

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



CARLOS GIUSTI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tourists take pictures after exiting Carnival's Mardi Gras cruise ship, docked in the bay of San Juan, on Aug. 3, marking the first time a cruise ship has visited the territory since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Help! My Carnival cruise credit offer is sunk

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Last year, I paid a \$750 deposit for three tickets on a Carnival cruise from Los Angeles to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. After the COVID-19 outbreak, Carnival canceled its cruises. Carnival refunded one of the deposits. It sent me a letter stating we had until May 2021 to decide whether to accept a full refund or reschedule a cruise and get \$500 additional cruise credit.

But somewhere along the line, they decided to change the offer without informing their customers. When I asked, a representative said they had an internal e-mail that they decided to deny refunds to anyone who had canceled more than 90 days before the cancellation. Now they are refusing our refund. Can you help me get my \$500 deposit back?

BESSIE WALKER,
Waipahu, Hawaii

A. Carnival, like all other cruise lines, suspended operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It offered a choice of a refund or a future cruise credit. The offer changed over time, which led to some confusion for the cruise line, as well as travel agents and passengers. Yours appears to be one of those cases.

Carnival's records show that you canceled your booking 68 days before it suspended its operations. It offered you no refund but said you qualified for a \$150 "early saver credit" for each booking.

However, your phone records suggest you contacted Carnival on April 18, more than a month after it announced its suspension. You indicated at the time that you intended to accept the future \$500 onboard credit offered by Carnival.

Here's the problem: Carnival's e-mails to you were clear about its refund process. It had "fully automated" the refund and credit process, "avoiding the need to call us."

"We urge you to carefully review this information and follow the online process, as calling us will not expedite your request," it added.

I'm not sure if Carnival wanted you to call. Phoning it may have led to some confusion about the timing of your re-booking request. And since a phone call generates no paper trail, it's really Carnival's word against yours.

You said it should be Carnival's responsibility to provide an exact date and name of the person you called and canceled the booking, as well as a transcript. But unfortunately, that's not how it works. Although companies like Carnival have sophisticated call center technology that generates transcripts and tracks each conversation, the only way to access it is with a court order. And no one is going to hire a lawyer over a \$500 deposit; it's not cost-effective.

I recommended that you reach out to one of the cruise line's executive contacts. I publish the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of Carnival's managers on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/advocacy-contacts/carnival-cruise-lines/.

You e-mailed Carnival's executives, as I suggested. Separately, I also reached out to Carnival on your behalf. It reviewed its records, including its phone logs, and fully refunded your deposit.

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

Tom Rush on being nice and never feeling guilty about pleasure

Tom Rush has been touring for more than half a century, so when the singer-songwriter has time for a vacation, he likes nothing more than relaxing at his home in southern Maine. During the pandemic, Rush began the Rockport Sundays series, in which he performs songs, tells stories, etc. from his home. "I refer to it as a backstage pass to my creative process," said Rush, 80. ("There is a typo on my birth certificate, but it says I'm 80. I'm actually 35 — some of the time," he quipped.) While he has enjoyed the weekly Sunday performances, Rush, who prior to last year averaged 60-65 shows a year, said he "really, really missed performing" live. "I've learned that when you tell a joke to a video camera, it doesn't laugh," he said. "Playing for a live audience is the driving force that gets us up on stage . . . interacting with a live audience and getting feedback. It's like playing tennis with somebody on the other side of the net as opposed to playing tennis with a backboard." Lucky for Rush — and his fans — his live touring calendar is filling up fast, with shows in Massachusetts and four other New England states in the next two months (for tour dates visit www.tomrush.com). We caught up with the Concord, N.H., native, who has three adult children, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? To be honest, I travel so much that my favorite vacation spot is home. When I rarely have gone on a vacation, it's been a different place every time. It's all about novelty.

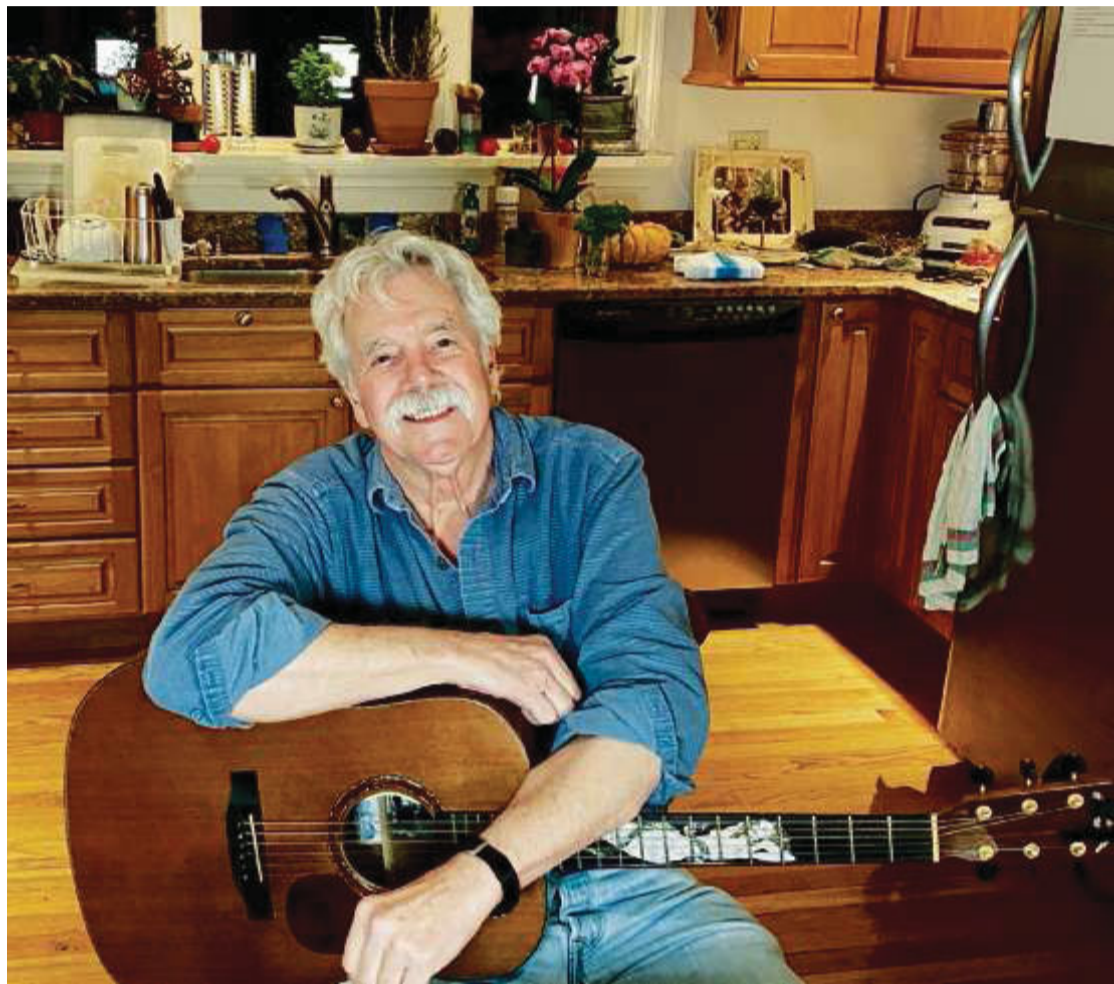
Favorite food or drink while vacationing? Whatever the local specialties might be — unless it involves insects of some kind.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? I'd like to get to Spain, Japan, Ireland, Vietnam someday. I just perceive them as being very different from what I'm used to — maybe not Spain so much as the Asian countries.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? At least one of my guitars.

Aisle or window? Window — better for sleeping.

Favorite childhood travel memory? Driving



Tom Rush in his kitchen.

with my family from our home in New Hampshire to our summer place in Connecticut, playing the license plate game, singing "We're in — insert name of state — now . . ." every time we crossed a state line — and stopping at Wiggins Tavern in Northampton every time.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? I have learned

over the years, children, never to feel guilty about pleasure.

Best travel tip? See above: Never feel guilty about pleasure. And be respectful and kind to everyone you meet — it's so much easier to have a good time when people are nice to you.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

COUNTY FAIR FUN RETURNS TO RHODE ISLAND

Make new summer memories at the 55th Annual Washington County Fair in Richmond, R.I., (Aug. 11-15). After hosting a virtual event in 2020, the fair is opening its gates again this year and welcoming families for five days of old-timey fun with activities that include midway rides, tractor and truck pulls, livestock shows, 4-H exhibits (Rhode Island's largest agricultural event), kiddie rides, and games such as a three-legged race, costume parade, mooring contest, potato sack race, pie-eating contest, and much more. Music fans won't want to miss the concerts on the main stage with country music performers such as Easton Corbin, Chris Bandi and the Dugger Band. Gates open 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Admission \$11; kids 10 and under are free. washingtoncountyfair-ri.com.

MUCH ADO ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

Free outdoor performances of the Bard's comedy of trickery, deceit, and masquerade, "Much Ado About Nothing," comes to Massachusetts (Aug. 6-29) as part of Brown Box Theater Project's 10th Annual Shakespeare tour. The expanded 2021 season features performances at 13 outdoor stages and workshops at four libraries across the state. Presented in partnership

with local organizations, each performance features professionally designed sets, lighting, costumes and props, performed by skilled regional actors. Audiences are encouraged to practice social distancing by bringing their own blankets and lawn chairs. Performances are open to all; no tickets are needed. All library workshops are free; some in-person and some virtual. (Please see each library's website for information and registration.) 443-808-1215, brownboxtheatre.org/portfolio-items/much-ado-about-nothing.

THERE

LUXE HOTEL DEBUTS IN HUDSON, N.Y.

Those heading to heart of New York's bucolic Hudson Valley — home to numerous antique shops, art galleries, restaurants and cocktail bars, as well as scenic hikes, kayaking, canoe-

ing, and more — might want to book a room in The Amelia. Located in historic Hudson, the just-opened boutique hotel, set in a 19th-century Queen Anne-style house, features eight distinct guest rooms and suites with modern furnishings and baths, library (including mini-libraries in each room), elegant common spaces, and seasonal outdoor pool surrounded by English gardens. Highlights include various cultural programming including author seminars, artist lectures, and seasonal concert series in collaboration with Bard College Conservatory of Music. Open year-round; available for individual stays and complete property buyouts. Rates from \$350/night. 518-768-7900, theameliahudson.com.

UPSCALE DIGS COME TO S.C. LOWCOUNTRY

Visitors to Charleston's Historic District have a fun and stylish new place to stay. With 91 guest rooms, including four suites, The Ryder has a laid-back bohemian vibe and coastal color palette that informs the hotel's design. Amenities include two spirited dining outlets helmed by culinary group Gin & Luck; a second-floor

courtyard with outdoor pool, sundeck, lounges, and lush landscaping; access to Pivotal Fitness, located adjacent to the hotel; and more. The centrally located hotel is steps away from the city's celebrated restaurants, museums, and markets, and less than a mile from the iconic Rainbow Row, a series of 13 colorful historic Georgian row houses. Rates from \$269. 843-723-7451, www.theryderhotel.com.

TINY PORTABLE HOMES GO ELECTRIC

Interested in an eco-friendly portable home? As consumers seek out travel and living spaces that incorporate a small carbon footprint, tiny portable home builder ESCAPE Homes is introducing all-electric (EV) options for each of its designs. Options include electric water heaters, electric heat and induction cooktops; microwaves and electric stoves are available in some units. EV models feature a 50a/240v power system, larger than the normal ESCAPE home 30a/120v power system. In addition, the company has unveiled a full line of air exchangers that constantly remove air from homes and bring fresh air in, ranging from a simple air exchanger, to a heat recovery unit to a full energy recovery unit. Exchanger models run from \$900 to \$1,600. EV power system upgrades start at \$3,350. www.escapetraveler.net.

EVERYWHERE

PLANT-BASED CREAMERS FOR HAPPY CAMPERS

Camping trips just got a whole lot tastier — and healthier — with two new non-dairy offerings from Goodmylk. Get rid of the sugary, dairy creamers with Goodmylk's plant-based activated creamers, Almond and Super Oat. In addition to organic almonds, maple sugar, and Himalayan salt, the Almond Activated Creamer includes a custom Longevity Blend of tocotrienols, astragalus, lion's mane, and reishi. The Super Oat Creamer, made with the same Longevity Blend, also features gluten-free oats, tigernuts (not a nut, a vegetable), dates, and Himalayan salt. The powdered product is easy to pack in its moisture-resistant metal tin. To use, simply froth, stir or blend two tablespoons to your coffee, smoothie, or favorite beverage. goodmylk.com

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