

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



GABBY JONES/BLOOMBERG

## Turo charges renter \$500 for a bad paint job on rental car

**Q.** I booked a 17-day National Geographic Expedition to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. I'm traveling with four other people. After I rented a car, I immediately reported an issue to the car owner and Turo, whom I rented the car from. But instead of acknowledging the problem, Turo blamed me and charged me \$500 for a new paint job. Turo insists that I was responsible because the peeling occurred during my rental period.

This experience has shaken my trust in Turo's commitment to fairness and customer satisfaction. Can you help me get my money back?

LATISHA THOMPSON,  
Groton, Conn.

**A.** I don't see how you could be held responsible for peeling paint on a car that you rented from Turo. I mean, if you had collided with another vehicle and the paint started peeling, then yes, perhaps. But you showed me pictures of your car, and it looked like a paint job gone wrong.

So, what happened? Your records show that Turo charged you a \$500 deposit when you rented the vehicle. After you returned the Sonata, Turo's claims team sent you an email saying that the owner had filed a claim to repair the paint on the roof. Since you declined Turo's optional protection, you were liable for the damage, according to Turo.

You signed an agreement saying that you are financially responsible for "all physical damage to or theft of a booked vehicle that occurs during a trip" including any additional costs and fees resulting from damage, regardless of who is at fault. In other words, while the damage wasn't your fault, you were still responsible.

Turo strongly recommends that you take "before" and "after" photos of your car. It even has a feature on its app called Trip Photos that allows you to do so and store the images in the app. I think this is brilliant because if you can prove that the car was damaged before you rented it, you're far less likely to face a successful claim by your host.

Why didn't you spot this damage when you picked up the car? You say the vehicle looked "very glossy and shiny" as if someone recently painted it. The paper trail between you and Turo shows that the company was unconvinced. A brief, polite email sent to one of the Turo managers I list on Elliott.org, my consumer advocacy website, might have led to the reversal of this \$500 charge.

I think there was enough reason for Turo to take another look at this claim. It's hard to imagine that you did anything to the vehicle to cause the paint to peel the way that it did. Something just felt off about it. So, I contacted Turo on your behalf. In response, Turo sent you an email that it had decided to drop the matter.

"We are pleased to inform you that we will be closing the claim, and you will not owe anything for damages at the present time," it added.

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](mailto:chris@elliott.org) or get help by contacting him at [elliottadvocacy.org/help/](mailto:elliottadvocacy.org/help/).

## THE V.I.P. LOUNGE

## Michael 'Fitz' Fitzpatrick

on jet lag, crashing a scooter, and using AI to help plan a trip

**W**hen he travels with his family, Michael "Fitz" Fitzpatrick, lead singer of the multi-platinum Los Angeles-based band Fitz and the Tantrums, enjoys renting a car and finding small towns and things to do that are "off the beaten path." For a recent trip to Europe, Fitzpatrick said he used — with great success — AI to help plan a four-week trip. "When we were in Southern France, for example, we wanted to be near Marseille, but not in Marseille, and with AI and Airbnb, we were able to find cool places in smaller towns that were perfect for our family," he said in a recent phone call from Madison, Wis., where his band was performing. "I shared information on my family, my kids' ages, and our interests. It [AI] gave me incredible insight into each place with amazing comparisons that really helped me find the best places to visit that fit our family." The indie pop, neo soul band, known for hits including "HandClap" and "Out of My League," will bring its The Man on the Moon Tour to Boston's House of Blues on Aug. 18. Fitzpatrick, 55, said that he and his band have a "long history" of performing in Boston and said audiences are "always amazing." In fact, he said, it was at a performance early on at the Paradise Rock Club that he "realized our band was going to be successful. ... It was a sold-out show and the loudest audience ever." The Los Angeles native said that those attending the band's Boston show "can expect joy," adding that "we really never tried to be the coolest, hippest band, but we are unabashedly joyful. ... Come and have this church of music experience with us." We caught up with Fitzpatrick, who lives in Pasadena with his wife, Kaylee, an actress and artist, their three sons — Theo, 12, Bash, 8, and Rémy, 6 — two dogs, one gecko, and a tortoise, to talk about all things travel.

**If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go?**

I would go to the south of France. I grew up with a French mother taking me to France as a child, so it always holds a special place in my heart.

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

It can be stressful, but we love to plan our adventures. We have kids, and we rent a car, and sometimes we find a place on Airbnb because our max drive time is four hours. As a result, we've discovered all these amazing small towns and places you'd never visit as a tourist.

**Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?**

I definitely want to battle my phone addiction and unplug, but I also have kids, so we let them have a little screen time so we can stay sane as parents!

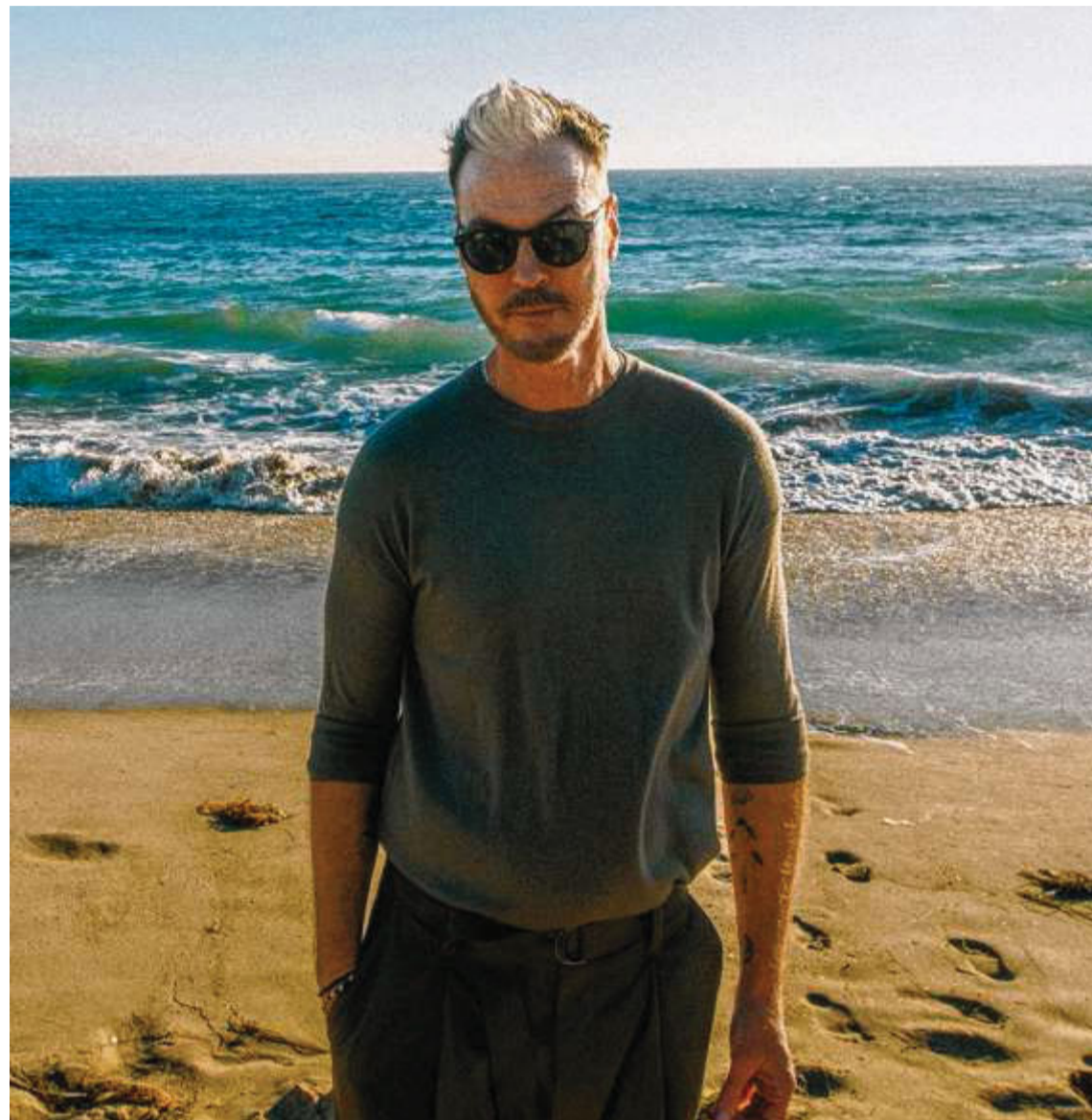
**What has been your worst vacation experience?**

Crashing a scooter on an island in Vietnam about 20 years ago and having to fly back to the US with a partially collapsed lung. Brutal.

**What is your favorite childhood travel memory?**

Traveling with my parents to Rome for my first time without my siblings. Just me and my parents. I was 12 or 13 and was able to live out the fantasy of being an only child.

**Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the ad-**



Fitz and the Tantrums frontman Michael Fitzpatrick in Malibu, Calif.

**venture of it all?**

I would say all. I like a balance of relaxation, with a hefty dose of adventure mixed in, and a light sprinkling of museums and historic sites.

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

"Trust" by Hernán Díaz.

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

Anthony Bourdain, because I know I would eat the best food of my entire life and have a really amazing [experience] of culture and food coming from one of the greats. And I'm sure that guy liked to party.

**What is the best gift to give a traveler?**

A universal plug adapter.

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

Peanut M&M's and Sun Chips.

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

We've collected sea glass from just about every

corner of the earth.

**What is your favorite app/website for travel?**

This was the first year that I used AI to help work through planning our trip. I used it to compare two towns based on my family, my kids' ages, and our interests. It gave me incredible insight into each place with amazing comparisons and really helped me find the best places to visit that fit our family.

**What has travel taught you?**

Nothing teaches you more about the diversity of the human experience than traveling.

**What is your best travel tip?**

Jet lag hack: If you're flying to Europe from the US, book a flight that gets you in around 1 p.m. ... Drop your bags and stay outside in daylight as long as you can and make yourself stay up until at least 10 p.m. Add one melatonin and you will completely avoid jet lag.

JULIET PENNINGTON

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## HERE

### STEAM FESTIVITIES IN LOWELL

Mark your calendar to head to Lowell for the not-to-be-missed eighth annual Lowell Kinetic Sculpture Race, a day of coordinated whimsy and mayhem that celebrates the intersection of science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics, known as STEAM. Held on the third Saturday of September, the free daylong spectacle show-



cases human-powered, all-terrain kinetic sculptures made from new and repurposed materials. Teams from around New England and the US converge in this riverside town to compete in the 10K race course through Bone-Shaker Alley (cobblestoned Middle Street), the Maddening Mud Pit, and the Merrimack Plunge — a dip into the Merrimack River. In addition to cheering on the racers, visitors can enjoy live music by The Party Band, performances by Cirque de Light, a family fun zone, and scarf truck tasty treats at a variety of food trucks. Wearing a costume, funny hat, feather boa, or other flamboyant attire is encouraged. Two shuttles will travel between venues, or bring a bike and follow the judges in their chariot along the route. Want to be a racer and not a spectator? The race is open to all ages, working with students from local schools and after-school programs, artists, engineers, bike enthusiasts, and anyone with creativity and a sense of adventure. Registration is open now through Sept. 1, though if that's too soon, you can always plan to participate next year. Sept. 20, events 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. [www.lowellkinetic.com](http://www.lowellkinetic.com)

## THERE

### INTERNATIONAL CAMPING SEARCH-AND-BOOK WEBSITE

Have dreams of camping in England or glamping in Italy? Searching for campsites just got easier for travel enthusiasts with Pitchup, a global outdoor accommodation website featuring over 6,000 campgrounds across 70 countries, including 76 bookable US campgrounds. There is no fee to join, and anyone can log on and search for their next outdoor adventure. Simply choose your destination, travel dates, and specify whether you're bringing your own tent, touring caravan pitch, or motorhome. You can narrow your search by what on-site accommodations you want, such as a lodge, cabin, pod, hut, glamping, or caravan for hire. Or search additional features such as hot tubs, electric pitch, adults only, campsite pub, outdoor swimming pool, dogs allowed, play areas, campfires allowed, open all year, and more. An online map allows you to view surrounding areas and check out sites across the globe. Booking is available online (not by phone or email), and dates and costs are clearly displayed alongside site types. Any questions you might have that are not addressed in the FAQ section are happily answered via a contact form. Special offers and discounts can be found via the "top offers" tab available at select campgrounds and RV parks. In foreign countries, payment is normally taken in the currency used in the location you're visiting. [www.pitchup.com](http://www.pitchup.com)

## EVERYWHERE

**SUMMER TEES FOR ANY ADVENTURE** Ibex, a Boulder, Colo.-based activewear apparel company, recently debuted its new line of shirts for sum-



mer. The GOAT Collection (Greatest of All Tees) get their superlative designation from fine tailoring paired with the benefits of merino wool. To achieve what it dubs "Weightless Wool," the company wraps ultra-thin merino fibers around a nylon filament to create a fabric — 89 percent merino wool and 11 percent nylon — that's both lightweight and durable. The fabric's soft, thermoregulating, and highly breathable qualities are designed to handle everything from summer hikes to long travel days to everyday wear. (The company was cofounded by a mountain climber who knows the needs of adventurers.) Additionally, the antimicrobial and odor-resistant fabric allows for multiple wears between washes, perfect for travels when you need to pack light. All wool comes from Australia and New Zealand, where farms are regularly checked to ensure their sheep are treated with respect and that the land is protected with best practices. Available in several styles, including men's and women's short and long sleeve crews, a men's polo shirt, and women's tank top. \$75-\$110. <https://ibex.com/collections/goat-collection>

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