

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



BECKY BOHRER/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE

A Holland America Alaska cruise.

Passengers stranded by a flight delay might not get their refund

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked an Alaskan cruise through Holland America for my family. A Holland America agent urged us to buy our Alaska Airlines flights through the cruise line. We did not purchase travel insurance. When our flight was canceled because of a mechanical problem, the cruise line said we'd miss the ship, so our only option was to cancel.

We lost \$3,952. Holland America only refunded the taxes after weeks of fighting. Holland America's agent promised us support if the flight was delayed or canceled. We would like a refund of the remaining balance since the mishap was a direct result of what was within their responsibility, not ours. Can you help?

MICHAEL RAMER, *San Jose, Calif.*

A. Holland America should have honored its verbal commitment to assist you when your flight delay ended your cruise. It looks like your 7:15 a.m. flight was canceled because of a mechanical problem. The next flight didn't leave until 10 a.m. This wouldn't have given you enough time to reach your ship.

You booked your flights through Holland America's Flight Ease program. This promises that if your flight is delayed or canceled by the airline on the day you are on your way to or from your cruise, their "staff is ready to assist you, 24/7." They state, "We'll even take care of any flight changes if needed to join the voyage at the next available port of call."

But Holland America doesn't promise that you will make your cruise or that it would refund your cruise under the Flight Ease program if you miss the boat.

You made several mistakes when you booked your cruise. First, you should always give yourself a cushion between when you arrive and when your ship leaves — preferably an entire day. You were cutting it too close. Second, always get travel insurance for your cruise. Insurance would have covered the full cost of your cruise. Flight Ease won't.

Finally, in reviewing your paper trail, it looks like you spent a lot of time on the phone with Holland America. Certainly, when your flight is canceled, you'll want to call your cruise line right away. But afterward, keep everything in writing so that you have a reliable paper trail showing your efforts to resolve the case. You may need to forward it to the Holland America executives whose names I publish on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

It looks like you were dealing with a Holland America cruise consultant when you booked your cruise and airfare. I don't see any evidence that the Holland America agent recommended travel insurance to you. He should have done so.

More importantly, Holland America should have refunded your airline tickets. Under Department of Transportation rules, an airline must automatically refund you when it cancels a flight. It appears that your airline had done this, but Holland America didn't pass the refund along to you.

I contacted Holland America on your behalf. It agreed to refund \$759 in airfare in addition to the \$832 in taxes and port fees that it had already returned. Unfortunately, you're going to lose the value of your cruise. This is an expensive lesson that I wish you could have avoided.

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

Ricki Lee Jones

on her love for Massachusetts, comfortable shoes, and those backseat games of 'kick'

Two-time Grammy Award-winning musician Ricki Lee Jones, who will perform at Medford's Chevalier Theatre on a double bill with Patty Griffin on Oct. 18, said she has a soft spot in her heart for Massachusetts and her fans in the Bay State. "Massachusetts kept me working in years that were really slim. There would be a lot of little towns I could get booked in and keep playing," she said in a recent phone call from her home in New Orleans. "When I had not played for about five years and came back in the late '80s-early '90s, Boston was the first place I played. I have this real or imaginary relationship with Boston, a romantic idea about it." Jones, 70, said she is looking forward to touring with Griffin, with whom she said she shares a "mutual respect" both as people and for each other's music. "[We] really want to try to boost the idea of two older women kicking ass," said the singer-songwriter — known for her genre-diverse songs often infused with jazz, R&B, soul, rock, and pop — whose first hit song was "Chuck E's in Love" from her 1979 self-titled album. And while Jones said she will be performing new material from her next collection (her 16th studio album, due to be released in early 2026 — more information may be found on Fish Sticks, her creative platform on Substack) on the current tour, audiences can rest assured that she will also play older material, too. "I think people are going to smile and have a lot of fun," she said. We caught up with the Chicago native, who moved to Phoenix when she was 4 and now calls New Orleans (where she lives with her French bulldog, Jazzy) home, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? I have always wanted to go to Africa, so if I could go right now ... I'd helicopter over to Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa. I'd see fossils and lions. I'd look at forests and old trees and old bones, families of villagers and families of elephants, I'd bird watch and walk along the water's edge of Lake Victoria or the Indian Ocean, or even [go] west to the Ivory Coast for the music and princes, and so forth.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? I definitely do not like to book trips.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? Hmm. Unplugged. The absence of plugs. Still, it sounds like people are involved. I would not want to be out in the middle of nowhere, neither hot or cold or tundra or villages. Unplugged ... unplanned? A real of-the-plan, off-the-map thing seems possible if you are on your own. But traveling with a companion, both are always concerned about the other's state of mind and well-being — well, my sweetheart and I are that way. So, it's harder to be unplugged, I think. Worrying about him worrying about my happiness. When we are responsible for others — or think we are — I find having an itinerary is helpful.

What has been your worst vacation experience? I don't get to vacation often, but I went to Mazatlán, Mexico, by myself a year or two ago, just to compare from the last time I was there 44 years ago. I did not have a good time. Cheap jewelry for a lot of money, people actually drinking cocktails while floating in the pool, and they kept changing my room. I hated it. But the worst involves lost bags or changed tickets or no one giving a damn to help you solve a problem. When you are far away from home, the problems seem so much worse, like maybe we'll die. It's all an adventure. I have had travel problems for sure — stolen passports, dead train passengers — but not on vacation.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? When I was about 4, my parents packed up my brother and me, and we drove across the USA in our Pontiac. It seemed as if Danny and I had always



Ricki Lee Jones on a recent trip to Bath, England.

lived there in the backseat, kicking each other in games of "kick," and finger-jumping the telephone poles for miles on end. When we came to Yellowstone National Park, we showed up after dark at a bathroom area [with] garbage cans where the bears liked to come. They approached our window, which we hurried to roll up as they came. It was all so thrilling and terrifying ... loving a thing that frightened me so. The bears would enter my subconscious and remain there, actors in countless dreams for decades to come. I suppose this was the biggest memory of travel — though our Sunday drives to Tombstone, Ariz., were pretty cool, too. They still had the old saloon, a dark place with men who drank. No different than it had been 60 years earlier when the stuff of legends sat in those very chairs.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? I am always working, but if I can go somewhere, I go for the immersion of it all. The sounds and sights, the animals, [and] the possibilities. Water and land and treetop. Birds and whales. I usually try to be near water. I am not interested in the cold, and I do not camp.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? Yeah, any book is excellent when you have nothing else to do.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Tom Waits, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Mary-Louise Parker, and/or Hilton Als.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Love and an AAA card. Or, if they are going to Europe, love and traveler's checks.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? Gosh ... I don't have a go-to snack. Maybe a Snickers bar.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? A very large stuffed toy that my dog really, really, really liked.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? I don't have one. We have a travel agent we are using in Italy to book our Africa trip — yes, I am going! Conde Nast has some spa information, but they are places I never go. We stay in Marriott hotels on the road and they're always consistently clean and such, but what I really like is when you sit down and turn on the TV, they show these artsy five-minute pieces on people who do interesting things, like one was on a person who does interpretive dance and another talks to whales ... very interesting.

What has travel taught you? I learned that what I thought was a given, right and wrong, reality, was actually just sociology. When you go somewhere where even the light switches, the tiniest insignificant things are different, [and] it makes you reconsider everything. One guy's corn on the cob is another guy's stinky cheese. It's all relative, as my friend Lowell George used to say.

What is your best travel tip? Wear comfortable shoes. Packing for an imaginary dinner somewhere will only make your suitcase heavy and you'll always be disappointed about those shoes one way or the other. But maybe you've got to pack them to find out they don't matter.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

SPOOKY SEASON IN PROVIDENCE

Halloween fans rejoice! Grab your willow broomstick and head to Providence where the spooky season arrives along with the crisp autumn air. Haunted happenings throughout the historic city transform the town into a Halloween lover's dream, including visitor favorites such as the Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular at Roger Williams Park Zoo, where thousands of intricately carved pumpkins light up the night (through Nov. 2) www.rwp-zoo.org/jols/; and the ongoing, nightly Providence Ghost Tours, with guides who lead you through shadowy streets steeped in paranormal lore. providenceghosttour.com For something different, the Haunted Boat Rides with Providence River Boat Company — with special guest guides from the Providence Ghost Tours — glide along waterways framed by the city skyline.

Listen to stories of Providence's haunted landmarks, infamous figures, and eerie past while sailing in an open-air vessel, cruising under low-hanging bridges alongside cobblestone walkways and century-old architecture. Ages 10 and older. Reservations required. Spooky costumes optional. providencriverboat.com/product/haunted-boat-rides/

THERE

PATRIOTIC EVENTS

AND HOTEL DEAL IN PHILLY

Pack your bags and round up your kids and head to Philadelphia where the city is celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the US Navy and Marine Corps. Both military services were founded in the City of Brotherly Love, and the town is hosting a series of anniversary events for the Navy (Oct. 9-16) and the Marine Corps (Nov. 7-11), including commemorative ceremonies, parades, parties, flyovers, and exhibits centered on Old City and the Historic District. www.homecoming250.org/ Looking for a place to stay? Many events are happening near the Loews Philadelphia Hotel, an Art Deco-era historic landmark in the heart of City Center boasting 581 gue-

strooms (including 16 luxury suites) decorated in slate gray and blue to reflect the city skyline visible from oversize windows. The first International Style skyscraper in the United States, the 33-story structure was built to house the country's first savings bank, the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society, whose rooftop red neon initials PSFS are visible for 20 miles. The original design and style are preserved in the hotel, including polished marble and granite from over 30 countries, and custom Cartier clocks on every floor. Hotel amenities include a fitness center with Peloton bikes; catering and conference facilities; and on-site dining in the Lobby Lounge, POD market for grab-and-go snacks and drinks, and Bank & Bourbon restaurant, serving casual, modern American fare for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Take advantage of the hotel's Connecting Comfort program that encourages multigenerational travel — from grandparents to toddlers and even four-legged family members — by offering guaranteed connecting rooms at the time of booking. Package rates from \$229 per night, which includes \$30 food and beverage credit per room. 800-235-6397, www.loewshotels.com/philadelphia-hotel

EVERYWHERE

PORTABLE TABLETOP GRILL

Tired of hauling your bulky grill around to campsites and picnics? Upgrade your barbecue camping experiences with Bola Grills' stylish, compact, and portable charcoal tabletop grills that are designed to be at the center of your festivities. Two models, BOLA Traveler and BOLA Grill Master, are engineered with spacecraft-grade, anodized aluminum inner shells and a matte, powder-coated stainless steel outer shell exterior, offered in both sea salt white or charcoal black finishes, with adjustable and rotatable cooking grates. Versatile and feature-rich attachments allow you to grill, smoke, skewer, sear, fry, and bake at your picnic table, campsite, or when tailgating before a big game. Additional features and attachments include a cast-iron griddle and charcoal grate; food-grade silicone legs, handles, and mitts; a tool holder and tools; hanging hooks, and more. Works with multiple heat sources. When finished cooking, cleanup is easy, and the smart design offers compact storage. Traveler \$119, Grill Master from \$269. www.bolagrills.com

NECEE REGIS