

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Marriott, Ritz-Carlton, Starwood to merge loyalty programs

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SPG, Marriott Rewards and The Ritz-Carlton Rewards are merging. Image credit: St. Regis

By STAFF REPORTS

Marriott International is bringing together Marriott Rewards, The Ritz-Carlton Rewards and Starwood Preferred Guest into one unified loyalty program with standardized benefits.

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Following Marriott's acquisition of Starwood Hotels & Resorts in 2016, the company had allowed SPG members to merge their points, but to-date SPG has remained an independent program ([see story](#)). As of August, the hospitality company is rolling out a new fully combined program with a single format for earning and using points.

Reward revamp

Starting in August, members will be able to combine their profiles with Marriott Rewards, Ritz-Carlton Rewards and SPG into a single account. Until Marriott announces a new name for its unified loyalty program next year, it will continue to use all existing titles.

Marriott says that under the new loyalty program, guests will earn 10 points per dollar spent, a 20 percent increase. However, following Marriott's announcement, some on social media voiced their frustration with what they saw as a devaluation of their loyalty points, noting that they preferred the existing SPG and Marriott systems to the update.

Translating SPG's system into the new point currency, Marriott will triple existing SPG members' points in August.

Marriott is also speeding up the process by which customers can achieve elite status and the elevated benefits that come with it. In the tiered program, guests earn Silver elite status after 10 nights, for instance, in line with SPG's existing program.

Platinum Premier members who stay for 100 nights with a spend of \$20,000 will become part of an ambassador program.



Marriott's merger with Starwood turned it into the largest hotel group. Image credit: Marriott

Those who have achieved Lifetime status as a frequent guest will keep their standing in the new merged program.

Platinum and Premier members will be able to take advantage of free breakfast at 23 hotel brands, an expansion on the existing offering.

Consumers who are enrolled will be able to accrue points across all of its 29 brands, which include the St. Regis and the Ritz-Carlton. The company will also allow guests to book any hotel within Marriott from Marriott and SPG's Web sites and mobile applications.

Marriott is also upping the digital and mobile experience for guests, giving members who book online free WiFi. Guests will also be able to check in or out on their phones, chat with the hotels and use their phone as a room key where available.

Along with the updated loyalty programs, Marriott is launching new versions of its branded credit cards with JP Morgan Chase and American Express.

Taking into account the experiential focus of today's travelers, Marriott is expanding its Moments offerings. In addition to 8,000 experiences that can only be booked with loyalty points, the company will launch 110,000 offers that can be purchased with cash.

These include packages around events such as the Super Bowl or Coachella, or meet and greets with celebrities or sports stars. Marriott is also teaming with Universal Music Group for a new "Moments Live" program of musical and culinary events.

"We listened to the travel aspirations of our members and set our sights on unlocking the full potential of our loyalty programs," said David Flueck, senior vice president of global loyalty at Marriott International, in a statement. "We are excited to announce that this August, our members can enjoy one set of benefits across our extraordinary portfolio of hotels from iconic full and select service, to extended stay, to unique boutiques and luxury brands.

"We hope to inspire our members whatever their travel passion, whether it is resorts featuring overwater bungalows, peaceful secluded island settings, ski-in/ski-out mountain resorts, towering hotels with picture-worthy views or even former palaces converted into hotels."

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