

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



GABBY JONES/BLOOMBERG

Booking.com transfers refund to someone else's credit card

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I reserved a villa in Alicante, Spain, through Booking.com and paid in full. Three days before my trip, Booking.com canceled the reservation and offered little help in getting an alternative. I found a new property on Booking.com, but it cost \$1,000 more.

Booking.com agreed to refund the difference and credited the amount to my Booking.com wallet. However, without my authorization, it then transferred the funds to an unknown credit card.

Despite numerous emails and phone calls, Booking.com ignored my requests for an explanation. Can you help?

ELAINE TREACY,
Commugny, Switzerland

A. Booking.com should have done everything it could to help you find an alternative when it canceled your reservation. Transferring your refund to the wrong account just added insult to injury. You did the right thing by documenting your communications with Booking.com and persistently seeking an explanation.

Here's what should happen: If an accommodation provider cancels your reservation, which is what appeared to have happened, then Booking.com should have notified you as soon as possible — not three days before your trip. It also should have tried to find you a suitable alternative accommodation. If it wasn't available, then Booking.com should have given you a full refund.

Additionally, in some cases where the cancellation is the provider's fault, Booking.com should have offered additional compensation, especially if there's a price difference between the canceled vacation rental and the replacement.

Booking.com didn't give you enough time, so you had to negotiate the \$1,000 compensation (which it should have just offered). And, of course, it shouldn't have sent your refund to a mysterious third party.

You could have tried contacting a manager at Booking.com for help. Sometimes escalating the issue can lead to a faster resolution. I publish the names, numbers, and email addresses of Booking.com's executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. In cases like this where a company ignores a legitimate complaint, sometimes involving a third party like a consumer advocate can help.

I contacted Booking.com on your behalf. After weeks of back and forth, Booking.com claimed they found no suspicious activity on your account. In other words, the company believed you had transferred your refund from your Booking.com wallet to someone else's credit card.

You then contacted executives at Booking.com and threatened to report them to the National Cyber Security Centre and Interpol. Booking.com then contacted you directly and issued a full refund to your bank account.

It's unfortunate that it took such extreme measures to get your refund. This situation highlights the importance of staying vigilant and persistent when dealing with travel companies. Remember to always document your communications and escalate the issue if you hit a dead end.

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

Maura Healey

loves TripAdvisor, values a good souvenir, and would travel with Oprah if she could

While Governor Maura Healey is yearning to travel the Northwest Passage and kayak in the Arctic Circle, she is setting her sights on destinations closer to home this summer. More specifically, the beaches north and south of Boston, including Wingersheek and Good Harbor in Gloucester, Crane Beach in Ipswich, Plum Island beaches, and, of course, those on the Cape and islands. Born in Bethesda, Md., and raised in Hampton Falls, N.H., Healey said she feels fortunate to have so many beautiful locations and vacation destinations right in Massachusetts — including the Berkshires, where she plans to attend a concert this summer. Healey, 54, was elected governor of Massachusetts in 2022, after serving as the Commonwealth's attorney general for eight years. When asked how she is juggling all of the ongoing political issues at the state, national, and international levels, she said in a recent phone call that she is “keeping my eye on the ball and focusing on Massachusetts; focusing on what our people need.” That includes more affordable housing and jobs, lower energy costs, and a continued commitment to transportation and education, she said, noting that earlier in the day she had signed a supplemental budget that will make a “historic investment” (\$1.32 billion from the state's Fair Share revenue) in transportation and education. “The bottom line is making Massachusetts more competitive and more affordable,” she said. We caught up with Healey, who lives in Arlington with her partner, Joanna Lydgate, cofounder and chief executive officer of the States United Democracy Center (a nonpartisan organization dedicated to protecting free, fair, and secure elections), Lydgate's two children, a 12-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter, and their golden retriever, Charlie, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? I'd love to travel the Northwest Passage and end up in a kayak paddling around at the top of the Earth in the Arctic Circle. More likely, I'll be loving day and weekend trips with family and friends to amazing Massachusetts places, from the Berkshires to the Cape and islands.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? I like to have input and give direction, but I'm terrible at booking, so I need help. And it saves time.

Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation? Books and books. Sitting by the beach on the water. And without our phones, except for taking pictures.

What has been your worst vacation experience? Turbulence over the Pacific on a flight to Fiji about 25 years ago. I was white-knuckling it and saying a few prayers.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? We didn't really have a chance to take vacations as a kid — my mom had her hands full with the five of us kids — but we did go every day to the beach, either to Hampton or Plum Island (Sandy Point). My favorite memory is being on my grandfather's shoulders in the water and jumping off, and him teaching us to body surf.



Maura Healey and Joanna Lydgate in Bar Harbor, Maine, last summer.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? All of the above. I do really love to absorb the sensibility, history, and culture of the place. I try to avoid touristy locations and seek out where the locals go. You learn more about a place that way, but you also get a better memory.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? “North Woods” by Daniel Mason.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Oprah. Number one, because she's been everywhere, knows everyone, and would have the best recommendations. And number two, is there a person with a better aura to travel with and be around than her?

What is the best gift to give a traveler? A book about the place they're going — more a travelogue type book than a guidebook — but something that gives them a sense of the place.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road

trip? Honey mustard pretzels.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? A Koa Outrigger canoe paddle given to me by a Hawaiian racer.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? I love using TripAdvisor for suggestions on where to go and what to do. Not only is it a Needham-based company, but I find it to be a helpful tool for discovering new things in new places.

What has travel taught you? Traveling is knowledge and it's learning. Learning about new places, cultures, people, and ways of living. Travel has opened my eyes to the world and also has given me a broader perspective and understanding of the human condition.

What is your best travel tip? Follow the locals. And always bring back something — even if it's small and inexpensive — but that has meaning to you and reminds you of that travel experience.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

PIONEER VALLEY ESCAPES

If you need a little help planning your next summer outdoor excursions (and who doesn't?) the Inn on Boltwood's new Adventures Inn Amherst program, in partnership with Adventure East, offers two outdoor escape packages. Pedal the Pioneer Valley is a three-hour guided bike tour for two through the Connecticut River Valley's rolling farmlands, historic sites, and quiet country roads. The Aim & Exhale experience for two blends the meditative practice of forest bathing with the thrill of guided archery in tranquil woods. Explore on your own numerous nearby trails for hikers and cyclists, including the Norwottuck Rail Trail, and conservation land trails like Amethyst Brook and the state park of the Mount Holyoke Range. The Inn's 49 stylish guest rooms and suites offer modern convenience and luxuries — pillow-top mattresses, high-thread-count linens, wireless internet — while maintaining their historic New England charm. (Think

wood headboards with posts and ruffled bed skirts matching elegant window treatments.) The onsite restaurant, 30 Boltwood, offers a farm-to-table-inspired menu for alfresco patio or indoor dining experiences. Located on the Amherst Common, the inn is within walking distance to many museums, restaurants, and shops, as well as The Drake, an intimate live performance venue. It also offers easy access for visitors to the colleges of Amherst, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Hampshire, and UMass Amherst. Rates from \$374 per night, double occupancy, for summer travel through October. 413-256-8200, www.innomboltwood.com

THERE

HAIL TO THE QUEEN

Be among the first to board Cunard's newly refreshed Queen Elizabeth, homeporting in Seattle for the first time for voyages to Alaska. (June to September, 2025 and 2026 only.) The seven- to 11-night Alaska voyages visit many of the region's memorable ports, including Ketchikan, Glacier Bay Na-

tional Park, Skagway, Juneau, and Victoria, British Columbia, while soaking in the pristine scenery of Glacier Bay National Park, Hubbard Glacier, and the Inside Passage. Bringing Cunard's luxury services to the region, the ship boasts revitalized signature spaces, elevated Princess and Queens Grills, expansive suites, and added amenities such as butler service and more. Inaugural Alaska guests will be the first to enjoy the new Pavilion Wellness Café, and the Harper's Bazaar Wellness at Sea program featuring three packages of wellness treatments, nutritious smoothies, masterclasses, and a selection of ELEMIS products. Cunard continues its partnership with the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, offering a speaker series with experts sharing insights into the region. Guests can also enjoy a “Locals Onboard” speaker series, featuring 11 Alaskan speakers, master Tlingit dance group, a Denali expeditionist, and local historians, artists, and photographers. Queen Elizabeth will be heading to Miami in October to start sailings to the Caribbean for fall and winter. Rates from \$1,109 per person for a balcony stateroom, based on double occupancy. 800-728-6273, www.cunard.com/en-us/cruise-destinations/alaska

EVERYWHERE

DIGITAL LUGGAGE TRACKER

As airlines start limiting carry-on luggage, and checking bags becomes more common, you can protect your belongings and your peace of mind with Knog's Scout Travel, a digital luggage tag, tracker, and alarm in one. This innovative device stores your contact information digitally, accessible via a QR code, allowing you to monitor your belongings 24/7 by us-



ing the Apple “Find My” app. What contact information you share is up to you, and can be updated in real-time via the Knog app. That information is helpful when someone scans the QR code and sees your details. If that occurs, you'll be alerted that your tag has been scanned and their message will be emailed to you; for example, “Your bag at Boston Logan Airport, carousel six.” To deter someone taking your luggage in a busy café or hotel lobby, the 85db motion-sensitive alarm will trigger with movement of its accelerometer while also setting off an audible alarm on your iPhone when in Bluetooth range. You can also set Trusted Locations, where you can leave an item without receiving a notification. Unlike GPS-based trackers, Scout Travel's compatibility with Apple's “Find My” app means that after purchase, there are no ongoing subscription fees. Compatible with iOS only. \$65. <https://us.knog.com/products/scout-travel>

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