

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



DAVID PAUL MORRIS/BLOOMBERG

Avis promised a refund of \$1,016, but where is it?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I recently reserved a tour, which included a rental car with Avis. But earlier this year, shortly before leaving, I got sick. My doctor said that I should not travel.

I logged on to the Avis website and canceled the reservation for the car rental. I logged on to the same website again approximately one week later to confirm the cancellation. The website confirmed that my reservation was indeed canceled.

Two weeks later, I called Avis to check on the status of my refund. A representative said my reservation was never canceled. She promised to cancel it that day and said I should expect my refund in three to five business days.

I also received an email from Avis claiming that a refund of \$1,016 had been issued and to allow up to 15 business days for the refund to post. But I have not received the money. Could you please help me?

MICHAEL KIVEL,
Burnsville, Minn.

A. I'm sorry to hear about your illness, and I hope you're feeling better now. You did the responsible thing by canceling your trip.

One tip: When you're looking for a refund, always get everything in writing. It looks like you did a lot of calling, and unfortunately, there's no record of a phone conversation unless you record it.

Usually, a car rental reservation is fully refundable. But because you had booked your rental as part of a tour package, it got a little bit complicated. Your Avis rental was booked as part of your tour with Delta Vacations. So, while Avis agreed to refund you, it was not a straightforward refund process.

One tip: When you're looking for a refund, always get everything in writing. It looks like you did a lot of calling, and unfortunately, there's no record of a phone conversation unless you record it. (Recording a phone conversation may be illegal in some states.) Eventually, you received something in writing that promised you a refund. If you had chosen to dispute your credit card charge, that email would have been useful. A bank might see that as a credit memo and push the refund through.

I list names, numbers, and email addresses of the Avis customer service executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. A brief, polite email to them might have moved this refund along much faster. I also have some tips on how to get a faster refund on my site.

I contacted Avis on your behalf. A representative reached out to you and asked for your last credit card statement, which showed that Avis had not yet refunded you. The company finally sent you the \$1,016.

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

Stuart Varney

on the Cape, Taylor Swift, and keeping his sense of humor

While he dreams of returning to India, and would like to revisit his old college stamping grounds in London, Stuart Varney, host of the morning show "Varney & Co." on Fox Business Network, said his favorite place to be is on Cape Cod, specifically in Chatham, where he has family nearby and a home just a stone's throw from the town's quaint Main Street. "It reminds me a lot of England and there's a lot of England in Chatham," Varney, 75, said in a recent phone call from his home in Hoboken, N.J. "It's a close-knit society and it's just got that charm that has not been spoiled — and that's a big deal. I like the church bells that ring. ... I'm in the middle of Chatham and can hear them all the time. And the stores on Main Street are different and interesting. There are no chains, there's no fast food. ... It's not like a trip into the past; it's like a trip into the best present and I like that." Varney also likes — and said he is excited about — hosting his first presidential primary debate. "To me, it's a very, very big deal," he said of his role in the second Republican candidates' square-off on Sept. 27. "I think, frankly, it's the highlight of my career. It is an honor." In addition to his daily morning business show, which focuses on economic issues facing the country, the Derby, England, native serves as host of Fox Business News Prime's "American Built," a series that showcases the ingenuity behind some of the country's most iconic landmarks. We caught up with Varney, who has six children and 11 grandchildren, to talk about all things travel.

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

I would like to travel in India again. I was there as a young traveler in the 1970s and found it to be the most spiritual place in the world. I'm sure it has changed enormously since I was there, but I have not been back, and it would be a delight to see. Same thing with London. Even though I was at college there — 50 years ago — I have not been back since the 1990s. Again, I'm sure things have changed a lot, but it would surely be fascinating.

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

My [tree] farm in upstate New York. I had to work from a very small apartment throughout the pandemic, so escaping to the woods seemed the best thing to do.

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

I am fortunate in having a daughter who is brilliant, technically, and has my interest at heart. So she organizes my travel. She is happy, very efficient.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?

I'm not sure what an "unplugged" vacation would be like, but if you mean getting away from my phone, the answer is no way. I happen to like living on my phone and feel it to be a great connection with the world outside. I don't want to lose it just because I'm on vacation.

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

I do not use all my vacation time. Fox generously provides me a great deal of time off, more than I actually want to use.



Varney with some of his grandchildren at Sweet Dreams Ice Cream Shop in Chatham.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

My worst vacation goes back to my childhood in England. My dad would get maybe a week off in the summer and we would often go to an English seaside resort: Blackpool, Skegness, [or] Scarborough. The problem was always the weather. There's nothing more dreary than an English seaside resort in the rain, and it rained often. I can't remember a specific year that was bad, but I do remember several.

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

There is a very easy answer to that: I relax, even though I have my phone with me.

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

I have two books that I am currently using as vacation reading: "I, Claudius" by Robert Graves, a really fine piece of Roman history; and "Peter the Great" by Robert Massie, a fine piece of Russian history. I don't know why, but I tend to read history, whether I am on vacation or not.

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

I would love to travel with Taylor Swift. To be around a talent like that, the greatest of the age, in such exciting circumstances would be a brilliant vacation. Not relaxing, and also not going to happen!

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

I don't give gifts to anyone other than family and occasional friends. I travel often, so if I got in the

habit of bringing back souvenirs or little gifts here and there, it would never end. And I'm not very good at selecting presents suitable for anyone.

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

That's easy: a banana and breadsticks.

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

I never bring back souvenirs. Wait, I take that back. In the 1960s I spent a year in east Africa [in the British Peace Corps] and brought back a Masai spear. I'm not sure I could bring that back these days.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

My favorite app is Flightradar24, which lets me track any flight anywhere in the world. A valuable travel app.

What has travel taught you?

If anything, travel has taught me to have a sense of humor. Things go wrong when you travel, and if you let it get to you, the travel experience is ruined. Somehow you have to find it within yourself to smile and look at the problem from a distance. Not always easy.

What is your best travel tip?

Very simple: Take the first flight out in the morning, always take a direct flight, [and] never check bags. You may think that never checking bags is impossible, but I've done it, and I have traveled with six children.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

HARVESTING MAINE'S BOUNTY

Calling all food aficionados: Tickets are on sale for Maine's Harvest on the Harbor, a culinary celebration that is four delicious festivals rolled into one (Oct. 25-28). Taking place in the coastal city of Portland, events showcase the best of the state's local bounty, from oysters to cheeses to distilled spirits, beer, and more. The kickoff celebration, TOAST!, raises a glass to the harvest season with members of the Maine Distillers Guild. Guests can savor Maine-made gins, vodkas, bourbons, rums, and more, while enjoying a variety of food pairings designed to complement the selection of spirits (\$75). The following day, Gourmet Graze highlights Maine's cheese and chocolate makers. The intimate tast-

ing pairs these two luscious creations — including cheeses from Local Goods Gathered and chocolates from Bixby Chocolate, Dean's Sweets, and Ragged Coast Chocolates — with your choice of Lunetta Prosecco, Yealands Wines, Bottega Vinaia, and locally roasted Coffee By Design selections (\$75). Lobster lovers won't want to miss Friday night's Maine Lobster Chef of the Year event, a friendly competition featuring a mix of rising-star and established Maine chefs. Attendees can graze from station to station and help select the People's Choice award, along with a distinguished panel of judges who will announce the Lobster Chef of the Year (\$110). On Saturday, the Maine Oysterfest with The Maine Oyster Company is the ultimate seafood celebration. Sip on refreshing libations while sampling offerings from

more than two dozen Maine oyster farmers who are happy to shuck, serve, and chat with guests about all things oysters. This popular event has two ticketed two-hour sessions, starting at 1 p.m. or 4 p.m. Each \$90 ticket includes 18 oysters. Not enough? Add on 6 oysters, \$12; 12 oysters, \$24. <https://harvestontheharbor.com>

THERE

NONSTOP FLIGHT TO GRENADA DEBUTS

Ah, Grenada. Famed for its aromatic spices and organic chocolate, the destination is now promoting its Pure Grenada experience which includes the tri-islands of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique in the eastern Caribbean. The spiffy website invites visitors to explore its 40 white sandy beaches (including the renowned Grand Anse Beach), 15 waterfalls, six chocolate factories, four rum distilleries, and more than 30 dive sites, including the largest shipwreck in the Caribbean, Bianca C, and the World's First Underwater Sculpture Park. Check out places to stay, dine, dive, sail, and more, and learn about travel requirements and ways to get around the islands. Beginning Nov. 4, the launch of Jet-Blue's new nonstop Boston to Grenada service will make it easier than ever for Bostonians to travel to the island. The scheduled year-round flight will be on the carrier's premium 159-seat A321 MINT aircraft with 16 lie-flat seats. Operating weekly on Saturdays, flights will depart Boston Logan International Airport in the morning to Grenada's Maurice Bishop International Airport, and arrive back in Boston the following Saturday evening. www.puregrenada.com



EVERYWHERE

SUPER BRIGHT HEADLAMP

As fall arrives and winter approaches, there's less daylight available for outdoor adventures. To bring light to the darkness, you may want to consider upgrading your arsenal of outdoor gear. Infinity X1 has just released its 650/750 Lumen Hybrid Headlamp, a hands-free light that comes in handy for every type of adventure — from camping to mountain biking to hiking — and can also be useful in unexpected situations such as a power outage, natural disaster, or a simple car breakdown. The water-resistant, lightweight, and durable headlamp is powered by the included rechargeable battery or dry cell batteries. Eight beam modes (with adjustable brightness outputs) include spot, flood, red light, spot with side light, flood with side light, and more. Includes one lithium ion rechargeable battery, three AAA Duracell batteries, and a user manual. \$69. <https://infinityx1.com/products/650-750-lumen-hybrid-headlamp>
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