

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ANTHONY DEVLIN

After Virgin Atlantic canceled Peter Ross's flight, he asked for his Chase points back. But why isn't he getting them?

## Virgin Atlantic cancels flight but won't refund Chase points

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** My wife and I planned a trip to London and Paris using points that we had transferred from Chase Ultimate Rewards to Virgin Atlantic specifically for our flights. The itinerary included a flight from Washington, D.C., to London, the Eurostar train from London to Paris, and a return flight from Paris to Washington on Air France.

The morning of our departure, we received a flight cancellation notice. I immediately called Virgin's customer service and spoke to a representative who put us on a British Airways flight the same day. I received an email with no locator number, so I called back. The next representative said that the British Airways flight was not available and that the original representative would call me within 60 minutes to confirm us on another flight.

I never received a return phone call, and when I continually called back over a five-hour period, nobody called me back as promised. I have screenshots of my phone calls with the time I spent on the phone.

Virgin offered to rebook us on a flight two days later, but the cost of our hotels and the Eurostar train were significantly higher. My wife was only able to take her vacation on our planned days, so I'd like a refund of the value of Virgin Atlantic points that were transferred from Chase Ultimate Rewards. Can you help?

PETER ROSS, *Washington, D.C.*

**A.** I'm sorry to hear about your ruined vacation. Virgin Atlantic should have refunded your points promptly. So, why didn't it?

It looks like you had a dispute with the airline after the initial cancellation. A Virgin representative rebooked you on another flight but didn't send you a record locator, so you couldn't be sure that it was a confirmed reservation. You then found an empty seat on another flight, but Virgin Atlantic wouldn't book you on this flight. So, you canceled your trip. Worse, Virgin Atlantic promised to call you back to fix the problem but never did.

Here's the thing: It doesn't matter why your flight was canceled or what kind of alternate flight your airline offered. When an airline cancels your flight, you get your money or points back — full stop.

A brief, polite email to one of the customer service managers at Virgin Atlantic or Chase might have helped. I publish both on my consumer advocacy website, Elliott.org. Even a quick review of your itinerary would have revealed the problems of rebooking you on a flight. But if it didn't, then Chase should have been able to claw back your points.

As I look at your correspondence with Virgin Atlantic, it appears that the airline was trying to pressure you into taking one of its upcoming flights. This is understandable; it didn't want to issue a refund. But rules are rules, and the airline couldn't just keep your points.

I contacted Virgin Atlantic on your behalf. A representative contacted you, and you furnished the airline with additional proof that things had gone sideways with your European vacation. The Virgin Atlantic representative admitted to "multiple failures in customer service."

Virgin Atlantic credited your points and added a flight voucher for the inconvenience. It also reimbursed you for the nonrefundable Eurostar tickets that you lost.

*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](mailto:chris@elliott.org) or get help by contacting him at [elliottadvocacy.org/help/](http://elliottadvocacy.org/help/).*

## THE VIP LOUNGE

# Shereen Hickman

on laughter, Jesus, saffron, and playing 'a salty old hippie'

**F**or performer Shereen Hickman, laughter is the cure for just about anything — especially, she said, in the "current climate." It's "extremely therapeutic," she said, and "available to all." That is why she enjoys comedy and circus performing, and is having a blast in her current role as Grandma in "The Addams Family" national tour, which will be at the Boch Center Wang Theatre for five performances March 21-23. "I was given quite a bit of creative freedom, which is rare in a well-known musical," she said in a phone call from the show's stop in Frederick, Md. "The trust in me ... by the director has been a thrill, since I can use improvisation and humor." The 54-year-old entertainer added that while her character is eccentric, she doesn't miss a trick and, despite living in the attic, is "very aware" of everything going on in the house. "I think of her as a salty old hippie who knows how to live off the land." Born in Denver and raised in Germany and Northern California (her dad was a chief major sergeant in the Air Force), Hickman has performed in several Cirque du Soleil shows, including "Zumanity" in Las Vegas and in the troupe's vaudeville show "Banana Shpeel" on Broadway. When not on tour, she collaborates with other comedy/circus artists, teaches improv, does voice-overs, and is the first female company member of Parallel Exit, a New York City-based, award-winning physical comedy theater company. We caught up with Hickman, who lives in Westfield, N.J., with her partner, Walt Patrylo, a mechanical engineer, to talk about all things travel.

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

Vienna, Austria. I was part of The International Theatre three years ago. It felt like home. Rich with history, culture, art, opera, and schnitzel. I often dream of unfinished moments in that glorious place, such as the annual Viennese Opera Ball. It is on my bucket list to attend in full dress code and exclaim "Alles Waltzer!" while I attempt to float across the dance floor with a partner who can lead us in a glorious flourish, my gown swooshing as I try my best to not whirl into others and create a pileup.

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

If I desire an itinerary, then a travel agent. If I just wanna wing it, then I go on my own.

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

Freedom! Self-care! Peace! And also, panic, loss of time, and no GPS/map!

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

Struggling to think of one as it relates to a vacation. Keeping a sense of humor and curiosity in all situations helps take the sting out of a bad one. Plenty of horror stories while working cruise ships. But never as a passenger.

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

I was 5 and in Hyde Park, London, with my family. We came upon a statue of Peter Pan. I kept referring to the statue as she. My father rebuffed with "Peter Pan is a boy." I insisted he was a she. My fa-



Shereen Hickman at the Colorado National Monument in April 2024.

ther then asked me: "How many girls do you know named Peter?" I answered "one!" He conceded.

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

All of these are the best reasons to vacation.

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

"Travels with Charley: In Search of America" by John Steinbeck.

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

Jesus. For me, I can't think of a more influential individual in all of recorded history. Long after his death, he remains pivotal. Above anybody else, living or dead, I would want to be alongside him and hopefully finally get some answers.

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

A universal travel adapter, moisturizer with sunscreen, wool blend socks, and laundry detergent

sheets.

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

Dark chocolate-covered raisins, pretzel thins, Luna bar, or a savory cracker.

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

I was gifted saffron from a local family on the island of Grenada.

**What is your favorite app/website for travel?**

Wanderlog.

**What has travel taught you?**

That friendships can be formed around the world, even if we don't share a common language.

**What is your best travel tip?**

Go where the locals go and where they don't go. Restaurants, neighborhoods, parks, etc. Speak with locals and discover little-known places.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### BERKSHIRES DANCE FESTIVAL LINE-UPS DAZZLE

Grab your seats early for the upcoming historic summer season at Jacob's Pillow in Becket. Returning for its 93rd season, Festival 2025 will showcase companies from around the world, presenting nine weeks of dance events for in-person visitors, and offering online audiences the chance to stream select events. Nine celebrated dance companies will present weeklong performances in the landmark Ted Shawn Theatre, including the return of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to the Pillow for the first time since 1963; the official sunset of the Stephen Petronio Company after an accomplished 40-year run; the world premiere of "Urban Love Suite," the latest incarnation of Sekou McMiller's dance and music project Afro Latin Jazz and Soul Experience; and so much more. Additionally, the popular outdoor Henry J. Leir Stage will feature an international roster of dancers, including performances by the KanKouran West African Dance Company, Calpuli

Mexican Dance Theater, Angkor Dance Troupe, as well as a variety of ensembles from The School at Jacob's Pillow. The new season also marks the opening of the reimagined Doris Duke Theatre, a technologically advanced theater dedicated to dance of the future. Beyond onstage performances, Festival 2025 includes exhibits, live streams, PillowTalks, classes and workshops, and community events (June 25 through Aug. 24). Member's presale tickets available now; general on-sale ticketing begins April 10. 413-243-0745, [www.jacobspillow.org](http://www.jacobspillow.org)

## THERE

### STYLISH HOTEL DEBUTS IN HISTORIC ROMA NORTE

Step inside the pink façade of the recently opened Casona Roma Norte and you'll discover a stylish and comfortable home-away-from-home in Mexico City. Located in the culturally vibrant Roma Norte neighborhood, celebrated for its tree-lined streets and dynamic culinary scene, the meticulously restored 1920s mansion hotel combines Belle Époque, Art Nouveau,

and Art Deco styles, all enhanced with modern luxury and amenities. Each of the 32 light-filled rooms is designed with soothing earth tones, wood floors accented with handwoven Oaxacan rugs, lush linens, marble-clad bathrooms, and photographs by Mexican photographer and filmmaker Santiago Arau. Amenities include a single-room spa offering massages, facials, aromatherapy, and more; and a gym with a treadmill, stationary bike, Nordic ski machine, weights, and yoga mats. Hungry? There's a welcome variety of food and beverage choices. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, Aquiles serves seasonal comfort dishes — from pancakes with bacon to fish tacos with guacamole to short ribs and burgers — crafted by namesake Chef Aquiles Chavez. Savor the unexpected fusion of Sinaloa and Japanese food at Suchi, a street-level eatery where the city's creative denizens flock to enjoy the newest creations by Chef Chavez. Fans of agave-based spirits won't want to miss Akamba, a bar offering a curated selection of national distillates, including Mezcal, Tequilas, Raicillas, Bacanoras, and Xtabentún (if you don't know what those are, you'll know when you leave!), with tastings led by an in-house Mexican Spirits Master who crafts cocktails tailored to your palate. Just need a small pick-me-up? Matcha Saloon merges the ambiance of a Japanese tea room with the French pastry mastery of the celebrated Mexican bakery, La Macaria. Coming soon: a rooftop restaurant with grilled fare and The Mirror Speakeasy for late-night drinks. A member of the Hamak Hotels Collection, the hotel welcomes pets, and guests ages 12 and up. Spring rates from \$330; summer rates from \$315. +52-55-117-8660, <https://casonaroma.com>



## EVERYWHERE

### EMERGENCY POWER ON THE ROAD

As road trip season approaches, it's wise to plan for the unexpected. One item worth adding to your vehicle's travel kit is a reliable way to power up your phone. Whether you're using GPS to navigate unfamiliar terrain or you need to call emergency services, staying connected is essential. Enter EZQuest's Ultimate Power Charger. This sleek and efficient charger allows you to power up two devices simultaneously, delivering a boost that's up to 1.5 hours faster than standard chargers. With universal compatibility, it works with a wide range of products, from smartphones to tablets. The best part? The EZQuest charger is suitable for both 12V and 24V vehicles, making it perfect for cars, trucks, RVs, and even larger vehicles. The digital display provides real-time car battery read-out voltage, and allows you to recharge devices while on the go. Whether it's an unexpected detour, a breakdown, or simply staying connected with family and friends, this power charger ensures you're always prepared. \$34.99. <https://ezq.com/ultimatepower-usb-c-72w-car-charger-dual-port-with-display-details.html>

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