

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

My Club Med vacation was canceled. Do I have to accept a credit?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. We booked a weeklong vacation through a travel agent affiliated with American Express (Altour) for last spring break. We had accommodations at the Club Med Miches Playa Esmeralda, including roundtrip airfare, for our family of four.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resort closed two weeks before our departure, and our trip was canceled. Club Med offered us a future travel credit for the land portion and an air credit for the flights. Last May, we rebooked with Club Med for spring break 2021.

Now the resort has not reopened, and our trip has been canceled a second time. They are again only offering us a future travel credit. For the airfare, which we booked through Club Med but is with American Airlines, we must use the flight credit before the end of this year.

We have been trying to work through our travel agent, but we have gotten only delays and obfuscation. I'm not sure if it's the travel agent or Club Med.

At this point, we do not want to rebook, and we simply want a full refund of both the land and air portions of our trip. Club Med sold us a trip twice and canceled it twice. They have had \$11,573 of our money for over a year. We feel it is not our responsibility to buy something else from them since they sold us a trip they cannot provide. We've told the travel agent that we want a refund, but she says they can only rebook. Can you help us get a refund?

EMILY MOERER,
Merion Station, Pa.

A. Club Med can't keep your money indefinitely. I think you deserve a full refund for your vacation.

I also think you were smart to work with a travel adviser. You had an extra layer of protection. Altour should have advocated for a quick refund or offered an acceptable alternative. It's unclear what Altour did for you. If I had to guess, I'd say it wasn't stalling but was probably overwhelmed with other COVID-19 refund cases.

A lot of tour operators offered vouchers after the initial outbreak. And many customers accepted them, hoping the pandemic would be over soon. But this is the travel industry equivalent to "long COVID," a condition where people continue to experience COVID-19 symptoms for longer than usual. It would have been easier if Altour had found a way to get your first vacation refunded. Then you could have booked a redo yourself when it's safer, instead of scrambling to use your expiring flight vouchers.

By the way, your hard-earned money doesn't expire. So why should your flight credits?

You could have appealed this to American Express. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the Amex managers on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/american-express/. I also publish the Club Med executive contacts at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/club-med/.

I contacted Altour on your behalf. It made arrangements for a full refund.

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



Karen Chen in Chinatown.

Karen Chen on getting back to Belize, relaxing in Jamaica, and hazy IPAs

As executive director of the Chinese Progressive Association, Karen Chen doesn't have much time for travel. But when she does get a break, she wants to go back to Jamaica. "It is just so beautiful there, and it is nice and relaxing," said Chen, 42, whose work with the grassroots community organization focuses on securing equality and empowerment of the Chinese community in the Greater Boston area and beyond. "We want to ensure that people in our community get access to basic needs," Chen said. The CPA is in the throes of planning its annual Chinatown Block Party on Aug. 15. "It's an opportunity for residents to get to know each other and support each other," she said. "And it's a lot of fun." The Cambridge resident was born and raised in Taishan City in the Guangdong Province of China. She moved to Belize with her family

when she was 9 years old, then to Boston when she was 10. We caught up with the Boston University graduate to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

My last vacation was in Jamaica 2018. I can say that it is one of my favorites because it was really relaxing. I stayed at the Rock House Hotel in Negril. It was really nice and relaxing.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Favorite drink: hazy IPA from local breweries. Favorite food: almost anything Asian and dishes with lots of vegetables.

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

Belize. I lived there for about a year when I was 9 years old. I haven't been back since. I would love to visit.

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

My phone and a water bottle.

Aisle or window?

Window. That way I don't have to keep getting up when people use the bathroom. Also, I'm small enough that I don't need extra leg room.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

None. My family emigrated from China to Belize and then here [Boston] when I was 10. Like many other immigrant children, I became an adult immediately because both of my parents were working — my dad in restaurants and my mom was a garment worker. So my older brother and I had to take care of everything at home — including two younger brothers. Vacations were not a part of our life.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Binge watch TV shows. Some of my favorites are "Better Call Saul" and "Breaking Bad."

Best travel tip?

Be open-minded and adventurous — while also taking safety precautions.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

LAND OF DINOSAURS ROARS TO LIFE

Attention, parents whose young kids are dinosaur-obsessed. (Pretty much every parent.) You'll want to adjust your busy summer schedule to include a trip to the Connecticut Science Center in Hartford, where the massive exhibit Dinosaurs Around the World will surely elevate you to Best Parent Ever status. The Age of Reptiles comes to life in the unrecognizable landscape of Pangea, a time when lush landscapes covered Africa, greenery was the norm in Antarctica and giant dinosaurs roamed the planet. The multi-layered narrative exhibit features fossils, authentic casts, cutting-edge research, and a dozen life-size advanced animatronics dinosaurs set in immersive environments, including the mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex of North America, swift Velociraptor of the Gobi Desert, massive herbivore Amargasaurus from the tropical jungles of South America and more. Adult \$24.95; Youth \$16.95; Senior \$22.95. 860-520-2160, ctsciencecenter.org/dinosaur

HISTORY OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM TOURS RESUME

After closing during the pandemic, the Royall House and Slave Quarters in Medford is re-opening for

tours to the general public on weekends in August and September. Once home to the state's largest slaveholding family in the 18th century, the property includes the Royall House, one of the finest Colonial-era buildings in New England, and the Slave Quarters, the only remaining such structure in the northern United States. Together they form a museum whose "architecture, household items, archaeological artifacts, and programs bear witness to intertwined stories of wealth and bondage, set against the backdrop of America's quest for independence." The museum also presents a range of public programs throughout the year. Tours start on the hour at 1, 2, and 3 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday. Capacity is limited to 12 people per tour; attendance is on a first-come, first-served basis. 781-396-9032, royallhouse.org

THERE

NYC MEATPACKING REHAB 2.0

In the Time Flies Department: It seems like only yesterday that New York's Meatpacking District was

transformed into a destination hotspot but, in fact, it's been 17 years since the iconic Gansevoort Meatpacking Hotel flung open its doors, helping to make the neighborhood one of the most highly trafficked areas in the city. Today, as the city reopens after COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns,

Gansevoort Meatpacking is once again fueling the neighborhood's renaissance with a multimillion dollar rebrand and top-to-bottom renovations. Offerings include 186 renovated guestrooms; 1,700 square-foot reimaged lobby with extensive art program; the MIRROR, an interactive gym device in every guest room; multiple food and beverage venues including a sprawling European cafe, Mediterranean restaurant, and basement karaoke and bowling bar (coming in 2022); 45th-floor heated outdoor pool; pop-up omakase sushi bar at the Gansevoort Rooftop; reimaged penthouse in partnership with Italian furniture designer Poliform; and more. Rates from \$535. 212-206-6700, www.gansevoorthotelgroup.com/gansevoort-meatpacking-nyc

JUST SAY OUI

French bee, a long-haul, low-cost airline based in Paris, has launched its first East Coast route in the United States between Newark Liberty International Airport and Paris Orly Airport. How low-cost is low, you ask? Fares start from \$139 one way — with some as low as \$94 for Basic Economy — on their fleet of four Airbus A350s. The 7-hour and 25-minute flights depart on Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Book from three options including Basic, the lowest-priced option, which welcomes one 26-pound carry-on bag; Smart, the Basic offering plus one 50-pound checked bag and an inflight meal (with a range of options including vegetarian and fish); and Premium, the Smart offering plus one additional 50-pound checked bag, two premium meals, complimentary beverage service, Premium cabin seat choice, line jump, priority boarding, and priority luggage delivery. In addition, French bee has joined forces with SNCF (the

French National Railway Operator) to offer packages combine air and train fare into one single fare to explore various destinations across France. www.frenchbee.com

EVERYWHERE

STYLISH TRAVEL BAGS FOR MOMS

Traveling with your little tyke means packing lots of accessories. Luli Bebe's new diaper bags combine style with function, meaning mothers can still look chic even when hauling around diapers, creams, and other baby-care essentials. Crafted from premium faux vegan leather, the bags feature nine pockets, magnetic flat front pouch, stain-resistant exterior and smooth wipeable interior, and can be carried over-the-shoulder or as a backpack. Available in a range of colors in two sizes, Monaco and Petit Monaco. \$129/\$159. lulibebe.com/collections/monaco-diaper-bag

CLASSIC LUGGAGE LINE'S SNAZZY UPDATES

Luxe German luggage company RIMOWA announces two additions to its iconic brand. First, look for updated suitcase colors in its Essential line — mango and bamboo — designed to evoke the balmy atmosphere of Thailand's famed floating markets. Second, the company has partnered with British brand CHAOS for a limited-edition line, the RIMOWA x CHAOS collection, featuring a bold colorful graphic in the shape of paint dripping down the case's exterior. Perfect for two to three days of travel, the suitcase includes a complimentary leather luggage tag embossed with a globe and a set of three slogan stickers. \$680-\$950. www.rimowa.com/us/en/home

NECEE REGIS

