

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

She wanted a refund for her Vrbo rental. The owner blocked her.

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked a Vrbo rental in Philadelphia for a birthday party with my friends. The code for getting into the rental was incorrect. I contacted the property manager multiple times on three different platforms and did not get a reply. I ended up staying somewhere else.

I would like a full refund and for this property manager to be off of Vrbo and Airbnb. They had poor communication and blocked me when I asked for a refund. Can you help me get my \$588 back?

CHARYSMA ADAMS, Philadelphia

A. This is a strange case that took me a while to untangle. But the bottom line is, you should have been given access to your rental when you showed up.

Let's start with your rental, which advertises itself as the perfect place for groups and small events such as game nights, birthday gatherings, and sleepovers. So, it's not as if you showed up with your friends and the owner decided not to rent to you. Instead, it appears you tried to contact the owner numerous times on the evening of your check-in for a one-night stay. The owner didn't respond until the following morning.

Further complicating your problem, for some reason, the owner processed your payment outside the Vrbo system. Even though Vrbo returned its fees quickly, the owner did not — and then blocked you.

If you couldn't get into your property, Vrbo should have helped you book a new reservation for your birthday party.

Vrbo offers a "book with confidence guarantee" that protects you against fraud or if the owner wrongfully withholds your damage deposit. If you couldn't get into your property, Vrbo should have helped you book a new reservation for your birthday party.

I reviewed the correspondence among you, the owner, and Vrbo. It looks like you followed all the correct procedures and tried to resolve this with both parties as soon as you discovered the problem. I'm troubled that the owner tried to block you when you asked for a refund. But the real issue was that the owner processed your payment outside of the Vrbo system. As I read Vrbo's terms, that means you aren't protected by its book with confidence guarantee.

You might have tried reaching out to one of Vrbo's executives. I list their names, numbers, and e-mail addresses on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/vrbo-customer-service-contacts/. I contacted Vrbo on your behalf. A representative agreed with me that yours was a "complex" case. The company offered a full refund as a goodwill gesture.

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" (National Geographic). Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Her travel advice?

Keep your papers safe, 'mind your manners,' and eat like vacation calories don't count

It's Grenada — Gree-NAY-da," Oneika Phillips is quick to point out about her home country in the Caribbean and favorite place to vacation. "Granada — Gra-na-da — is in Spain." The dancer/actor/singer, who has appeared in several Broadway shows, is currently in the revival of "1776" at American Repertory Theater in Cambridge in advance of its Broadway debut. And even though the Tony-winning original production premiered on Broadway in 1969, Phillips said there is still a story to be told (the cast includes performers who identify as female, non-binary, and trans, and reflect multiple representations of race, gender, and ethnicity) and lessons to be learned. "At the time [1776], everyone on that stage would have been excluded — even with the statement that all men are created equal. That was the 'in' that gave us the audacity to step on the stage in these non-traditional roles and present the work, because we all should have equal opportunity to speak to what history is," Phillips, 45, said. "I'm keen to know people's responses, because I know that it will polarize, but I also think that's the responsibility of art." She said it's important to remember that the Founders, in creating the Declaration of independence, "were protesting to ensure that their rights were not trampled upon. And here we are in a period where women's rights and the rights of racial groups are constantly in question and constantly being marginalized and silenced, so this is an opportunity for us to say that what the Founding Fathers were doing was a promissory note to all of us to now do the exact same thing. ... I can use their words to validate protest, and that's a magnificent thing." The revival, in which Phillips plays Joseph Hewes (a signer of the Declaration of Independence), was directed by Diane Paulus and Jeffrey Page and runs through July 24. We caught up with Phillips, who lives in Brooklyn, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Easy answer: Grenada. Known as "the isle of spice," Grenada — pronounced Gree-NAY-da — is a crown jewel amongst the islands of the Caribbean. It also happens to be home. This island is remarkably beautiful with a tapestry of blue topaz Caribbean Sea waters, crystal cyan skies, greens of every hue blanketing the volcanic mountains, sandy shores ranging from ochre to onyx and an equatorial sun that adds a golden kiss to any melanin. Basically, Grenadians live where you vacation. One other thing: The people are friendly and formidable, quick to flash a smile at friendliness ... and just as quick to suck our teeth at foolishness — so mind your manners.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Favorite food, hands down, is a Caribbean roti or "buss up." Roti is an East Indian dish brought to the Caribbean during the colonization practice of indentured servitude. The trans-Atlantic trade had been abolished, but bodies were still needed for oppressive work. Colonizing empires turned to Asia and East India to place people into servitude with conditions just barely better than enslavement. East Indians were brought to former colonies like Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. The food of East Indians was blended with that of descendants of Africans, and incorporated local spices and flavorings. Roti of the Caribbean uses a flatbread similar to naan and flattened to a near perfect circle like a burrito. Curried meats, veggies, and provisions are placed into the roti "skin" and wrapped tightly to be eaten by hand. "Buss up" is



Oneika Phillips at Annandale Falls in Grenada.

when the skin is ripped into smaller pieces that are used with hands to wipe up the curry and devour the deliciousness. I am grateful to East Indian ancestors for preserving the dish and integrating it into Caribbean culture. And favorite drink: When in the Caribbean, premium rum and coconut water — from the coconut, not a box — or rum and sorrel, also called hibiscus in the United States. Yum. When in Europe, red wine. Anywhere else? Local juices such as passion fruit, citrus, and mango.

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

Two places I can name with immediacy: Tanzania and Bali. Both have an incredible allure [and] rich cultures embedded within beautiful coastal and internal landscapes. I've been to many places on the planet, all of which have impacted my humanity. I can't wait to add Tanzania and Bali to the list.

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

My green card. Duh! No, but seriously ... ensuring all travel documents are in tow is essential. Passport, additional ID like a driver's license, or a permanent resident card are vital for border entry, foreign exchange, and overall identification. It's important to have secure places to store them like a hotel safe or [with] trusted friends and family.

Aisle or window?

Aisle — especially if it's a long international flight. I like the leg room, ease of motion to get in and out of the seat, and not having to climb acrobatically over humans to go to the bathroom.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

So many. I had the best childhood traveling from

one Caribbean country to the next to see family and friends. If I had to single out favorites: traveling to Trinidad with my father to see his sister, my grandmother and my sister, who lived with them, and traveling to Barbados with my mother to see her sister and my cousins there. Memories of climbing mango trees and playing in the street of Diego Martin, Trinidad, and listening to the Atlantic Ocean drum loudly against the East Coast cliffs of Barbados as my cousins and I built sand castles are core memories that leave me so grateful for family and community. Also ... turbulence. Yep, turbulence. It left me elated. I would squeal loudly with delight at every dip. A bonus: Those were the days when family could stand on waving galleries and meet you at the gate. Who remembers that? The best.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Being a tourist. I want to absorb as much as possible. Also, eating and drinking like travel calories do not count.

Best travel tip?

While travel is usually for fun, I refer back to passports and IDs. Make copies of these and e-mail them to yourself. Have a portion of cash in either USD or local money — or both. Ensure you either commit to memory or have on your person the address or location where you are staying. Move about cities with care. Have something on your person that secures your valuables to you. Losing or having a wallet or passport stolen in a foreign country is like salt in wine. No thank you — we don't want it. So have the time of your life, but also be careful and responsible so the business side of things doesn't hamper your joy.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

BEAUX-ARTS BASH IN PROVIDENCE

Celebrate the Graduate Providence hotel's 100-year anniversary with 1920s-themed cocktails, food, and live performances by New England vintage dance company, The Tropigals and the Compaq Big Band (\$75). Formerly the Providence Biltmore, the redesigned landmark in the heart of downtown is now part of the Graduate Hotels' handcrafted collection of accommodations located in university towns in the United States and United Kingdom. The lobby's original ornate ceiling, crystal chandeliers, and glass-and-brass elevator shine among other Beaux-Arts design elements incorporated throughout while guest rooms sport old-world charm with layers of plaid, tweed, and leather. Amenities include Reiners (a sports-inspired dining experience); lobby-level coffee shop; and the full-service Norwich Spa. All key cards at Graduate Hotels (including another in New Haven) look like old college ID cards, and feature notable alumni. Rates from \$229. 401-421-0700, www.graduatehotels.com/providence

AHOY SAILORS!

Sailors and landlubbers alike are invited to experience The Sailing Museum, a just-debuted destination in Newport, R.I., the heart of New England's sailing community. Designed to introduce new

audiences to the principles of sailing while appealing to the sailing faithful, the museum offers 11 immersive exhibits, additional interactive media exhibits, and objects and artifacts related to the sport — many which have been provided by members of the National Sailing Hall of Fame and America's Cup Hall of Fame. Located in the historic Armory Building on Thames Street. Open daily. Adults \$18; seniors, military and college students \$15; ages 11-18 \$12; 10 and under free. 401-324-5761, thesailingmuseum.org

STYLISH AND AFFORDABLE BASE CAMP IN N.H.

Be one of the first guests to stay at Bluebird Sunapee, the newest offering from Lark Hotels' growing brand of redesigned, contemporary hotels, motels, and lodges. Nestled between Mount Sunapee and Lake Sunapee in New Hampshire, 53-room hotel is the perfect base camp for visitors looking to enjoy the region's year-round activities — hiking, biking, canoeing, snowboarding, ice fishing, alpine skiing and more. Rooms feature forest green and white wainscot paneling, alpine modern furnishings, printed camp blankets and luxury bedding. Amenities include indoor pool with a seasonal outdoor deck; wood-burning stove during fall and winter seasons; kids game room; and plenty of storage for your gear. Rates from \$134. 603-763-2010, www.bluebirdhotels.com/hotels/sunapee

www.bluebirdhotels.com/hotels/sunapee

THERE

KETCH A FISH

Anglers heading to Southern Alaska will want to check out The Ketch (formerly the Edgewater Inn Restaurant & Marina), a revitalized 25-room boutique hotel nestled along the Tongass Narrows, minutes from downtown, Ketchikan airport, and cruise ship docks. The intimate fishing inn has been reimagined as a casual-chic residential lodge designed with deconstructed and upcycled materials associated with fishing, hiking, and the great outdoors. (Think thermal fleece curtains and nautical lighting fixtures.) Open seasonally from June 1 to Sept. 30. Rates from \$349 per person, double occupancy, including meals. Two-night minimum stay required. Add-on excursions include fully guided and self-guided fishing packages. 800-247-9059, www.theketchinn.com

A GRAND RAILWAY PACKAGE

Take a ride on the Grand Canyon Railway and save 30 percent on one- and two-night Summer Getaway Packages that include accommodations, round-trip train travel in one of six classes of service, dinner, and breakfast. Located 2.5 hours from Phoenix and 4 hours from Las Vegas, the train runs daily from Williams, on historic Route 66, to

within steps of the South Rim and El Tovar. Composed of railcars from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, including luxury dome cars, open platform observation car, and vintage coaches with opening windows, the train departs at 9:30 a.m. and returns at 5:45 p.m. with a three-plus hour layover for exploring the canyon and its historic buildings and exhibits. Packages available through Sept. 1; rates from \$180/adults. Don't want to stay overnight? Full-day adventures also available, from \$67/adults; \$32/children. 800-843-8724, www.thetrain.com/offers/summer-getaway-package

EVERYWHERE

WINE WITHOUT WORRY

Wine-loving travelers no longer need to avoid red wine — and its possible stains — while on vacation or business trips. The newest must-have item for on-the-go spills is the handy Emergency Kit offered by Wine Away, a leading red wine stain remover for 25 years. The kit contains two mini-mist sprays for removing wine stains, that also can be used for coffee, blood, ink, and other accidental spills. Weighing less than one-ounce each, the sprays are TSA-friendly, meaning you can easily slip them in your handbag or briefcase before your flight. \$9.99. Single-use travel packets are also available. 15 for \$15. www.wine-away.com/shop/p/emergency-kit NECEE REGIS