

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

He wants a refund instead of a Royal Caribbean cruise credit

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. In 2019, my wife, Sandy, and I booked a Royal Caribbean cruise to New England and Canada. This plan was to celebrate a special occasion, our upcoming 50th wedding anniversary. We were scheduled to leave in May, but Royal Caribbean canceled the cruise and offered us either a refund or a 125 percent cruise credit. We asked for the credit.

In May, Royal Caribbean issued a cruise credit for just \$1,260 — \$841 less than the \$2,101 the cruise line had promised. I called and spoke to representatives on three different days to request a refund and obtain an explanation for how our cruise credit had been miscalculated. Shortly after ending the phone conversation with the last representative, I received an e-mail notification from Royal Caribbean showing a new credit of \$1,681 (that's a 100 percent cruise credit).

Royal Caribbean refuses to explain the miscalculation of the cruise credit and will not refund our cruise. We feel that a refund from Royal Caribbean is justified. Can you help us get a refund?

RICH KANUCHOK,
Baltimore

A. Like most other cruise lines, Royal Caribbean offered a full refund or a 125 percent cruise credit after the pandemic. You chose the 125 percent cruise credit. Now, in a perfect world, Royal Caribbean would have allowed you to change your mind and get a full refund. But once you decided to take the credit, the usual terms would have applied. The most important of the terms is the expiration: You have two years to use the cruise credit. Here are the other rules: www.royalcaribbean.com/faq/topics/onboard-cruise-credit-offer.

Royal Caribbean should have offered you the full 125 percent cruise credit quickly. But in the chaos of the mass cancellations, it did not. You asked your travel adviser, the cruise line and finally the cruise line's executives to give you the full 125 percent. But the results were the same.

Should you be able to change your mind on a refund if Royal Caribbean can't do what it promised? I think that's debatable. One thing is for certain, though. The cruise line needs to either give you the full 125 percent cruise credit or a refund.

I like the way you handled your case. You started with your travel adviser but then escalated directly to the cruise line and then contacted the executives. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of Royal Caribbean's managers on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/royal-caribbean/. You also kept almost everything in writing, which allowed you to have a paper trail of the correspondence between you and the cruise line. Nice work.

In the end, granting you a refund was up to Royal Caribbean. I contacted the cruise line on your behalf. It sent you the \$2,101 cruise credit it promised via your travel agent.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. His latest book is "How To Be The World's Smartest Traveler." Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.



Chris Wallace and his wife, Lorraine, at Catherine's Palace in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2018.

THE VIP LOUNGE

CHRIS WALLACE ON EAR PLUGS, HIS GLOBE YEARS, AND THAT TIME HE WENT TO RUSSIA RIGHT AFTER A TOUGH PUTIN INTERVIEW

In the more than 17 years that veteran broadcast journalist Chris Wallace has hosted "Fox News Sunday" (which marks its 25th anniversary on April 28), he has reported on a variety of topics spanning four US presidential administrations. "There's always something new in terms of the story line, in terms of the balance of power in Washington, in terms of the challenges the country is facing," said Wallace, 72. On the international front, Wallace recalls interviewing Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki in 2018 and asking him why people who oppose him "end up dead." He was heading to neighboring Russia for a week's vacation with his wife the day after the interview. "I remember thinking at the end of it: Gee, is this a good idea to be going right after this?" he said. "But I figured: What the heck — I'm this close." Wallace said that all turned out well and that they had a "wonderful time." The Chicago native, whose pre-Fox professional credentials include "NBC Nightly News" anchor, "Meet the Press" moderator, and "ABC Primetime" correspondent, got his start in Boston after graduating from Harvard. "I worked at the Globe for 3½ years. I was the City Hall reporter covering Kevin White and Louise Day Hicks, and then from there I went on to be the national reporter at the Globe," he said. "It was my first job out of college and it was a great start in the business I've been in for the last half century." Wallace also has fond memories of Martha's Vineyard, where he vacationed with his dad, the late broadcast journalist Mike Wallace, then later with his own family. Wallace said he considered getting a place on the Vineyard, but ended

up buying a second home in Annapolis, Md. — less than an hour's drive from his home in Washington, D.C. "I miss the Vineyard, but this is a heck of a lot easier to get to and from." Wallace and his wife, Lorraine, a cookbook author, have six children between them (it is the second marriage for both; he has four kids and she has two), and seven grandchildren — with an eighth on the way. We caught up with Wallace to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

That's hard. I love a lot of the same places everyone does — Paris, Rome. ... So I will give you a more unusual one: Russia. I took my wife there just after a tough interview with Russian President Putin, which may not be the smartest time to vacation in Russia. But we had a great trip. St. Petersburg is fascinating. My favorite day, we went off without a guide to the Faberge Museum to see the wondrous Faberge eggs. Then we took a boat on the canals that intersect the city — sort of like Venice. Our other stop [was] Moscow. I think Red Square is one of the great sights in the world. And despite my interview with Putin, his office gave us a special tour of the Grand Kremlin Palace.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

I like to eat the food of the place where I am traveling: grilled fish and salad in Greece; pasta and great wine in Italy; anything in France.

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

So many places. I have never been on safari in Africa [which is] maybe the top of my bucket list. [Also] Angkor Wat in Cambodia [and] Machu Picchu in Peru.

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

Earplugs. I do not like to be kept up at night by noise from the next hotel room. So wherever I am traveling, [I bring] ear plugs.

Aisle or window?

This is the easiest question: aisle. If I need to get up — especially on an overnight trip — I do not want to have to climb over somebody.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

I was really lucky as a kid. My parents took me on a lot of trips around the US and overseas. I never took it for granted. I remember when I was 9 or 10, and they had just started commercial jet travel to Europe, we went on one of the first Pan Am flights from New York to Paris. Even at that age, I knew this was special.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

I don't even know what this means. One of the joys of traveling is savoring it — enjoying every minute. That's why we all work so hard — to enjoy vacations. So I feel no guilt whatsoever about any pleasure on vacation. Just gratitude.

Best travel tip?

I am going against the conventional wisdom here. I know the experts say — if you're flying to Europe — get on the plane, turn your watch to the time in the place you're going to, don't eat a heavy dinner, and go to sleep immediately. Again, how often do we get to do this? I stay up, eat and drink everything I'm offered, and get the two or three hours of sleep that are left. But I will say this: No matter how tired I am, I never take a nap my first day in Europe. Just power through. Get a great night's sleep at the end of the day and you feel ready to go on day two.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

Fenway baseball packages

It's baseball season! Fenway Park may have capacity restrictions this year but diehard Red Sox fans can take advantage of several Swing Batta Batta Baseball Packages offered at Hotel Commonwealth, the team's official hotel in Kenmore Square. The best deal, Show Your Sox Spirit, offers overnight accommodations where you can watch the game on TV in a Fenway-facing guest room for two (a mere 542 feet from the action but no view of the field); bucket of iconic ballpark treats; and \$50 gift card to the Red Sox team store. Rates from \$219. Additional overnight packages for two offer a variety of viewing opportunities, including watching the game from the State Street Pavilion Club, Green Monster seats, or front row dugout seating, with more perks such as guided tours of the ballpark, historical guide through the Red Sox Hall of Fame, personalized message on scoreboard during the game, and more. \$799-\$2,500. 617-933-5000, www.hotelcommonwealth.com/packages



Plan ahead for rail travel in New England

Fans of rail travel will want to check out Vacations By Rail's five New England tours offered in September and October, 2021-2022. The six-to-10 day fall tours traverse a variety of states with options

for museum tours, city walking tours, scenic cruises and optimum foliage viewing opportunities. For example, the six-day New England in a Nutshell tour explores historic and scenic sites in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont by rail, water, and sky (from \$1,895); and the eight-day New England Autumn Foliage Express tour departs from Boston before winding its way through famed fall-foliage vistas — the White Mountain National Forest and Mt. Washington regions of New Hampshire, and Vermont's Green Mountains — as well as offering mansion and museum tours in Mystic Seaport and Newport, and scenic vistas on Cape Cod (from \$2,495). Tours farther afield — to destinations across the United States, Canada, and more — are also available. 877-929-7245, www.vacationsbyrail.com/destinations/north-america

THERE

Food lover's road trip

Looking for an alternative to your same-old-same-old road trip? Southern Delaware's Culinary Coast offers open-air culinary adventures with an added bonus of five-star beaches and boardwalks, celebrated breweries, and family farm experiences. From Lewes to Fenwick Island, visitors can enjoy local sea bounty while dining al fresco on ocean-view patios. A 2013 bill supporting shellfish aquaculture revitalized Delaware's oyster industry, meaning you'll find fresh Inland Bay oysters on many menus. In addition, visitors can explore more than a dozen craft breweries, wineries, and distilleries in the area, including Dogfish Head, Thompson Island Brewing Company, and Salted Vines Vineyard & Winery. And with almost half of the land in Sussex County dedicated to farmland, there are opportunities to visit and taste the area's

bounty at inland farms and orchards. Need a place to stay? Dogfish Inn — yes, affiliated with the beer — offers 16 simple, stylish rooms in Lewes. (Rates from \$169) Find links to additional accommodations, dining options, outdoor adventures, and more at Southern Delaware Tourism. 800-357-1818, visitsoutherndelaware.com



Saddle up and ride

Want to plan a dude ranch vacation but don't know where or how to begin your research? A great place to start is the newly launched, easy-to-navigate website created by the Dude Ranchers Association. Showcasing more than 90 pre-qualified ranch destinations in 10 US states and British Columbia, visitors can filter searches by location, capacity, length of stay, food options, national parks, and more before finding links to individual ranch websites. Look for activities that satisfy your vacation wish list, including horseback riding, hiking, fishing, swimming, zip-lining, white-water rafting, rodeos, cattle drives, western dancing, and fine dining. You can also request a printed Dude Ranch Association brochure directory or access a downloadable version. duderanch.org

EVERYWHERE

Virtual travel offers global experiences

With many international borders still shut down, there's still a need for creative experiences enjoyed at home. Enter: Beeyonder. Founded by Boston-based entrepreneur Brittany Palmer, a bilateral amputee, Beeyonder is a virtual travel platform designed especially for individuals with conditions that prevent or inhibit their ability to travel. (These days, that applies to many of us.) Offering 350-plus global experiences across 47 countries in over 20 languages, the website transports individuals and groups via live-from-the-street tours, cooking classes, art workshops, wildlife encounters, music lessons, educational seminars, and more. Another benefit: Participants have access to practically empty famous landmarks typically flooded with tourists. Rates from \$10. beeyonder.com

Misadventures at sea

Korean-American Chaney Kwak had the misfortune to be aboard the Viking Sky when the luxury cruise ship suffered a catastrophic engine failure on March 23, 2019. After surviving the harrowing experience, complete with 60-foot swells and 87-mph gales pushing the vessel toward the notorious Hústadvika coast of Norway, Kwak did what any award-winning travel writer might do: He wrote a book about his experience. Debuting in June, "The Passenger: How a Travel Writer Learned to Love Cruises & Other Lies from a Sinking Ship" chronicles 27 hours aboard the distressed Viking Sky, while at the same time examining Kwak's own family history, issues of race, art, global inequality, and his failing relationship. www.godine.com/book/passenger/

NECEE REGIS