

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



STACY REVERE/GETTY IMAGES

FedEx charges \$1,237 to ship luggage that it couldn't deliver

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. My wife and I shipped two suitcases from Iowa to Norway for a cruise using FedEx (via Luggage To Ship). The luggage arrived on time but was sent back to Oslo, Norway, for customs verification. Despite daily calls to FedEx, agents provided conflicting updates and blamed Norwegian customs. For four days, FedEx offered no information on how I could get my luggage out of customs.

Finally, FedEx claimed that it couldn't deliver the luggage until after our cruise departed, forcing us to pay \$1,237 for the shipment of luggage that we didn't receive when we needed it. We contacted FedEx executives using your site's contacts but received no response. We also sent a letter. We've kept all emails and call transcripts.

Why did FedEx fail to communicate clearly or resolve this? Are we entitled to a full refund?

TODD JANUS, *Des Moines*

A. FedEx should have handled your customs clearance and provided accurate tracking updates. Its International Priority service guarantees a timely delivery, contingent on proper documentation — which you had.

You used a third party called Luggage To Ship, which promises “simple, reliable, and affordable” luggage shipping, according to its site. But a closer look at the Luggage To Ship terms reveals that it is not responsible for shipment delays because of, among other things, “customs delay, customs or carrier inspection.”

This let Luggage To Ship off the hook. It would be able to send your luggage to Norway, have it sit in a warehouse, and return it without giving you a refund (at least, according to its terms).

But FedEx is another story. It promises “dependable service,” and at the time of your cruise, it offered a money-back guarantee. (At the time I'm writing this, this guarantee has since been revoked.)

In fairness, it looks like FedEx was responsive to you when you asked about the status of your bags, but then failed to update you regularly when your luggage got stuck in customs.

I'm used to writing about the perils of checking luggage, so this is a new twist. Next time you cruise somewhere, it might make sense to just pack a small carry-on to avoid the hassle of transporting lots of luggage.

I think taking this up with FedEx was the right idea. You paid to have your luggage shipped to your cruise, and it never got there. What's more is that you shouldn't have had any customs trouble since you were sending clothes and toiletries to your ship.

I'm not sure why the FedEx executive contacts on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org, did not respond to you. I publish the names of the executives as a service to you and them. For you, it's an opportunity to get your case resolved; for them, it's a chance to avoid an embarrassing story. Unfortunately, it's a chance that they missed by ignoring your email.

I contacted FedEx on your behalf. A representative responded that it would resolve the case with you “directly,” apparently hoping to keep me from writing a story about this. But as I said, FedEx already had its chance. FedEx refunded your \$1,237.

And the story? Well, here it is.

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

Jake Tapper

on travel, Jimmy Kimmel, and his latest book, ‘Race Against Terror’

Most people know Jake Tapper as the lead Washington anchor for CNN, where he hosts the weekday program “The Lead with Jake Tapper” and cohosts the network's Sunday morning public affairs program “State of the Union.” What many people may not know is that the Philadelphia native, who has also moderated or co-moderated many high-profile political debates, including the 2024 presidential election debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, is also a best-selling author who has just released his eighth book, “Race Against Terror: Chasing an Al Qaeda Killer at the Dawn of the Forever War.” Tapper, 56, called the book — based on a true story about the extraordinary efforts by American law enforcement and prosecutors to build a case that would bring Al Qaeda terrorist Spin Ghul to justice — a “fascinating story.” He explained in a recent phone interview that “the race” in the title refers to “a race against a ticking clock. They have to prove a case against this guy ... in a finite period of time before the Italians [who had detained him] get fed up and just put him in a refugee camp from which he will easily escape.” Tapper said he was especially intrigued when he learned about the case “because it was a story of sleuthing detective work — all the stuff I love from police procedurals like ‘CSI’ and ‘Cold Case.’ It was all of that, except it was true [and it was about an] Al Qaeda terrorist.” Tapper, on the day before a book signing in Boston, said he was looking forward to the event and to visiting his old stamping grounds. “We came down to Boston all the time,” said the Dartmouth College graduate. “We came down for football games, Dartmouth [versus] Harvard; to hit on girls at Simmons College; to run around downtown ... we came down to go to a Boston Red Sox game, and I'm pretty sure we got kicked out.” He called Boston a “great city” and one that “I love visiting.” We caught up with Tapper, who lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Jennifer Brown Tapper; their two children, daughter Alice, 18, and son Jack, 16; their three dogs, Clementine, Moose, and Bear; and the newest addition to the family, a cat named Wilhelmina, to talk about all things travel.

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

One of those luxury islands in the Caribbean, because I am exhausted. I would say Fiji, but it takes way too long to get there, so I'd say the Caribbean.

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

I find trips with the kids — teenagers now — need activities, so travel agents are key for that, and we have had great ones. But for a quick weekend getaway, my wife and I can handle that on our own.

Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation?

Would if I could. My brain is too wired to consume news, so it is very difficult for me metaphorically to not stay on top of things. Also, I read and listen to books via my iPhone so it's not easy to leave it in my room.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

Family vacation when I was a kid, 10 or 11, in Montreal ... pouring rain, trailer pops off the hinge of the station wagon, blended family, super un-fun.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory?

I have great memories of visiting my grandpar-



Jake Tapper with his wife, Jennifer Brown Tapper, daughter, Alice, and son, Jack, in Idaho.

ents in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for Christmas holidays. A snowy Chapel Hill, a fire, carolers, the warmth of my Grammie and Grampie's love ... truly a magical time.

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

Relax!

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

I'm a voracious reader so the honest answer will be whatever is in the queue. But I know Christina Kovac's latest, as well as John Irving's and George Packer's will be there.

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

Jimmy Kimmel, fishing in Alaska. He has a lodge in Idaho, and my family and I go there every year. He's a great fisherman and also a very patient fisherman, because I'm not as good.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

All of the following: a portable phone charger, a neck pillow, good sunglasses, ear buds.

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

Pretzels. If I'm in Philadelphia, where I'm from, then a soft pretzel. After that, anything I can get.

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

There was a time when I collected snow globes from every spot I visited with my now-wife. But I think the kids broke them when they were toddlers. Oh, well.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

TripAdvisor for restaurant recommendations.

What has travel taught you?

That the stresses of daily life are ephemeral and ultimately don't amount to a hill of beans.

What is your best travel tip?

When you're young, explore. When you're old, relax.

JULIET PENNINGTON

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HERE

ADULT-ONLY LUXURY MOUNTAIN CABINS

Love the idea of a wilderness escape but long for more creature comforts than camping can provide? The newly opened Hinata Retreat in Charlemont might fit the bill as your ideal luxury mountainside getaway. Sprawling across 570 tranquil acres, the adult-only retreat boasts 12 cabins, with 18 additional cabins scheduled to debut in the winter and spring months. Hinata means “facing the sun” in Japanese, and all of the cabins and buildings face the east. Designed to be an opportunity for couples to “relax, reset, and reconnect,” the simple but elegant 500-square-foot private cabins blend rustic and modern sensibilities, with king-size beds, floor-to-ceiling windows with panoramic mountain views, well-equipped kitchenettes, fireplaces, sleek bathrooms, separate soaking tubs, smart TVs, WiFi, and private decks. The casual Hinata Bar & Lounge offers cocktails, small

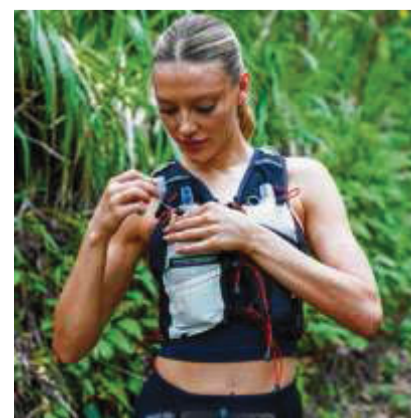
plates, and decadent dinners after 4 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays. (Seared scallops with French lentils or Parisian-style gnocchi, anyone?) Two-night minimum bookings are currently on offer for an introductory rate of 25 percent off standard rates, from \$350-\$600, depending on the month and weekend/weekday. An all-inclusive escape package is for guests who want everything covered, including three meals for two a day, priority access to restaurant and curated experiences. \$550 nightly. Additional add-on packages offer in-cabin meals, champagne on ice, rose petal-strewn beds, a signature pound of coffee with mugs to take home, and more. *From \$149. 413-822-0561, www.hinataretreat.com*

THERE

STYLISH HIDEAWAY DEBUTS IN NEW MEXICO

Visitors to Santa Fe this winter have a new place to rest and unwind after exploring the city's expansive cultural

scene, nearby hiking trails, and other outdoor adventures. Perched on a hilltop above downtown — with sweeping views of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains — Hotel Glorieta spreads across 6 acres with access to Bureau of Land Management lands that are open for recreational use. A sister property to the beloved El Rey Court down the street, the hotel is inspired by its namesake, Glorieta, a historic mountain village in Northern New Mexico. Originally built in 1976, the just-opened and reimagined leisure resort's 128 rooms offer a modern take on Santa Fe style, layering saturated earth tones and warm textures to reflect the surrounding landscape. Communal spaces include Lady Duff's Lounge, a sultry restaurant and cocktail bar inspired by the muse behind Brett Ashley in Ernest Hemingway's “The Sun Also Rises”; The Marigold Room, an intimate music venue with programming that reflects the creativity of the local music scene; and a Leisure Club complete with an outdoor pool and hot tub. Amenities include an outfitted fitness center, sprawling



lawn, curated retail shop with local artisan goods, and guest programming such as yoga, fireside history, and stargazing chats. The grand opening offer, running through March 31, includes 20 percent off the starting room rate plus a hat and trail guide. *From \$165 a night. 505-992-5800, www.hotelglorietasantafe.com*

EVERYWHERE

SPORTY HYDRATION VEST FOR ALL-DAY COMFORT

Whether you're hiking, running, biking, or power walking along your favorite trails, it's important to stay hydrated. FlipBelt, the company that created the original bounce-free, hands-free running belt, is debuting the Tahoe Hydration Vest — a versatile travel staple to pack on your next adventure. Designed for performance and all-day comfort, the vest sports an ergonomic cut and an adjustable three-strap chest system that moves with you, not against you. Serious sports enthusiasts will love the 13 pockets that can hold all your race-day gear, plus two 500ml soft flasks and a 2.5L backup bladder sleeve. Elastic compression cords secure gear as water volume or load shifts. Adjustable straps lock in fit and minimize movement during high-impact activity. Ventilated mesh lining keeps airflow steady and skin dry. Safety features include a zippered pocket for keys, cards, and essentials, reflective detailing, and an integrated emergency whistle. Available in three sizes and five colors, for men and women. *\$136. flipbelt.com/products/tahoe-hydration-vest*

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