

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

## This Vacasa rental is disgusting. Can I get my money back?

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** I planned a trip for a group from a small rural town in Kansas. I booked a vacation rental in Galveston, Texas, through Vacasa. From the start, the stay was truly horrible. The house had not been cleaned. As the days went by, things only deteriorated. We found rats, cockroaches, and bedbugs. The air conditioner went out, and the owners didn't repair it.

I have kept a record of all calls, texts, and emails to Vacasa, but have received very little back in terms of responses. Vacasa staff members promise to get back to us, but don't.

Vacasa has offered to refund one night of our stay. We want a full refund. Can you help us get our \$6,292 back?

CAROL WILSON, *Wichita, Kan.*

**A.** Your vacation rental was a dump. According to your notes, the house hadn't been cleaned when you arrived. There was trash in the house, and the outside garbage bins were overflowing. The toilets hadn't been cleaned. The beds weren't made. And that was before you discovered rodents and insects.

If you ever check into a rental like that again, here's my advice: Leave immediately! Obviously, no one had serviced the home, and it wasn't ready for you. Does Vacasa guarantee that your home will be clean? In fact, Vacasa promises that its homes will be squeaky clean — or, in its words, premium clean. "Our professional team is committed to providing clean and safe homes for our guests and owners each and every stay," they state.

Staying in the rental means you have accepted the accommodations, and that makes a full refund all but impossible.

It appears Vacasa fell far short, at least in your case. I see a lot of back and forth with Vacasa in your paper trail. At some point, it might have been more useful to appeal your case to someone higher up. I list the names, numbers, and email addresses of the Vacasa customer service managers on my consumer advocacy website, Elliott.org.

At the risk of repeating myself, I don't think you should have ever accepted this rental. But you did, and that complicates things. Your group not only stayed in this inferior rental, but you also cleaned the property and purchased trash bags, new pillows and blankets, and laundry detergent. You were trying to be accommodating, but your willingness to stay in the rental and be good renters really made things more difficult for you.

Because your group stayed in the property, Vacasa assumed you found the accommodations acceptable. Like all vacation rental companies, it has a policy for offering refunds when something goes wrong. Staying in the rental means you have accepted the accommodations, and that makes a full refund all but impossible.

Unless, of course, you call me. I asked Vacasa to take another look at your group's experience. I also forwarded some of the photos of the property. Vacasa contacted you and raised its offer to \$3,200, or about a 50 percent refund. Your group is happy with that 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

# 'Don't be afraid' and other travel advice from Larry Fish

**L**arry Fish has traveled to more than 100 countries and all 50 states in the US, but the 79-year-old former chairman and chief executive officer of Citizens Bank still has destinations on his bucket list — including the Badlands of South Dakota and "every college venue that I haven't been to." The retired banker and philanthropist, who serves as chair of Bridge Over Troubled Waters, which provides services for at-risk youth in Greater Boston, and of the United States-Japan Foundation, travels with a group of friends to two or three college football games every fall. They have continued this tradition for nearly 40 years and have been to more than 60 college campuses. "Next, I'm heading to Lexington, Ky., to see Kentucky host Florida," he said in a recent phone call, adding that he enjoys "the bands, the traditions, the campuses, the kids, and the football — oh, and the bars. ... Every campus has got a college town and every college town has got some great bars." Fish, who with his wife, Atsuko, has three adult children and six grandchildren, just returned from a hiking trip in the Canadian Rockies and plans to go to Japan with his wife (who was born and raised in Tokyo) at the end of October. And while his favorite countries are Japan, India, and Brazil, and his favorite cities are Venice, Kyoto, Jerusalem, Rio de Janeiro, and New York, Fish said he "loves going to new places and experiencing things for the first time." The Harvard Business School graduate lives in the Back Bay, and has homes in Honolulu and West Falmouth, where his family congregates every summer. "I live in a part of the Cape that is very down-to-earth and low-key, so I appreciate the community we have there. And I love the ocean [and] swimming in the ocean," he said. "I just love the wind and the smell and the freedom of the ocean." We caught up with Fish to talk about all things travel.

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

I would bicycle through the Badlands of South Dakota ending up watching the South Dakota State Jackrabbits host the North Dakota State Bison because I love combining physical activity with natural beauty and, as my friends know, I'm a big college football fan.

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

Japan. I couldn't wait to get back. The country is so intentional, beautiful, different, and subtle. Amazing food, too.

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

I don't care. Whatever is fastest at the time.

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

A villa in Tuscany, a safari in Botswana, my home at the Cape, anywhere in Hawaii. These days I unplug easily.

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

I've been retired from full-time work for 17 years, and while I stay busy in the community, I probably travel six to eight weeks a year. Love getting going.

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

I've never had a totally bad vacation. I like Aus-



Larry Fish and his wife, Atsuko, in Tuscany earlier this year.

tria and Switzerland less than many people. Like anybody, I don't do well with airport delays or traffic jams.

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

My ideal vacation combines everything — physical activity, culture, beauty, and, at the end of the day, comfort. I visited the Fogo Islands this past spring with my son and we got up close to massive icebergs, took long nature hikes, experienced Newfoundland hospitality, and stayed at the amazing Fogo Island Inn. Had it all.

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

I'm not a big reader. I watch videos on the plane and stay active when I land.

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

A musician/poet — [Bob] Dylan, [Bruce] Springsteen. ... But my first choice would always be family.

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

Share stories. There's nothing more fun than swapping experiences, adventures, [and] favorite

places with other travel lovers.

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

I try and eat as little as possible and drink as much water as I can while flying.

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

Prayer wheels from Tibet.

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

Don't have one but I'm constantly searching,

browsing.

**What has travel taught you?**

Dive in, explore some dark alleys, refresh your soul, immerse yourself in beauty, difference, adventure. ... Travel is about lifetime experiences and endless learning.

**What is your best travel tip?**

Don't be afraid. You won't get sick. You won't get robbed. My best experiences have been to places like Patagonia, India, Africa, the high Arctic, [and] the Peruvian Altiplano — places that many people find challenging.

JULIET PENNINGTON

## HERE

### MUSIC MILESTONES AT SYMPHONY HALL

Celebrate Boston Philharmonic's 45th season at Boston's Symphony Hall along with the 85th birthday of the founder and conductor Benjamin Zander. The ensemble of student, professional, and amateur musicians will be performing carefully curated programs of symphonic masterworks, including Beethoven, Shostakovich, Mahler, Bruckner, and more. The season includes four Boston Philharmonic Orchestra concerts and three Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra concerts, kicking off Oct. 20 and ending May 3. Prior to each concert, Zander will offer a deeper understanding of the works in the program with his legendary "Guide to the Music" talks. Opening night presents Elgar's Violin Concerto, featuring Israeli-born violinist and conductor Guy Braunstein — the former concertmaster of the Berliner Philharmoniker — who plays a rare violin, built in 1679. Continuing its tradition of nurturing emerging soloists, this season welcomes back several young artists who made their Boston debuts with one of the orchestra's ensembles. Of note is Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 performed by Ukrainian pianist Anna Federova, who has been organizing benefit concerts for victims of the war; Mozart's C minor Piano Concerto featuring the Italian pianist Alessandro Deljavan — winner of the Raymond E. Buck Discretionary Award at the Van Cliburn Competition in 2013 and the youngest winner ever, at the age of 9, of the Concours musical de France; and Schumann's Cello Concerto with Bos-



ton-bred Zlatomir Fung — the first American in four decades and youngest musician ever to win First Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for cello. Tickets are on sale now, \$10-\$125. Live stream tickets also available: \$20. 617-236-0999, www.bostonphil.org

## THERE

### NEW IMMERSIVE EXHIBITION BENEATH THE COLOSSEUM

Gladiators! Armor! Competition! If these topics get your historic travel juices flowing, you won't want to miss the new VIP Underground Colosseum tour in Rome, which also includes the Roman Forum and Palatine Hill. City Experiences, part of Hornblower Group, has expanded its one-of-a-kind tours through the award-winning international tour providers, Walks. Offered in partnership with the Parco archeologico del Colosseo, this all-new exhibition and immersive multimedia installation — featuring holographic projected gladiators — transports visitors back nearly 2,000 years to Ancient Rome, reviving the scenes of the pas-

sage of the gladiators from the tunnel that connected Ludus Magnus (the gladiator training gym) to the Colosseum Arena. Along the tour path, the underground exhibition is enhanced through a collection of armor displayed along with original artifacts from the collections of the Parco archeologico del Colosseo, the National Archaeological Museum in Naples and the National Archaeological Museum in Aquileia, with weapons that categorize the styles of gladiators competing for victory. After an extended tour of the Colosseum (including general access areas), the tour heads to the Roman Forum and Palatine Hill, once the center of politics and commerce in Rome. The tour includes a Colosseum entrance ticket, an English-speaking guide, and headsets for groups over six

people. Tickets from \$133. www.takewalks.com/rome-tours/colosseum-underground-tour

## EVERYWHERE

### TRAVEL OPTICS FOR THE BIRDS

What makes for a perfect travel binocular or monocular? Those looking for great optics combined with compact, waterproof, and rugged housing (at an affordable price) will want to consider Nocs Provisions, maker of adventure-ready binoculars, monoculars, and accessories. The company recently launched the Green Jay Collection, inspired by the rare and active forager typically found on the border between Texas and Mexico. The brightly colored, limited-edition collection references the bird's yellow and green body, bright blue head, and black contrast around the eyes and beak. Available in the brand's 8x32 Zoom Tube monocular (\$75) and the Standard Issue 8x25 binocular (\$95). Need more details? The Standard Issue features fully multi-coated lenses and BaK4 roof prisms to produce an extra crisp image. Completely waterproof (IPX7 certified) and fog proof, the binoculars are ideal for every adventure, from mountain trail hiking to sightseeing in the city and even, yes, to birdwatching. The rugged and water-resistant Zoom Tube's wide field of view (384 feet @ 1000 yds / 7.3 degrees) allows you to see an extremely wide range while maintaining a close focus of 7 feet for viewing nature's smaller details. Great for backcountry adventures where every inch of space is precious. www.nocsprovisions.com/collections/green-jay

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