

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

An American Airlines plane moves along the tarmac at Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

American Airlines cancels passenger's entire ticket by accident

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I'm an American Airlines frequent flier, and I recently booked an award ticket with Japan Airlines, an American partner. The flight was from New Delhi to Haneda Airport, then on to San Francisco.

A couple of days before my flight, I called American Airlines to upgrade the Japan-to-United-States leg of my trip to business class. Unfortunately, the agent canceled my entire ticket without telling me. I got off the phone thinking that my ticket was still valid.

When I contacted Japan Airlines the day before my flight to check on my vegetarian meal, a representative told me that there was no reservation for me. I called American Airlines and spoke with a supervisor, who reviewed the notes of my call. She said the agent had written that I had canceled my flight. This, of course, was not true.

The supervisor tried to find me a ticket, but the only one available was a full-fare business class ticket for \$3,548. I booked the ticket, but I would like American Airlines to refund it, since this was their mistake. A few months ago, American Airlines promised to review my request, but it hasn't gotten back to me and no longer responds to my emails. Can you help?

SATRUPA KAGEL, *Taos, N.M.*

A. American Airlines shouldn't have canceled your ticket, and it should have quickly refunded the extra money you had to spend.

But why didn't it? In reviewing your correspondence with the airline, I can find no obvious reason. By the way, great job on keeping all the emails. Those are your key to a fast resolution. There was one minor problem, which is that the emails you sent contained some all-uppercase statements. (This is considered yelling online.) American's agents, who have some discretion in deciding which cases get prioritized, might have been put off by those statements.

But still, they shouldn't have been. The agents should not have stopped responding to your messages and emails when you used the assigned case number. There was no written evidence that American had promised to refund your fare.

By the way, you can find the names, numbers, and email addresses of all the American Airlines customer service executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. A brief, polite email to one of them might have prompted another review of your case. It looks like you tried to reach out to the executives but didn't get an answer.

This brings me to the main takeaway for the rest of us: American should have found a way of fixing this without you having to pay another cent. You should never pay for a ticket or a hotel room in the hope that the travel company will refund you. It probably won't.

But not for you in this case! I reached out to American Airlines on your behalf. A representative called you and said the reason for the lack of response was a "high turnover" in the customer service department. (I can only imagine.) You received a full refund for your ticket and your miles — a great resolution.

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

Guy Braunstein

on being lost in Manhattan at 9, his worst vacation, and Charlie Chaplin

He may be a classical violin virtuoso, but Guy Braunstein is also, thanks to his 12-year-old son, a Beatles enthusiast — so much so that he recently released an album titled "Abey Road Concerto," in which he weaves a dozen songs from the popular Beatles album into a concerto for violin and orchestra. "When my son was 6, he asked me who John Lennon was, so I told him everything I knew about him and showed him [music videos] on YouTube. He was hooked after a few songs," said the musician, conductor, and composer in a recent phone call from Berlin. "When I would take out my violin to practice Tchaikovsky, he said 'stop that crap; play the Beatles.'" The former Berlin Philharmonic concertmaster, who performs with orchestras around the world, will be the featured soloist at the Oct. 20 season opening concert of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra at Symphony Hall. He called the local concert venue "a very, very special place" and said that while the acoustics are "incredible," it's more about the audiences. "Every time I go onstage, it's like a welcome home," he said. "It's a very personal feeling." Braunstein, 53, was the opening soloist last season, too, where the encore was his version of the Beatles' "Blackbird," written as a virtuoso for the violin and inspired by the Black Lives Matter protests following the May 25, 2020, murder of George Floyd. We caught up with the Tel Aviv native, who lives in Berlin with his wife, Gili Schwarzman (a flutist and composer) and their two sons, 12 and 5, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? Definitely Iceland. Moon's embassy on planet Earth.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? On my own. I'm too much of a pain in the neck for any travel agent.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? I wish ...

What has been your worst vacation experience? I once spent 16 hours in an airport terminal. It was in Sardinia in Italy and we had just had the most incredible week in a beautiful coastal village. But then we went to the airport and returned the car, just to realize there was a big mess with the airport. There was nothing around, no hotel ... and we had already returned the car. A commercial amount of espresso was consumed, and those of us stuck



Guy Braunstein (far right) meeting up with (from left) the Boston Philharmonic's Robert Jordan, Lauren Radnofsky, and founder and conductor Benjamin Zander, during the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra's European tour in June 2024.

there formed a little community.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? When I was 9, I got lost in midtown Manhattan. But without a map or even speaking any English, I managed to find my way back to the hotel in the Village. My mother was close to having a heart attack, but I was so proud.

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

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? I read endlessly at home, but never take books with me when on the road.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Charlie Chaplin. I saw all his films — every single one of them — and sketches a zillion times, and I find him the most fascinating personality ... and the biggest genius of them all.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? A sleeping pill.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? Whatever they have.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? An engagement ring. I was on tour and she [his then girlfriend, now wife] was home in Berlin. I wanted her to come to Vienna so I could get down on one knee and propose. She didn't want to come, so the pianist I play with, [with whom] we are both friends, knew my [now] wife was very strict about my diet. She said "you'd better come or I am going to buy him three desserts after every meal." That worked, and when she arrived, I took her straight from the airport to the jewelry shop.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? WhatsApp ... also Expedia or eDreams.

What has travel taught you? You can plan everything to the last detail, but in the end, God has the last laugh.

What is your best travel tip? Be patient.
JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

MINIATURE FAIRYLAND BLOOMS IN BOYLSTON

Fans of magical miniature fantasy worlds won't want to miss the exhibit, "Enchanted Forest, Nature-Inspired Fairy Houses," at the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in Boylston. Within The Ramble, a 1.5-acre accessible, whimsical woodland garden for children and families, visitors will discover more than 30 intricately designed, one-of-a-kind fairy houses, built with natural and nature-inspired materials by artist Sally J. Smith. The exhibit is open daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., through Oct. 31, with general admission. Additionally, two new interactive elements and special events are designed to captivate audiences of all ages, including light displays and illuminated installations at Fairies Aglow (select evenings in September and October, 6-8:30 p.m.) and the Fairy Fest weekend, with crafts, workshops, entertainment, fairyland market, and beer garden and café (Oct. 12-14, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.). Reservations can be made online. 508-869-6111, nebg.org/enchanted-forest

JUST SAY QUACK! SPLASHY DUCK TOUR DEAL

Take advantage of a special \$30 deal

that celebrates the 30th anniversary of Boston Duck Tours, an hour and 20 minute adventure on land and water aboard one of the company's colorful 28 amphibious vehicles. The booking window is short to snag your tickets, so make sure to plan ahead. The anniversary ticket offer is available from Sept. 30 through Oct. 4, and can be purchased on the Duck Tours website using promo code 30YEARS. Giving back has been a core pillar of the company's culture, so in addition to the

\$30 promotion, every employee will be given 30 \$5 bills (\$150) to pay it forward or donate in any way that they choose. <https://bostonducktours.com>

THERE

AFFORDABLE LUXURY IN TULUM JUNGLE

Those looking for a great deal on a friends or family winter getaway may want to check out TROBBU Tulum, an all-inclusive luxury villa experience offered by the ROBBU Boutique Collection. Opening in January, 10 three-level villas will feature more than 2,700 square feet of serenity designed to blend in with the idyllic jungle setting. Each villa can accommodate up to eight guests, and will feature three bedrooms and 3½ baths, an infinity pool, decked terrace with sun loungers, bar and grill area, living room and fully-equipped kitchen. TROBBU will also offer a shared spa with treatments that incorporate elements of nature into massages, fully-equipped fitness center, and common area. Staring rates per night are \$900, no matter if there are two or eight guests, meaning the more in your party, the greater your savings.

An optional all-inclusive daily menu can be enjoyed in your villa, with themed nights such as Taco Tuesday and menus offering Mexican, Italian, and Lebanese cuisine along with fresh seafood and pizzas. Pricing is complimentary for ages 3 and under; \$60 for ages 4-17; and \$80 for ages 18 and over, per day, for breakfast, snacks, lunch, dinner, and pizza bar.



Concierges can create tailor-made experiences within the villa and destination, including activities such as wine tastings paired with decadent desserts, cooking and mixology classes, karaoke, photoshoots, wellness classes, visiting cenotes, yacht rentals, and water excursions. Kids can enjoy pizza-making classes, art activities, yoga, and more. In addition, TROBBU Tulum will have a real estate component where travelers can purchase a fraction of one of the 10 villas and become part of the TROBBU Owners Club. <https://trobbu.com/en/home-english>

EVERYWHERE

CONVENIENT WAY TO CARRY WATER AND GEAR

Whether you're walking, hiking, biking, scaling mountains, or running to the grocery store, it's helpful to have all the essentials you need securely in one place — especially if one of those essentials is a bottle of water for staying hydrated on-the-go. Arco Gear's new water-resistant Hydro Carrier offers a convenient solution that combines functionality and comfort in one stylish package. Features include an insulated bottle sleeve; front flex pocket that can hold your keys, passport, trail snacks, and more; built-in wallet with six slots for credit or ID cards; water-resistant phone pocket to keep tech dry; carry handles to grab and go; and shoulder strap with removable shoulder pad. Available in three sizes, and multiple colors including pink, orange, blue, green, black, camo, and more. From \$25. Or purchase Hydro Carrier with stainless steel Hydro Vessel Water Bottle combo pack (includes screw top sports lid and pop-up straw lid). From \$49.99. www.arcogear.com
NECEE REGIS