

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Dollar Car Rental didn't have my car, but still charged me \$82

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I recently rented a car from Dollar at the Atlanta airport. When I arrived at the airport, there was a four-hour wait for a car. There were no computer or weather issues. If I had continued waiting, I would have missed my wedding rehearsal. I tried to resolve the problem by calling the 800 number, but I could not. So I left and rented from a different company. But since I had prepaid for the rental, Dollar charged me \$82 for the car anyway.

I reached out to Dollar on Twitter, and a representative offered me a \$50 coupon and a credit for the rental that would expire in just a few months. I'd rather get my \$82 back. I paid for a rental car at a certain time, and Dollar could not deliver it. I should not have to pay for the car. Can you help me?

BETH BONNESS, *Portland, Ore.*

A. Dollar shouldn't have charged you for a car that it couldn't deliver. And when you pointed out the problem, the company should have promptly refunded the \$82 instead of offering you an expiring credit.

What happened to your rental? It wasn't there when you arrived at the airport, but there have been widespread reports of car rental shortages, especially on busy weekends and holidays. The reason behind this is that car rental companies routinely accept more reservations than they have cars, anticipating that some customers will be no-shows. Then when everyone shows up, they have a problem.

What's especially problematic is when you prepay for your rental. That means you pay Dollar for the car when you reserve it, and in exchange for a lower rate, your reservation becomes nonrefundable. (The discount is usually 15 percent to 20 percent.) You should reasonably expect Dollar to hold a car for you, since it has already received your money. But this time, with a four-hour wait, it simply ran out of vehicles.

How do you avoid a situation like this? First, consider booking a non-prepaid reservation. You might be able to get the same savings by shopping around for a better rate. You can also find discounts through AAA or your favorite club warehouse. To ensure that a car is available, consider renting one at a less busy time. (Friday afternoons tend to get crowded, for example, while Wednesday mornings are quieter.)

But for you, letting a representative know that you couldn't wait four hours — and getting that representative's name — would have probably saved you a world of trouble. Dollar marked you as a no-show and kept your money, which it is allowed to do. If you had spoken with an employee at the Atlanta location, they might have authorized a refund. (If you booked through an online travel agency or travel adviser, you could also contact them to handle the refund.) I wouldn't have just walked away from the rental location knowing that Dollar had \$82 of my hard-earned money.

It looks like you appealed this to an executive at Hertz, the parent company of Dollar. (I list the Hertz executive contacts on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org.) But the company would not issue a refund. Sometimes even a meticulous paper trail and a polite request isn't enough. And while my methods for resolving a customer service dispute are highly effective, they don't work every time.

You reached out to my consumer advocacy organization, and I contacted Hertz on your behalf. The company apologized to you, issued a full refund for the \$82, and let you keep the \$50 credit as a "gesture of goodwill."

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

'Holdovers' actress Pamela Morgan

on her famous husband, the beauty of P-town, and the perfect beach getaway

When she was filming "The Holdovers," actress Pamela Morgan knew it was something special. So when the Alexander Payne-directed film won a slew of awards (including two Golden Globes and three Critics Choice) and was nominated for five Academy Awards, Morgan said she was "very excited" but not surprised. "And I think Paul [Giamatti] and Da'Vine [Joy Randolph] are going to win [Oscars] in their respective categories," predicted the Fall River native. Set in 1969 and 1970, "The Holdovers" stars Giamatti as a curmudgeonly teacher at a New England boarding school who has to stay on campus to watch over a handful of students who have nowhere to go over Christmas break. Morgan, 59, said she believes that much of the movie's draw is that it "harkens back to movies of old." She said there are "no bells and whistles, no crazy stunts . . . just a heartwarming story about three people whose lives are pretty crappy at what is supposed to be the best time of the year. They form a family unit and it's just very touching." Morgan, who got her start on the stage, has more recently acted in TV shows (including "Law and Order") and films (including "Boston Strangler" and "Julia"), and she produced a short film during the pandemic. In "The Holdovers," she plays a waitress who refuses to serve a student from the boarding school a dessert that contains alcohol — much to the chagrin of Giamatti's and Randolph's characters. "It was a wonderful experience," said the mother of an adult daughter and stepdaughter of the making of the Massachusetts-filmed movie. We caught up with Morgan, who lives in Rehoboth with her husband, Bill Morgan, a retired golf ball research and development executive, and their 2-year-old rescue Siberian Husky, Juneau the Girly Girl, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? I would travel to the islands of Madeira and Azores. I am of Portuguese descent and would love to visit the birthplaces of my ancestors. Everything I've heard and read virtually guarantees a beautiful vacation experience.

Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted? I haven't traveled far either before or after COVID. My husband and I spent a few days in Provincetown this past June attending the Provincetown International Film Festival. A short film for which I was both executive producer and lead actress screened there. I hadn't been to P-town in well over 35 years. We have gorgeous location treasures in our own backyard.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? When our daughters were young, our family took many vacations, and, in most cases, we booked through a travel agent, when travel agencies were more abundant in numbers. Now we typically book on our own.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? For me, "unplugged" means beach, books, beverages, and bed. No back-to-back tours trying to get everything in; limited shopping. Truly a time to relax and recharge. My husband and I found exactly this at Little Palm Island, located off the Florida Keys coastline. It was the best vacation I ever experienced. They keep both telephones and televisions out of the guest rooms — fabulous thatched-roof bungalows — and public areas. Walking back from dinner every night we'd encounter tiny Key deer who were so used to humans they would greet you on the



Pamela Morgan and her husband, Bill Morgan.

path. Pure delight.

What has been your worst vacation experience? Without question, it was actually our airline experience on a trip from Providence to Arizona for New Year's in 2018. Late departure, re-routed, and forced into three unexpected additional connecting flights before the planned connecting flight; late to Chicago and missed flight to Phoenix. Put up in awful hotel. When we finally arrived, the following day, in Phoenix, my daughter's luggage was missing. My husband and I went to the airport every morning for three days hoping to be reunited with the bag — to no avail. We had to take her shopping for clothes, including a nice outfit for our New Year's Eve event. Luggage was finally found and delivered to her back in Massachusetts upon our arrival. Awful.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? Typically it's for relaxation, but we are always interested in discovering the environments and history of the locales, and sampling the local cuisine.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? I literally have a large round basket in my bedroom with about 25 books, at any given time, that make up my reading queue. So, my book selection would really depend on the timing of my next vacation. In general, I tend to read fiction when I travel. Some of my favorite authors are Elin Hilderbrand — who lives on Nantucket — Jodi Picoult, Dennis Lehane, Dan Brown, Sue Monk Kidd, and Kristin Hannah.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Well, I already do! My husband is the inventor of the Titleist Pro V1 golf ball.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Not that I have many occasions to give a gift to a traveler, but, in the past, I gave family members gift cards for

certain airlines. I think a gift card that would pay for, say, a month's membership to Audible — so they can listen to podcasts, books, etc., when traveling — or for Uber or Lyft for them to use at their destination, scented travel neck pillows or eye masks, waterproof phone case . . . the list could go on and on.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? Cheez-Its — the extra toasty kind — cashews, roasted garlic Triscuits, and, of course, Fiji water.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? Well, maybe not the coolest, but certainly appropriate for me. Anyone who knows me knows that I take a lot of pictures, always — and not just on vacation. I found the most fabulous photo albums, in both Hawaii and Mexico, that are made of natural materials native to those areas. They are exquisite and filled with the photographs from our vacations in those locales.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? I don't really have one, although we do use Yelp and Google for restaurant reviews.

What has travel taught you? To appreciate the beauty of our world, the differences in our cultures, and the time and ability to experience both.

What is your best travel tip? Don't bring your large wallet, stuffed with all your credit and reward cards, coupons, etc., on vacation. Instead, treat yourself to a small travel wallet that houses just the absolute necessities such as license or other ID, one credit card, health insurance card, and some cash. Also, pack a lightweight drawstring or similar bag to stash your dirty clothes. That way any unworn clothing will not get mixed in with your dirty laundry upon arrival back home. Finally, look for a carry-on that has an external pocket for your laptop, book, magazine, etc., versus having to carry a large personal item on the plane.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

SADDLEBACK'S FAMILY-FRIENDLY FESTIVAL

Wax your skis and snowboards and take the family to Rangeley, Maine, for Presidents' Day weekend — or winter break week — at Saddleback Mountain's third annual February Festival (Feb. 23). The all-day family-friendly events include the new Gee Whiz Grom Slopestyle Jam in the morning (kid-oriented mini-jumps, boxes, and rollers), live music throughout the afternoon, ice carving demo, bonfire, dazzling fireworks display, and radiant torchlight parade at the base lodge after dark. Hungry? Saddleback's new mid-mountain restaurant, The Nest, offers a ski-up bar, food kiosk, and immersive dining experience for ticketed skiers at a 3,620-foot elevation. (A steaming bowl of ramen and fish cakes, anyone?) In the base lodge, The Pub and The Market offer full dining and tasty grab-and-go options daily. With more than 600 skiable acres, Saddleback's vast terrain is known for its uncrowded slopes, meaning you'll spend less time waiting in lift lines and more time enjoying downhill runs. Prefer cross-country skiing? You'll find 55 kilometers of groomed trails at the Rangeley Lakes Trail Center, located on the Saddleback Mountain access road. When you book an overnight stay through one of Saddleback's lodging partners — Rangeley Rentals, The Rangeley Inn, The Saddleback Inn, or Loon Lodge — you can save at least 30 percent on lift tickets. Single-day 2024 lift ticket window or



"walk-up" rates: adult (19-64) \$135; teens, juniors, and seniors \$85-\$95; under 5 and over 80 free. Plan ahead and save 30 to 50 percent by booking online. 207-864-5671, www.saddlebackmaine.com

THERE

GULET CRUISING ALONG THE TURKISH COAST

Food, wine, and archeology converge in A Turkish Odyssey, the newest gulet cruise along Turkey's southwest coast offered by Peter Sommer Travels (Sept. 15-29). Two-masted wooden gulets were traditionally used for transport and fishing along the Turkish coastline. Every gulet in Peter Sommer's portfolio is hand-crafted in Turkey with comfort in mind, and can host groups from two to 22 people. The 15-day Turkish Odyssey cruise begins in Bodrum and ends in Göcek, cruising

around the Datça and Bozburun peninsulas and into the Gulf of Fethiye. Trip highlights include visiting hidden archeological sites, the walls and towers of the 2,300-year-old fortress of Loryma, a colorful market, a traditional carpet-maker, and viewing public buildings, a theater, antique church, vast tombs cut into rocks, and a castle high above a harbor between two rocky outcrops at Kaunos. Along the way, savor wine, honey, olive oil, and more produced in local villages. The tour also allows ample time for swimming, snorkeling, and kayaking in turquoise waters, or to simply relax on deck. \$6,500 double occupancy includes all accommodations and meals, excursions with expert guides, entrance fees and tips on land, airport transfers on the first and last day, and more. Maximum of 14 guests. 855-443-3027, www.petersommer.com/tours/caria-turkey-food

New in 2024: Americans vacationing in Turkey no longer require a visa to visit Istanbul, Mediterranean resorts, ancient sites throughout Asia Minor, and the unique landscapes of Cappadocia and the Anatolian Black Sea coast. For more information on visiting Turkey: <https://goturkiye.com/>

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