



Guest Senior Traveler Paul McD, Atlanta GA: I had a recent unusual standby experience. Scheduled a 3:45 pm return flight out of Los Angeles, but my business there was completed early, and I arrived at LAX at 11 am. I rushed to the gate clerk and asked if I could catch the just-boarding 11:30 flight.

He said all the seats were full, but put me on standby. I watched passengers load up and there were no standby seats. I ate lunch, did some Smartphone work, and then went to the gate where the next flight was scheduled for 1:30 pm. The clerk there said she'd put me on standby, and if I got a seat, there was an extra charge of \$42 to change my ticket. I reluctantly agreed as he put the charge on my credit card. As passengers boarded, the clerk made a loudspeaker request that anyone who'd agree to be bumped from that flight would get a \$200 voucher.

I complained it made no sense to charge me \$42 to be a standby when he offered \$200 per volunteer bump. If she'd put me on the flight, I said I'd volunteer to be bumped, giving me a net profit of \$158.

That flight was late leaving, and didn't actually get off the ground (without me) until after 3 pm. By that time, I was already at the gate where my originally-scheduled 3:30 flight was about to load passengers, including me. The flight left on time and we reached our destination city 20 minutes early.

Airlines are tightening up stand-by and volunteer bump rules in these days of ever rising prices, and it may be tougher to do it. In another incident, I was flying cross country. As I waited for my flight, the squawk box asked for volunteers to be bumped, and the bribe was \$250 in flight vouchers, plus a promise to be on the next available non-stop.

Just about five minutes later, the clerk said he had booked me in an unsold first-class seat on a rival airline's flight just loading up. I had a luxurious four hours with big, comfy seat, wine and delicious steak dinner. I actually arrived nearly an hour before my original flight got there, and I was \$250 richer.

Over the years, I've agreed to be bumped at least a half dozen times, and usually with savings,

either in cash or airline vouchers. I only do it when getting a later flight promises to add only another hour or two to my schedule.

Savvy senior passengers volunteer to be bumped from red-eye (late night) flights. In addition to cash, they may get free rooms in near-airport hotels and breakfast, before flying to their destinations the next morning. Much better than spending the night on a lumpy bench in the passenger waiting area.

If you're interested in standby strategies, check with airlines you frequently use. Ask about current standby rules, and if required, put your name on the list of willing standby candidates.