

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

The Ocean Explorer is owned by the Boston company Vantage Travel.

Awaiting refund for a Vantage cruise that was canceled in 2020

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Back in 2019, I made a reservation for me and my wife to go on Vantage Travel's "Croatia & Culinary Gems of the Adriatic Coast" tour. Other members of our family were also planning to join us on this trip. I made the final payment of \$20,655 for our trip in October 2019.

As part of the cost of the trip, I paid \$999 per person for a "cancel for any reason" travel insurance policy from Trip Mate. Part of the reason I had booked it was in case my sister-in-law's cancer returned. Unfortunately, it did, and she died before the trip.

In early 2020, we canceled our tour and initiated a refund request through Vantage Travel. I also submitted a claim to Trip Mate. Because of the pandemic, Vantage canceled our tour before its scheduled departure.

Trip Mate reviewed the claim and approved it in mid-2020, but said payment would be made by Vantage.

I have e-mailed Vantage multiple times and have made several phone calls. Twice on those phone calls, a representative provided the projected dates of when we would receive a refund. However, we have not received any refund or a written assurance as to when we will receive one. Can you help me get my \$20,655 back?

DAVID MADDOX, Arlington, Va.

A. I'm so sorry about the loss of your sister-in-law.

You should have received a quick refund on your prepaid, nonrefundable expenses after Trip Mate approved your claim. I don't know why you didn't, but I know you aren't alone. Many travelers had the same problem during the early days of the pandemic. It was a confusing time.

You handled this one by the book. You bought the correct insurance for your needs. A "cancel for any reason" policy will allow you to cancel your vacation for any reason and receive a partial refund. But, some restrictions apply. Your Trip Mate policy, however, was a little different from the standard "cancel for any reason" policy. It lets you cancel, and you'll receive your entire prepaid, nonrefundable trip cost "in the form of a Vantage Travel Certificate for the cancellation penalty amount."

So, the best you could have done was a voucher. But, Vantage also canceled your cruise. In that situation, you should have had a choice between a voucher and a refund. It looks like things got confused between your claim, the Vantage cancellation, and your refund request.

I publish the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the Vantage executives on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/vantage-deluxe-world-travel/. A brief, polite e-mail to one of them might have "unconfused" the process.

Bottom line: You should not have to wait years for a company to refund your purchase.

I contacted Vantage on your behalf, and it refunded your cruise.

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

Ronee Penoi is looking forward to new beach memories near Boston

When she was hired just over a year ago as director of artistic programming at ArtsEmerson, Ronee Penoi said she knew she was exactly where she needed to be. The well-respected arts leader and producer had collaborated (most recently through her role as producer of Octopus Theatricals, a production company that is responsible for Tony Award-winning "Hometown") with ArtsEmerson for years, and was excited to take on a permanent role with the local arts organization. "The thing that I really missed — and I think that this also might be part of my Indigenous background, too — is really having a connection to place and being able to be part of the conversation and the society shifting over time," the Pittsburgh native said. "So the kind of relationship with the audience and the way in which the artists are inspiring a certain conversation is a part of the puzzle that I never got to have when I was working in the independent producer space. So I was really hungry for that and because I worked with ArtsEmerson before interviewing for this position, I knew that there was something happening here that was really special in terms of changing the way theater organizations think about themselves and work in relationship to specific transformation." She added: "The notion that the theater, while powerful, is a prompt and the conversation is the point, was really meaningful to me. ... It feels like something is shifting at ArtsEmerson and I am so excited about that on so many levels." We caught up with Penoi, 37, who lives in Melrose with her husband, Bill Jusino, and their nearly 6-year-old pug mix, Penny, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

I went to Barcelona and Begur — on the Costa Brava of Spain — for my



Ronee Penoi at Delaware's Dewey Beach with her dog, Penny.

honeymoon with my husband in 2015, and would love to go back. Every time I walked out the door in Begur, I had this sense that something amazing was just around the corner. Some of my favorite discoveries were a hidden tunnel along the coast and a surprise beach with pulpo [octopus] served beachside. Closer to home, I've

been going to Dewey Beach, in Delaware, since I was a kid. My husband proposed there, so it has that added layer of special meaning, too. It's always the recharge I need: beach, friends ... and mini-golf. That said, now that I'm a Boston local, I'm excited to make new beach memories closer to home.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Whatever is local. I'm in Scotland right now, and committed to trying haggis.

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

Japan. I fell in love with traditional noh and kabuki theater in college, and even learned how to play the kotsuzumi and otsuzumi drums — but I still haven't made it there. Theater is in our DNA — it's present in every culture in some form. I think I'm so drawn to international work because there is so much beauty and meaning in witnessing something that can seem so distinct, but also have so much shared resonance.

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

Melatonin. Critical for switching time zones.

Aisle or window?

Window seat. Very helpful for napping and reflecting.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

When I was a kid — I was in middle school, I believe — I went with my parents and grandma to the Stratford and Shaw Theater Festivals in Canada. I think I saw a week of back-to-back theater. That was when I first saw "Hamlet," and started to associate amazing theater with amazing conversations with my family that we wouldn't have had otherwise.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

A late-night coffee or cocktail — the perfect way to wind down after a long day.

Best travel tip?

Only take a carry-on if you can. That way you can move more freely and avoid any lost-baggage headaches.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

LIGHTS! ACTION! SCIENCE!

Who says science is boring? Certainly not the organizers of the Cambridge Science Festival. Modeled on art, music, and movie festivals, the annual, weeklong, multicultural event is designed to make science accessible, interactive, and fun by showcasing the leading edge in fields of science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM). Produced by the MIT Museum, and based at the Kendall/MIT Open Space, programming falls into four categories: Science + Climate, Science + Food, Science + Fashion, and The Science Carnival, the latter of which includes a midway, main stage, sideshows and more. Most events are scheduled for Oct. 6-9, after the new MIT Museum debuts on Oct. 2, including the US premiere of "Borealis," an artwork by Swiss artist Dan Acher that will re-create the magic of the Northern Lights in the night sky above Kendall Square (8-11 p.m.). All events in the Festival Zone (Kendall/MIT Open Space) are free; all ages welcome. Events at other locations may have a fee. cambridgesciencefestival.org

CRAFTS CRISSCROSS MAINE

Fall is a popular season for visitors to Maine. This year, consider enriching your leaf-peeping experiences by checking out the annual Maine Craft Weekend (Oct. 1-2). The two-day event — in featured cities Bath, Biddeford, Bucksport, Ellsworth, Freeport, Gardiner, and Monson — is a great opportunity to visit artist studios, attend glassblowing, blacksmithing, tapestry weaving (and more!) demonstrations, participate in pottery wheel lessons,

and tour craft shows, outdoor installation sites, nonprofit craft organizations, craft-based schools, and pop-up shops. Plan your route on the easy-to-use website that allows you to filter choices by date, city, craft medium, and featured events. mainecraftweekend.org/about-maine-craft-weekend

THERE

SAN DIEGO BEER-CATION

It's not too early to book a flight to San Diego County, a.k.a. "The Capital of Craft," to attend the 14th Annual San Diego Beer Week, an annual beer-a-ganza celebrating the area's independent brewing community (Nov. 4-13). Join the San Diego Brewers Guild and more than 60 independent breweries for 2022 Guild Fest, the official kick-off party on Nov. 5 that showcases tasty craft beer from San Diego and beyond, as well as food trucks, live music, and more at Surf Sports Park in Del Mar. (Tickets from \$55.) During the week, each brewery will host its own events and special beers. The closing event, The Beer Garden at The Lodge at Torrey Pines, will feature 28 breweries and 14 chefs for a fine-dining, food-and-beer pairing feast. Book tickets early as this popular event sells out quickly (\$145). www.sdbbeer.com/guildfest.html

AN ISLAND HOTEL, LITERALLY

Imagine a small hotel surrounded by turquoise waters where the island itself is the hotel. Introducing Saba Rock, a stylish nine-room resort set on one acre in the North Sound of the British Virgin Islands. After a complete rebuild following Hurricane Irma in 2017, the boutique island resort

reopens on Oct. 15 with a new modern look. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer endless water views in each accommodation; elegant touches include spacious beds with Frette linens and towels, double-sink bathrooms with Molton Brown toiletries, and private balconies. Additional amenities include a helipad; full-service marina; al fresco restaurant and bar; spa and salon services; private or group yoga and meditation sessions; and merchandise shop. Travelers can fly into St. Thomas, USVI, or San Juan, Puerto Rico, and then transfer to local carrier airlines to Beef Island, Tortola, or Virgin Gorda Airport. From there, take a complimentary Saba Rock ferry to the island, or arrange with the resort for a private transfer. Rates from \$550. 284-393-9220, sabarock.com

EVERYWHERE

MINI-EMERGENCY KITS FOR HIM AND HER

It's easy to forget to pack all the little things you might need on your vacation. Anne Cate's Skyline Emergency Kits do the remembering for you, with individually packaged travel essentials for men and women. Choose your favorite skyline design (from more than 100 US and international cities and college towns) to decorate a vegan leather mini wallet that contains, for her, 20 items such as a hair tie, chap-

stick, floss pic, sewing kit, emery board, safety pins, earring backs, tampon, pain relief medicine, and mints. For him, a multi-use mini bag (branded with the abbreviated name your city of choice) includes 15 items, including a bottle opener, pain relief medicine, nail clippers, shaving cream, razor, and stain cleaner. Additional skyline-adorned products include crossbody bags, totes, pillows, and more. All items are manufactured in Cleveland using domestically sourced materials. \$25. annecate.com/collections/emergency-kit

BATHROBES MEET BEACH ROBES

Ever wish you could wear your bathrobe — indoors and out — all day long? Plover Robes has designed a series of thermoregulating and moisture-wicking hooded robes that are designed to be worn anywhere at any time, from couch to beach, from boat to campsite fire. Fanciful patterns and bright colors depict llamas, lobsters, cactus, narwhals, jellyfish, coral, and Bayahibe roses. The chemical-free synthetic fabric, composed of a poly-elastane blend, offers a four-way stretch in its inner and outer shells. Features include an inner mesh pocket with a pullover flap, anchored belt stays, and locker loop for hanging. Available in two sizes: regular and long. From \$109. ploverrobes.com

NECEE REGIS

