

Super-size Me: Why Everyone Gets Upgraded but You - By Daniel Edward Craig

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Upgrades are less frequent these days now that hotels have implemented sophisticated revenue management practices, but they're still common. They tend to occur when a hotel is sold out because hotels often oversell lower-rated inventory and must upgrade in order to fill all rooms. If you travel frequently and never get upgraded, you might want to take a good hard look at your travel habits.

Why everyone else gets upgraded:

1. They pay a high rate. The higher your rate, the better your chances of being extended special favours. That's why government employees fall at the bottom of the pecking order when it comes to upgrades. If you want to be bumped up to the presidential suite, your odds will increase if you book the next highest category.
2. They book direct. Third-party websites like Expedia skim up to 30% off your rate, which makes you a low-rated guest in the eyes of the hotel no matter how much you shelled out. If you book direct, the hotel gets the full rate, which bumps you up in the upgrade hierarchy.
3. They're loyal. Even if your hotel doesn't have a loyalty program, it likely tracks stays. As a frequent guest you should get priority when upgrades are available.
4. They asked nicely. As a hotelier I'm loath to advise travelers to request something for nothing, but if you really want an upgrade the most direct approach is to ask. If you're shy, ask the agent what she recommends for a nice room or good view. Front desk staff are more powerful than you think. If you ever get a lousy room, think about how you behaved at check-in. If your request is declined, be gracious and don't take it personally. Hotels want you to be happy, but they're a business.
5. They have a good reason. If you're celebrating a special occasion, tell the reservations agent. But don't expect her to upgrade you, she's trained to squeeze every possible dollar out of you. Ask her to note the occasion in your reservation and be specific about the type of room you want. The front desk reviews special requests on the day of arrival and tends to have a soft spot for special occasions. Whatever you do, don't lie. You might get an upgrade, but you'll go to hell.
6. They arrive late. In a full-house situation hotels often wait until late in the day to upgrade because they can save costs if there are no-shows and the suites go unoccupied. It's the after-midnight arrivals who often get the penthouse suite. Of course, this only happens when you're alone, are exhausted, and have a 6:00 AM flight the following morning.
7. They're important. And by this I don't mean self-important. The sad reality is the people who can most afford to pay for a suite are the most likely to get upgraded because hotels want to impress them.
8. They had a legitimate complaint. Speak up if you're not happy with your room or have been mistreated. But don't complain for the sole purpose of getting an upgrade-the hotel will be reluctant to give it to you.

Why you don't get upgraded:

1. You're obnoxious. Did you demand an upgrade rather than ask nicely? Did you drop the owner's name-and mispronounce it? Were you wearing sunglasses?
2. You slipped the bellman a \$20. One article I came across makes this ludicrous suggestion. First of all, you tipped the wrong person. Bellmen have no control over hotel inventory. But don't tip the front desk either. That's not tipping, it's bribery. You're asking the employee to do something that could get her in trouble.
3. You're obsequious. Another article recommends informing the desk agent you'll write a note to management about how helpful he was if he upgrades you. This is as unsavory as slipping him a \$20 and will likely produce the same result. If you're happy with his service, write the letter, but don't use it as a bribing tool.
4. You're staying too long. One- and two-nighters have a better chance of getting upgraded because they tie the suite up for less time. If you're staying longer, being willing to take a suite for a night or two and then switching back might help your chances.
5. You're cheap. Many hotels give upsell incentives to front desk staff, so don't be surprised if you inquire about a better room and get a sales pitch. The differential can cost far less than through reservations. It's not an upgrade, but it's still a great deal. If you can't afford it, politely decline. You might get bumped up anyway.
6. You called the general manager. Several 'travel gurus' recommend this tactic. As a former GM I assure you it's no way to ingratiate yourself. GMs love hearing from guests, but not if they're angling for a free upgrade.
7. Your profile is flagged 'do not upgrade'. Guest profiles record more than your favourite colour of M&Ms, they also record bad behavior, like when you wiggled out when you didn't get an upgrade on your last stay. If you're abusive, rest assured your profile will be permanently red-flagged.

8. You arrived with a trunk-load of booze and a four-piece band. Hotels covet their suites and will not upgrade if they think you won't respect the space. In the past I've upgraded people and they've held a raucous party in the suite. Not cool.

If you are lucky enough to get upgraded, don't forget to acknowledge the people who made it happen. If you do all the right things and still never get upgraded, don't get all paranoid, sometimes it's just the luck of the draw. And remember, the only surefire way of getting that suite or heart-shaped vibrating bed is to cough up.

About The Author

Daniel Edward Craig is a hotel consultant and author of *Murder at the Universe* and *Murder at Hotel Cinema*, mystery novels set luxury hotels. His blog provides a frank and entertaining look at issues in the hotel industry at www.danieledwardcraig.com.

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