



Southwest usually has the best prices for any flight to one of its destinations. However, through the years, whenever we flew SW, the price would inch up a bit from the last trip. In the early 1990s, whenever I flew from Tucson to Los Angeles, the round trip price was \$60 plus about another \$10 in taxes. Last month I flew from Tucson to Los Angeles, and the round trip was \$250, with another \$50 for all the add-ons.

Other than the much lower price, did we find flying Virgin America as pleasant an experience as going with our old buddy, Southwest? Well, all I can say is that we left San Diego and got to San Francisco ... eventually. Because of some glitch or the need to sober up the pilot, the flight was more than two hours late in taking off. What should have been a 90-minute experience became a 200-minute drag.

We've been on delayed Southwest flights, too, and with the same cramped seats, the inside heat, the experience wasn't too pleasant. However, SW cabin crews are always super-helpful, pleasant, and even in the most stressful occasions, very funny stand-up comedians. On our Virgin flight, all the members of the cabin crew were uniformly grumpy and totally unhelpful.

Because the Virgin engines were running, but not the air conditioning, we weren't allowed to use our cell phones during the two-hour delay. A young mother in a row near me asked one of the flight attendants if she could call her husband informing him that we'd be at least two hours late arriving in San Francisco, the answer was an angry recitation, "FAA regulations forbids the use of cell phones at this time, because they could interfere with the pilot's communications with the tower".

What communications? We were just sitting there for two hours while some mechanical glitch was being welded or glued together. Couldn't the attendant just go forward and ask the pilot that

simple question? In fact, because of the growing resentment among the passengers, the cabin crew actually totally disappeared for the final, sweaty hour on the tarmac. I guess the grumps didn't want to be hanged by their flotation devices.

I won't say I'll never fly Virgin Atlantic again. The price was great, we got to our destination safe and sound, and the return trip was on time and uneventful. I'm sure the two-hour outward-bound delay was unavoidable, and not the usual condition. And, when schedules are going right, maybe the grumpy crew members are actually friendly to the passengers. I sent a complaint note to Virgin, and I'm sure many other people on that delayed flight did the same. Here's just a suggestion, but maybe Virgin America can simply send its crew members on some Southwest flights for lessons in smiling, courtesy and consideration.