

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



WINDSTAR CRUISES

A Windstar cruise ship

Can Windstar Cruises keep my \$17,000 airfare after I canceled?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. My husband and I booked business-class airfare for our Windstar cruise in New Zealand through the cruise line. There was no mention of the tickets being nonrefundable until we received the confirmation. We had to cancel the cruise, and we tried to get a ticket refund.

Windstar claims it booked the tickets through a third party called Global Marine Travel and that they are nonrefundable. I called American Airlines, which confirmed that it sent a refund to Global Marine Travel. It looks like Windstar Cruises is keeping our \$17,000 airfare. Can you help us get a refund?

P. McMURTRY, *Indio, Calif.*

A. Windstar should have disclosed that your airline tickets were nonrefundable. And if the airline refunded your tickets, it should have at least considered passing that refund along to you.

I reviewed the correspondence between you and Windstar. I could not find any disclosure of the non-refundability in its e-mails to you. Since business-class tickets are often refundable, you had every reason to believe you might get a refund — or, at least, a full ticket credit.

In an e-mail sent to you, Windstar pointed out that according to its terms, air travel is nonrefundable once purchased, no matter what your ticket says. So that means even if American refunds Windstar's travel agency, it gets to keep the money.

Windstar should have disclosed that your airline tickets were nonrefundable.

I've dealt with these double-jeopardy refund cases before, and I have a problem with any company imposing new rules on a purchase. But that's not why I took your case. I took it because I could not find any disclosure of Windstar's refund rules on their website (www.windstarcruises.com/terms-conditions).

You tried to resolve this yourself by filing a dispute on your credit card (more information on how to do so at www.elliott.org/ultimate-consumer-guides-smart-travelers/the-complete-guide-to-chargebacks-and-winning-a-credit-card-dispute). A chargeback is your last line of defense against a fraudulent purchase. You might have contacted one of the executives at Windstar Cruises (found at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/windstar-cruises) to plead your case before trying a credit card dispute.

Mostly, I was curious about Windstar's disclosure. The paper trail between you and the cruise line did not spell out the airfare refund rules. I contacted Windstar to see if I had missed something. In response, the cruise line refunded your \$17,000 airline tickets.

Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy (elliottadvocacy.org), a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. E-mail him at chris@elliott.org or get help by contacting him at elliottadvocacy.org/help.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Akaash Singh

is on Team Travel Agent, hopes to travel with his mom, and would like to flush his phone but can't

Akaash Singh loves India, but said he is itching to go to the Maldives on his next trip abroad. The Indian-American stand-up comedian, actor, and podcaster — who cohosts the popular “Flagrant” podcast with Andrew Schulz (on YouTube with more than 1 million subscribers) — is bringing his edgy comedy show to the Wilbur on Jan. 14. “I can't wait to get to Boston. I love the city — outside of the weather,” said the 38-year-old Dallas native in a phone call from Punta Mita, Mexico, where he was vacationing with his wife, Jasleen. While admitting that he pushes the envelope on the joke front, he does so unapologetically. “I think there are fewer and fewer comedians who are willing to make laughter out of things that are otherwise uncomfortable. I am not disrespectful, but I like to laugh at things that people are not supposed to laugh at in society. People are able to do that at my show.” We caught up with Singh, who lives in New York City with his wife, who is working toward her master's degree in business journalism, and their 5-year-old Maltipoo, Happy, to talk about all things travel.

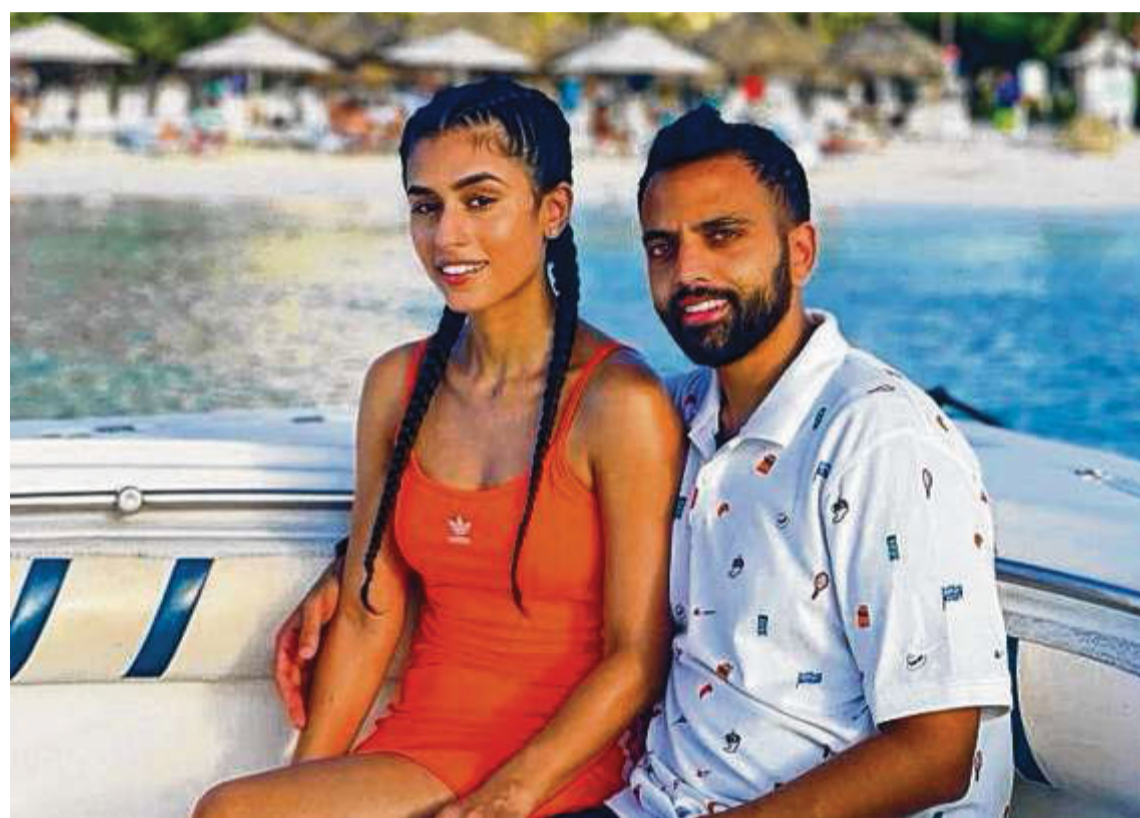
If you could travel anywhere right now, and money was no object, where would it be? It would be a two-leg trip: first would be to India. I love Bangalore and Mumbai and also think Chandigarh is amazing, but would also love to see Kerala in the south. I've heard it's amazing. Wherever we go, afterward I would stop by the Maldives before going back to America. I've heard it's amazing and as much as I love India, it's exhausting.

Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted? I gave quite a few people COVID on Thanksgiving 2020 — apologies again to Colin Quinn — the silver lining in that awful cloud, though, was we were immune before the vaccine. So our entire podcast — to whom I also gave it — headed down to Miami during lockdown. And after nine months of being locked down, seeing other people and escaping the constant cloud of COVID was one of the happiest times of my life.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? I always booked on my own, but now I got a great Indian travel agent named Sudeep Shah. If you travel a lot, especially for work, it's very worth it. I had to miss two shows in Tampa in March because I had multiple flights canceled. Ever since then, I've been Team Travel Agent.

Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation? I wish I could live an unplugged life. One of my life goals is to continue climbing in my career, eventually reaching a point where I no longer need my phone for work. I would give my iPhone to someone in need or do us both a favor and flush it down the toilet.

Do you use all of your vacation time, or leave some on the table? When you work for yourself, you



Akaash and his wife, Jasleen, in Aruba in December 2020.

typically work seven days a week. However, when there are a couple of days/weeks when things shut down — typically the last two weeks of the year — we take it.

What has been your worst vacation experience? For our one-year anniversary, I took a quick trip to Chicago with my wife. But health issues got in the way and she couldn't do anything — at all. It was brutal for her, and seeing her go through it wasn't great either. Our anniversary dinner was my wife lying in bed and me eating room service alone, watching TV on my phone so I wouldn't wake her up.

Do you prefer vacationing to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? It depends on how busy I've been. If super busy, I don't want to do anything. If not, let's see the world.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? On my way to Mexico now and taking the book “Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.” I barely read now because of this stupid phone though, so hopefully I can make a dent in it.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Forget celebrities. I just want to convince my mom to take a trip.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? It depends on where you're going. To France: a pocket translator.

To India: toilet paper.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? If I'm trying to be healthy, protein chips or turkey jerky. If I'm being a real human being, anything else.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? I used to buy mugs and magnets. Now I think souvenirs are fairly stupid. My house [has] got enough crap I don't need. Why collect even cheaper crap that I need even less?

What is your favorite app/website for travel? Hotwire hot deals. But if I can't get a hot deal, it's all the same.

What has travel taught you? Go! Go everywhere. Live in different places. Experience every culture you can. The world is so much bigger than you think. See it all.

What is your best travel tip? I went to India in 2019 with my wife for our engagement and it was amazing. Also, the first time I went to Europe I saw Rome. And I remember when I saw the Colosseum — this thing I learned about in school but never cared about — I realized why people travel. Seeing things is so, so much different than reading about them. And as obvious as that sounds, you kind of have to experience it to really realize it.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

SKIJORING AT SNOWFEST

Winter sports enthusiasts will want to head to the Skowhegan State Fairgrounds in February for the Northeast Equestrian Skijoring Regionals, Maine's first and New England's only equestrian skijoring competition (Feb. 25, 11 a.m.). What in the world is skijoring, you ask? It's a sport that pairs a horse and rider with a snowboarder or alpine skier. At Skijor Skowhegan, the team time-trial racers will traverse a 1,000-foot track of gates and jumps. In addition to bragging rights, competitors with the fastest runs will win cash and additional prizes. The Baxter Brewing Company is hosting a beer garden, and a concession booth will serve soups, chili, hot dogs, and pizza. The event is part of the larger Somerset Snowfest, taking place in the towns of Skowhegan, Canaan, and Madison, that includes a box sled derby for kids, ice-hole world championships, downhill kayak race, winter woodland scavenger hunt, horse-drawn sleigh rides, and more. (February 18-26). Most events are free unless noted in registration forms. somersetsnowfest.org

ART WITH ATTITUDE

Fairfield University Art Museum turns its attention to promoting women's empowerment with its new exhibition, “Women's Rights Are Human Rights.” Comprised of more than 80 colorful posters, created by both men and women artists worldwide, the show celebrates and acknowledges the vital role citizens play in protecting and promoting human rights while addressing issues of gender inequalities entrenched in our global society. From gender wage disparities, access



to basic education and health care, violence, discrimination, and sexual and reproductive rights, the posters in the exhibit challenge religious and cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes with the aim of achieving true equality between women and men. Walsh Gallery. Jan. 20 through April 8. Free. www.fairfield.edu/museum/exhibitions/upcoming-exhibitions/womens-rights-are-human-rights/index.html

THERE

CARIBBEAN CHARMS IN ST. CROIX

Enjoy a relaxing escape from the cold at the newly renovated King Christian Hotel on the US Virgin Island of St. Croix. Situated on the Christiansted waterfront in the heart of downtown — with boardwalk access to restaurants, bars, shops, and the casino — the boutique luxury hotel features 46 fully remodeled rooms and suites, and six distinct culinary concepts. Bright and airy accommodations feature custom-designed terracotta flooring, cane and wood furnishings, and natural jute rugs, brass finishes, and floor-to-ceiling marble-clad bathrooms. A lush secluded pool and sundeck, with teak lounge chairs, hand-painted side tables, and striped umbrellas, offers a dedicated poolside menu of cocktails

and small plates. A nearby water taxi ferries guests to snorkeling and swimming opportunities at Protestant Cay Beach. Named a top travel destination for 2023, St. Croix does not require a passport for US travelers. Standard suite rates from \$249. 1-340-773-6330, www.kingchristianhotel.com

NEW CRUISE EXPLORES PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Cruise the Columbia and Snake Rivers of the Pacific Northwest on America Queen Voyages' new Portland to Spokane tours. Travelers will board the American Empress, the largest overnight riverboat west of the Mississippi River, for a nine-day cruise between ports in both Oregon and Washington. The journey offers views of dramatic coastlines, snow-capped mountains, rolling hills of vineyards, and lush forests, and includes visits to port towns and cities with outdoor adventures, historic sites, gift shops, antique stores, art galleries, craft breweries, and lively restaurants. Voyages are offered many weeks, from March through November 2023-2024. Rates from \$2,479.20. 866-522-1166, www.aqvoyages.com/river-cruises/columbia-snake-river/portland-to-spokane/

EVERYWHERE

READY, SET, FISH!

Get ready for fly fishing season with a rod from the Tenkara Rod company. A simple type of fly fishing developed in Japan, tenkara — literally “fishing from heaven” or “sky fishing — is primarily used for trout and other fish in freshwater mountain creeks and streams. A great way to learn the sport without a reel, the compact gear is ideal for backpacking, bike packing, camping, and road trips. The 2.3-ounce Beartooth Rod is the company's most compact and easy-to-pack rod, collapsing down to 14 inches, and extending to 10 feet with 6:4 flex. The Beartooth Package includes the rod, rod tube, rod sock, line, line holder, flies, and tippet. \$225. www.tenkararodco.com

PERSONALIZED RUNNING SHOES

Having comfortable footwear when traveling is a necessity, not a luxury. Whether you're running on woodland trails or exploring a new city, you can now elevate your athletic footwear experience with Hilma, a running shoe brand with new technology created specifically for women. What differentiates this performance product from others on the market is that it takes more than one measurement to determine your perfect size. A five-minute online consultation employs multidimensional sizing, including choosing different toe boxes from square to tapered, to provide a personalized fit. Features include a cushioned tongue, lateral side toe bar, lugged rubber outsole, and breathable mesh upper. The 9.7-ounce body makes them easy to pack and wear. Available in three colors. \$159 includes shipping. <https://join-hilma.com>

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