

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

Where's my ticket refund from GotoGate? It's been eight months.

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I purchased two airline tickets from GotoGate for my wife and son in late 2020. The tickets were for a one-way trip with SriLankan Airlines from Guangzhou, China, to Kigali, Rwanda. Sadly, the airline canceled the flight. I bought new tickets with Qatar Airways for my family to return to Kigali.

I asked for a refund. It's been eight months and I haven't received my money back yet. I contacted SriLankan Airlines and a representative asked me to contact GotoGate, my travel agency. But it appears both GotoGate and SriLankan Airlines are not keen on the refund. I would appreciate your help in getting my \$2,718 refunded. Thank you so much.

JOSEPH OBIORA EZEZUE,
Maiduguri, Nigeria

A. This shouldn't be that complicated. When an airline cancels your flight, the refund should be automatic. You shouldn't have to chase down your money, even if it's in the middle of a pandemic.

SriLankan Airlines should have immediately refunded your money to your travel agent, GotoGate. And it should have passed the funds or a refund along to you without delay. As I've noted before, you might have expected a brief delay during the initial outbreak, but this happened at the end of 2020. Planes were flying. Online agencies were accepting reservations. There's no excuse.

So, what happened? Well, it looks like you made your booking through a third party, a German online agency called MyTrip. It appears the agency then contracted with GotoGate for your tickets, which then made the reservation through SriLankan Airlines. That's a lot of parties involved but not uncommon.

I get a lot of e-mails from readers asking why people bother dealing with third parties. Why not book directly through an airline? In your case, that would have vastly simplified the refund process. But others might want to work with a trusted travel adviser or access special deals that an online agency might have.

You kept a comprehensive paper trail. You have an e-mail from MyTrip verifying that SriLankan Airlines processed the refund in December. That's a key piece of evidence, and all my team and I needed to crack this case.

Question is, could you have done it yourself? I think so. You could have appealed to an executive at GotoGate (we publish the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of GotoGate's customer service managers on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org).

You might have also considered contacting your credit card issuer to initiate a dispute. The Central Bank of Nigeria allows for credit card chargebacks under certain circumstances, and you might have been able to secure a full refund even without the cooperation of the airline or online agent.

It took a while, but GotoGate finally responded directly to you and sent the full refund.

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

Martin Sexton says Boston crowds 'tend to sing beautifully'

Like all touring musicians, Martin Sexton is happy to be back on the road performing, sharing songs from his lengthy musical catalog including some numbers from his latest release, "2020 Vision" (which includes a John Mayer accompaniment on a song titled "Calling on America"). Sexton, who is known for his eclectic musical style encompassing everything from folk to blues to pop to ballads, is performing three shows at City Winery on March 31, April 1, and April 2. The Syracuse, N.Y., native said he enjoys performing in Boston, where he spent his early days as a musician busking and playing small clubs in and around the city. "I'm a real food guy and I love to eat locally wherever I am, so when I'm in Boston, I like to get fresh seafood — and visit some old friends," said Sexton, 56, who lived in Boston for several years in the early 1990s. "The Boston [crowds] are really receptive and they tend to sing beautifully. It's funny how that varies from state to state. In Boston, they seem to sing harmony really well, and the energy is really beautiful." Sexton and his wife, Georganne, split their time between homes in Northampton and Saranac Lake, N.Y. We caught up with the singer-songwriter, who said he and his wife have four children — one together and three from past relationships — to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? There's an ancient walled village in [the] Umbria [region of Italy] called Todi. You enter the gates and it's like time stopped in 1100 AD. My wife, son, and I spent six months there while touring Europe. No big chains, just a lot of down-home Italians serving up the real deal. Tiramisu and espresso for 2 Euros, mmm. Almost no English spoken; they were patient most of the time.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? My favorite food has a lot to do with where I am at the time. With a fine line between vacation and work, I'd say Wiener schnitzel in Switzerland, barbecue down south, or Dungeness crab in Vancouver is a good start.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? I've always wanted to paddle the Northern Forest Canoe Trail. To launch my kayak here in the Adirondacks and paddle for hundreds of miles like the natives did thousands of years ago would be a bucket list trip. One day ...

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? Well, if not my phone or American Express, I'd have to say my electric razor. Can't quite



Martin Sexton and his wife, Georganne, in Saranac Lake, N.Y.

trim the beard without it.

Aisle or window? Window. I still like seeing the world from way up high.

Favorite childhood travel memory? [When I was] 13 my parents drove their four youngest of 12 [children] to Memphis to visit my big sister. Really dug the road trip and when we got there, we saw the sights like Beale Street, the riverboats, and a little place called Graceland. My fire was lit.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? It's a secret, but probably once a tour I have been known to partake in an extra-thick vanilla milkshake. Any diner will do.

Best travel tip? As a road man, I would always recommend finding the local joints. The "meat and threes" [three sides of vegetables] of the Southland, the taco trucks in LA, the best walleye and wild rice in the Midwest, and of course the shiny diners along the way. They're easy to find now in the digital age.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

SWEET DEAL FOR MAPLE MAVENS

Spring has finally arrived, which means it's maple season in New England. Lovers of all things maple will want to take advantage of the sweet new deal offered by The Glen House, the 68-room hotel at the base of Mount Washington. The Maple Madness Package includes a two-night stay, map of local sugar houses, and bottle of locally produced 100 Acre Sugar Shack maple syrup. Also includes a signature maple-themed "Whiskey Click" cocktail for two, a mix of craft whiskeys and cold brew laced with allspice and cardamom. This warming drink is ideally enjoyed near the hotel bar's stone fireplace where floor-to-ceiling windows offer views of the snow-capped Presidential Range. *Available for stays now through April 30. From \$161.50 per night. 603-466-3420, theglenhouse.com/packages-specials*

CELEBRATE 90 YEARS OF DANCE IN THE BARKSHIRES

Dance fans will be happy about Jacob's Pillow 90th Anniversary Season celebrations. Featuring 10 weeks of programming, running June 22 through Aug. 28, the festival offers world premieres, new commissions,

90th Anniversary Season celebrations, Pillow-exclusive engagements, and work developed at the Pillow Lab. Confirmed companies and engagements include Limón Dance Company, Taylor Stanley, Michelle N. Gibson with the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Miami City Ballet, and more. Companies will perform at the newly renovated Ted Shawn Theatre, on the outdoor Henry J. Leir Stage, and at sites across the campus. Ticketed performances are enriched by talks, exhibitions, events, free performances, and more. *Public ticket sales begin April 6. 413-243-0745, www.jacobspillow.org*

THERE

SAY HOLA MEXICO! AT PACIFIC RESORT

Recently reopened (after debuting just as COVID shut the world down), the family-friendly Conrad Punta de Mita is a lavish retreat nestled along the rugged Pacific coast of Mexico. Located 45 minutes from Puerto Vallarta International Airport, the sprawling property offers a something-for-everyone approach to luxury vacations. Stay in one of 265 spacious and light-filled guest rooms and 25 suites — with coastal décor, indigenous artwork,

and luxe amenities — and enjoy a 2-mile-long sand beach, rejuvenating spa, state-of-the-art fitness room, game room, kids club, golf, cooking and mixology classes, plus beachside, poolside, and terrace dining experiences with sophisticated to casual to grab-and-go delicacies. Off property activities include ziplining, sailing, deep sea fishing, whale watching, and more. Golfers should check out the Perfect Par Package, which includes two rounds of 18-hole golf at the adjacent, Greg Norman-designed Higuera Golf Club; daily gourmet breakfast for two; and 20 percent off spa treatments. Or simply loll with a book and margarita at one of three pools, including one adult-only and one family pool with waterslide. *Rooms from \$625. Golf package from \$712. 844-298-4300, www.conradpuntademitacom*

ALL ARE WELCOME ON BACKCOUNTRY TRIPS

Those looking for respectful and welcoming backcountry experiences might enjoy Holiday River Expeditions' new series of Affinity Trips designed for both the LGBTQ and BI-POC communities. Beginning in May and running through August, the four debuting tours, ranging from three to five days, include rafting trips through Desolation, Westwater, Lodore, Whirlpool, Ruby and/or Split Mountain canyons along the Green, Colorado, and Yampa rivers in Utah and Colorado. Trips range from beginner to intermediate levels of difficulty, from calm, serene waters to Class III and IV whitewater. *Rates from \$725 to \$1,325. 800-624-6323, www.bikeraft.com/affinity-based-trips*

EVERYWHERE

MEMBERSHIP APP CURATES TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Do you spend as much time planning and booking a trip as you spend relaxing on vacation? Origen, a new membership travel company, aims to save you precious time when planning your next adventure with its personal con-



cierge service that creates completely individual, custom trips. Combining cutting-edge technology with human expertise, Origen manages and arranges end-to-end trip details through one convenient app. Customers get help when they need it from real people as well as self-serve on the app. The \$3,000 annual membership fee includes unlimited trips, unlimited trip revisions, and hassle-free 24/7 support. Whether your dream is to book an African safari, visit Greenland, explore the Grand Canyon, or tour Scandinavia, Origen will take care of all the details, leaving you more time to pack your bags. www.origen.me

TRAVEL SKINCARE UPGRADE

Upgrade your travel skincare routine with the new exfoliants, serums, creams, and oils developed by Kind Science. Products use a globally-sourced blend of vitamin-loaded plants and other natural ingredients — without added dyes, fragrances, toxins, or heavy oils — formulated to improve hydration, retain moisture, and increase elasticity to skin that gets dry and stressed on long flights and in climate-controlled hotel rooms. Most of the products in this line are less than 3 ounces, meaning they're TSA-friendly for those who pack light to avoid checked baggage fees. \$28-\$48. www.kindscience.com/shop

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