

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

Debunking the mystery of the missing hotel refund

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Last year, I booked a trip to Las Vegas through a site called Traveluro. My airline canceled the flight, and I could not get another flight. So, I had to cancel my hotel reservation.

I contacted Traveluro, and a representative agreed to cancel my reservation and give me a full refund. But the refund showed up in my account as “pending” and then completely dropped off. It was never fully processed.

I filed a credit card dispute with my bank, but my bank denied my request. Traveluro is extremely hard to get in touch with. I call, and it rings once, then hangs up on me. I’ve been trying for months!

The one time I got through — other than my first call — a representative said they would escalate the situation and that somebody would call me within 24 to 48 hours. That never happened. Please help me get my \$444 back!

JESSICA RADOSEVIC,
Danville, Calif.

A. If Traveluro promised you a refund, it should have delivered one.

First of all, you might be wondering what Traveluro is. It’s an online travel agency operated by Holisto, a company based in the United States and Israel. Traveluro offers support in several European languages, which is perhaps where the “uro” part comes from.

So, why didn’t Traveluro refund your hotel? First, online agencies don’t control refunds on nonrefundable rooms. They would have to ask the hotel in Las Vegas for a waiver, which would take some time. It looks as if Traveluro tried to get your money back — hence the “pending” refund. But it ran out of time when you decided to file a credit card dispute.

A credit card dispute means you are asking your bank to reverse a transaction because it’s fraudulent, or you didn’t receive the product or service you ordered. I have more on how chargebacks work in my ultimate guide to credit card disputes on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

So, what went wrong? I mean, besides trying to call an online agency, which is usually a bad idea. (Always email to create a paper trail.)

Well, it turns out the company was able to secure a full refund for your hotel, according to Elad Shmilovich, Holisto’s chief operating officer. “However, in parallel, the customer submitted a charge-back, which prevented the refund from being fully processed,” he says. “That’s why the customer saw a pending notification, which disappeared.”

“Not to worry,” Shmilovich added. “I’ve asked my ops team to issue a new refund, which should already be in her account.”

Ah, I love a happy ending! But there’s an important lesson here for the rest of us. When a company promises a refund, you have to give it time. Sometimes a refund to your credit card can take up to two billing cycles, which is more than two months. If you lose patience and file a credit card dispute, it doesn’t just stop the refund process. It can actually reverse it, ensuring that you never end up getting your money.

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 or get help by contacting him at elliottadvocacy.org/help.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro

on Spam musubi and heated sleep masks

For many, the name Jake Shimabukuro is synonymous with the ukulele. The award-winning musician, who is known for showcasing the versatility of the small stringed instrument in genres that include funk, rock, pop, bluegrass, folk, and classical, began playing the ukulele when he was 4. He has worked with some of the top names in the music business — including duets with Willie Nelson, Bette Midler, Ziggy Marley, and Jimmy Buffett — on his 2021 album “Jake & Friends.” But it is his latest collaboration with Mick Fleetwood (from Fleetwood Mac) that has the 47-year-old Honolulu native pinching himself. “This is my first blues project, and doing it with Mick is a dream come true,” he said of the soon-to-be-released album “The Jake Shimabukuro & Mick Fleetwood Blues Experience.” He said at least one of the songs from that album will make it into shows on his current tour, which includes stops at the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport on June 17, the Center for the Arts in Natick on June 21 and 22, and at Payomet Performing Arts Center in North Truro on June 23. Joining Shimabukuro on stage will be acclaimed bassist Jackson Waldhoff — “an incredible musician with such a big heart. ... I feel so grateful to be sharing the stage with him,” Shimabukuro said. “I think the bass guitar and the ukulele work really well because they both serve on opposite ends of the spectrum. If you think of a piano, the bass is like the middle left of the piano and the ukulele is from the middle right, so the two instruments kind of complement each other. I don’t have any notes lower than a middle C, but the bass has everything lower than middle C.” Shimabukuro said that fans attending his shows can expect “everything from Beatles to Queen to Japanese folk tunes to traditional Hawaiian songs. ... We try to mix it up.” We caught up with the musician, who lives in Honolulu with his wife, Kelly Yamasato, a physician who specializes in maternal and fetal medicine, their sons — Chase, 11, and Cole, 9 — and their 4- or 5-year-old rescue dog, Squeaks, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? Portugal. That’s where the original inspiration for the ukulele came from. When Portuguese immigrants came to Hawaii, they brought the machete and the rajão [both small, stringed instrument] and started teaching Hawaiian people how to play. The ukulele was a fusion of the two — the tuning of the rajão and the size of the machete.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? If it’s business-related, I like to use an agent. If it’s for personal travel with family and friends, I prefer to do it myself.

Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation? Does that mean I would just leave my amp at home? [laughs]. This summer, our whole family will be going to Fiji for the first time. Looking forward to it. Of course, I’ll be taking my ukulele because you never know when a spontaneous jam session will occur.

What has been your worst vacation experience? Once, about six or seven years ago when I was on a family trip on a neighboring Hawaiian island, I got a bad case of vertigo. I was really sick and spent the entire vacation in bed. That was a bummer — but I felt well-rested when I got back home.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory?



Jake Shimabukuro next to a bronze statue of Buck Owens in Bakersfield, Calif.

My grandparents lived on Molokai [a Hawaiian island], and my brother and I used to fly there every summer to go fishing and freediving. I loved it.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? I think a successful vacation experience should have all three of those elements.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? Currently, I’m reading a book called, “Mind Gym: An Athlete’s Guide to Inner Excellence” by sports psychology consultant Gary Mack. I started reading it because my kids are really into sports and one of their coaches recommended it. He said he usually recommends it to athletes when they are a little bit older, so I wanted to check it out first to make sure it is appropriate for their ages. Interestingly enough, there are a lot of similarities between athletic performance and stage performance ... a lot of crossover with what goes on in an athlete’s mind and in a musician’s mind.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Probably a famous chef so that we could enjoy some awesome dining experiences.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Whenever I go to Japan, I buy these heated sleep masks to give away as gifts. They are great for the airplane and for effective power naps during the day.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? Spam musubi.

What is the coolest souvenir you’ve picked up on a vacation? A white Abbey Road coffee mug from when I was in London, in the studio, recording. It was about four years ago.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? Apple Maps and Google Maps.

What has travel taught you? To always keep an open mind.

What is your best travel tip? Pack as light as possible.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

NEW BIKING TRAILS IN MAINE WOODS

Calling all biking enthusiasts! The Appalachian Mountain Club has just opened more than 330 miles of gravel roads for mountain biking, gravel grinding, and backpacking on its extensive properties in Northern Maine. Under its Maine Woods Initiative, AMC’s conservation efforts have permanently protected 114,000 acres of forests, ponds, and lakes, all available for you to explore. Sleeping arrangements can be made at one of three rustic backcountry lodges and cabins at Gorman Chairback, Little Lyford, and Medawisla. (Contact info, amenities, and reservations for each are linked through the AMC website.) Lodges are about a six-hour drive from Boston, so reservations are recommended before you make the journey. Make sure to stop for gas, groceries, and other last-minute essentials in Greenville or Brownville, the last

towns you’ll pass through driving from points south. Most definitely plan ahead if you want to attend the Slapjack Gravel Riding Festival at Medawisla Lodge and Cabins (Sept. 6-8) for guided group bike rides, live music, free swag, fun clinics, equipment demos, and evening presentations. In addition, AMC has partnered with the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation to produce the snazzy Gravel Field Guide, a book of helpful maps and top routes designed to help both newbies and experienced riders. www.outdoors.org/resources/plan-your-trip-with-amc/lodge-to-lodge-gravel-biking-in-maine-itinerary

THERE

ALASKA IN AUTUMN

Fewer crowds and lower prices — along with unforgettable experiences — make the shoulder season one of the best times to visit the 49th state. Alyeska Resort, said to be the largest mountain resort in Alaska, is one of a

few properties that remain open year-round, providing guests with continued access to adventure and wellness offerings. Located 40 minutes from Anchorage in Girdwood, the 299-key property combines luxury accommodations with convenient access to nature. In autumn, the weather is ideal for hiking while fall foliage is on full display. The resort recommends more than 12 hiking trails on Mount Alyeska, from challenging to family-friendly, via an interactive map on its website that displays levels of difficulty along with additional details about each hike. A 40-passenger aerial tram provides scenic tours, and allows guests to access trails at higher elevations.

A unique complimentary service, dubbed the Aurora Concierge, provides guests with a wake-up call when the multi-hued lights of the aurora borealis are visible, typically from late August to April. Additional amenities include an indoor saltwater pool, seven dining options, and the Alyeska Nordic Spa, a 50,000-square-foot series of outdoor hot and cold hydrotherapy pools, massage treatments, and wellness experiences, including yoga classes, meditation sessions, and exfoliation rooms. At the resort’s annual Oktoberfest (Sept. 27-28), raise a stein of beer and enjoy Bavarian food, music, and games at the Alyeska Daylodge. (Yodeling contest or German spelling bee, anyone?) New this year: the Black Diamond Club is a luxury offering of premium accommodations, services, an exclusive lounge, and amenities including private concierge to arrange daily activities and access to the hotel’s helipad. Fall rates from \$249. Black Diamond Club rates from



\$499. 907-754-2111; www.alyeskaresort.com

EVERYWHERE

ON-THE-GO ORAL CARE

Sometimes it’s the little things that make a big difference when you’re traveling. From short trips, when you’re trying to pack light, to long-haul flights, when easy access to oral care is often essential, you’ll be happy to have the Curaprox Travel Set as part of your basic travel gear. The colorful, stylish, Swiss-made oral care travel kit contains everything you’ll need to keep teeth clean and breath fresh: two-piece toothbrush that snaps together (with replaceable brush head); gentle whitening toothpaste; and two sizes of interdental brushes, designed to reach the tricky spaces between your teeth. The 4-by-2.5-inch case easily fits in your carry-on, suitcase, and even your pocket. So lightweight and convenient, you might just carry it around all the time. Available in three colors (green, blue, or black), each with unique toothpaste flavor (watermelon, peach/apricot, or carbon). \$12.95. curaprox.us/shop/dental-care/travel-set-green

NECEE REGIS