

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### What's a Delta SkyMile worth in the case of a refund?

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** My wife, Judy, and I booked a cruise on American Queen Voyages two years ago. The trip was scheduled to depart from Chattanooga, Tenn., last fall on the American Countess. Four days before our departure, we received a notice from American Queen that it had changed our final destination from Memphis to Louisville, Ky., because of low water levels in the Mississippi River.

I found it hard to believe that they did not know about the low water levels more than four days before our departure, but we were able to change our return flight. Since we had made our original flights on Delta using SkyMiles, we did the same for the flight change.

American Queen asked us to submit documentation for the flight change costs, and I sent them on Oct. 27, 2022. Two months went by with nothing but an automated reply, so I attempted to reach someone at American Queen by telephone. But it's impossible to contact anyone there regarding refunds by telephone. I reached out to one of the executive contacts that you publish on your site, and a few weeks later, I got a reply from a woman in sales who promised a refund. But she said that it would take approximately 60 days for it to process.

It has now been over one year since I submitted the requested documentation, and they no longer answer my emails. Can you help me get the \$930 back that American Queen promised us?

TERRANCE HARDY,  
Escondido, Calif.

**A.** American Queen should have paid you promptly for the rescheduled flight. You were more than patient with the company. You made polite inquiries by phone and email, but nothing seemed to work.

### The problem is that no one agrees on the value of a mile.

Your refund misadventure is more complicated than it appears. You had booked your tickets using your Delta SkyMiles. When you asked American Queen for a refund, you included copies of your old and new itinerary. You explained that you had to redeem another 31,000 miles each for the new trip. You asked American Queen for \$930 by calculating the value of a mile at .015 cents per mile.

The problem is that no one agrees on the value of a mile. Some say a Delta SkyMile is worth 1 cent, some say 1.2 cents, and some say it may be as high as 1.5 cents. But one thing is certain: The American Queen Voyages system was set up to give cash refunds for actual money spent. The mile valuations may have confused it.

If that's true, then someone at American Queen should have said something to you. Maybe they could have made a counteroffer on the mileage or explain the company's policy about reimbursing passengers for their miles? A \$930 reimbursement is essentially the cost of a new plane ticket, so it might have made more sense to just buy a new ticket. All of those things should have been worked out before you submitted your expenses to American Queen.

The experience you had following up on your reimbursement is not unique to American Queen. Many travel companies drag their feet when it's time to issue refunds.

You reached out to my advocacy team. I contacted the company on your behalf, and after several inquiries, I received an email that American Queen was "currently expediting this reimbursement." You finally received your \$930 refund.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the end of it. A few weeks after I resolved this case, American Queen Voyages ceased operations.

*Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy (elliottadvocacy.org), a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. Email him at [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org) or get help by contacting him at [elliottadvocacy.org/help](https://elliottadvocacy.org/help).*

## THE VIP LOUNGE

### Jill Van Velzer on Bob Dylan, fisherman sandals, and Cheetos

**B**efore being cast in the national tour of "Girl From the North Country," Jill Van Velzer admitted that she wasn't too familiar with some of the deeper cuts from Bob Dylan's music catalog. "I knew the hits like 'Blowin' in the Wind' and 'Like a Rolling Stone,' but honestly, I don't think it's important at all [for the audience] to know the songs before coming to the show," said Van Velzer. "And hearing his songs, taking in his words, in a theater piece is such a good vehicle for absorbing the poetry of his lyrics." The Tony Award-winning musical was at the Emerson Colonial Theatre March 12-14. Van Velzer said she has grown to love many of the lesser-known Dylan songs — which have been reimagined — in the musical, which opened on Broadway in February 2020, closed the next month because of the COVID pandemic, then resumed performances in October 2021. Featuring more than two dozen of Dylan's songs — each accompanied by instruments from the 1930s — it won a Tony Award in 2022 for best orchestrations. Van Velzer plays Mrs. Burke, one of the characters staying at a Minnesota boarding house in 1934, during the Depression. "I can identify with her for sure. She is someone whose current world is in chaos and she's trying to hold it together, to not let chaos wash over her and get the better of her," said the actress, who is traveling with her husband (Timothy Splain, the show's musical director), their two young children, 7 and 3, and her "sainted" father, Michael Van Velzer, the official "babysitter and teller of grandpa jokes." The Orange County, Calif., native called the musical "deeply emotional and very funny ... heartfelt rather than heartwarming." We caught up with Van Velzer, who lives in Manhattan with her family, to talk about all things travel.

**If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go?** My brother lives in China, near Shanghai, with his wife and my twin nieces. Unbelievably, I've never gotten to visit them there. Apart from Shanghai, I'm also dying for a chance to get back to the UK for the first time in over a decade. I lived there as a kid when my father was in the Air Force, and I studied in London during college. I want my UK friends to meet my husband and our kids.

**Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted?** It was Boston. In October 2020, my husband, Tim, and I were crammed into a one-bedroom apartment in NYC with our then 3-year-old son and infant daughter. We desperately wanted a break from New York, but also knew that our kids couldn't get a COVID vaccine yet. So airplanes were out, and we needed a destination with a lot of outdoor sightseeing. We opted for a long weekend in Boston. I got to exercise my lifelong evangelistic fervor for historical walking tours, Tim got cannoli-to-go from Mike's Pastry, our son ran around the playground at Boston Common, and we all ate some marvelous crawfish étouffée from the restaurant French Quarter next to the Boston Opera House. ... I'll always have a soft spot for Boston.

**Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?** My husband is my travel agent. He's better at culling through the options.

**Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?** A vacation without phones or email sounds heavenly. But



Jill Van Velzer in Provincetown with her children in 2020.

Murphy's Law for actors dictates that the day you neglect your inbox is the day your agent will send you the really big audition. In fact, I almost missed my agents' request for my ["Girl From the North Country"] audition. It arrived at 8 p.m. on Friday of Memorial Day weekend, right after my poor father flew into New York City for what he thought was going to be a nice, relaxing holiday visit. ... But three weeks later, I got the job offer, and now here we all are. ... I might have to wait until I retire to "unplug" altogether.

**Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?** The perfect vacation contains a blend of all three, as far as I'm concerned. I do lean into the learning aspect, though. My husband says that he's never seen me willingly pass up the chance to read an information plaque.

**If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be?** Oh wow, can I tag along with Elvis Costello on one of his concert tours? I sang one of his songs for my "GFTNC" audition, and had a passing familiarity with his song catalog. But last month, he came to see our show and invited some of us to see his show at Ryman Auditorium in Nashville.

**What is the best gift to give a traveler?** I'm one of those people who needs total darkness to sleep ... so I think a well-fitting sleep mask is a necessity for airplanes, hotels, Airbnb rooms with bad mini-blinds, you name it.

**What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip?** Cheese sticks, an apple, some cashews, or pretzel chips. I also have a weakness for Reese's Pieces and Sour Patch Kids. But if you give me a bag of Cheetos and promise not to make me share them, I'll rename one of my kids after you.

**What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation?** So many favorites: The oh-so-detailed penciled miniature of Smolny Convent from a street art fair in St. Petersburg, Russia; A replica of the original main door key to Independence Hall in Philadelphia; A self-published cookbook of pie recipes from Imogene Mersey, the Pie Lady of Blackwater, Mo.; the drop leaf table with the barley twist legs that my parents brought back from England.

**What has travel taught you?** The best gift my parents ever gave me, though I didn't know it at the time, was a childhood spent living in/traveling to different cities and countries. I learned why it's worth taking the trouble to get to know people; why it's worth being friendly even when you feel like being shy. I got to see how subtle changes in manners and language and habits can define a place, can make you an insider or an outsider. And in a big way, travel gave me my career — I don't know that I would have decided to be an actor if I hadn't fallen in love with live theater after all our family trips to the West End while we were living in England. Also, weather. Travel taught me how to dress for the weather. There's nothing like spending the Fourth of July on a snowy mountain in Norway to convince you that adequate layers are your friend.

**What is your best travel tip?** I wish my college self had known that 90 percent of trips only require three pairs of shoes: Doc Marten boots, fisherman sandals, and tennis shoes. In summer, maybe not even the Docs — unless you're in Norway. ... See previous answer. But you actually don't need those high heels. Trust me. You can wear the sandals to that nice dinner.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### NOT-SO-RUSTIC COTTAGES DEBUT IN VERMONT

If you love the concept of a rustic mountain cottage vacation but wish for more modern comforts, then consider Tälta Lodge. This Bluebird by Lark property, located along Stowe's Little River, recently added two new freestanding cottage suites to its 52 guestrooms and suite offerings, upping its nostalgic appeal with a contemporary take on the area's original 1960s mountain accommodations. Dubbed Stugas — the Swedish word for cottage — the 425-square-foot suites might confound earlier pioneers. Rather than musty interiors with the bare necessities, the Stugas feature private patios with outdoor seating and fire pits, living space with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking scenic grounds, kitchenettes stocked with essentials, and a separate bedroom with ultra-soft linens. Twenty-first-century pampering continues in

the bathroom, with radiant heated floors, heated towel racks, and walk-in showers.

First opened in October 2021, the property boasts sprawling common spaces, including an indoor heated pool, outdoor hot tub, yoga room, sauna, and plenty of places to stash your adventure gear such as handy modular gear walls, ski and mountain bike storage, and boot drying rooms. A new onsite cocktail bar, FjällBar (meaning "mountain" in Swedish), serves inventive craft cocktails, beer, cider, and light bites such as cheese and charcuterie plates, and tinned fish specialties from Spain. The resort also offers an online planning guide for your trip to Stowe, including tips on where to ski, hike, and mountain bike, and helps narrow your selection of area breweries, shops, and restaurants. Mid-March and April rates for Stugas: \$360; lodge rooms from \$142. 802-253-7525, [www.bluebirdhotels.com/hotels/talta-lodge](http://www.bluebirdhotels.com/hotels/talta-lodge)

## THERE

### SPLASHY URBAN OASIS DEBUTS IN SAVANNAH, GA.

The genteel city of Savannah, Ga., is abuzz over the debut of Hotel Bardo. Located in the heart of the city's 30-acre Forsyth Park, amid native magnolias, tulip poplars, and Oak trees dripping Spanish moss, the sprawling, 2-acre resort houses 149-guest rooms and suites in a transformed 19th-century Southern Gothic structure. You'll find all the trappings of southern hospitality — without the stuffiness — when you step inside the living room-style lobby, anchored by The Green Room, an oval-shaped bar serving cheeky cocktails such as the Least of Your Worries, a rum, kumquat, and makrut concoction to kick off your southern sojourn.

Meandering further into the hotel grounds and gardens leads one through a courtyard to an expansive 25-meter outdoor pool with cabanas inspired by the Mediterranean coast. The poolside Bar Bibi continues the coastal Italian theme with bright salads, crudo and brick oven-fired pizzettas, and cocktails. Bardo's marquee Italian restaurant, Saint Bibiana — named for a 4th-century Roman virgin and martyr known as the patron saint of hangovers — offers a more formal but still playful version of coastal cuisine. Guest rooms are designed as serene retreats with natural materials and textures, and luxe Frette linens. Additional amenities include the debut of Saltgrass, a holistic fitness and wellness spa; kids program Camp Bardo; and a membership and social club, Club Bardo. Additionally, this urban oasis — in the center of the historic district — is steps away from all the arts, culture, entertainment, and shopping that the city has to offer.



Rates from \$450 per night. 912-238-5158, [www.staybardo.com](http://www.staybardo.com)

## EVERYWHERE

### COMFORT MEETS STYLE IN TRAVEL SOCKS

Fans of wearing compression socks on long flights and road trips will want to check out Dr. Motion's stylish offerings. Often worn for medical reasons (varicose veins and lymphedema) and for enhanced athletic performance, Dr. Motion's knee-high compression socks are designed to wear every day, featuring a mild compression level (8-15mmHg) that is especially useful when sitting for long periods. In addition to knee-highs, both men's and women's compression socks are available in a variety of lengths, including crew, quarter, and ankle, in stylish colors and patterns, including for sports. Features include graduated compression extra support, warmth, moisture-wicking, breathable materials, and anti-odor properties. \$10. <https://drmotionsocks.com>

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