, which makes for great flexibility.
4. **There's no fee to cancel or change.** You can remove your companion any time for free, and you can change or refund your tickets any time with no fees.
5. **You and your companion must check in separately,** as you have two different confirmation numbers.

Once you fulfill the qualifying requirements, the Southwest Companion Pass is an easy, rewarding way to bring a friend along for (almost!) free on all your Southwest flights.

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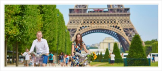

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