

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Why is it taking so long for an OAT refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I'd like some advice for obtaining a refund for a trip to Morocco my wife and I booked with Overseas Adventure Travel, which is based in Boston. We originally scheduled for April 2020. OAT canceled the trip in March 2020. At that time, OAT offered either a full refund or incentives to rebook the trip or opt for other future trips. We had until May 1 to decide.

But before May 1, we asked about a refund, and a representative told us that it was no longer an option. OAT booked us on a future trip instead.

I recently read that Overseas Adventure Travel was required to honor my request for a refund under Massachusetts law. I contacted OAT late last year and again asked for a refund. A representative told me that it would take 30 to 90 days. I called them in January, and a representative told me it would take 30 to 90 business days. I've reviewed the Massachusetts Travel Seller law and saw that refunds should be made within 30 days.

OAT has been a fantastic company for the past two tours we have taken with them, but now I am worried our \$9,864 they agreed to refund will disappear. Any advice or efforts on your part are greatly appreciated.

A. You're absolutely correct that the Massachusetts Travel Seller law (940 Mass. Reg. 15.06) requires a full refund. And since Overseas Adventure Travel is based in Boston, it must return your money. Its May 1 deadline is irrelevant.

I'm dealing with a lot of Overseas Adventure Travel cases at the moment. It seems the company strongly encouraged customers to accept a credit — maybe a little too strongly. I mean, it

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should have at least waited until its own deadline before telling you that you had to take the credit.

I've said this before, and I'll say it again: If you can give your tour operator an opportunity to reschedule your trip, you should. Companies like OAT are struggling amid a difficult pandemic. You mentioned to me that your previous two OAT tours were terrific. What better way to ensure the company survives than giving it your business?

But you shouldn't have to do that, and the state of Massachusetts agrees. So this is really an open-and-shut case. You get a refund. Period.

If anyone else is having a problem with getting a refund from Overseas Adventure Travel, the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of its executives can be found at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/grand-circle-travel/. I recommend sending a brief, polite email citing 940 Mass. Reg. 15.06 and requesting a refund within 30 days. If that doesn't work, you can file a complaint with the Massachusetts attorney general — or with me.

I contacted Overseas Adventure Travel on your behalf. It issued an immediate refund.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit 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.



BY JULIET PENNINGTON | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

For those who want the skinny on anything reality TV-related, Middleton native Derek Zagami, who goes by “Derek Z,” is the go-to guy. Not only does he interview reality TV stars on his nationally syndicated show “RealTea with Derek Z” (which streams live at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesdays on Roku and Apple TV), he has even appeared on “Real Housewives of New Jersey.” Zagami, 26, who also hosts “Luxe Life with Derek Z” on NECN (and nationally on NBCLX), said while he was happy to keep the show alive virtually during the pandemic, he is happy to be back doing the “real estate meets travel show” in person. The Boston resident said he is also looking forward to traveling again and wants to bring his mother to Montenegro, in the Balkans, for her 60th birthday. We caught up with Zagami to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Montenegro, near Croatia. It is the most beautiful peaceful place I have ever traveled to in the world. We stayed at a boutique hotel, Forza Terra, set right on the water with amazing views of the landscape. Once checked in, we hopped on a stunning yacht each day to explore and swim in these caves. The water was like nothing I ever have experienced before. The best parts were the privacy, food, and culture I

got to experience. I am bringing my mom there to celebrate her 60th birthday because I want her to see it. Harbor Island off of Eleuthera in the Caribbean would be a close second. I can't get enough of the pink sand beaches and the privacy of the island and the unique dining experiences that are gems.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Listen, vacation is all about having fun, so vodka on the rocks for me. And I am eating healthy 24/7 at home — I like to enjoy a good chocolate chip cookie.

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

I want to go to Dubai. My friends tell me it is epic, so I would love to see what the buzz is all about. I love fashion and the “luxe life,” so I want to see it firsthand.

One item you can't leave home without?

I can't just say one item. When I travel I have three outfits a day planned out, and trust me, they are all fabulous. So I would say my clothes and shoes — you always have to make a statement!

Aisle or window?

Well if you are flying internationally, aisle — just

because you want room to stretch your legs out. But for domestic travel, window is fine so you don't have to keep getting up for people wanting to go to the bathroom. Honestly, if you can book an extra leg room exit row, and or, even better, upgrade to first class, that is always worth it to me.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

Disney World. My parents would bring me each year and we would stay at the Grand Floridian in the Princess Diana suite and I remember running around the hotel in an oversize bathrobe playing hide-and-go-seek with my mom.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

I do like upgrading my room when I arrive, which then turns into more upgrades throughout the stay, but I always say live in the moment and have fun. Look at the bill at the end.

Best travel tip?

Don't be scared to travel to Europe. People always say to me it is too expensive to get a flight. And I make them take out their phones and they are shocked [that] you can get amazing deals.

And every time I do that, the person ends up booking a trip!



HERE

JUST SAY MOO

Grab the kids and hit the road this summer on the Cabot Cheese Farm Trail. After cocooning over a long and often stressful winter, fun and safe outings — such as visits to local farms — are at the top of many family wish lists. As a co-op, Cabot Creamery is owned by 800 farm families located throughout New England and Upstate New York, many of whom are welcoming visitors to tour their farms, meet their cows, and taste some locally produced foods, including ice cream, pies, maple syrup and (of course!) a selection of yummy Cabot cheeses. Plan your trip on the easy-to-navigate website; narrow your choices with results filtered by state, season, and activities such as properties with farm stands, specialty foods, tours, bed and breakfast options, gift stores and more. www.cabotchese.coop/farm-trail

REFRESHED HOTEL DEBUTS GREAT DEALS

Those looking for an affordable hotel in the Boston area — for out-of-town visitors or a staycation — may want to consider the newly renovated Hyatt Place Boston/Braintree. A gateway between Boston, the South Shore, and Cape Cod, the property boasts multi-million-dollar renovations to all its guestrooms and public spaces, plus state-of-the-art amenities and food and beverage offerings from its culi-

nary partner, Legal Sea Foods. (Hello, room service? Can you send up a lobster roll and clam chowder?) Each of the hotel's 204 guestrooms has been completely refreshed, including new carpet, paint, furnishings and fully renovated bathrooms. A 24-hour gym incorporates new Life Fitness equipment with personalized TVs. Special starting rates from \$109. 888-848-9496, www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/massachusetts/hyatt-place-boston-braintree/boszb

THERE

NOLA DEBUTS JEWISH MUSEUM

A new museum made its much-anticipated debut in New Orleans this month. Located a few blocks from the Ogden Museum of Southern Art and the National World War II Museum, the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience focuses on the history of 13



states over the last three centuries, including Colonial times, the Civil War, World War II, and the civil rights movement. Multimedia exhibits examine how Jewish immigrants and succeeding generations adapted to life in the South, and also address the many ways that Southern Jews navigated issues of race and antisemitism. The museum will operate with limited capacity through the summer after its May soft-opening. A grand opening is scheduled for the weekend of Oct. 2-3. Anyone who wants to contribute their own Southern Jewish experience story to the museum are encouraged to share it via the website. msje.org

STRESS-FREE CRUISE BOOKING

Cruise lovers hesitant to commit to sailing might be reassured by new travel protocols announced by Ponant, a leader in luxury small ship expeditions. Not only will proof of vaccination be a requirement, but all guests and crew must also show proof of a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours of boarding. In addition to rigorous on-board sanitary protocols, the company has invested in state-of-the-art medical facilities, including ultrasound and radiography equipment and a medical team of at least one doctor and nurse on each ship. Still need convincing? The Ultra Serenity booking policy (for bookings made before June 30, 2021 cruises scheduled before March 2023) requires only a 25-percent deposit, with remaining balance due 30 days before departure. Passengers can cancel the trip up until 30 days before; full amount will be credited toward another reservation within two years. In the event of a positive Covid test within 30 days of sailing, passengers will receive a full refund. Sailings resume in Iceland beginning June 16. 888-400-1082, us.ponant.com/stress-free-booking-conditions

GREEK VILLAS OFFER SECLUDED GETAWAYS

With Greece reopening its borders to American travelers, hospitality brand onefinestay's new selection of villas in Mykonos and Santorini offer a secluded refuge on the idyllic islands that have been closed to US travelers for

more than a year. The newly curated collection features 30-plus contemporary villas, along with a series of concierge services ranging from access to reservations at the finest restaurants, in-villa beauty treatments, private yacht charters, chef prepared meals and more. The villas in Greece mark the first phase of the company's expansion into 14 new destinations globally, including Europe and US ski regions, scheduled to be rolled out in the coming months. American visitors will not be quarantined as long as they provide proof of two doses of COVID-19 vaccine or negative PCR test carried out 72 hours prior to arrival. www.onefinestay.com

EVERYWHERE



ORGANIC BABY CARE TRAVEL KIT

Earth Baby, a California company committed to using certified organic fruit- and vegetable-based ingredients in personal baby care products, is offering an On-The-Go travel kit designed to make parents as happy as their kiddos. Includes all the essentials: organic broad spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen, diaper rash cream, hand sanitizer gel, and calming aromatherapy mist all packaged in a handy travel bag. Products check all the boxes that discerning parents desire: reef-friendly; no artificial dyes or animal derived ingredients; free of parabens, sulfates, phthalates, formaldehyde, mineral oil, propylene glycol, petrolatum, lanolin, and more. \$35. earthbabystore.com/product/on-the-go-kit

