

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THE VIP LOUNGE

Travel executive Jacqui Lewis is on another journey — this one to raise money for rare cancers

When Jacqui Lewis was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer last year, she took the passion and drive she brought to her career as a successful travel industry executive to create a foundation to raise money for cancer research, trials, and new treatments. “It’s not right that cancers that are considered rare make up 22 percent of cancers but get only 3 percent of [research] funding,” said Lewis, 55, who has stage 4 cholangiocarcinoma, also known as bile duct cancer. She started a nonprofit foundation called The Rare Initiative (therareinitiative.com) and, to date, has raised nearly \$460,000 — with a goal of surpassing \$1 million — for the Henri and Belinda Termeer Center for Targeted Therapies at Massachusetts General Hospital. Lewis, who started her own travel business selling student travel packages as an undergraduate at Penn State, went on to found several successful travel companies and is now president and managing director of the US division of the UK-based Audley Travel, which specializes in customized travel itineraries. We caught up with the Philadelphia native, who lives in Marblehead with her two children, Evan, 18, and Anjelica, 16, and their “psychotic” Pomeranian, Cali, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Having worked in the travel industry for 35 years, I am lucky to have traveled extensively and all over the world. I would have to say Botswana with my two children was the best so far. It is a rare gift to experience something for the first time all together, and great for my children to learn about the conservation work being done in the country, as well as the plight facing many countries regarding poaching and big-game hunting, which is clearly something we could never support. Safari is the ultimate age leveler — it doesn’t matter if you’re 15 or 50, seeing the “Big Five” [lion, leopard, black rhinoceros, African bush elephant, and the African buffalo] in the wild for the first time turns everybody into a wide-eyed child.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

It depends on where I am. All bets are off when it comes to vacation dining . . . happy to load up on pasta in Italy, seafood by the sea, or shaved ice in Hawaii. I enjoy trying local cuisine — usually accompanied by a glass of Burgundy — in off-the-tourist-track restaurants. Although since treatment, it is more likely to be celery juice.



Jacqui Lewis and her two kids, Evan and Anjelica, in Machu Picchu, Peru, in 2018.

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

Antarctica because it’s something truly unique — a once-in-a-lifetime experience; like nothing else on Earth. We planned to go last year but canceled due to COVID. I am hoping to get to go one day if treatment allows.

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

Eye mask. Sleep is life.

Aisle or window?

I prefer the window. I like to not have to worry about one side of me hitting the person next to me or getting kicked when others are walking down the aisle. I also find I can sleep leaning against the window, but I have mastered sleep anywhere when I travel pretty well over the years.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

My family didn’t have the means to travel when I was a child. A great road trip was really fun for us. I remember piloting in the car with a paper map, driving for hours playing random games and listening to music from a cassette tape in the car. Once we arrived at our destination, it was about the people we met and the experiences we shared together as family.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

I like to book myself into a massage when I first arrive to take away some of the travel fatigue and set me up for my adventure.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

FILM FESTIVAL BY, FOR, AND ABOUT KIDS

Young filmmakers are in the spotlight at the Boston International Kids Film Festival, where films created by, for, and about kids return to the Regent Theatre in Arlington Nov. 19-21. More than half of the nearly 60 screened films are student-made, with producers and directors 18 or younger. A pair of documentary films will be featured: “Yung Punx,” which follows kids ages 8 to 12 as they form the band Color Killer for a talent show, and end up playing the main stage at Lalapalooza; and “YOUTH v GOV,” which documents a group of kids’ efforts to sue the federal government over climate change. Films can be accessed online, with some shown at the Regent Theatre throughout the weekend. Color Killer will perform live after the screening of “Yung Punx” Friday night. Festival passes begin at \$50 for access to all online and in-person screenings, and question and answer sessions. <https://bikff.org/>

SPARKLING LIGHTS AND FROSTY FESTIVITIES

This is the season to enjoy Holiday Lights at Lake Compounce where more than a million glimmering, colorful bulbs will decorate the park in Bristol, Conn. Running from Nov. 26 through Dec. 31, visitors can stroll the grounds to the sound of holiday music, decorate

example, Abode at Double Eagle in Park City sleeps 10 from \$375/night; while the Abode at Old Town Overlook, also in Park City, sleeps 14 from \$895/night. 855-553-4954, www.onefinestay.com/lp/chalet-collection/

EARLY BIRDS GET WINTER DEALS

Those hoping for a warm winter getaway may want to jump on the Winter Early Birds special offered by Silversands Grenada, one of the Spice Island’s most modern resorts. Book by Dec. 17, for travel between Jan. 8 and April 30, and receive a 25-percent-off discount on accommodations and breakfast. For example, a Garden View King, normally \$1,125, is reduced to \$843.75, including full breakfast for two. Stay in one of the resort’s 43 rooms and suites, or in one of the three- and four-bedroom villas that dot the beach and hillside. Amenities include full-service spa, fitness center, rum and cigar lounge, private airport transfers, two globally inspired restaurants, and more. A stunning 100-meter infinity pool leads to Grand Anse Beach, known for its two miles soft white sand, clear waters, and calm breezes. www.silversandsgrenada.com/resort

A LUXURY RESORT FOR ALL SEASONS

Enjoy the ski-in/ski-out experience at Viewline Resort Snowmass, Autograph Collection, a mid-mountain resort in Snowmass Village, Colo. Reopening on Dec. 1, the property now boasts a four-star rating due to

the introduction of luxury services and elevated renovations to its public spaces, and 254 guestrooms and 20 suites. Integral to the resort’s transformation is the addition of signature fine-dining restaurant Stark’s Alpine, as well as après ski pampering at the full-service Lupine Spa, featuring Ayurvedic methods and treatments. Not into skiing? In addition to snowshoeing, ice skating, and snow biking, the resort is promoting multi-season activities, including mountain biking, fly fishing, golf, and more. Rates from \$329, standard room; \$599, entry level suite. Rates flex based on season and demand. 888-236-2427, www.viewlineresortsnowmass.com/

EVERYWHERE

APP FOR DESIGN-SAVVY TRAVELERS

Travelers looking for accommodations that are as beautifully designed as they are comfortable will want to download Sonder, a hospitality platform that provides a variety of modern design accommodation options — from spacious rooms to fully equipped suites and apartments — in over 35 markets spanning 10 countries and three continents. The app gives guests full control over their stay with self-service features, simple check-in, 24/7 on-the-ground support, and additional amenities and services, as well as access to insider city guides that include restaurant and itinerary recommendations. www.sonder.com/

NECEE REGIS



TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Grand Circle canceled my tour twice. How about a refund?

By Christopher Elliott

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Grand Circle has canceled my tour from Paris to Normandy two times. I’ve contacted the company by phone, e-mail, and US mail, asking for a refund. They have not helped me in any way. My only option is to book a new tour with the credit.

I want a full refund of the \$5,824 I spent. Can you help me?

ERNEST BELZIL, Mesa, Ariz.

A. You chose the right tour but at the wrong time. Europe was iffy for American visitors during the early part of the pandemic, which is probably why Grand Circle had to cancel your tour twice. That’s completely outside the control of the tour operator.

Your right to a refund is buried deep in the terms and conditions of Grand Circle’s terms and conditions, its contract with you, at gct.com/home/termsandconditions.

Grand Circle reserves the right to cancel or shorten a trip or cruise “without notice.” When it does, your sole remedy will be a prorated refund for any unused portion of the trip or cruise, calculated under the company’s typical business practices.

“Any applicable refunds will be returned to you in a manner to be determined by the company, including, but not limited to, credit for future travel,” it says.

Did you get that last part? Grand Circle says it can give you credit if it wants, rather than a refund. But wait! Are those the terms to which you originally agreed? I checked the terms from early 2020, before the pandemic, and that last line about applicable refunds being re-

turned to you in a manner determined by the company wasn’t there.

Companies like Grand Circle have argued that you are also agreeing to the new terms and conditions by accepting a credit for a future tour. And that means they can essentially continue to offer credit until you finally take a trip or give up. I’m not sure if I agree with that.

You could have found the Grand Circle executive contacts on my nonprofit consumer advocacy organization’s website at elliott.org/company-contacts/grand-circle-travel/. You might have tried reaching out to one of them to get this resolved. You kept a good paper trail, but you went overboard with my advice to keep things brief. Feel free to describe the steps you’ve taken to retrieve a refund, rather than simply asking for your money back.

I contacted Grand Circle on your behalf. The company has made its position on refunds clear to my advocacy team and me in the past. Nevertheless, we thought we would ask Grand Circle to take another look.

You received a phone call from Grand Circle. It agreed to refund your tour, minus a \$300 cancellation fee.

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.