

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

## My brother died. Can I get a refund for my airline tickets?

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** I had tickets on United Airlines to fly from San Jose, Calif., to Anchorage, Alaska, last summer. In August, my brother died unexpectedly, so we canceled our travel plans.

I reserved my airline flights through Booking.com and followed all their instructions regarding a refund. I sent my brother's death certificate and obituary. Booking.com asked for more proof that we were related, and finally, they asked for his birth certificate. They kept asking for more documentation. Then, they denied our claim.

I appealed to United Airlines, and it graciously agreed to refund our tickets, even though we booked through a third party. Shortly after that correspondence from United, Booking.com also agreed to refund our tickets.

As of now, I still have not received the refund to my credit cards, even though they say they have refunded me. I have sent numerous e-mails to all the people listed on your consumer advocacy site, and I continue to get the run-around about waiting for Booking.com to receive responses from the airline. I don't know where to turn! I'm so frustrated at this point. I hope you can help me.

DEBBIE SCHEMBRI,  
San Jose, Calif.

**A.** My condolences on your loss. Airlines will almost always refund a ticket if a passenger dies or if the travel companion of a passenger dies. But when it comes to relatives like brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles, it depends on the carrier.

Online agencies like Booking.com, the online agent you were using, have a special department that handles waivers and favors. United Airlines turned down your request through an intermediary, but then agreed to refund your ticket when you contacted them directly.

By the way, excellent job on the self-advocacy. You worked your way up the ladder, first contacting your online agency and then your airline — and you didn't take “no” for an answer.

You might have avoided this with a reliable travel insurance policy. Insurance would have refunded your prepaid, nonrefundable expenses, such as airline tickets and hotel rooms, in the event a close relative dies.

I like the way you kept all of your correspondence in writing instead of calling. Too often, people try to phone the airline or online agency, hoping that they can get a quick resolution. But they don't have a record of the conversation, so when they don't get the outcome they want, they have to call again and explain the situation all over. That's so frustrating, and it rarely fixes the problem.

What made this case a slam dunk was that you had a promise from United in writing that it would refund your ticket. But here's where things went off the runway. Although you booked your ticket on Booking.com, it was actually made by a third party called GoToGate (you can find executive contacts for GoToGate on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org). It looks like there was a miscommunication between United, Booking.com, and GoToGate, which led to the delay.

I contacted GoToGate on your behalf, and you received a full refund, as promised.

*Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy (elliottadvocacy.org), a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. E-mail him at chris@elliott.org or get help by contacting him at elliottadvocacy.org/help.*

## THE VIP LOUNGE

# She's expanding her horizons

**J**ust back from a week's retreat at Rythmia Life Advancement Center in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, Marina Cappi called the experience “life-changing” and one that left her more prepared than ever to tackle the numerous projects she has on her plate as a film producer and founder of Marina Studios in Quincy, the country's only woman-owned movie studio. Cappi, 34, said the resort/plant-based medicinal center — where she practiced yoga, mediated, and learned from shamans from the Amazon jungle — was “emotional” and “intense.” While she is looking forward to her next vacation (to Lake Como, Italy, in August), Cappi is now focused on her studio expansion endeavors. In addition to her main soundstage in Quincy, the Rochester, N.Y., native recently opened a studio in Canton and is expanding to other locations throughout New England. “There is such a need for [studio] space, and Massachusetts has so much to offer,” she said. Cappi, who was executive producer on the Whitney Houston biopic “I Wanna Dance with Somebody,” just finished working on “The Collaboration,” a film about the complicated relationship between artists Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and “Thug,” about an aging gangster trying to right the wrongs of his past. Both films will be released later this year. We caught up with Cappi, who lives in Hingham with her 4-year-old twins, to talk about all things travel.

**If you could travel anywhere right now, and money was no object, where would you go?** This is so hard to answer. I would say my top-three travel destinations right now are Croatia, New Zealand, and Lake Como. However, I just booked Lake Como, as I have never been and it's the most convenient of the top three given my limited time not working.

**Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted?** I love this question because it doesn't pertain to me at all. The day the pandemic started, I was actually on vacation with my children in Key West — which we kept extending. I did *nothing* but travel and work during COVID. There wasn't much to do other than golf, and host meetings outdoors. So, we golfed and worked outside with clients all over the country. I was able to do a lot of bucket-list trips during the pandemic, including the 24 hours of Le Mans in France, Ravello and Positano on the Amalfi Coast, Costa Del Sol in Spain, and Mallorca. I also went to pretty much every golf course I have ever dreamed of going to, all across the country multiple times in the two years of COVID — and secretly wouldn't mind reliving those two years over and over again. It was the most fun experience ever. I hosted family dinners almost every night we were home in Boston with all my friends and family for the entire time the restaurants were shut down.

**Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?** I prefer booking trips on my own or with my vacation company Inspirato [a luxury subscription travel app]. If you ask anyone who knows me, my number-one app is the Michelin Guide app and I spend hours no matter where we are traveling finding the best place to stay, the best restaurants, and the things not to miss. I spend a lot of time on airplanes and usually am researching the



Marina Cappi in Kohler, Wis.

not-to-miss spots no matter where I'm heading. Inspirato has been an incredible asset when I don't have time; they have the best properties all over the world and are so accommodating. It's been a wonderful investment for my family since we are always off to somewhere new.

**Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation?** In all honesty, I've never unplugged for even a day in my life, but my trip to Costa Rica was *all* about being unplugged . . . seven days without my phone.

**Do you use all of your vacation time or leave some on the table?** I am thankfully my own boss, so I work from wherever I feel like vacationing, anytime I want. And I would have it no other way — hence the reason I have never had an unplugged vacation prior to Costa Rica.

**What has been your worst vacation experience?** This is actually a funny inside joke within my family. . . My senior year of high school, my mother took us on a catamaran sailing in the British Virgin Islands, and I was so bored I slept the entire trip. I hated every minute of it. My cellphone didn't work and I couldn't text my friends. Hindsight tells me I was just an immature teenager.

**Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?** All of the above. I love new places, cultures, and food. I love language . . . and really beautiful places.

**What book do you plan on bringing with you to**

**read on your next vacation?** These days it's always a script. I read about 100 a week these days. Otherwise, it would be an Elin Hilderbrand novel, as they are always such a dreamy escape to paradise.

**If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be?** Stanley Tucci, all over Italy. I had the pleasure of working with him last year and his food knowledge is incredible.

**What is the best gift to give a traveler?** An Away suitcase.

**What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip?** Organic raw almonds always do the trick, and recently 88 Acres bars have been an awesome snack that can hold me over from Boston to LA.

**What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation?** The olive oil from Spain was insane, but the jewelry from Athens is unmatched. I also love shopping for handbags in Paris.

**What is your favorite app/website for travel?** The Louis Vuitton City Guide travel app for major cities is the best. And the Michelin Guide app.

**What has travel taught you?** Everything I know. It's certainly shown me how beautiful the world is.

**What is your best travel tip?** Research before you go. Learn as much as you can. And be open-minded. Go to local spots and take advice from people there. You can learn a lot in a local dive bar, no matter where in the world you go.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### PORTLAND HOTEL PACKAGES

If you're heading to Portland, Maine, this summer, take advantage of special packages offered at the Cambria Old Port, a lifestyle brand managed by Choice Hotels. Online specials offer a variety of deals including a book direct and get \$25 dining credit per night; discounted breakfasts with up to \$40 value; parking package; and pet package with pet amenities. The new-build hotel boasts 102 rooms and a fourth-floor lobby that is home to Alto Terrace Bar + Kitchen, a destination restaurant with an elevated outdoor dining patio. Located adjacent to the Shipyard Brewing Company, the hotel is a short walking distance from Portland's waterfront and the Casco Bay Line terminal, as well as shops, galleries, and cultural attractions including the Portland Museum of Art. Little indulgences at the hotel include a curated selection of local craft beers, signature cocktails, and wines at the terrace bar; the Cambria Contactless Concierge; free Wi-Fi and tech-friendly rooms; spa-inspired bathrooms

with signature Bluetooth mirrors; state-of-the-art fitness center; and valet parking. Traveling with pets? Two are allowed per room. Meeting the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the hotel offers ADA-compliant amenities throughout the property including wheelchair-accessible facilities and bathrooms, handicapped parking, and alarms for hearing- and vision-impaired guests. Rates starting at \$399 in-season; \$149 off-season. Package prices vary. 207-800-3421, www.cambriaoldport.com

## THERE

### RETRO-THEMED HOTEL DEBUTS IN FLAGSTAFF

Road trip time! Those driving west this summer can travel back to the groovy 1960s at the Americana Motor Hotel. Located along Route 66 in Flagstaff, Ariz., this 89-room 1962 motor hotel will open in July following an extensive renovation by Practice Hospitality. The property follows a nostalgia trend that's been sweeping through the hospitality industry for the past few years, where funky '50s and '60s

roadside motels are rehabbed to capture the spirit of an earlier age, albeit with 21st-century amenities. The Americana describes its design as “retro-futuristic” and its rooms boast plush new beds, premium linens, hypoallergenic pillows, 43-inch TVs, refrigerators, safes, coffee makers, blackout shades, walk-in showers, and — in a nod to the past — disco balls.

In addition to being a great place to stop for the night along the iconic Route 66, the hotel aims to be a basecamp for adventure in Northern Arizona, including the seven national parks and monuments in Flagstaff's backyard. Amenities that may entice you to stay longer include a year-round large and heated pool, parking (directly outside your room), spacious backyard, morning coffee, loaner bicycles, yard games (bocce and cornhole, anyone?), telescopes for stargazing, fire pits, and hammocks. In addition, the lobby offers grab-and-go breakfast options. Later in the day, loll by the pool or in the yard and enjoy burgers, dogs, fries, and other classic American fare, and cold canned beverages. Pets welcome. Rates from \$150. 800-815-7506, www.americana-motorhotel.com.

## EVERYWHERE

### FOLD-N-PACK HANGERS

Packing (and unpacking) when traveling just got easier with the Fold-N-Pack Smart Hanger. Pack clothing on the foldable hangers to reduce wrinkles, and save time at your destination: simply unfold and hang garments in the closet. Use for any hanging garment, including shirts, pants, suits, and dresses, in duffel bags, backpacks, and standard lug-

gage. Made from a durable plastic that can support the weight of heavier items, including jackets, the hanger's unique folding mechanism allows it to fold flat when not in use, making it compact for storage. Available in three colors: jet black, metal gray, and rose gold. Single: \$19.99; pack of four: \$64.99. foldnpack.com

### SEAT BACK POCKETS FOR FLIGHTS

Ever noticed how the seat pockets on an airplane can barely fit your essentials anymore? Serenity's Tray Organizers slide over your tray table, and are a great way to keep must-have travel items at your fingertips during flight, with four pockets that can hold electronic devices, magazines, water bottles, kid toys and books, eyeglasses, snacks, and more. Lightweight, antimicrobial, and washable. At the end of your flight, it slips off and transforms into a drawstring tote. Available in six colors. \$45. www.serenity-seats.com/collections/all-products/products/tray-organizer

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