

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP

A British Airways Airbus A391-131 comes in for a landing at Heathrow Airport on April 29.

## Road Scholar downgrades traveler from business to economy

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** I just completed a Road Scholar trip to Egypt, but on the trip home, British Airways canceled my flight four hours before its scheduled departure. My ticket on British Airways was in business class, but British Airways rebooked me on Egyptair in a leftover seat at the back of the plane in economy class. The ticket cost British Airways \$416.

I spent \$3,000 on business-class airfare. I'd like to get a refund for the fare difference. But so far, both Road Scholar and British Airways have refused. Can you help?

MAUREEN KELLEHER,  
Simsbury, Conn.

**A.** Flight cancellations happen. But when they do, you should receive a refund for your downgrade from business class to economy.

British Airways' general conditions of carriage — the legal agreement between you and the airline — addresses a change of schedule like the one you experienced. It explicitly says that you will get a refund when there is a fare difference and you use the ticket. Road Scholar's terms and conditions don't address an involuntary downgrade like the one you suffered.

There are also Department of Transportation rules that have to be followed. It says that you're entitled to a refund if you're involuntarily moved to a lower class of service. For example, if you buy a first-class ticket and get downgraded to economy class because of an aircraft change, the airline must refund the fare difference. If your flight had originated in the United States, DOT rules would have applied.

Flight cancellations happen. But when they do, you should receive a refund for your downgrade from business class to economy.

I think you have a strong case for a refund. So, what's going on here? I reviewed the paper trail between you and Road Scholar. Since the tour operator had booked your flights, it was responsible for getting you your refund, so you went to the right place. But after four months, you weren't getting anywhere. It was time to call my advocacy team.

I could see no reason for the delay in your refund. In fact, two other members of your party had already filed successful credit card disputes to recover their money. By the way, I don't recommend doing that as a first step to recovering your money. It's always better to ask the company for a refund first. You can find the executive contacts for Road Scholar on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I contacted Road Scholar on your behalf. A representative responded to me shortly after that.

"I'm happy to report that we have resolved the situation with Maureen and are issuing her a refund," she said. "Her previous complaints had gotten caught up in the wrong department. Thanks for the nudge to escalate so we could get her talking to the right people to resolve her issue."

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](mailto:elliottadvocacy.org/help).

## THE VIP LOUNGE

# Choreographer Ebony Williams

on vacation thrifting, packing light, and Michelle Obama

**A**claimed dancer and choreographer-to-the-stars Ebony Williams, a Dorchester native, may not be a household name, but many have seen popular artists from Alicia Keys to Doja Cat dancing to her moves, and have seen her at work on multiple platforms, including in music videos. Most notably, she was one of two backup dancers matching Beyoncé move-for-move in the iconic 2009 MTV video of the year, for the song "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)," which led to Williams touring with Beyoncé and even performing at the Super Bowl with her. When she's not choreographing routines for popular artists, Broadway shows, or movies, Williams choreographs campaigns for global brands from Alice + Olivia to Lululemon. Currently, she is the head choreographer for the play "Toni Stone," at the Huntington Theatre through June 16. Written by Lydia R. Diamond, the play is about a St. Paul woman named Toni Stone. Known as baseball's "female Jackie Robinson," she was the first woman to play professional baseball on a men's team in the Negro League. Williams, who lives in New Jersey, said in a recent phone call during a break in rehearsals that she has been busy doing research "on certain gestures and things that were popular during the 1940s . . . using movements of the time to make sure that we are staying true to the story line." As an example, Williams said the way the players celebrated when they hit home runs nearly a century ago was different than they do now. "They didn't do things like high-fives," she said, adding that if she could describe the choreography for this show in just a few words, it would be "a feeling that is true to the era, character-driven, and I would say that it has sparks of spectacle." Williams, who began dancing when she was 8, graduated from the Boston Conservatory with a bachelor of fine arts (in dance) degree. She said she is excited to be working locally and seeing family and friends. "Being back . . . it's part of the reason I took the job," she said. We caught up with Williams — who is married and, in addition to two teenage stepdaughters, has an 11-month-old son — to talk about all things travel.

**If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go?** South Africa because I've never been to Africa. Any time I was supposed to go anywhere in Africa, something happened. I don't know where my roots come from, so I'd like to start by going there to explore that. Also, the culture around movement is so important to me — I think it would be a great place to train and connect with that culture.

**Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?** Typically, I don't get to take vacations for myself, since I'm [usually] traveling for work, so I can't explore as I'd like to. If I were to take a real vacation, I'd like to go through a travel agency so I could have help from someone who knows the area. I'd like to let them work on the planning so I can relax.

**Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?** It sounds stressful, but also, it's something that I want to explore. For me, I know I need to unplug and connect with myself. Being still and being one with yourself is actually very scary, but I think it'd be very therapeutic. It could be a very rich experience to unplug and take that time.

**What has been your worst vacation experience?** Not a particular vacation experience, although I've had bad experiences when I've had ex-



Ebony Williams in St. Croix.

pectations set from online images of the spaces I'm booked to stay in, and then when I arrive the reality is not as nice or new as the online marketing would have had me believe.

**What is your favorite childhood travel memory?** Not childhood, but in my teens. One of my first jobs — modeling and dancing — was for Champion sportswear, and we went to Key West [in Florida] to perform [in a fashion show]. It was my first time in a tropical place, and it was very luxurious and fun . . . and there were lots of palm trees.

**Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?** I need a vacation, so I would say to relax. It would probably be somewhere remote and in a jacuzzi.

**What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation?** Honestly, it would be a journal. It wouldn't be a book to read. I'd like to lean into connecting with myself and write some thoughts down to manifest some things. Also, taking a moment to reflect on the things that have gotten me to the space where I am today as a creative, a woman, a mother. . . I'd like to take that time.

**If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be?** Probably Michelle Obama. She seems like she has a good balance of being so smart and also being a human. I think that's so important, especially for a woman in her position in the spaces she's occupied.

**What is the best gift to give a traveler?** An itin-

erary that includes a list of places to go that are specific to the area in which they're exploring.

**What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip?** David Original Sunflower Seeds — in the shell, roasted, and salted.

**What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation?** Not a souvenir, but I like thrifting when I go away — especially overseas, where one can stumble upon the best and most unexpected finds. And of course, because their name brands might be different than ours in America, I feel like you can find all these great pieces that can last in your closet for many years.

**What is your favorite app/website for travel?** When I was young it was Priceline, but now I would say Travelocity.

**What has travel taught you?** To learn about other cultures — including other languages — and also about the beauty of how music and dance bring so many cultures together and eliminate language barriers.

**What is your best travel tip?** Pack only the essentials — your spirit will be lighter. I remember when I first started touring, I used to take everything I had to have choices. And it's true, it can be nice to have those choices, but I learned when I took only the essentials, my energy felt lighter. And it gave me room to have an extra bag that was slightly empty so I could pick up a few things along the way.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### ISLAND FESTIVAL CELEBRATES FOOD & WINE

It's not too early to snag your tickets to the Martha's Vineyard Food & Wine Festival (June 6-9), a four-day celebration of the finest seafood and farm-fresh ingredients on the island and across New England. For 2024, the popular event moves from October to the start of the summer and greatly expands its offerings. Programs include an opening night reception at the Harbor View Hotel, three grand tastings, five private dining experiences at top restaurants around the island (pairing an island chef with a celebrated guest chef), and a new masterclass series of hands-on food experiences for those who love to cook as well as eat. Designed by several culinary experts, the masterclasses include cheesemaking, how to craft cocktails like a pro, the art of gnocchi, and an open-deck oyster farm boat tour with the owners of Cottage City Oysters.

Tickets sell out quickly; prices vary per event. If you're looking for accommodations, four hotels are offering Food & Wine Festival packages linked via the festival website: Winnetu Oceanside Resort, Harbor View Hotel, Christopher Hotel, and Edgartown Inn. [www.mvfoodandwine.com/](http://www.mvfoodandwine.com/)

## THERE

### BACON, MUSIC, AND MORE BACON IN MACON

How can one resist touring something called the Macon Bacon Trail? Not this traveler! Inspired by Macon, Ga.'s Coastal Plain League baseball team, the Macon Bacon, the indulgent self-guided foodie tour promises all-things-bacon at 19 cafes, burger joints, pizza places, and restaurants in this historic central Georgia town. A map and links to individual locations are available online, or download the Tour Macon mobile app. Visit five to 15 spots to earn badges and redeem Macon Bacon-branded prizes at the

downtown visitor center. When not indulging in pork products, explore the rich live music scene as well as the town's cultural music heritage, including museums dedicated to Otis Redding, The Allman Brothers, Little Richard, and Capricorn Studios, a 1969 launching point for Southern Rock pioneers. <https://visitmacon.org/bacontrail/>

Need a place to stay? Check out the 94-key Hotel Forty Five, part of Marriott's Tribute Portfolio. Occupying one of downtown Macon's few remaining historic high-rises, the hotel is named after its location on an iconic 45-degree angle formed by Cherry and First Streets with Cotton Avenue. Each guest room and suite features deluxe bedding, artisan cabinetry, vintage design elements, and a rich contrasting color palette accented with copper. Three unique dining venues include Loom, a chef-driven restaurant (the Steak Burger with house-made bacon jam is conveniently listed on the Macon Bacon Trail); Hightales Rooftop Bar, for elegantly crafted cocktails; and Reckon Coffee Bar, for your favorite morning beverage, pastries, and breakfast on-the-go. Rates in May/June from \$185. [www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/mcntx-hotel-forty-five-macon-a-tribute-portfolio-hotel/overview/](http://www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/mcntx-hotel-forty-five-macon-a-tribute-portfolio-hotel/overview/)

## EVERYWHERE

### CANINE TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Love to travel with your dog? Say hello to Dog Travel Gear, an online shopping hub for canine travel essentials



handpicked by dog travel expert Susan Hartzler and her furry companions. From practical gear (hard-sided portable kennels) to fashionable accessories (red all-weather boots), every item in the curated selection has been dog-tested and human-approved to guarantee a successful journey. A quick perusal of the website's offerings will remind you of things you didn't realize your pet might need when you're on the road: a bed with machine-washable fabrics and zippered removable covers; quilted microfiber rear car seat protector; collapsible water bowls; pack of 140 poop bags; and more. And then there are specialty items such as pet bicycle baskets; jogger no-zip stroller; and a 3-in-1 airline approved rolling pet carrier, backpack, and car seat. And who can resist 100 percent cotton Hawaiian camp shirts? On the website's blog, "Paws on the Go," Susan shares her knowledge about dog travel with insights on where to go and resources on what to bring. <https://dogtravelgear.com/>

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