

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Iberia downgrades passenger to economy without a refund

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. My husband and I were downgraded from premium economy to economy on an Iberia flight from Chicago to Madrid. We booked with Avios miles and paid \$543 in taxes. Under EC 261, the European airline consumer protection regulation, we're entitled to 75 percent of the ticket value as compensation. This is roughly 29,452 Avios miles.

But Iberia only gave me 3,500 miles and ignored my husband's claim, saying that he lacked an Iberia Plus account. I filed multiple claims, cited EC 261, and even emailed executives using your contacts. No luck.

Did Iberia violate EC 261? How can we get the compensation we're owed?

CHRISTOPHER LONG, *Chicago*

A. Getting an unexpected downgrade from premium economy to economy can be painful and frustrating. Spending eight hours in a tiny airline seat with almost no personal space is no way to start a vacation. And if you paid for a higher class of service, you deserve to get your money or miles back.

You're right — Iberia should have refunded 75 percent of the fare for your downgraded cabin under EC 261. Since you booked with miles, the compensation should reflect the fare's value in Avios points. The airline also failed to address your husband's claim properly. Requiring a loyalty account for compensation is not a valid reason to deny a passenger's rights.

You did everything right by citing EC 261 and escalating the situation to the Iberia executives listed on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. Your husband should have filed a separate claim even without an Iberia Plus account and created one if it was required. Always keep a paper trail (as you did); it's critical for proving your case.

When an airline fails to follow regulations, there is a way to light a fire under it. You can file a complaint with the country's aviation regulator. In your case, this would have been Spain's Agencia Estatal de Seguridad Aerea, which is responsible for enforcing EC 261 in Spain.

You had an excellent paper trail with Iberia, and you cited the correct regulations. An AESA complaint might have nudged the airline into doing the right thing.

By the way, this is the first time I've seen an airline make a loyalty program membership a prerequisite for EC 261 compensation. But it kind of makes sense. Iberia's policy is to return the miles to the ticketed traveler. How could Iberia have compensated him with Avios points if he doesn't have an account?

Iberia is following a playbook that I've seen many times during my career as a consumer advocate. An airline offers you take-it-or-leave-it compensation, and you have to decide: Take it or leave it?

I contacted Iberia on your behalf, and it refunded 75 percent of the miles that you and your husband spent on the flight.

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

Singer-songwriter Crispian Mills on Cornwall, processed cheese, and Disneyland

English singer-songwriter and guitarist Crispian Mills, best known as the frontman of the psychedelic indie alt-rock band Kula Shaker, said he loves performing in America and has a special affinity for Boston. "I'm looking forward to finding somewhere to have a cup of tea," said Mills, joking that he and his bandmates are "going to have our own tea party" while in town. Kula Shaker, which had a number of top-10 hits on the UK singles chart in the 1990s, is performing at Brighton Music Hall on Sept. 21. It will be the fourth stop on a 15-city tour across the US and Canada. "It's always exciting to [play in] America, where there is so much rock 'n' roll history," Mills, 52, said in a recent phone call from England. "We're still romantic about America as a musical homeland." The musician, whose mom is British actress Hayley Mills (who starred in the hit 1961 film "The Parent Trap"), said he is excited to have the original band back together for this tour — and for last year's album "Natural Magick." "We're being very prolific at the moment; the band is on a creative roll," he said, adding that a new record is in the works. "We play every show like it could potentially be our last — our last day on Earth, let alone our last show — so it's pretty high energy." Mills said that while some newer songs will be performed on the current tour, the band will play its hits including "Govinda," "Hush," "Tattva," "303," and "Into the Deep." "We always mix up our repertoire," he said. "It's a good test for new material ... to see if it stands up against the old stuff." We caught up with the Hammersmith, London, native, who lives in Cornwall with his wife, Josephine, a homeopath and former model, and their two teenage sons, Hari and Keshava, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? Cornwall, the farthest southwestern point of the British Isles, which has some of the most beautiful coastline in the world. It's pretty good for surfing, too. Cornwall — "Kernow" — has its own native language, being home to the Celts, is peppered with ancient stone circles, and shops selling the famous Cornish pasty.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? I don't think I've used a travel agent for 20 years. Come to think of it, I'm not sure I've been on holiday for almost as long.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? Leaving smartphones and neural interface devices behind is an admirable idea. However, if you play guitar, I advise that it's always best to travel with at least 1,000 watts of amplification [on] hand, as you never know when you might need to play a blistering solo on a windy hilltop.

What has been your worst vacation experience? India will always present you with heaven and hell in equal measure. I nearly died quite a few times in India, either due to sickness, extreme weather, or near-misses in a car. Once also on a plane, which broke down on the tarmac minutes before takeoff. That said, I've also met some extraordinary people, visited the most beautiful places, and experienced things that can only be described as miraculous. So, altogether, I'd say it was worth it.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory?



Crispian Mills in Cornwall, England.

Going to Disneyland with my mum when I was 7 years old. It was like a fever dream. I don't think I've ever quite recovered.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? I enjoy beautiful landscapes, especially dramatic mountains and coastlines. I like hiking, but I have had some great experiences driving as well. The Scottish Highlands are one of my favorite places on Earth. When I was 19 years old, I proposed to my wife on the Isle of Arran. As soon as she said yes, we were besieged by rainbows. We are still married today.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? "Weird Scenes Inside the Canyon: Laurel Canyon, Covert Ops & the Dark Heart of the Hippie Dream" by David McGowan.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? A first-class ticket.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? Falafel, though side effects make it best suited to solo voyages.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? Holy water/holy dust. I do like to vis-

it holy places. In India I will always go to holy places and take some of that home with me. Some of these places that really have been sanctified by thousands of years of saints going there and practicing their faith ... they are incredible. I can't explain unless you've been there yourself. In Italy, visit [Basilica of] St. Francis [in Assisi].

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

TTFL — Transcendental Transport for London. It doesn't exist in this present dimension, but it can be found on the light web.

What has travel taught you? Never eat processed cheese.

What is your best travel tip? Leave the house at an auspicious time. Time has quality, so choose your astrological moment carefully. Like catching a wave. That's what astrology is all about ... understanding and working in harmony with the world around you. This kind of tradition of leaving the house at an auspicious time is very common in the East. It's not about trying to control the world around, but more about working in harmony with it.

JULIET PENNINGTON



MAINE CRAFTS ASSOCIATION

HERE

CRAFTY WEEKEND IN MAINE

Combine a colorful fall leaf-peeping tour with a celebration of the arts during the annual Maine Craft Weekend. (Oct. 4-5). An educational and family-friendly event for craft enthusiasts, collectors, and craft-showcases visitors, the two-day affair showcases the best of the best in a wide array of craft fields, including basketry, ceramics, glass, fiber and textiles, jewelry, printmaking, leather, and more. Events are taking place throughout the state, so wherever you're traveling, you're bound to find something to pique your interest. Dozens of participating sites — including private artist studios, outdoor installations, workshops, galleries, craft schools, pop-up shops, and more — are listed on the website's easy-to-use map. Search for events online in the craft categories that most interest you, as well as by city and date. This year's featured cities, where you'll find coordinated city-wide craft-related offerings, are Belfast, Biddeford, Ellsworth, and Freeport. Looking for a place to stay?

Along the southern coast, the Ogunquit Hotel Collection offers a diverse selection of accommodations at seven hotels, ranging from lavish indulgences to budget-friendly options. (Average rates from \$350/night.) www.ogunquit.com/ Farther north along the coast, choose from a variety of cottages, rooms, and suites at the Bluebird Ocean Point Inn. (Rates from \$295.) www.bluebirdhotels.com/hotels/ocean-point Events at the Craft Weekend are free. mainecraftweekend.org/

THERE

GRAND DEBUT ALONG CHICAGO'S GOLD COAST

Chicago is abuzz with activities this fall, with highlights including the Chicago Architectural Biennial, Chicago Fashion Week, the much-anticipated "Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind" exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and a variety of spooky Halloween events. Explore your options and plan a visit to the city's tourism website: www.choosechicago.com. In buzzy hotel news, The Talbott, a historic landmark in Chicago's Gold Coast (a his-

toric district along Lake Shore Drive), recently completed a full-scale renovation and officially joined Marriott Bonvoy's Autograph Collection. Originally built in 1927 by renowned Chicago architect Alfred S. Alschuler, The Talbott has long been celebrated for its Georgian Revival style. The new design reimagines every aspect of the property, including all 178 guestrooms, public spaces, and event areas, and reinterprets the Gold Coast's historic elegance through a warm palette of camel leather, brownstone red, antique white and touches of gold. Drawing inspiration from nearby institutions like the Art Institute of Chicago, the art found throughout the hotel is a mix of bold, modern, and classically influenced works that aim to create a dialogue between past and present. Open for breakfast, brunch, and dinner, the onsite restaurant, LAUREL, offers Mediterranean-inspired cuisine with a focus on seasonal ingredients. Exclusive offers and packages can be found online. Rates from \$299. 312-944-4970, www.talbottchicago.com/

EVERYWHERE

STYLISH INNS INSPIRE TRAVEL DREAMS

Discover ideas for future travels with "The Inn Crowd: Artistic Getaways and the Modern Innkeepers Who Crafted Them" by author and photographer Jackie Caradonio. With more than 250 photographs of 20 stylish inns across the Northeast, the book also features profiles of the innkeepers who speak of their passion for hospitality and desire to build something beautiful. Each chapter focuses on a different inn, telling the story of its creation through gorgeous photography and the owners' colorful tales.

Featured inns include The George, beauty mogul Bobbi Brown and her husband Steven Plofker's 31-room hotel in a landmarked Georgian Revival building in Montclair, New Jersey; the Inn at Kenmore Hall, former J. Crew menswear designer Frank Muytjens and his partner Scott Edward Cole's 19th-century Berkshires estate; Inns of Aurora, American Girl dolls founder Pleasant Rowland's art-filled guesthouses in the Finger Lakes of New York; and The Roundtree at Amagansett, former tech attorney Sylvia Wong's secret oasis in the heart of the Hamptons. The book covers what makes each property unique, including interior design, art collections, culinary offerings, and gardens. Caradonio has spent more than 20 years photographing and writing about hotels around the world, as a staff editor at Departures, Robb Report, and Travel + Leisure, as well as writing for many of the nation's top travel publications. The Inn Crowd is a perfect coffee table book for browsing and dreaming, and might even encourage you to get off the couch and travel somewhere soon. \$59.95. www.phaidon.com/en-us/products/the-inn-crowd-artistic-getaways-and-the-modern-innkeepers-who-crafted-them NEECE REGIS



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