

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

It's not safe for me to fly. Can I get a refund for my American Airlines ticket?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I recently used part of a \$721 ticket credit on American Airlines to book a flight from Fort Myers, Fla., to Birmingham, Ala., to see my grandson perform with the Alabama Ballet. I used \$616 in credit and paid a \$200 change fee.

Unfortunately, that was one of the first weekends of the pandemic, so the Alabama Ballet canceled its performances. I canceled the flight, fearful of the virus. This left me with a credit of \$616, which is good until early 2021.

I am turning 86 in a couple of weeks. The pandemic has grown since then, and since I am in the most vulnerable age group, I am not going anywhere and am unlikely to travel for a long time, if at all. That is a lot of money to throw away and not be able to use. I am therefore requesting a refund, or an alternative if there is one, to receive a credit I can allow someone else to use.

American Airlines won't offer a refund or a voucher that I can let someone else use. Can you help me?

BETTY BARRETT,
Huntington, W.Va.

A. American Airlines should help you use your credit — but technically, it doesn't have to.

The terms of your ticket purchase were clear. You had a non-refundable ticket, which allowed you to cancel your flight and receive a credit. Back then, American also charged a \$200 change fee (it has since stopped the practice for most tickets).

Your case is a little complicated. You canceled your first ticket and received a \$721 credit. Then you rebooked a new flight, paying a change fee, and canceled your second ticket. That left you with another credit. But you can't use that credit now because of the pandemic.

Airlines are not in a good place. They insist that flying is safe, but the risks of travel during the pandemic are undeniable. If you're in an at-risk group, staying home is a sensible move, even if you lose the value of your ticket credit.

American Airlines should have shown some compassion since you are in a high-risk age group. But as I already mentioned, it didn't have to. It was following the rules of your original ticket purchase. And you agreed to those rules when you booked your original flight.

In a situation like this, you're better off sending a direct appeal to a manager at the airline. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of all the American Airlines customer service managers on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/american-airlines/.

You reached out to American by e-mail. A representative responded quickly, granting your request for a transferable voucher. You'll be able to give the voucher to another family member, so the money won't go to waste.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.



THE VIP LOUNGE

Janet Wu on Africa, Asia, a bar with good onions, and being a grandmother

Ask veteran broadcast journalist Janet Wu what her favorite hobby is and she doesn't hesitate to answer: Travel. "I can't wait to travel again," said Wu, an Emmy Award-winning political reporter who is co-anchor (with Ed Harding) of WCVB TV's "On the Record," which airs Sundays at 11 a.m. Now that she's "semi-retired," the Bridgewater, N.J., native said that she is looking forward to visiting places on her bucket list, including the Galapagos Islands. "I want to see the animals, and it's one of the unspoiled regions of the world. I've also never been to Machu Picchu and would like to go there, too," said Wu, 70. "Before I die, I want to go to some of these places that haven't been as touched by civilization as other places have been." But staying put has its perks for Wu, who has two adult children and recently became a "Poh Poh" (Cantonese for grandmother) and looks forward to welcoming a second grandchild this summer. "I could sit and snuggle this baby forever," she said

of her new granddaughter. "Being a grandma . . . it is as advertised." We caught up with Wu, who lives in Boston with her husband, Adams Carroll, a retired sales and marketing executive, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

I have three favorite destinations: Hong Kong, Africa, and Bermuda. I have been going to Hong Kong regularly since I was a child for family reasons, but as an adult, I've come to appreciate it more for its cosmopolitan and true international diversity. There are very few cities — and that includes New York, London, and Paris — where just about everyone speaks at least two languages fluently. For Africa, we've been to Tanzania, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa over two extended trips. The color of the landscape, the spirit of the people, the history . . . and of course the animals, are unforgettable. My third favorite is Bermuda since Hong Kong and Africa aren't quick and easy trips. Bermudians have a conservative style certainly, but

no one there looks twice at you because you are a different race or in a mixed-race marriage walking down the street . . . and those motorbikes! Love the pace, the formality, the beaches.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Favorite drink is a vodka Gibson. You can tell the quality of any pub, restaurant, or beachside bar by its onions — if they even have them.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?

Still waiting for my trip to Galapagos. Also, our trip to Scandinavia earlier this year was canceled [because of] COVID.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling?

My black, bulky cotton jacket/wrap. It keeps me warm and serves as a blanket. Also, this one pair of thick cotton socks/slippers that allows me to walk to the restroom without having to

search for my shoes or pick up wet spots from spilled drinks in the aisle.

Aisle or window?

Window. I generally travel with my husband and he likes the aisle.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

Going to Asia for the first time with my parents. It is about family. It was the first of many, many trips to China — especially Hong Kong where I spent a summer. Then when I became a parent, we took our children. When they graduated from college, they lived and worked there, so it became an annual event for almost a decade.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Room service, of course.

Best travel tip?

Have easy access to sanitizer — even pre-COVID — and chargers. You never know when you'll be stuck waiting for delayed planes, trains, or buses.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

NEW KID-FRIENDLY CAMP-RESORT

Attention all parents whose kids are going crazy after quarantining all winter! (Meaning, everyone.) Fans of family-friendly parks — and Yogi Bear and Boo-Boo — will cheer to learn a new Jellystone Park Camp-Resort location is debuting in mid-April in Massachusetts. Northgate Resorts is converting a 132-site campground, formerly the Shady Acres Family Campground in Carver, into Cranberry Acres Jellystone Park, named after nearby cranberry bogs. Amenities include a fishing pond and beach, swimming pool, kiddie pool, hiking trails, nine-hole miniature golf course, two playgrounds, dog park, gem mining sluice, game room and arcade, horseshoe pit, basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts, and 4,320-square-foot pavilion. Tentative additional attractions include jumping pad, laser tag, cornhole, and kayak rentals, with plans to expand the camp store and, in 2022, install cabins. www.campjellystone.com

DAFFODILS AND MIDWEEK DEALS

If cabin fever has you down, check out the discounted midweek rates in Hammetts Hotel's "Travel Is Uncanceled" package. This centrally located Newport, R.I., waterfront hotel offers 84 stylish rooms priced from \$99 to \$169. The hotel and the city of Newport continue to maintain rigorous COVID-19 precautions, and the offer is available to anyone feeling excited about travel; no vaccine records are required. Available through May 27; must be booked by April 1. 401-324-7500, www.hammetts.com. If you're looking for some nearby outdoor activities, and you time it right, you can view the springtime daffodil display at Blitheworld, a 33-acre seaside estate where over 50,000 daffodils bloom in April. www.blitheworld.org

THERE



ADOBE STOCK

ADVENTURE TRAVEL IN USA

If recent surveys are correct, most Americans will be planning domestic, rather than international, vacations in 2021. With that in mind, G Adventures is promoting 15 small group trips that take advantage of the wide-open spaces in America's national parks. For example, Hiking Utah's Big 5, one of the new itineraries offered this year, is a nine-day, active style trip that visits Capitol Reef, Arches, Canyonlands, Bryce, and Zion national parks. Features camping most nights with some hotel/airbnb stays to start and throughout; affordable public and private transport. Limited to 13 travelers, ages 12 and above. Rates from \$1,599. Additional adventures available to Hawaii, Wyoming, Alaska, and more. 800-281-2354, www.gadventures.com/united-states-adventures



ERIC ISSELÉE - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

VIRGINIA BEACH HOTEL AND AQUARIUM DEBUT

Tired of your same old beach haunts? Those searching for a different desti-

nation may want to consider the newly-opened Delta Hotels Virginia Beach Bayfront Suites, the area's only beachfront hotel on Chesapeake Bay. Offering 295 spacious one- and two-bedroom suites on its own private beach, the hotel includes amenities such as an outdoor pool and lounge, kayak and bike rentals, and 24-7 ultra-modern fitness center. The property's signature restaurant, Tin Cup Kitchen + Oyster Bar, serves a robust oyster program and coastal cuisine on its expansive outdoor patio. Rates from \$300. 757-481-9000, www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/orfdb-delta-hotels-virginia-beach-bayfront-suites/ If you're visiting with the kids, the nearby Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's South Building reopens this summer after a \$25 million renovation that includes interactive play areas, a giant Pacific octopus, two touch pools with jellies and Indo-Pacific invertebrates, and brings back the Aquarium's beloved otters. www.virginiaaquarium.com/Pages/default.aspx

EVERYWHERE

TRAVEL TIPS FOR SOLO WOMEN ADVENTURERS

Solo women travelers are a growing segment of the travel market. While international trips may be on hold — for now — you can still prepare for future adventures with a complimentary 96-page color booklet offering "101 Tips for Solo Women Travelers." Created by Boston-based Overseas Adventure Travel (O.A.T.), a leader in solo-friendly travel for women over 50, the booklet presents advice from seasoned solo women travelers in over 80 countries, including such topics as packing like a pro, safety issues, best travel apps, how to dine like a diva, recommended solo travel destinations, and more. With tips in hand, make sure to check out the top five O.A.T. trips cho-

sen by women to destinations in Morocco, Africa, Egypt, Sicily, and Japan. 800-955-1925; www.oattravel.com/community/101-tips



Baby Sleeping Bags

KEEP LITTLE CAMPERS WARM

Camping and outdoor enthusiasts who want to keep their young children warm are discovering the joys of Morrison Outdoors' Baby Sleeping Bags. The miniature sleeping bags feature sleeves to give your baby the freedom to use their hands while creating a cozy sleep environment for the littlest campers in your life. Available with polyester fiber insulation for moderate temperatures, and down insulation for colder temperatures. Hesitant about investing too much in an item your child will soon outgrow? The company has partnered with Rerouted to make it easy to trade in your used sleeping bag, get cash back, and support great causes. Simply return the item with provided pre-paid shipping label for cash back and a discount code for a matching amount to spend with Morrison Outdoors. Available in two sizes: 6 to 24 months and 2 to 4 years. From \$84.95. morrisonoutdoors.com

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