

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

Help! My Expedia tour credit is about to expire.

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked a hotel stay at the Opus XVI in Bergen, Norway, in 2020 through Expedia. The hotel was part of a package. I had to cancel the trip because of COVID-19.

Expedia refunded our airfare and issued a \$1,875 credit for Opus XVI that expired in December 2021. Norway has been closed to US travelers, so we have been unable to use the credit.

I called and requested an extension or refund from Expedia. A representative told me that they would contact the hotel on our behalf, but we needed to deal directly with the hotel for a resolution. Expedia said it had already sent the \$1,875 to the Opus XVI.

I e-mailed the hotel last summer, and I received an e-mail reply that it denied my request. Instead, the hotel offered a 50 percent discount if we booked a future stay directly.

I have e-mailed Expedia, sharing the hotel's denial of our request, and asked for their help in securing an extension. We have not received any response from Expedia. I understand that this was a nonrefundable reservation, yet since our stay was canceled through no fault of our own and we can't visit Norway, we believe our credit should be extended. It is unfair to pay for a stay we are unable to take. Can you help?

KENT YORK, *St. Paul*

A. The Opus XVI shouldn't pocket your money. Expedia should have helped you get either a refund or an extension.

Your trip to Norway was part of a tour package that included airline tickets and accommodations. Technically, that makes Expedia your tour operator, and it bears some responsibility in making sure all the components are in order and usable. Expedia is also your travel agent and, as such, should be taking care of you — especially during a difficult time like this.

Telling you that you had to deal directly with the Opus XVI was simply wrong. A good travel agent and tour operator takes responsibility for the products it sells. Expedia fell short of that.

I understand that Expedia had already paid the hotel, but that's not your problem. And I also know that the rules say you can't get a refund. But these are unusual circumstances, and companies like Expedia and its hotel partners have invoked that time and again during the pandemic. You can, too.

I would have sent a brief, polite e-mail to an executive at Expedia. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the Expedia customer service managers on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. Calling doesn't make a lot of sense because you won't have a record of the conversation. You need written proof that you've tried to resolve this through the right channels.

Companies should not be able to pocket your money at a time like this. You may want to give your business to a travel agent or a tour operator — as opposed to an online agency — that will fight for you during an extraordinary circumstance.

I contacted Expedia on your behalf. The company agreed to extend your hotel voucher by a year.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Elliott's latest book is "How to Be the World's Smartest Traveler" (National Geographic). Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Jason Santos on tapas, a good plane Bloody Mary, and the beauty of a travel credit card

Celebrity chef Jason Santos is so busy running his five Boston-area restaurants — plus appearing on Fox TV's "Hell's Kitchen" and Paramount Network's "Bar Rescue," as well as stints as a guest chef on other shows, including NBC's "Today" and "The Talk" on CBS — that he doesn't have much time for travel. But when he does, it's Thailand that beckons the 45-year-old blue-haired chef. "It literally will change your life," he said of the Southeast Asian country in a recent phone call from Los Angeles, where he was filming seasons 21 and 22 of "Hell's Kitchen," on which he is one of Gordon Ramsey's sous chefs. Santos said season 21 should air in the late summer/early fall, "but with COVID, the TV schedule has been a little off." Season 9 of "Bar Rescue" will air in February, he added. Santos said he is especially excited about his newest eatery, Nash Bar, which opened earlier this month in the space that housed his former restaurant Abby Lane. "It's super cool, with an open kitchen and a griddle behind the bar so the bartenders can make late-night grilled cheeses," he said. "There's also live music and eventually we're going to have a roof deck." His other restaurants are Buttermilk & Bourbon in Boston and in Watertown, Citrus & Salt in Boston, and B&B Fish in Marblehead. We caught up with the Melrose native, who lives in Woburn with his wife, Thuy, and their two Shiba Inu pups, Miso and Kobe, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? Thailand. I went there nine years ago and liked it so much that my wife and I went there on our honeymoon three years ago. The people are so incredibly sweet, nice, and genuine, the landscape is absolutely stunning, and the food is on a different level. I can't get enough. It literally will change your life. I try not to visit to the same place twice, but this is the exception. Vietnam is a close second.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? Don't judge me, but there is something about being on a tropical beach and drinking really sweet crappy frozen drinks that just gets me every time.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? Barcelona. There is something about the passion for food there that I find mesmerizing and would like to explore firsthand. Also, I want to eat tapas until I



Jason Santos and his wife, Thuy, on Ko Pha Ngan, an island off the coast of southeast Thailand.

can't eat tapas no more.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? My wife.

Aisle or window? I weirdly am particular with this. If it's a shorter flight I like the aisle — I think in my head that I can get off the plane quicker — and if it's a long trip I like to have a wall to lean up against.

Favorite childhood travel memory? My parents and grandparents would book a summer lake home every single year in either Maine or New Hampshire. My mom still does it to this day. As a child, I felt like we were driving across the world. My family would

pack up the car super early on a Saturday morning with groceries and we would head out.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? I love a good plane Bloody Mary. I generally don't drink a lot or drink on a plane at all, but for some reason when I am going on a legit vacation, I like to kick it off with a Bloody Mary with a packet of lime.

Best travel tip? Get yourself a travel credit card. It will change the way you travel — from waiting for your flight in a great lounge or an upgrade at a hotel. Want my referral link for a platinum Amex? Just kidding ... sort of.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

ALOFT ALIGHTS IN PROVIDENCE
Urban-inspired Aloft Providence Downtown makes its stylish debut in the city's Innovation and Design District. Part of Marriott Bonvoy's brand portfolio that is known for modern decor and architectural design, this new Aloft hotel boasts 175 guest rooms (including five upgraded suites) appointed in an eclectic, minimalist style. (Think plush platform beds, white bedding, and bright striped area rugs.) Amenities include fitness center, lobby bar, 24/7 one-stop shop with grab-and-go snacks, and Blu Violet, a rooftop lounge boasting panoramic skyline views, innovative food, signature craft cocktails and space for special events. Rates from \$150. 401-254-0710, www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/pvdal-aloft-providence-downtown

SHUCKING GOOD TIME
Lovers of all-things-oysters (and seafood) will want to make a road trip to Duxbury for the newest food and hospitality offering from Skip Bennet and

his Island Creek Oysters crew. The redesigned Winsor House, which operated as a landmark area restaurant for more than 100 years, now offers a menu that showcases sustainably farmed seafood in both innovative and rustic preparations, including fried oyster sliders, whole grilled striped bass, and skate wing and tofu cioppino. Located adjacent to ICO's sprawling campus and farm where visitors can also book a private two-hour tour of the hatchery, property, and Duxbury Bay and get a lesson in how to shuck your own. (Farm tours offered May-September.) 781-934-0991, www.winsorhouse.islandcreekoysters.com.

THERE

CHILL OUT IN CANADA
Love ice and snow? You can experience the chilly delights of an ice hotel without journeying above the Arctic Circle at the Hôtel de Glace, the only ice hotel in North America, located a half-hour drive from Quebec City. Each year, the hotel is built completely from the ground up with a new thematic concept. Guests can choose to stay the night, tour the property, or just grab a drink at the ice bar. Overnight accommodations in its 24 ice-sculpted rooms and suites includes an ultra-comfy arctic sleeping bag, access to ice skating path, and Nordic relaxation area with outdoor hot tubs and sauna under the

stars. Rates from \$313 per night. Day pass \$23. 888-384-5524, www.valcartier.com/en/accommodations/hotel-de-glance-ice-hotel/

PANAMANIAN OASIS OFFERS LUX DEAL

Looking for some luxury at an affordable price? The Santa Maria, a Luxury Collection Hotel & Golf Resort, a sprawling oasis in the heart of Panama City, is offering A Little Lux package that's hard to refuse. Includes deluxe accommodations for two, daily breakfast, a bottle of Veuve Clicquot Champagne, cheese board amenity, free parking and enhanced Internet access. While there, guests can take advantage of a Nicklaus signature 18-hole golf course, destination spa, sweeping infinity pools, international dining options, and country club with tennis and soccer courts, baseball field and fitness center. Rates from \$204/night. Package valid through Nov. 1. Use promo code ZJ1 when booking. www.marriott.com/offers/luxury-package-off-08719

REIMAGINED MANHATTAN

Those longing for the sophisticated days of yore along Central Park South can indulge in a bit of nostalgic luxury at the reimagined Park Lane New York. Each of the 610 spacious guest rooms in the 47-story property aim to capture the magic of the city, featuring oversized windows overlooking Central Park and the NYC skyline; custom murals inspired by the park; plush sitting areas; Bellino Fine Linens; and strikingly-designed bathrooms with Le Labo Hinoki amenities. Three unique food and beverage venues,

Rose Lane, Harry's New York Bar, and an exclusive rooftop cocktail bar, offer stylish respite from the bustling streets. A fitness center with state-of-the-art equipment includes its own separate outdoor terrace. Located directly across the southeast corner of the park, the hotel is within walking distance to major attractions, cultural institutions, and more. Rates from \$450. 212-371-4000, www.parklane-newyork.com

EVERYWHERE

ECO-FRIENDLY ON-THE-GO WATER
Looking for an eco-friendly and affordable way to stay hydrated on-the-go? Whether you're going to the airport or the gym, PATH's plastic-free bottled water offers a sustainable solution to the world's single-use plastic problem. The infinitely refillable bottles, made from 100-percent recyclable lightweight aluminum, are available in three thirst-quenching options: still (pure reverse osmosis filtered water); sparkling (delicately carbonated with added electrolytes); and alkaline (pH of 9.5+ with specialty electrolytes). Built with a wide mouth for easy refilling. Priced for less than \$3 per bottle, or \$19.99 for a nine-pack, you can afford to leave one in your car, another in your suitcase, and won't worry if one gets lost en route to your next destination. drinkpathwater.com

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