

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

I accidentally booked two rentals on Hotwire. Can I get a refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked a prepaid, nonrefundable rental car through Hotwire recently. Then, a few days later, I booked another car for the same dates by mistake.

I tried to cancel one of the bookings and request a refund. Hotwire refuses. Obviously, I can't drive two cars at the same time. Their system shouldn't allow someone to double book. I have used Hotwire for many years. Before this, I was a satisfied customer. Can you help me get my \$178 back?

ROBERT SHARP, *Swampscott*

A. You made two prepaid, nonrefundable car rental reservations through Hotwire. And they are, as you say, prepaid and nonrefundable. As a regular user of Hotwire, you should have known that.

But just how nonrefundable is nonrefundable? Well, I've talked to insiders at opaque sites like Hotwire, and here's what they tell me: If you make an honest mistake when you book through the site and call right away, they can work with you to cancel the overlapping reservation. But the longer you wait, the harder it gets to fix something like this. And yes, by nonrefundable, they really mean nonrefundable. Well, mostly.

Still, I think Hotwire should have a system to at least warn you that you're about to make a double booking. And it looks like Hotwire didn't send you a confirmation for your first reservation. If it had sent you one, this would be a borderline case that I couldn't have advocated. But it looks like a few things went wrong on Hotwire's side, too.

Look, plans change. It would be nice to see the travel industry adopt a 24-hour rule so that customers like you could fix problems like these. If everyone treated each other like travel companies treated you after a nonrefundable purchase, imagine what the buying experience would be like. No returns on anything, ever. Buyer's remorse would become a national pastime.

I reviewed the e-mail correspondence between you and Hotwire. Everything looked promising for getting a refund. A representative told you not to worry, agreeing that your second booking was a "mistake." He added that Hotwire just needed to "verify" the refund through your car rental company.

Then you received bad news: "We can only process a refund for the other reservation if one of them was processed within an hour. But it shows here that the second reservation was booked after a few days."

If Hotwire had told you up front about that, then you wouldn't have gotten your hopes up.

You probably already know this, but next time, you might want to avoid a nonrefundable reservation. You can find plenty of good deals directly through a car rental agency or on a site that sells refundable reservations, like Hotwire's sister site, Expedia.

I think a brief, polite appeal to a Hotwire executive might have also worked for you. I list the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of the Expedia contacts on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/expedia-customer-service-contacts/.

As I mentioned, this is a borderline case. You should have paid closer attention to your reservation and its strict terms. As an experienced Hotwire customer, you already knew that. At the same time, Hotwire didn't warn you about the double booking, it strongly suggested it could get you a refund and then let you down. I feel there's a case for at least a goodwill refund here.

I contacted Hotwire on your behalf, asking it to review your case. A representative responded quickly. "I just wanted to close the loop and let you know that we've canceled the double booking and issued a HotDollar credit for the second booking Mr. Sharp made in the amount of \$178," a representative told me. That's a generous resolution.

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

Andrew McCarthy is many things: actor, director, author, dad — and travel writer

Andrew McCarthy wears many professional hats, including those of actor, director, author, and travel writer. As a member of the "Brat Pack," he costarred in such iconic 1980s films as "St. Elmo's Fire," "Pretty in Pink," and "Less than Zero." While he still acts occasionally, McCarthy, 59, said in a recent phone interview that he spends more time directing — most recently episodes of the NBC drama "The Blacklist" (which stars his "Pretty in Pink" and "Less than Zero" costar James Spader) — and fitting in travel writing whenever he can. It is McCarthy's passion for travel that will bring him to Boston for the Travel & Adventure Show at the Hynes Convention Center on March 5 and 6. He will speak at 10:45 a.m. on March 5. "The theme is the transformative power of travel; how travel changes us for the better," McCarthy said, adding that he gets "giddy" while attending travel shows. "You walk in and there are all of these people presenting different places to go. . . and it's just like wow, it's a big world out there. I still get very excited by that and so when I go, I always like walking the floor for a while before I go do my thing because I find it very inspiring." The author of the 2013 travel memoir "The Longest Way Home: One Man's Quest for the Courage to Settle Down" and two other books said that it's time for people to get back to traveling. "I think we've all been on the couch far too much the last couple of years," he said. "It's time to get up off the couch." McCarthy, who has won numerous travel-writing awards, is married to Dolores Rice and has three children — Sam, 19, who is in the Netflix show "Dead to Me," Willow, 15, who has been in three Broadway shows (including the lead in "Matilda"), and Rowan, 8 — as well as a 6-year-old English golden retriever, Lola. We caught up with the Westfield, N.J., native, who lives in New York City, to talk about all things travel.



Andrew McCarthy and his son Sam, in summer 2021 on the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

Maui and love to return to Hawaii. I want to return to Patagonia.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? I am embarrassed to say that I am not much of a foodie. I'm always happy to eat pizza — and you can get some good ones, and terrible ones — all over the world. I did have a bowl of lemongrass soup in Laos 25 years ago that I've never forgotten.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? I've been scheduled to go to Antarctica twice and had to cancel both times at the last second. I gotta get there before the ice melts. And I'd like to go to Egypt; it seems odd that I've never been.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? Almond butter. Snacking can make a

seemingly horrible situation bearable and maybe even interesting — and memorable.

Aisle or window? Aisle. I tend to feel trapped easily.

Favorite childhood travel memory? We used to go to a family resort in the Pocono Mountains in the winter and they had a fantastic toboggan run that shot you out over the frozen lake. Amazing.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? One of the beautiful things about travel is that we tend to be more open than at home. I'm game for anything on the road; spare me the guilt.

Best travel tip? Stop planning, just go.
JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

ICA LIVE ALIGHTS IN BOSTON

Just in time to relieve the gloom of winter, the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston has announced its spring 2022 live music and dance performance schedule, taking place in the Barbara Lee Family Foundation Theater. Dates in March and April include THE DAY, a music/dance collaboration among legends Maya Beiser, Wendy Whelan, Lucinda Childs, and David Lang (March 11-13); a weekend of performances by 18 New England dance artists (March 18-20); acclaimed pianist Vijay Iyer and his jazz trio (April 7); and A.I.M by Kyle Abraham and his dance company, a series of solos, duets and trios harnessing the spirit of Nina Simone's intimate songs (April 15-17). 617-478-3100, www.icaboston.org/calendar

SUMMER MUSIC TIX AVAILABLE NOW

If spring is just around the corner, can summer be far behind? The creative team at Vinegar Hill Music Theatre in Arundel, Maine, is busy planning for a 2022 season of live music, outdoor movies, and special events. Tickets are already on sale for the June 17th kick-off concert when Portland band Spencer and the Walrus take the stage for their annual "Beatles Night" show. Additional acts, for dates through Oct. 1, include acclaimed folk singer-songwriter Dar Williams, Broadway star

and vocalist Linda Eder, powerhouse blues act Roomful of Blues, comedian Juston McKinney and more. Starting July 10, visitors can enjoy the weekly Sunday Chill at the Hill, a relaxing afternoon of acoustic music in the garden, food trucks, and local artisans. 207-985-5552, vinegarhillmusictheatre.com

THERE

DISABILITY TRAVEL SITE ADDS TOURS

Travelers who use wheelchairs or face other accessibility challenges will be pleased to discover Wheel the World, an online booking company whose mission is to make travel more accessible to everyone. Operating in 80 destinations and rising, Wheel the World offers places to stay, things to do, multi-day private trips, and recently launched a roster of fully accessible, multi-day domestic and international



group tours. Nine new tours in six destinations — New York City, Costa Rica, Greece, Israel, Morocco, and Switzerland — offer opportunities to explore in a safe way while accompanied by like-minded explorers and accessibility-trained guides. The five- to 10-day excursions offer a varying number of spots (8-10) for manual and power wheelchair users. Planned in-destination assistance allows travelers to focus on experiencing sights, sounds, and culture throughout the trips. From \$2,400 per person, includes activities, accommodations, and ground transportation. 628-900-7778, gowheeltheworld.com/travel-group-tours

CRUISING THE DALMATIAN COAST

Families and groups of friends looking to travel, sail, swim, and explore together in a socially distant manner this summer may want to check out private yacht charter options in Croatia with Sail Dalmatia. Bespoke traditional, motor yacht, sailing yacht and gulet charters, ranging from two to 30-plus guests, feature well-appointed spacious cabins, on-board chef, leisure gear (SUPs, kayaks, snorkeling gear, fishing rods), passenger insurance, and more. For example, a 10-person charter with captain and crew on the elegant gulet Angelica can be booked in July and August for about \$27,000, or \$2,700 per person. A range of prices, higher and lower, are available for more than 100 vessels. Want to splurge? In May, Sail Dalmatia will

christen the newest luxury sailing yacht for cruising the Dalmatian Coast, a 45-meter/147-foot hand-built vessel that will comfortably accommodate 14 guests and seven crew members, named — what else? — Life is Good (from

\$74,000). www.saildalmatia.com/yacht-collections

EVERYWHERE

ADVENTURE APP WITH CERTIFIED GUIDES

As outdoor adventuring becomes more popular, so the need for skilled instruction on tours grows. Enter 57Hours, an online platform that connects people with certified guides for outdoor fitness activities such as backcountry skiing, hiking, climbing, mountain biking, surfing, kiteboarding, rock climbing, and more. A great resource for discovering available activities when traveling, 57Hours handles everything — from setting you up with the best guide for your skill level, to ensuring you have the proper gear, to collecting payment/gratuity — all through the app. The site also offers avalanche education classes, highly recommended for anyone planning backcountry winter sports. Offering more than 300 adventures around the globe, the app is also useful for planning trips close to home. 57hours.com

TRAVEL BUDDY LIGHTS THE WAY

Sometimes the smallest gadgets become the most valuable in a traveler's collection. For example, the Buddy Beat Light by Spice of Life is a brilliant, hands-free solution when light is needed for activities such as looking at campsites, bicycling, and walking at night, and even for reading in bed (when you don't want to disturb your sleeping partner). This lightweight, wearable product loops around your neck, and lights the space in front and back with powerful LED lights. A magnet closure keeps it securely closed for any activity. The unit has a built-in Bluetooth speaker (providing quality sound without earbuds) that allows you to listen to music, podcasts, or even receive calls when paired with a smartphone. \$64, spiceoflifeusa.com/collections/buddy-beat-light-with-call-answering

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