

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Vacation rental is a complete nightmare with bugs and dog urine

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** My husband and I checked into a rental home in Branson, Mo., that we booked through Booking.com for our seventh anniversary. It was a complete nightmare! The whole place smelled of dog odor; there was dog poop in the unit and a grass pee pad that smelled of dog urine.

There were dog pee stains throughout the unit, and the carpet looked like it hadn't been cleaned in years. There was dust all over and bugs in the bathtub. There also was a spot of pee (still wet!) on the couch.

When we booked the unit, it never said it was dog-friendly, or I would have never rented it because I have a pet allergy. We packed up our stuff and left to find a different place in the area to stay.

I've been going back and forth with Booking.com and Vacasa, the company I rented it from, for the past three days, and they refuse to refund our stay. A local manager of the Vacasa rental unit claims there's nothing wrong with the property because they sent someone to clean up the mess, but I disagree. I took photos and videos of the place before we left for proof.

Please help me get my money back from these scam artists!

MARY BREWER,  
Weldon Springs, Mo.

**A.** No one should have to stay in the rental unit you described. The home that you reserved on Booking.com, which was managed by Vacasa (a rental management platform), should have been clean when you checked in.

Typically, when you check in, and the unit hasn't been cleaned (this happens sometimes), the rental management company will send someone over to remedy the situation. But I believe there are cases in which a rental unit is unsalvageable. Examples of this include finding black mold, a fire hazard, rodents — or the powerful stench of animal urine.

### No one should have to stay in the rental unit you described.

Yes, Vacasa could have cleaned the carpet and bathtub, but if you have a dog allergy, there's no way it would have been enough. As you note, neither Vacasa nor Booking.com ever indicated that the rental home was pet-friendly which, for someone with an animal allergy, means "do not rent."

Ultimately, Booking.com is responsible for the quality of the unit. The company listed the home on its site, and your accommodations were not as described. I can see from your paper trail that you tried to resolve this with Vacasa and Booking.com, but neither stepped up to give you a refund.

A brief, polite appeal to one of the Booking.com executives, along with photos and videos of the rental, might have fixed this problem for you. I publish the names, numbers, and email addresses of the Booking.com customer service managers on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I contacted Booking.com on your behalf. A Booking.com representative noted that the reserved property had a review score of 5.7 out of 10, which is low — the implication being that you should have known this wouldn't be the Ritz. It's a vacation rental in Branson.

"That being said, after investigating this case, Booking.com can completely understand that the cleanliness of the stay did not meet the customer's expectations," the representative added. "We have reached out to the property on behalf of the guest and issued a full refund."

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

## THE VIP LOUNGE

### Jon Hamm

hopes to get to Japan, loves luggage, and can unplug on vacation . . . to an extent

**A**ward-winning actor Jon Hamm, whose film credits include the 2010 Boston-based Ben Affleck movie "The Town," will be back in the area on Friday (Jan. 31) to receive the Hasty Pudding Theatricals 2025 Man of the Year award. And while he has appeared in numerous films — from comedies ("Bridesmaids") to action blockbusters ("Top Gun: Maverick") — the 53-year-old actor is best known for his role as Don Draper in the period drama series "Mad Men," for which he won numerous awards. He has also been in many television series, including "30 Rock" and the current hit "Landman," and lent his voice to animated films including "Shrek Forever After" and "Minions." Hamm has multiple projects in the works as well, including an Apple TV+ series arriving in April called "Your Friends and Neighbors," in which he will star alongside Olivia Munn and Amanda Peet, and serve as executive producer. Even with such a busy career, he hopes to find time to go to Japan, since he's never been and wants to visit his college roommate, who lives there. Hamm's visit to Cambridge comes on the heels of his appearance at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, last weekend. We caught up with the St. Louis, Mo., native, who lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Anna Osceola (an actress from Cambridge), to talk about all things travel.

**If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go?**

For some reason leaving the country seems even more appealing right now. But all kidding aside, I would genuinely like to go to Japan. Never been and always wanted to go. My college roommate is living and working there now, so no better time.

**Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?**

We book through a wonderful agent and then my wife gives copious notes.

**Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?**

Most of mine are unplugged to a certain extent. Completely unplugged would be stressful, I think.

**What has been your worst vacation experience?**

Worst vacation was probably when I got stomach flu, followed two days later by my wife.

**What is your favorite childhood travel memory?**

Best childhood travel for me was a trip I took with my mom out to Southern California to visit my aunt. We saw like six amusement parks in seven days. It must've been misery for her.

**Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?**



NEILSON BARNARD/GETTY IMAGES

Jon Hamm and his wife, Anna Osceola, attended the Sundance Film Festival Gala Fund-raiser on Jan. 24 in Park City, Utah.

Relax first. Learning and adventuring are by-products.

**What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation?**

Whatever I'm currently reading — "Jimmy: The Secret Life of James Dean" by Jason Colavito at the moment.

**If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be?**

Probably someone who owns a boat.

**What is the best gift to give a traveler?**

Luggage. I can't have enough luggage.

**What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip?**

Jerky.

**What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up**

**on a vacation?**

All the souvenirs I've collected are "cool" in their own way. Each represents the trip we were on and where we were at that moment. Couldn't pick one.

**What has travel taught you?**

When I was a kid growing up in Missouri, I never thought I would get the chance to go anywhere outside the United States. My experience with foreign countries was National Geographic and James Bond films. It made me appreciate the opportunities I get to go to those places now — and to always make the most of them.

**What is your best travel tip?**

Don't stress. The journey is the destination and the destination will be fantastic.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### VIVA LA REVOLUTION!

Mount your steed (or get in your car) and dash along the route traversed by Paul Revere to Lexington and Concord for this year's celebrations commemorating the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution. Begin your tour at the Concord Museum, where you can view an extensive collection of Revolutionary War objects, and enjoy a variety of immersive programs and experiences, including three new special exhibitions, a free Community Day celebration, an ongoing Forum speaker series, and a new book by Curator David Wood. <https://concordmuseum.org/>

Extend your visit with a meal and a stay at the Inn at Hastings Park, located steps from the Lexington Battle Green, where the "shot heard round the world" took place. The 22-room luxury boutique hotel, the Boston area's only Relais & Châteaux property, was recently awarded a coveted Michelin One-Key — the equivalent of Michelin's restaurant star ratings for hotels. In advance of the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, the hotel is offering a series of Revolution-themed packages. Soar by helicopter over Revere's route with the One If by Land, Two If by Sea, Three If by Air package; take a chauffeured tour of historic sites with the Revolution 250 package; or treat your sweetheart to

Champagne and chocolate-covered strawberries with the Revolutionary Romance Package. Early reservations are recommended for special dinners at the onsite restaurant, Town Meeting Bistro, including Spirits of Revolution Farm to Vine Dinner (March 27); 250th anniversary Paul Revere Midnight Ride Dinner & Candlelight Procession, with a 30-minute theatrical reenactment at the Hancock-Clark House (April 28); and the Patriots' Day Champagne Brunch (April 19). Winter rates from \$325, including breakfast. Packages are priced separately. 718-301-6660 (reservations);



781-301-6655 (dining). [www.inn-at-hastingspark.com](http://www.inn-at-hastingspark.com)

## THERE

### LAI-D-BACK CARIBBEAN LUXURY

Be among the first to stay at the recently opened JOIA Aruba by Iberostar, a family-owned European hotel chain committed to sustainability and responsible tourism. All 240 luxury suites have private balconies and terrace Jacuzzis with panoramic views of the white sands and turquoise waters of Eagle Beach. Accommodations boast a contemporary coastal design, with colors inspired by coral reefs, parrot fish, the sand, and the Caribbean Sea. For dining and imbibing, choose from three unique restaurants and four bars, including a relaxed pool bar and aqua bar for sipping cocktails or mocktails without ever leaving the pool. Indulge in rejuvenating massages, revitalizing body and facial treatments, hydrotherapies, and nail and hair services at the Spa at JOIA Aruba. Like to golf? Guests can access the nearby Iberostar Tierra del Sol Golf Course, the island's only 18-hole championship course — designed by



Robert Trent Jones II — with views of the sea on three sides. For those considering a destination wedding, the resort offers a romantic gazebo for ceremonies and a bridal suite complete with salon stations for the big day. Rates from \$580. 833-399-7888, [www.iberostar.com/en/hotels/eagle-beach/joia-aruba-by-iberostar/](http://www.iberostar.com/en/hotels/eagle-beach/joia-aruba-by-iberostar/)

## EVERYWHERE

### STYLISH AND STURDY WATERPROOF DUFFEL

For adventures that require more than a water-resistant bag, consider the new Highwater Duffel by Bote, the innovative outdoor living company specializing in paddleboards, kayaks, skiffs, and more. The 100 percent-waterproof-submersible luggage will keep your stuff dry when rafting, surfing, paddling, and other water activities. The sturdy and spacious 39L duffel's nylon seam-welded construction features double-sided TPU coating and a fully waterproof main zipper; a side mesh pocket organizer; compression molded bottom panel (for structure and protection); two side grab handles and top handle; and a removable padded shoulder strap. It will fit easily into overhead storage bins on your flights. Available in six stylish colors. \$249. Smaller, waterproof backpacks, sling packs, and belt packs are also available. \$70-\$175. 888-855-4450, [www.boteboard.com/products/highwater-duffel-seafoam](http://www.boteboard.com/products/highwater-duffel-seafoam)

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