

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

She couldn't change her train tickets. Can she get a refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I recently booked two train tickets from Seville, Spain, to Madrid from Trainline, a ticket reseller. The tickets are 70 percent refundable.

I needed to change to an earlier train but couldn't do it online. So, I purchased two new tickets for travel and have sought a refund for the tickets I couldn't use. I tried to talk to customer service first in Seville and then Madrid. A representative told me to submit my request online.

I followed all the instructions on the site. Trainline has suggested that I'm entitled to a refund. But now, it's saying the exchange is impossible unless I send a screenshot of the error message I received, with a timestamp, when trying to cancel my ticket. Can you help me?

LINDA SHAPIRO, *Chicago*

A. Trainline's tickets are refundable, but like airlines, you have to cancel before the train leaves. Trainline says it has no record of you trying to cancel, so it is going to keep all your money.

But here's the problem: Although Trainline said it can process a ticket change request through its site, you couldn't do it. This is a common problem with travel companies. They direct you to their websites for the "best" customer service, but then offer you nothing but dead ends and error messages.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say companies create sites to turn people away — and allow them to keep your money. But in this case, it was probably an issue with your browser accessing a

The next time you have to cancel something before your departure or stay, please make sure you have something — an e-mail, a printout, a cancellation number — that shows you contacted the company before your deadline for a refund.

European site or something benign. Sometimes, these things just happen.

Trainline's terms and conditions, which you can find on its site at [thetrainline.com](https://www.trainline.com), are clear about the timeline for canceling your tickets.

I think if you had something in writing that shows you tried to cancel your tickets on time, you could have received the 70 percent refund. But you didn't have any proof, which made your case more complicated.

The next time you have to cancel something before your departure or stay, please make sure you have something — an e-mail, a printout, a cancellation number — that shows you contacted the company before your deadline for a refund.

I reached out to Trainline on your behalf. It reviewed your records and verified that it denied your refund because you had not canceled your tickets through your Trainline account.

Trainline says it decided to make "an exceptional refund" and has honored the 70 percent refund.

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

THE VIP LOUNGE

'I'm the pack-light guy. My inner circle often teases me about it.'

Celebrity chef Spike Mendelsohn is excited to bring his newest culinary offering, PLNT Burger, to the South End. Located inside Whole Foods in the Ink Block development, it is the 11th PLNT Burger location, with many more planned, according to Mendelsohn, who partnered with Seth Goldman in launching the vegan eatery in 2019. All but one of the PLNT Burger locations are in kiosks inside Whole Food markets around the country, with one brick-and-mortar location in Union Square in New York City. "We offer an indulgent, delicious, crafty burger that just happens to be plant-based," said Mendelsohn, 41, who owns or is affiliated with about two dozen restaurants/restaurant brands worldwide. "I think we're seeing a major shift in our food system globally. ... We're just scratching the surface of it right now, and I'm excited to see where it goes." In addition to Beyond Meat burgers (the mushroom bacon barbecue burger with cheddar cheese is a bestseller, he said), PLNT Burger offerings include chicken nuggets made from pea protein, fries, chili, soft-serve ice cream, and shakes. Mendelsohn, who was born in Montreal and lived there with his family until they moved to Spain when he was 11, came in fifth place in the fourth season of "Top Chef," which aired 2008-'09. He lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Cody Borromeo, a public relations specialist, their son, Ace, 5, and their Goldendoodle, Goldie. We caught up with Mendelsohn to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Hawaii. It's a second home. I love the people, hiking, surfing, waterfalls. ... What more can you ask for? Maui is my go-to island. I have a little bit of a second family there — one of my best friends has lived there for 10 years — and it's got a little bit of everything, including rain forests, waterfalls, surfing, delicious fresh fruit, and just great people. So for me, Hawaii is one of my happy places.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Mexican. I love getting the Mexi going on vacation with margaritas.

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

Galapagos Islands. I really want to take the National Geographic cruise to the Galapagos. I'm nerdy that way.

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



Spike Mendelsohn on Maui.

My GoPro [camera]. Always make it a GoPro day!

Aisle or window?

Window. People sitting and standing can get distracting.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

I was very fortunate in that I had a family in the restaurant business. I had a mother who loved traveling. She really loved French chefs. I remember on one of my trips to France, we just had an amazing experience. We traveled from Paris all the way down to the South of France, to Monaco — and we hit up Marseilles — and I just really fell in love with the culture and how the French held food as such an important part of their life ... from how it's grown to

what region it comes from. I really fell in love with food in France because I just thought that was the coolest thing. It really left a lasting impression — so much so that later on in my career, when I finally had a chance to go and do an apprenticeship, I took one in the North of France.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Sleeping ... I need it.

Best travel tip?

Pack light. I've been known to not pack at all and just buy clothing on a trip. I'm the pack-light guy. My inner circle often teases me about it.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

MARCEL MAKEOVER

You've seen it from I-95 in New Haven: the landmark Brutalist structure that modernist architect Marcel Breuer completed in 1970 for the Pirelli Armstrong Rubber Company. Empty for decades, the property makes its grand debut on May 12 as the Hotel Marcel, the country's first Passive House Certified and first net zero energy hotel. Developed by Becker + Becker, the hotel will generate 100 percent of its own electricity to provide power to its 165 guest rooms and suites, new American restaurant and bar, lounge and 7,000 square feet of meeting and event spaces. Interior design company Dutch East Design juxtaposes a feminine interior with the masculine exterior, adding pops of muted dark green and sienna, caramel vinyl, walnut, and decorative lighting to the utilitarian gray concrete. No need to worry about highway noise: triple-glazed windows ensure rest while offering dramatic views of Long



Island Sound, historic New Haven, and Yale University. Rates from \$229. 203-780-7800, www.hotelmarcel.com

EXHIBIT CELEBRATES BOOKS FOR KIDS

Fans of children's books — and kids of all ages — won't want to miss the upcoming exhibition at the Portsmouth

Historical Society. "Imagine That! The Power of Picture Books," celebrating the heritage of books created in New England, features more than 100 original artworks by over 30 illustrators, a bookmaking station, play space, toy theater, and reading nook. Artists who have shaped the field are represented alongside popular contemporary artists, including Maxfield Parrish, N.C. Wyeth, Dr. Seuss, Eric Carle, Chris Van Allsburg, Grace Lin, Beth Krommes, and more. Open daily, May 6 through Sept. 25. Adults \$10. Free to children under 18, military, those older than 70 and Society members. First Fridays are free. Includes admission to the John Paul Jones House Museum. 603-436-8433, portsmouthhistory.org

THERE

WAKE UP AND SMELL THE LAVENDER

Summer visitors to Hvar, Croatia, arriving for its sparkling seaside harbor and islands, vineyard-covered hillsides, olive groves, and lavender fields, have a stylish new place to stay in the



minute drive to the tiny 14th-century town of Velo Grablje, where in mid-July the Lavender Festival returns with more than 15 different lavender-flavored products such as beer and chocolate as well as concerts, workshops, and more. Hotel rates from \$300. www.suncanihar.com/riva-marina-hvar-hotel.html

INTIMATE ALASKAN CRUISES

Hop aboard American Queen Voyages' inaugural sailings on the brand-new Ocean Victory and Ocean Navigator, and explore some of the marvels of Alaska's Inside Passage. With no more than 202 guests, and 84 crew, you're sure to feel pampered on the 12-day voyage from Vancouver to Sitka (or the 13-day Sitka to Vancouver route). These boutique coastal vessels can easily navigate canals, locks, tranquil bays, and hidden ports where larger ships cannot go, making it easier to get close to the scenic waterfalls, glaciers, and abundant wildlife that can be experienced on the trip. Sailings available May through September, 2022-2024. Rates from \$4,600. 833-929-0605, www.victorycruises.com/cruises/authentic-alaska/

EVERYWHERE

MELT AWAY TRAVEL STRESS

Are you a nervous traveler? Boost your

stress resilience with Sensate, a portable, palm-size device and audio app designed to help you naturally regulate your anxiety responses and calm jittery nerves by the use of soothing sonic frequencies. Fits in your carry-on or toiletry bag for easy-access when decompressing in your hotel room, and even at home. Simply lay down, put on your headphones and turn on the device. Choose a soundscape and allow yourself to be guided through an experience to feel relaxed and more focused. Use as little as 10 minutes a day for calming results. Comes with detachable lanyard, eye mask, case, and charging cord. \$249. www.getsensate.com

FITNESS SOCKS FOR ALL SPORT ENTHUSIASTS

Hikers, runners, bikers, golfers and more will want to stock up on Swiftwick's new performance sock, the Flite XT Trail. Available for both men and women fitness fanatics, the socks feature a natural merino wool upper that wicks moisture and regulates temperature, along with grip fibers and ankle support to maximize stability. Additionally, a seamless toe box eliminates points of friction in the forefoot. Available in 5-inch and 2-inch cuff heights. From \$19.99. swiftwick.com/collections/fitness

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