

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



Elizabeth Kimpel's Vrbo rental in Toronto was occupied, so why wouldn't the company refund her stay?

Guest already occupies a Vrbo unit booked by another

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. My family recently booked a condo in downtown Toronto through Vrbo. Just before we arrived, we received a text that our reserved condo had plumbing issues and that they had assigned us to another rental in a different building.

When we tried to check in, we found that the unit appeared to be occupied by another guest. There were toiletries in the bathrooms, clothes in the closets, and food on the table. We immediately notified the manager. His advice was to lock ourselves inside the condo and that they would send a cleaner. I considered this an unsafe suggestion.

Also, the condo wasn't the equivalent to the one we had originally reserved. It was smaller and had one less bathroom than the original condo. The manager insisted that we return to the property and promised to clean it. But we didn't trust him, so we returned the key to the concierge and found a different place to stay.

We texted the manager asking for a refund. The manager replied that my husband had been abusive, and they would not refund the money. Can you help me get our \$2,356 back, please?

ELIZABETH KIMPEL, *Potomac, Md.*

A. Vrbo should have offered you a full refund when it couldn't provide you with the rental that you had reserved. Vrbo has a Book With Confidence guarantee that says if your property is "materially misrepresented" in the listing, it will help you book a replacement.

So, what went wrong here? It looks like you worked with the property manager on the rental swap. When you needed help, you reached out to Vrbo in writing, but Vrbo just contacted the property manager for a resolution.

This isn't surprising. Vrbo sees itself as a platform — an intermediary between the renter and the rental manager — and only wants to get involved when it collects its fees. Apart from this, Vrbo usually sides with rental managers, who are its real customers.

In reviewing the correspondence between you, the manager, and Vrbo, I don't see any evidence that your husband was abusive. If anything, you were polite and direct. You just wanted what Vrbo had promised — not a smaller apartment and not a condo that was already occupied.

You could have sent a brief, polite email to one of the company's executives and asked for another review of your case. I publish the names, numbers, and email addresses of the Vrbo executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

Here's my take on what should have happened: Instead of referring you back to the condo manager, Vrbo should have found you a comparable rental quickly. This would have fixed the problem and ensured that your family had a positive experience using the rental platform. Clearly, Vrbo did not take its Book With Confidence guarantee seriously in your case. It can do better.

I contacted Vrbo on your behalf. It apologized and refunded the \$2,356 you spent on the occupied condo.

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

Olivia Goosman on Chex Mix, sleeping on planes, and moving-in-day chaos for Boston college students

Boston Conservatory at Berklee student Olivia Goosman said she is still pinching herself over being cast in the national tour of the Tony Award-winning musical "Parade," coming to the Emerson Colonial Theatre March 11-23. The musical theater major, who is minoring in stage management, likened the story line of "Parade," which premiered on Broadway in 1998, to a true crime podcast. "We show [the audience] the evidence and let them decide," she explained. "Parade" is a dramatization of the 1913 trial of Leo Frank, a Jewish American man living in Georgia who was accused and convicted of murdering a 13-year-old girl. Goosman, 20, plays the role of the murdered teenager, Mary Phagan. "I'm on in the very beginning for a good little second, but then during the testimony, there are flashbacks as part of the trial," she said. "I did a lot of research going in to make sure I was telling her story as correctly as possible and also as truthfully as possible." Goosman said that "as sad a story as it is, with the way Leo Frank is mistreated, it is also a beautiful love story between Leo and his wife." And though the events on which the musical is based took place more than a century ago, she said they are relevant in 2025 "because we are still in a world where there are prejudices against people ... and given where we are politically right now, the show is hitting pretty close to home. It's tough sometimes." Goosman, the youngest of three children, said she is looking forward to showing off her adopted city to her "wonderful" castmates while in Boston — including dining in the North End and shopping on Newbury Street — and seeing friends and teachers from the Conservatory. We caught up with the Ann Arbor, Mich., native to talk about all things travel.

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

That would be a tour of Asia. Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea seem like highlights, but my dream trip would be to see it all. I haven't been to Asia, but I have heard nothing but good things. My brother just went backpacking all over Southeast Asia and he said it had the most gorgeous views he had ever seen, and, in general, the food is some of the best ever, so I know I'd love that.

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

I prefer to do it myself. I feel like you save money that way, and also you can plan more to what you know you want to do and not get stuck into too many touristy things.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?

I love the idea of an unplugged vacation, but I've never tried it. It seems a bit unrealistic nowadays, but when I am on vacation, since I am distracted, I naturally use my phone a lot less, which feels nice.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

I haven't had any horrible vacation experiences that stand out. But a travel one I have is when I moved to Boston. In Boston, it is law that your lease begins on Sept. 1 and ends on Aug. 31. So, this means that for the entire student population, there are about 12 hours when everyone is homeless with all their belongings in a U-Haul. This also means that on those two days, all of the streets are filled with kids and their parents — who usually are not Boston natives — trying to drive around the city with couches hanging out of their trunks and dressers out the windows. Many people get stuck under bridges or get into accidents, and even more people get parking tickets. It is quite literally the most chaos I've ever seen.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory?



Olivia Goosman (pictured in Puerto Rico) is in the cast of "Parade," coming to the Emerson Colonial Theatre March 11-23.

My mom had to travel a lot for her job when I was a kid, so I got to go to a lot of very cool places at a very young age. She worked in Australia for a while and that was such a fun vacation. We went all over, but spent a lot of time in the Gold Coast area. I loved going to the Australia Zoo. I did a ropes and zip lining course over some of the animal enclosures, which was super fun.

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

I think it depends on the vacation. I try to do a bit of all three everywhere I go. While on tour, it's been really fun to explore the cities. I haven't been to many of the cities we are going to and it has been very fun so far trying the best food spots, going to the museums, and just this week a group of us went to an NBA game in Cleveland.

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

I am currently reading "The Edible Woman" by Margaret Atwood. I'm only on the third chapter, so I can't tell you how great it is yet; but so far, it's been entertaining. I also love reading plays. I have a few in my trunk packed for this trip and am excited to read those.

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

The first person who came to mind was Kim Kardashian, mainly because she has a private plane and seems to travel in luxury. I'd love to know what that is like as the best seat I've ever had is Delta Comfort Plus.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

Just before the tour started my parents got me the Béis Weekend Travel Bag and it is awesome. It fits everything and more, and it's a perfect carry-on that holds all you would need for a weekend trip, or, like me, you can use it for all the things that don't quite fit

into the suitcase. It also has a compartment where you can put all your shoes, which is super convenient for keeping things clean and organized. I also think every traveler needs a good jewelry case. It's something you don't always think about, but having a place for your jewelry so it doesn't get tangled or lost is an absolute necessity.

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

Recently my go-to snack has been Chex Mix. And for something sweet, Sour Punch Bites. I also love to go to Dunkin' and get the everything bagel minis.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation?

I can't think of souvenirs that stand out at the moment, but I'm doing something cool for this tour: I got a new water bottle at the start of the process, and in every city, I'm adding a new sticker so by the end I'll have a little piece of every city to look back on. It's looking super cute with the few I have so far.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

I don't use too many apps when traveling, but I have been using Beli, which is an app to rate restaurants.

What has travel taught you?

I don't quite know how, but travel has taught me the art of sleeping anywhere at any time. On most flights, I will fall asleep before the plane takes off and wake up to the landing. It's pretty awesome.

What is your best travel tip?

Go with the flow. Don't stress yourself out too much — and enjoy the airport. Try not to get too caught up in sticking to a plan for the week and take it day by day to do whatever you're in the mood for that day. If something really cool comes up, take that opportunity. You never know when you'll be back in the same place.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

MAPLE-THEMED HOLIDAY

Lovers of all things maple won't want to miss Maple Weekend in Connecticut, a two-day event taking place in 18 towns across the state. Sugarhouses will open for tours, demonstrations, and tastings for visitors who want to learn how sap is collected and turned into sweet products. The maple syrup producers, also referred to as sugar-makers, will explain how they collect the maple sap from February until late March, and how the maple taste and amber color are formed through boil-



ing. Hosted by the Maple Syrup Producers Association of Connecticut, a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to encourage the production of high-quality maple syrup products in Connecticut, the group's website provides helpful lists of participating sugarhouses along with addresses, hours, and contact info. Be sure to stock up on pure maple syrup, maple cream and candy, maple butter and mustard, and other products (local honey, farm fresh eggs, nuts, and spices) for sale at many of the small producers' farms. *March 16-17. www.ctmaple.org/maple-weekend.html*

Looking for a place to stay on your sugary getaway? The recently opened Abner Hotel in Litchfield, located in the historic Litchfield County Courthouse building, boasts 20 elegantly appointed guest rooms, The Courtroom restaurant (set in the former courtroom), and a lively rooftop bar aptly named Verdict. March rates from \$207. 860-898-8000, www.theabnerhotel.com.

THERE

RUGGED HIKES AND CULTURE TOURS IN PAKISTAN

Adventure travel and community-focused tourism company, G Adventures, is launching three new trips offering the opportunity to explore the landscapes, trails, and villages of Pakistan. These tours, the first offered by G Ad-

ventures in this destination, include two active-style adventures and one 18-to-thirtysomething-style trip focusing on immersive experiences that support local communities. The two active-style trips (9 or 11 days) center around a hike in a remote, untouched region that stretches across the Thallay La Trail, a historic route that linked the ancient kingdoms of Khaplu and Shigar for centuries. Travelers will get an insight into local life and the ancient significance of the route, all while appreciating staggering scenery, hiking past glaciers, through mountain passes, and traversing meadows where goats and yaks graze. A night in the Shigar fort, now a luxury hotel, provides the perfect end before meeting local artists in Islamabad's truck art workshops and having time to explore the walled city of Lahore. Priced from \$2,499 with departures from July 1.

The new 18-to-thirtysomethings trip, a 13-day journey, explores undiscovered regions without the longer, more challenging hiking days on the Thallay La Trail. The tour takes travelers from Lahore to Islamabad, with gentle mountain hikes, pauses in mountain towns, and lunches with families along the way, blending active adventures — like traversing the Passu Glacier — with opportunities to meet local entrepreneurs. Priced from \$1,499 with departures from June 21. All trips are geared toward small group

travel with maximum sizes of 12 to 16. International flights are not included in the price. 888-800-4100, www.gadventures.com.

EVERYWHERE

TRAVEL GEAR FOR BABIES

Traveling with an infant or active toddler can be a challenge, especially in a hotel or at grandma's house at bedtime. Baby product company Nuna's travel cribs and play yards offer a stylish and practical solution when it's sleep or play time for your little one. Choose among three models that differ slightly in terms of weight, age, and size accommodations. All models set up and fold easily, with mesh sides for breathability, washable mattresses, organic cotton sheet, sturdy frames, padded edges, and a convenient travel bag with duffel handles. It can convert from a bassinet to a play space for crawl-friendly fun. The SENA Aire model offers a changer accessory (sold separately). The COVE Aire Go model has the slimmest silhouette, and can function as a bedside crib in tight spaces. The PAAL Playard's zip-open side mesh panel (with a secure clip lock) allows for face-to-face interactions with your baby. Available in a variety of colors. From \$275. <https://nunababy.com/usa/travel-in-home-gear/travel-cribs-playards>

NECEE REGIS