

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Where's the refund from my canceled Lufthansa flight?



ADOBE

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Last year, I booked airline tickets from Prague to Los Angeles through SkyLux, an online ticket broker. After Lufthansa canceled my flight at the last minute, a SkyLux agent promised that the company had refunded my money, but that I needed to pay for a new ticket.

The money had not been refunded. I paid for two tickets. The second one, needless to say, was more expensive than the first. I've been calling and e-mailing for nine months asking to be refunded, still nothing! When I asked for a manager, they would not give me anyone else to speak with aside from the original booking agent. Can you help me get a refund?

MICHELLE ALEXANDER,
Los Angeles

A. I'm sorry that SkyLux didn't refund your ticket as promised. It's hard to describe the chaos that followed the COVID-19 pandemic. Airlines canceled flights. Travel agencies tried to rebook the tickets or secure refunds. The situation left customers confused and irritated.

Nine months is way too long to wait for a refund, of course. It looks as if Lufthansa sent your refund to SkyLux. But somehow, the money didn't make it to you. Then you contacted the online ticket broker, and there was some confusion about who had the money. Finally, you decided to dispute your charges un-

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der the Fair Credit Billing Act. SkyLux won the dispute and won.

So what's going on here? First, it looks like the online agency and your airline got its wires crossed. No one knew who had your money. For the record, when an airline cancels your flight, you're owed a full refund within seven business days. Lufthansa should have sent the refund to your agent, and your agent would have forwarded the money to you.

The wheels turned slowly after the outbreak. The pressure of hundreds of thousands of refunds made the gears of the airline refund machine grind to a halt. Certainly, some unscrupulous companies used the pandemic as an excuse to hold on to your money, giving them an interest-free microloan. But most businesses were just overwhelmed.

Your credit card dispute didn't help, unfortunately. The dispute is a last resort when all negotiations and appeals have failed. And believe it or not, SkyLux was still working on your refund request. So when it received your chargeback, it fought the chargeback and won.

Before the dispute, you might have appealed to a manager at SkyLux. I publish the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of the customer service managers at SkyLux on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/skylux-travel-customer-service-contacts/.

It looks as if your credit card company tried to contact SkyLux, but it didn't always respond (except to dispute the charges). I find it strange that your credit card issuer would side with the ticket broker, anyway. It might have done so because you were past the 60-day limit to dispute your charges. But a bank may still choose to help you under certain circumstances.

Also, it looks like Lufthansa charged you a \$250 cancellation fee even though the airline canceled your flight. I'd like to think that was a pandemic error, too.

I contacted SkyLux, and it sent you a 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

DJ WhySham on Aruba, a well-stocked knapsack, and getting out to support local artists



DJ WhySham in Aruba.

Dorchester resident Shamara Rhodes — better known as DJ WhySham — is a musical and societal force. A cutting-edge DJ and producer who champions local and regional musical artists, Rhodes is also an activist who combines music and social justice by working to provide necessary resources for Boston's disenfranchised communities (and has received numerous community awards in recognition of her efforts). The only female nominated in the Producer of the Year category at the 2021 New England Music Awards (on Oct. 17), Rhodes, 30, is also a two-time nominee for the Boston Music Awards DJ of the Year. Host of her own radio show (1 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays) on Spark FM Online and the official DJ for Brandie Blaze and Cakeswagg, Rhodes is busy planning (in conjunction with Once Somerville) the Finally Live Reloaded! festival — featuring DJ Chubby Chub — set for Sept. 10 in Somerville. "I'm looking forward to celebrating the artists' art that they have been working so hard on but, unfortunately, due to the pandemic, haven't been able to perform to their full live capacity," said the Dorchester native. "I hope everyone comes out and supports local artists. It's going to be a great experience." We caught up with Rhodes to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Aruba, only because that was the last place I visited before the pandemic. I went to Aruba for the Soul Fest and it was amazing, BIPOC [Black and Indigenous People of Color] from all parts of the world came to celebrate music, history, and celebration of life. I got to go out of the country the first time with a group of friends and we made everlasting memories.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? A good ol' Twisted Bob Marley is amazing for the 21-plus crowd, and a nice orange juice mixed

with cranberry juice for those under 18. I also love a good rice, beans, and plantains plate no matter where I am. Each culture has its own spin to it; just make sure it's nice and hot for me.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? I would love to travel to Italy, which was actually a place always on my grandmother's bucket list before she passed away in 2007. The only reason why I haven't gone yet is due to the cost, so I need to save! Italy also has beautiful architecture that I saw in photos growing up. And of course the food — can't forget the food!

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? My knapsack. This is your kit for everything — including a mini first-aid kit — because you never know what may happen. This knapsack is basically your mini survival kit with/without electricity.

Aisle or window? Aisle. Although I am not that tall, I like to stretch out and I do not like feeling stuck in between people. Plus, I like to be able to get up and use the bathroom when I want without bothering anyone.

Favorite childhood travel memory? My grandmother taking me to family reunions. She would save, save, and take off that time to make sure it was a good time. My favorite was Virginia Beach. ... Family from everywhere would meet there because it was a central location. I remember walking out of the hotel and being right on the beach.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? Collecting shot glasses. I am a shot glass fanatic! We have to stop and grab one everywhere I go — and not at the airport ... unless I run out of time.

Best travel tip? Always, always at least make one copy of your ID. Also, learn how to use or say certain phrases. ... You never want to disrespect someone's culture.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

OYSTER TRAIL DEBUTS IN MAINE

Plan an oyster-centric getaway this fall with the Maine Oyster Trail, a recently-launched interactive guide to oyster experiences in the state. Slurp and shuck your way along the trail that connects you to 75 Maine businesses, including oyster farm tours, raw bars, mobile shuck trucks, charter tours, and kayak excursions, as well as opportunities to buy oysters directly from farmers along the coast. The Trip Planner allows you to build your own custom route with filters for coastal regions, hands-on experiences, and oyster "hot spots." Use the digital Oyster Passport to check in at participating businesses, track visits, and complete challenges; redeem check-ins for Maine Oyster Trail rewards and swag. maineoystertrail.com

NEW SPORTY RESORT IN RHODE ISLAND

Move over, Wyoming. Sit down, Montana. New England now has its own amenity-rich sporting destination and luxury hotel in Richmond, R.I. The newly-opened Hilltop Lodge at the Preserve features 18 suite-style accommodations, 12,000-square-foot OH! Spa, fully-equipped fitness center, outdoor pool, and a variety of dining options including the adults-only Safari Tent Experience with Cohiba cigars and Laphroaig scotch. The Preserve's 3,500 acres host a variety of sporting activities that are available for all ages, including 19-station and 12-station sporting clay courses; clay and grass tennis courts; zip lining; swimming; archery; 10 fly-fishing ponds; kayaking and canoeing; yoga; 18-hole, par-3 golf course; equestrian center; and more. Rates from \$500. 844-451-5913, preservesportingclub.com/lodging/hilltop-lodge-suites

THERE

GALAPAGOS ECO-ADVENTURE

Ready for adventure but hesitant about cruising? You may want to consider the seven-night Galapagos itineraries — limited to 20-passengers — offered by Ecoventure on its identical yachts, Origin and Theory (named after Charles Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" and theory of evolution). Managed like floating boutique hotels, with 10 spacious staterooms offering views of the sea, they are the only Galapagos vessels in the Relais & Chateaux collection. Excursions and educational



briefings are led by two certified naturalists; daily activities include snorkeling, kayaking, beach walks, zodiac rides, and hiking tours that bring you close to the destination's most fascinating species. Two unique itineraries depart every Sunday, year-round. During two back-to-back sailings this fall (Oct. 31-Nov. 7 and Nov. 7-14), naturalist and National Geographic certified photo instructor Antonio Adrian will host themed photography departures. Rigorous safety protocols for COVID-19 are detailed on website. Rates from \$8,050 per person, double occupancy. 800-633-7972, www.ecoventura.com

SNAZZY HOTEL LAUNCHES IN STEEL CITY

History and contemporary design intertwine to perfection at The Industrialist Hotel, Autograph Collection, the newest development in the renaissance of Pittsburgh's historic downtown. Gotta love the backstory: The original 18-story building was constructed in 1902 for James Arrott, known as the "Bathtub King of Pittsburgh" for being the first in the region to manufacture enameled iron bathtubs. Today, the meticulously restored and modernized interior (including original marble walls, ornate ceilings, and iconic arched windows) offers designs inspired by Pittsburgh's resilient history as a steel capital. Located in the iconic Golden Triangle, with views of the Monongahela River, the property boasts 124 rooms, lobby bar, social

lounge with fireplace, and communal seating, fitness center, and modern American restaurant, The Rebel Room. Rates from \$229. 888-236-2427, www.theindustrialisthotel.com

THE FINAL FRONTIER — FOR \$125k

Who says space travel is only for megabillionaires? For a mere — ahem — \$125,000, you and up to seven additional space explorers can gently ascend above 99 percent of Earth's atmo-

sphere for an awe-inspiring tour of the planet's biosphere from inside the comfortable capsule of Spaceship Neptune. Throughout the six-hour journey, propelled by a state-of-the-art space-balloon the size of a football stadium, guests in reclining seats can soak in the 450-mile, 360-degree view. Refreshment bar, lavatory, and Wi-Fi connection (to livestream your trip, of course) are available in the pressurized, roomy capsule. Offered by pioneering Space Perspective, operating at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Spaceflights for 2024 are sold out. Book now to reserve for 2025 and beyond. www.spaceperspective.com

EVERYWHERE

COMPREHENSIVE FIRST AID TRAVEL KIT

Upgrade your first aid supplies for hiking, camping, and other adventure trips this fall with the MyFAK first aid kit by MyMedic. Don't let the small size (7.5-by-6.5-by-5 inches) and weight (less than 3 pounds) fool you. This kit is packed with over 100 high-quality medical and trauma supplies designed to be effective in real-life situations, including for bleeding, burns, sprains, fractures, and more. The rugged, durable, and easily accessible pack is made from high-quality nylon Cordura. Available in five colors. The company also offers a selection of larger and smaller kits and supplies. \$120. mymedic.com NEECE REGIS

