

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



THE VIP LOUNGE

Former Patriots quarterback Drew Bledsoe and his family visited Costa Rica in December.

Drew Bledsoe loves the beach but wouldn't pass up a trip to Siberia

While football has always been a big part of Drew Bledsoe's life, the former Patriots quarterback is more focused on wine these days. When he retired from the National Football League in 2007, the popular signal-caller "double backed" to his hometown of Walla Walla, Wash., and, in 2008, opened a winery he called Doubleback that focused primarily on producing sustainably sourced cabernet sauvignon wines. The business has grown exponentially to include three different wineries — Doubleback, Bledsoe Family Winery, and Bledsoe-McDaniels — and an expanded variety of wine offerings in one location spread over 360 acres (90 of which are growing grapes). Bledsoe, 49, who said he loves coming back to his old stamping grounds in Boston, was

a (virtual) featured guest at the recent annual Boston Wine Festival, where his event sold out quickly. "I think that even though Washington State — including the Walla Walla Valley — is the second-largest wine-producing state in the United States, it's relatively unknown outside of the Northwest and the West Coast," said Bledsoe in a recent phone call from Bend, Ore., where he lives with his wife, Maura, with whom he has four children ranging in age from 17 to 23. "Being a part of the festival is a great opportunity to educate people on why the wines that are coming out of the Walla Walla Valley are so special. And, [when the festival is held in person] it's always fun to be back in Boston and catch up with friends." We caught up with Bledsoe to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Any beach with a sunset. We've had great trips to Hawaii and Costa Rica.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Whatever is local. My grandpa taught us that when you're in a new place, you simply ask the server to bring you what they're most proud of. However, when I come to Boston, I immediately head to the North End. I haven't found good Italian food out West.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?

Croatia [because] I hear it's spectacular and Siberia [because] I want to be someplace where very few humans have been.

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

Sunglasses. . . I'm always optimistic.

Aisle or window?

Aisle. My bladder sucks at 49.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

Crappy hotels and a '54 Chevy station wagon. Nothing better on the way to Disneyland!

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Hot tamales and sunflower seeds.

Best travel tip?

Be nice to the people at the desk. They can change your experience — [for the] positive or negative — with a couple of keystrokes. If you're not a jerk, you can have a nice time.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

A GETAWAY THAT GIVES BACK

Readers hungry to support local businesses and restaurants negatively affected by the pandemic may want to consider Boston's Revolution Hotel and Wildlife Hospitality group's Getaway that Gives Back. Offered in partnership with Restaurant Strong and the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, guests who book an overnight staycation at the South End hotel will receive 10 percent off all room types; \$25 gift card redeemable at in-house Cosmica Coffee; Cosmica (Mexican eatery and bar); or the nearby Beehive restaurant and bar. In addition, 5 percent of your total room rate will be donated to Restaurant Strong. Available through April 30. Rates from \$110. 877-239-0882, www.provenancehotels.com/the-revolution-hotel

THERE



KUSAMA INSTALLATIONS COLOR NY GARDENS

Fans of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's colorful, monumental, and immersive installations and paintings will be happy to discover her newest exhibit, "Kusama: Cosmic Nature," opens this spring at the

New York Botanical Garden (April 10 through Oct. 31). Billed as the first-ever comprehensive exploration of the artist's lifelong fascination with the natural world, Kusama's multiple outdoor installations — including signature polka-dotted organic forms and mesmerizing images of plants and flowers — will transform each visitor's experience in the garden's 250-acre landscape. Admission available through advance purchase of timed tickets; on sale to the public March 16. Adult: \$35; ages 2-12: \$15.

DESERT OASIS DEBUTS IN MEXICO

Soft adventure luxury is apparently a thing, and the newest addition to this travel category makes its stunning debut an hour's drive into the desert landscape from San José del Cabo Airport, Mexico. Paradero Hotels' Todos Santos is situated within the La Mesa farming community, an agricultural area comprising more than a dozen family-owned farms. The property's 35 suites aim to blur the line

between indoor and outdoor living, with walls designed to disappear into the background of farming fields and mountains. Noteworthy features include an on-site 100,000-square-foot botanical garden with 60 endemic species; artisan-made furniture from Mexico; half-moon infinity pool; below-ground spa inspired by a secret

watering hole; open-fire kitchen with a traditional Oaxacan clay oven; and guided hiking and mountain biking. Miss the ocean? Nearby surf and sea experiences can be arranged. Rates from \$550. www.paraderohotels.com

EVERYWHERE

HOME-SWAPPING SITE

Dreaming about travel but worried about the cost? Love Home Swap, a members-only global home-swapping platform, allows you to explore the world through the power of sharing. The site features thousands of homes — from beachside condos to mountain homes to penthouses with city views — in 110-plus countries worldwide. How does it work? Members can choose from a classic, simultaneous swap, where you swap houses with someone else (either at the same time or on different dates), or a non-simultaneous points swap, allowing you to travel without having to match your plans with another member. Choose from three different monthly plans; lite (\$11); standard (\$13); and platinum (\$15). Free trial membership available online. 888-877-2110, www.lovehomeswap.com

RE-CREATE YOUR FAVORITE HOTEL AT HOME

If you're craving a luxurious hotel visit but aren't quite ready to travel, you're in luck. With a simple click of your keyboard at Shop Marriott, you can order your favorite hotel brand products to re-create an indulgent hotel experience at home. Peruse signature lines of linens, pillows, duvet covers, and hemstitch sheets as well as This Works bath and body products, scented candles, decorative pillows and fluffy robes. A lifestyle collection features arc floor lamps, throws, outdoor furniture and more. Links to specific hotels will lead you to more items — including beds, chocolates, and (why not?) gilded ice buckets — from your favorite boutique properties, including St. Regis, The Ritz-Carlton, W Hotels, Westin, and more. www.shopmarriott.com

NECEE REGIS

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

I paid twice for my airline ticket. Can I get one refunded?

By Christopher Elliott

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Before the pandemic, I booked a Hawaii cruise for my daughter and myself on Norwegian Cruise Line. When I checked in for my outbound flight on United, an airline representative told me that NCL had not paid for my ticket.

I purchased a one-way ticket to make my connection. On the ship, I checked with guest relations, and they assured me that everything was correct for my return flight. But again, when I went to board my return flight, they said my ticket was not paid.

My daughter purchased my return flight ticket using her credit card. I have asked NCL for proof of payment to United Airlines on three separate occasions. A United Airlines representative said I couldn't get a refund for my new tickets because I had used them.

Can you help me? I'd like a refund of \$2,557 from either NCL or United Airlines.

RUBY TYSON, *Richmond Heights, Ohio*

A. NCL should have paid for your flights. And since this happened a few months before the pandemic started, there's no excuse for this oversight.

Here's what should have happened: When you let guest relations know about your flight problems, a representative should have helped you. NCL should have refunded you for the extra flight immediately, but more importantly, ensured that you had a confirmed flight back home. It did neither.

I reviewed the correspondence between you, the cruise line, and your travel adviser. It painstakingly details the months you spent trying to resolve this. You went through all the channels and still came up empty-handed. Part of the reason: Shortly after your cruise, the pandemic started. It decimated not just the cruise industry but also airlines and travel agents. No one was willing to help you.

The strangest part of this case is that you had what appeared to be a paid ticket. United Airlines could not confirm that the ticket hadn't been paid, leaving your travel adviser and NCL to hash it out. They weren't making progress.

I recommended that you appeal your case to someone higher up at United. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of key United Airlines executives on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/united-airlines/.

After several e-mails to the executives, you reported that United contacted you to apologize for the confusion. The airline issued a full refund.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.