

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Hotel in Cancun gives their guest the silent treatment

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I have a reservation with a hotel in Cancun, Mexico, through Booking.com. It is during the high season, and I was concerned that the hotel might be full and that my reservation would not be honored.

So, I reached out to Booking.com and the hotel. The hotel hasn't responded to my messages, emails, or phone calls. I contacted Booking.com, and it promised to attempt further contact by email and phone but carefully avoided mentioning a proposed action if the hotel fails to respond.

Booking.com has insisted that the booking is valid, but that I must wait until my arrival at the hotel to discover if my reservation will be honored. If the hotel doesn't honor the reservation, Booking.com suggests that I call it for help.

I'm concerned that if I have to call Booking.com, it will be an expensive international call. If another hotel is available during the peak season, there will certainly be significant additional costs. If there are no vacancies, am I to sleep in the street?

Booking.com says I must endure this uncertainty. I would like to cancel my reservation, but the booking is nonrefundable. My impression of their customer service is that there is a concern for protocols and a complete disregard for guests. Will you please assist?

DAVID MARSH,
West Midlands, England

A. Strictly speaking, your Booking.com reservation is nonrefundable, so the platform is entitled to keep your money. But it should also respond to your messages, and if you're not hearing anything, this is a sign of trouble.

There's no rule that a hotel has to be responsive to a guest after a reservation is made. But common sense tells you that if a hotel accepts your reservation, it should be able to answer a few questions about the room and also independently confirm your reservation.

I think it's absolutely reasonable to expect a hotel to answer your questions after you've made a reservation.

Now, to be fair, Booking.com did send you a confirmation, and in a follow-up email, it confirmed that the reservation was a contract. But reading between the lines of your paper trail, it looks as if even Booking.com was starting to get worried. What if the hotel had no intention of honoring your reservation? Would you have to sleep on the sidewalk?

You followed all the steps to a resolution. You reached out to the hotel by email, phone, and text message. Then you contacted Booking.com. (You could have also escalated your case to one of the Booking.com customer service executives. I publish their names, numbers, and email addresses on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.)

I think it's absolutely reasonable to expect a hotel to answer your questions after you've made a reservation, especially if it's completely nonrefundable. The hotel should have offered you written assurance that it had a room for you.

Reading between the lines, I can see why you were concerned. You had found an excellent room rate on Booking.com — almost too good to be true. When I reached out to Booking.com on your behalf, a representative confirmed your story. She said Booking.com had verified your reservation and reached out to the property on your behalf. Booking.com also promised to cancel your nonrefundable reservation for free if contact was not made. And after receiving no response from the hotel, Booking.com did as it promised.

"We can confirm the reservation has been canceled, and our team is working to process a refund," the Booking.com representative told me. You reviewed your credit card records and found that the hotel had not charged you yet, so you were in the clear.

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

THE VIP LOUNGE

Wendy Lippe

on Iceland, being in the air on 9/11, and Patrick Swayze

Brookline resident Wendy Lippe is a clinical psychologist with a private practice and a clinical assistant professorship at Boston University. She is also a theater professional who is a member of the Actors' Equity Association. In 2010, she combined the two pursuits and founded The Psych Drama Company (www.thepsychdramacompany.com). "I wanted to reach people and connect with audiences in as meaningful a way as possible," she said in a recent phone call. "We've experimented with many ways of doing that, having produced everything from Shakespeare to works from the American greats, like Edward Albee and Tennessee Williams." The nonprofit theater company's latest production, Sarah Ruhl's "Stage Kiss" is, Lippe said, a "departure" from what the company has done in the past. "We were going to do Eugene O'Neill's 'Long Day's Journey Into Night,' but the world right now is so heavy and dark, that we decided it was time for a comedy with dramatic elements that warm the heart," she said, referring to "Stage Kiss" as Ruhl's "love letter to actors that takes the psychology of the 'showmance' and elevates it tenfold." The immersive production ("We break the fourth wall, so the audience has the option of getting involved in the show," she said), directed by Second City alum and Boston University graduate Rani O'Brien, is at the Boston Center for the Arts Plaza Blackbox Theatre Feb. 13-23. It's no coincidence that "Stage Kiss" is opening on the eve of Valentine's Day, said Lippe, the company's producing artistic director — who is also a cast member in the latest production. "It asks important questions about the nature of love and loving, and it helps us to be curious about the love relationships we choose and why we choose them; that we make different choices for love relationships at different stages in our lives," she said. "As a clinical psychologist, I am very invested in our society becoming less judgmental and critical and more curious and compassionate. I think that this particular play holds the potential of helping us move away from defensive and simplistic categorization of love relationships, such as 'this is a toxic relationship,' 'this is my soulmate' ... these are really empty, vague terms and they are quite binary, whereas human love relationships are so layered and complicated and filled with dialectical tensions." We caught up the Great Neck, N.Y., native to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? Iceland. It's January and the perfect time to see the Northern Lights. And now that I've discovered this amazing glass house surrounded by the Northern Lights on Airbnb, it's definitely time to go.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? For faraway exotic destinations, I always use a travel agent. For European travel, that's all me.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? Overwater bungalows anywhere in the world. You can quite literally unplug from your laptop or cellphone and roll from your desk or bed into the ocean in two seconds. My vacations always involve some amount of work, so this is ideal.



Wendy Lippe (in 2022) outside of an overwater bungalow in Jamaica.

What has been your worst vacation experience? Flying home from Italy with my mother on 9/11. We were halfway home when we learned the airplane was headed back to Rome. We couldn't get back into the US for another two weeks.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? Summer trips to the Jersey Shore with my family to visit my grandparents. We always loved going to Brigantine's Castle, the live haunted house.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? All of the above. Different vacations meet different needs. The Devil's Pool at the edge of the precipice of Victoria Falls, the DMZ in South Korea, and Ravello on the Amalfi Coast are all equally wonderful, but in very different ways.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? Two plays: Edward Albee's "At Home at the Zoo" and Noel Coward's "Private Lives."

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Patrick Swayze ... don't ask.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Frequent flyer miles.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? Some chocolate and some protein.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? A 5-foot-tall art nouveau sculpture from Prague.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? TripAdvisor.com.

What has travel taught you? Perspective. You have to get out of the box in which you exist in order to actually see the box for what it is — and for what it isn't. Similarly, travel paradoxically takes us out of ourselves and simultaneously connects us more deeply to ourselves.

What is your best travel tip? Just go. Don't obsess about it. Life is too short and there is so much to experience in this big, beautiful world.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

Chase the winter blahs away in Providence at "Lumina 2025: PLAY!" a series of events designed to transform the city into an illuminated playground that celebrates the spirit of play through interactive installations, dynamic performances, and vibrant cultural and musical experiences. This year's highlights include POP! from Gentilhomme, five enigmatic glowing monoliths where POP! creatures live and emerge to put on a show when you call to them; Ice Dance International's ice dancing and fire skating performances at the newly renovated Providence Rink; performances by Rhode Island Ballet, RI Latino Arts, RI Kung Fu Club, and other groups that represent the city's diverse cultural heritage; and, a community favorite, dances with the Providence Drum Troupe and ERB, and street performances by the ever-energetic Big Nazo. Also not to be missed are two installations by LeMounde Studios: Light Lane, where visitors can pedal stationary bikes to create lights and music

projections; and Harmonies, larger-than-life glowing violins, guitars, and boomboxes for interactive fusions of sound and illumination. Taking place at various locations throughout downtown Providence, Lumina 2025 invites everyone to celebrate and share in the joy of community with free admission, accessible spaces, and family-friendly workshops. Feb. 1-17. www.downtownparks.org/event/lumina

THERE

BOOK NOW SAVE LATER CRUISE DEALS

Plan ahead and save a bundle on your next cruise with Princess Cruises' Come Aboard sale. This promo is certain to include a destination that inspires you, whether your dream is to sail to Caribbean beaches, Asian wonders, or glaciers in Alaska, simply book now through Feb. 28 for discounted travel on select cruises around the globe through 2027. The deal includes up to 40 percent off fares on 17 ships — including the brand-new Sun Princess and Star Princess — sailing to 330 destinations across sev-

en continents. Enjoy complimentary room upgrades within the same stateroom category, free fares for third and fourth guests when booked in the same stateroom, and refundable deposits of just \$99. The line's Better than Best Price Guarantee has been extended through Dec. 15, 2025. If you find a better cruise fare on Princess.com for the same Princess cruise, stateroom category, and sail date at any time before your final payment, Princess will provide 120 percent of the difference in the form of an on-board credit. 800-774-6237, www.princess.com/en-us/cruise-deals-promotions/limited-time-offer

EVERYWHERE

A DUO OF TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Sometimes it's the little things that make your journey easier, such as these two items that fit easily in your carry-on bag. For light-sensitive sleepers, the Hilu Sleep Mask's ergonomic design blocks out light by fitting the contour your face. But no need to be concerned about your face getting hot and sweaty — the graphene fabric's antimicrobial properties are made to regulate the temperature to keep your

eyes cool. A sturdy adjustable strap keeps the mask in place whether you're in flight or in your hotel room bed. \$25. <https://myhilu.com/products/hilu-mask-the-ultimate-sleep-enhancement>

PlaneAire's plant-based sprays and wipes keep hands and surfaces hygienically clean as you travel from home to your destination. Lab-tested ingredients in surface wipes include pure organic essential oils — peppermint, lemon peel, oregano, thyme, and lavender — and the hand sanitizers' antibacterial, antimicrobial, and antiseptic blends are made with 70 percent naturally derived ethyl alcohol plus aloe, glycerin, green tea, safflower oil, lingonberry extract, chlorella, and spirulina, and essential oils derived from fruit, flowers, leaves, and seeds. The Travel Essentials bundle includes one surface and air mist, six individually wrapped surface wipes, and one hand sanitizer, all packed in a reusable zip-top bag. Hand sanitizers are available in delicious-sounding blends: cardamom lavender, lemongrass rosemary, pomegranate basil, and more. \$28. www.planeaire.com/product/travel-essentials

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