

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

I paid twice for my checked luggage. Where's my refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked two flights through GoToGate from San Jose to Mexico City, and then to Oaxaca, Mexico.

I ran into a problem on my flight from San Jose to Mexico City, which was on Avianca. I knew these were small planes, so I prepaid \$33 for each checked bag. But when I checked in at San Jose, the agent had no record of my prepaid bags. I discussed it with them and showed my receipt. I even spoke to a supervisor. But I ended up having to pay \$90 per bag.

I have copies of my boarding pass showing “no checked bags” and the receipt for the \$180 fee. When we arrived in Oaxaca, I called the phone number on my receipt, but after speaking to a representative we were disconnected. A representative e-mailed me and said there should have been no issue with the baggage. She invited me to file a claim. I’ve heard nothing since. Can you help?

PETER HOLT, *Woodinville, Wash.*

A. You shouldn’t have had to pay twice for your luggage. A quick phone call to GoToGate should have cleared this up before you left. Instead, it turned into a losing argument with an Avianca supervisor.

GoToGate is an online travel agency, which means it is supposed to represent your interests (and it also takes a commission from the airline). Even if there wasn’t time to sort out the luggage problem at the airport, the agency should have quickly refunded the extra fee. But again, no refund. By the time you contacted me, it had been more than a month.

Let’s take a step back. Why are airlines charging so much for checked baggage? Because they can. Airlines know that we need to travel with luggage, so they charge for it when we buy our tickets — and if we don’t immediately say “yes,” they more than double the price and charge us extra at the airport.

One day, when enough passengers refuse to play along, airlines will stop this nonsense. Until then, you should know that airlines have built their entire business model on charging luggage fees. They will try to squeeze every red cent from you when you fly.

I noticed that after you called GoToGate, you quickly switched to e-mail. That’s preferable. You need a paper trail showing that Avianca or GoToGate goofed. It looks like GoToGate intended to process your refund but never got around to it. The company needed a reminder.

Evidently, your reservation was handled by multiple online agencies, which made your resolution a little more complicated and may have led to the crossed wires.

At some point, you also dealt with a third agency called Mytrip, which is owned by the European online agency Etraveli Group. I publish the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the GoToGate and Etraveli Group contacts on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

How do you avoid something like this? Book directly with the airline, because going through intermediaries just leads to confusion and potential problems.

I contacted Etraveli Group on your behalf. A representative contacted you and refunded the \$180 in extra luggage fees that you had to pay.

Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy (elliottadvocacy.org), a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. E-mail him at chris@elliott.org or get help by contacting him at elliottadvocacy.org/help/.

THE V.I.P. LOUNGE

Ed Robertson of Barenaked Ladies

on coming back to Boston, Taylor Swift, and where he’d go if he had \$1 million

If you ask Barenaked Ladies frontman Ed Robertson, he will tell you that for him and his band, “all roads lead to Boston ... the epicenter of our success” in the United States. He said that Boston and Detroit were “the first strongholds, or what we started to refer to as the ‘Barenaked Belt’” early on in the Canadian band’s genesis. “We were in Boston for the release of our biggest record, ‘Stunt’ [1998], and had planned an in-store appearance at Newbury Comics,” Robertson, 52, recalled. “The record store got 3,000 calls from people looking for tickets ... so we ended up doing it on City Hall plaza — even though 80,000 people showed up and all we had were acoustic instruments and a tiny PA [public address system].” Barenaked Ladies — known for such hits as “It’s All Been Done,” “Brian Wilson,” “Falling for the First Time,” and “If I Had \$1,000,000 — will be back in Boston (this time with more advanced technology) at the Leader Bank Pavilion on July 9 as part of its Last Summer on Earth 2023 tour. Opening acts are Five for Fighting and Del Amitri. Robertson, a Toronto native, said that concertgoers can expect “an absolute cavalcade of monster hits,” as well as some numbers from the record that is being released in September. “People have always expected the unexpected at our shows,” he said. “I think we’re a band that’s known for knowing where they are and who they’re playing for. No two nights are ever the same.” We caught up with the father of three adult children who lives in Toronto with his wife, Natalie Herbert, an interior designer, and their two dogs, Otis and Sadie, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, and money was no object, where would you go?

Liveaboard, a dive boat [tour operation] in the Maldives. It’s not the money; it’s the time. You stay on the boat the whole trip and go scuba diving three, four, even five times a day. That’s something we planned for my 50th birthday celebration, but had to put it on hold because of the pandemic. We’re looking to get back into planning that and get it booked because we’ve been looking forward to it for a long time. My wife and I are certified rescue divers, the boys are open-water advanced divers, and our daughter is an open-water diver ... nerdy certification levels.

Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted?

We went to a festival in Mexico ... and I got COVID on the flight home.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?



Ed Robertson and family on a sailboat diving trip in the Grenadines.

We’ve done both. We have a great travel agent, and they can offer tremendous value.

Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation?

I’ve done many and I always enjoy it. I was 28 and had a number-one hit before I had a cellphone, so disconnecting is a nonissue. My kids are fine with it too. We’ve done lots of sailboat vacations and remote locations.

Do you use all of your vacation time or leave some on the table?

For the first time in my life, I’m saying no to gigs to facilitate planned time off. It feels great.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

I’ve had pretty great luck. We once spent a week at a camp in The Pantanal in Brazil, where accommodations were several stars below advertised ... but we still had a great time.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?

Always for adventure. Many of our vacations are centered around diving, since we all dive. Also, love historic places, art, architecture, etc.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation?

Chris Hadfield’s latest thriller.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be?

Taylor Swift. I think she’s an amazing songwriter, and her jet would come in handy.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

Local knowledge.

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

Any sort of trail mix, mixed nuts, and raisins.

What is the coolest souvenir you’ve picked up on a vacation?

Take only photos; leave only footprints. That said ... my wife bought me a wicked vintage pinball-type game from an antique market in France.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

Google Translate comes in very handy.

What has travel taught you?

That the world is huge, and we should all be sharing it. Community is a big one.

What is your best travel tip?

Always go local. Take local cooking courses. Learn as much of a local language as you can manage. Immerse yourself in otherness. Don’t try to see all the postcard spots. Meet the people who live there.

Juliet Pennington can be reached at writeonjuliet@comcast.net.

HERE

SEASIDE HOTEL DEBUTS WITH STYLISH UPGRADE

The Bluebird Ocean Point Inn hotel has officially opened in East Boothbay Harbor, the newest addition to the growing portfolio of Bluebird by Lark properties composed of redesigned hotels, motels, and ski lodges. The first Bluebird property in Maine, this 61-room reimagined coastal hotel boasts interiors — designed by Elder & Ash — of neutral tones paired with light wood that take inspiration from summer on this rocky shoreline, where the air is filled with scents of salt spray and the surrounding pines. A variety of accommodations are available for families, groups, and solo travelers, including king and double queen rooms in nine cottages, as well as suites and multi-bedroom suites all updated with plush beds and décor that is a sleek and modern take on New England motel design. The onsite Ocean Point Kitchen offers casual and classic New England fare in a renovated dining room and bar overlooking the sea. Think local mussels steamed in pilsner, lobster rolls, fish tacos, Maine scallops and seafood, and a lobster bake with littleneck clams and corn. Or chow down on a smash burger with Parmesan fries. Amenities include a retail store with curated essentials; picnic tables along the oceanfront; and lawn games. When not relaxing by the hotel’s heated, saltwater outdoor pool, the mid-coast Boothbay Harbor area boasts seafaring and hiking activities, beaches, working waterfronts, and small villages with crafts, breweries, and historic sites to explore. Rates from \$239. 207-633-4200, www.bluebirdhotels.com/hotels/ocean-point.

THERE

BALLOON FESTIVAL LIGHTS THE SKY

Think you need to visit the American Southwest for a premier hot-air bal-



loon experience? Think again. The New Jersey Lottery Festival of Ballooning (July 28-30) celebrates its 40th year as “the largest summertime hot air balloon and music festival in North America.” With almost 100 balloons ascending five times over the weekend, there’s plenty of chances to sign up for the wonders of floating among the clouds. The festival is held at Solberg Airport in rural Readington, N.J., about 50 miles west of New

York City. The colorful balloons make their mass ascension early in the morning and again in the late afternoon, when winds are at their lightest. The signature festival event is the “Balloon Glow.” Beginning at sundown, during the Saturday evening headliner concert, the pilots blast propane burners at predetermined times to release a burst of fire into the balloons which then “glow” like immense fireflies, creating a magical light show.



(Rides \$275-\$350 per person.) In addition to balloons, the festival offers live music, including headliners KC and the Sunshine Band, Everclear, Fitz and the Tantrums, and Parth Oza and Team saaz. During the day, tribute bands perform works of Bruno Mars, the Grateful Dead, Fleetwood Mac, and more. Stroll the grounds to peruse the work of hundreds of arts and crafts vendors, and taste foods from around the world. Family entertainment includes fireworks, amusement rides, a kids’ concert, and multiple performances of the Fearless Flores Thrill Show, with high-wire aerialists, a “motorcycle raceway in the sky,” and motorcycle stunts in a circular cage. General admission: Adults \$32; ages 4-12 \$12; under 3 free. balloonfestival.com

EVERYWHERE

HIT THE TRAILS WITH THE ULTIMATE BACKPACK

Is it time to ditch your old backpack? If so, it might be time to upgrade to the Max Backpack by Able Carry. Designed with 30 liters of space for travel, work, and play, the pack uses durable materials with solid construction such as X-Pac shell for lightweight strength, a 1000D Cordura nylon base, 420D ripstop lining, YKK ratchet coil, bartack stitching, and DWR coating. Hikers will appreciate the well-padded shoulder straps, ventilated back panel, handy magnetic sternum strap, and A-frame support to make hauling gear more enjoyable. Additional features include a protective laptop sleeve (fits up to 17-inch devices); spacious main compartment; hanger hook; luggage pass-through (to secure backpack to a carry-on handle); lockable zippers; and multiple external and internal organizer pockets. Available in three colors: Ocean Blue, Earth Green, and Tarmac Black. \$278. ablecarry.com/products/max

NECEE REGIS