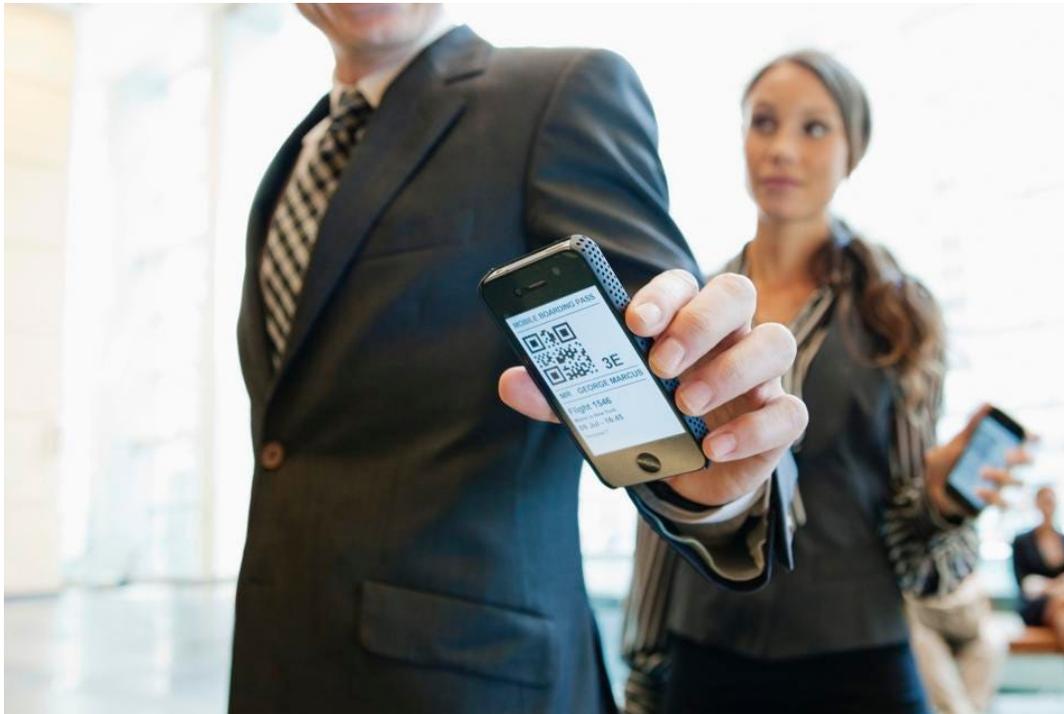


Insider Tips For Using Or Extending Your Airline Ticket Credit

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The government wants airlines to eliminate airline ticket expiration dates. Here's how to get yours extended now. GETTY

Here's some good news for anyone holding an airline ticket credit: The government wants to eliminate expiration dates on flight credits — under certain circumstances. And at least one airline has already done so.

The Department of Transportation this week [announced a rulemaking](#) that would make ticket credits valid "indefinitely." But the proposed regulation would only apply to flights canceled for

pandemic-related reasons, such as government-mandated bans on travel, closed borders, or passengers advised not to travel to protect their health or the health of other passengers.

Southwest Airlines went even further. A few days before the announcement, it said [its ticket credits would never expire](#), no matter the reason for the cancellation.

But until all ticket credits last indefinitely — and for passengers, that day can't come soon enough — how do you make the most of your expiring ticket credits and vouchers?

The rules vary among air carriers, say experts.

"Every airline has different guidelines for flight credits," says Ana Gloria Garcia, a senior air manager for [Embark Beyond](#). "Overall, when an airline issues a credit to the passenger, you have up to a year to utilize the credit, starting from the date that the ticket was issued."

I have details in my [complete guide to using your flight credit](#). But in light of recent developments, how do you know if your credits are about to expire? What should you do in that case? And what are some of the strategies you can use to extend the validity of their ticket credits?

It turns out there's a lot more to using a ticket credit than just booking a new flight.

Track your ticket credits closely

Since most ticket credits expire — some within as little as three months — you'll need to track them. "Make sure you know how many ticket credits you have and where they are from," advises Matt James, publisher of the travel site [Visitingly.com](#). "Check the

expiration date on your flight credits. Some airlines require you to use your flight credits within a certain time frame." Also, he recommends using your ticket credits as soon as possible. "The sooner you use them, the less likely you are to lose them," he says.

Ask for a ticket credit extension — and you shall receive

"One of the best ways to extend a flight credit is to simply ask," says Narendra Khatri, principal of [Insubuy](#), a [travel insurance company](#). He says this is one of the times when calling the airline is a good idea. "You'll probably be more successful getting a definitive answer by calling the airline directly than through email or Twitter, but try to call during off hours to reduce your wait time a bit." If you call, make sure you record the conversation or get a confirmation email confirming the extended expiration date before you hang up.

Be flexible when you use ticket credits

Book a flexible fare — not a "basic" economy class ticket — so that you can cancel if necessary and receive a new flight credit. "Then repeat the process and buy another ticket within the flight credit validity period," says Vibha Dhawan, a travel advisor with OvationNetwork. "You can repeat this process until you're ready to use the credit to fly somewhere."

Pro tip: Some airlines were more generous at the start of the pandemic with expiration dates. So make sure they don't reset your new expiration to an earlier date.

Book a ticket you'll never use

Many airlines automatically extended their ticket credits during the pandemic. For example, Delta Air Lines flight vouchers originally expiring in 2022 will now expire in December 2023. You can

extend any JetBlue flight to September 30 [by applying for an extension through its site](#). But if you need more time, book a ticket you'll never use, says [personal finance podcaster](#) Julia Menez. Aim for a busy time like Labor Day or Thanksgiving. "That way, if your flight time gets shifted, it's considered an involuntary schedule change," she says. You'll get a full refund.

Use your ticket credit to upgrade your travel experience

If you can't book a flight, try using your ticket credits for an upgrade, says Sara Raudenbush, a business consultant and frequent air traveler. "Often on travel within the U.S., first class is not even worth paying for — even for long-haul flights," she says. "But for transatlantic flights where you may be getting flights on partner airlines, the first class or business class accommodations are nicer than what we typically see even with the lie-flat beds." It's sometimes possible to use ticket credits to pay for an upgrade. But the upgrades are usually not available until a few weeks before departure, so timing is important.

Negotiate a ticket credit

Airlines know it's just a matter of time before all ticket credits never expire. They're trying to hold on to the last dollar from a scheme that has gone on for too long. That's something to remember when you negotiate. And sometimes, you have no choice but to negotiate.

Ryan Dame's ticket credits from 2019 had expired long ago when he asked his airline if he could revive the \$630 credit. "It was a long shot," says Dame, the co-owner of [Casago](#), a vacation rental company. "I sent them an email with the details about the cancellation and how we were not comfortable flying during Covid. They sent a response email back within two days and confirmed

that we would be allowed to use the unused \$630 credit. It was an untypical and very positive airline experience."

Your ticket credit expiration date is just a number

Some airlines have acknowledged that vouchers shouldn't — and won't — expire. Consider what happened to Barbara Glavish, a retired occupational therapist from Incline Village, Nev. She was scheduled to fly to Sydney in 2020. "Air New Zealand gave me a credit which would expire in June 2021," she recalls. "Then they extended it to June 2022." She asked for another extension, and when she didn't hear back, she contacted [an executive at Air New Zealand](#). "I received a prompt and friendly reply extending my credit to June 2023 and suggesting I contact them again if I needed an even later date, and they'd try to oblige," she says. "Can't ask for more than that."

Even if you have all of these insider tips for using and extending an airline ticket credit, it's still possible that one of your vouchers will expire. My final piece of advice is this: Don't let them go. The airline industry received \$81 billion in government bailout money during the pandemic. Even though it has a policy that your money expires, that doesn't make it right.

But you have to fight for your ticket credit. That may mean appealing your case to an executive, as Glavish did. Or you might have to [complain to the Department of Transportation](#).

But the bottom line is, it's your money. Your airline has no business keeping it.



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