

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Guest says hotel accidentally overcharged by \$2,500

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** I booked a weekend trip for early September last year to the Miraval Berkshires, an all-inclusive resort in Lenox. It was my best friend's birthday, and my sister was initially going to join us. She could not make it, so I notified the hotel well within the time allowed to modify my reservation without penalty. Rather than three nights and three people, it would be two nights with two people. Since Miraval is all-inclusive, the property charges per person, per night.

The hotel charged me for three people. I noticed the extra charges when I checked out, and a representative first told me I would be refunded. A few days later, another hotel representative told me I would not be refunded.

After trying to have this resolved for over a month and requesting a detailed breakdown of costs per night so that I could understand where the discrepancy was, their billing department offered to refund \$290, which is about 1/10 of the overcharges.

The Miraval team had offered such a poor resolution, and even then, the mere \$290 wasn't refunded or processed. Now they have stopped responding to my emails. The whole process has been exhausting, and I am feeling stuck, like there is nothing else I can do. Can you help me get the \$2,500 in overcharges refunded?

DALIA HAMZEH, *Braintree*

**A.** Miraval should have charged you for two nights for two people, as you requested. If it overcharged you, then it should have quickly refunded the charges instead of stringing you along and giving you the silent treatment.

You did the right thing by calling the resort to cancel your sister's stay and sending a follow-up email. This creates a necessary paper trail, allowing you to prove that you requested a cancellation. You also made the request within the cancellation window.

It appears Miraval never confirmed the cancellation in writing. This should have set off all kinds of alarms for you because it means the hotel is still expecting three guests and plans to charge you accordingly.

How can you extract a response from a hotel like the Miraval Berkshires? You could have looked up the name of the general manager for the hotel and sent him an email. The manager would have forwarded the message to someone in reservations, who would have then ensured that you had a written confirmation.

Another opportunity to fix this would be at check-in. In a follow-up conversation, you mentioned that you asked about the rate when you checked in because it reflected three people. A representative assured you it would be fixed. But I probably wouldn't have left the lobby without a written confirmation that reflected the correct price.

Finally, after multiple failures to get this corrected, you could have appealed this to someone at Miraval's corporate owner, Hyatt. I publish the names, numbers, and email addresses of their customer service executives on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I contacted Miraval on your behalf. A representative responded, saying that the hotel would not comment on guest billing inquiries or personal experiences "in any way."

"What I can share with you is that they take guest and consumer feedback seriously and investigate any asserted matters like this with detailed backup, following up directly with the party themselves," the representative said.

And they did. The general manager of the Miraval called you and explained what happened. He says the original rate had been "miscommunicated" to you and that you did, in fact, pay the correct rate. To make up for the misunderstanding, he offered you either a refund or an opportunity to return to the property for two nights at no charge. You've decided to return.

*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

### James Carville has strong opinions about when to travel, too

**J**ames Carville has never been one to shy away from his convictions when it comes to politics. But he is also pretty adamant about do's and don'ts when it comes to travel — including his insistence on leaving from the United States for Europe as late at night as possible and mixing the very notion of jet lag. The Democratic strategist, public speaker, and author will be at the Shubert Theatre on Nov. 2 with journalist Al Hunt for a live taping of the duo's podcast "Politics War Room." Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin will be a guest. "Hopefully there will be a lot of laughing and maybe an election prediction or two," he said. And while Carville, 80, said he wasn't prepared to make his own prediction, he did share that he would "rather be Harris than Trump right now." Carville, who was born on a military base in Georgia and raised in Carville, La. (named after his grandfather, a postmaster), is a former lawyer and junior high school science teacher who says he's a big fan of Boston. "I like it because it's unpredictable. The streets make no sense and it's easy to get lost ... but every time you turn around, there's something significant," he said. Carville lives in New Orleans with his wife, former Republican consultant and White House strategist Mary Matalin, with whom he has two adult daughters. They have two rescue dogs, Harry and Chino, and "cats that come in and out of here all the time," he said. We caught up with Carville to talk about all things travel.

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

It would be somewhere that I haven't been ... a place I've really wanted to go, like Beijing or Prague or Cape Town. And I'd include Milan, too.

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

Usually on my own because I fly so much and I save my miles for international travel.

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

I don't know if I'd really want to do that. What I like to do is take urban walks — mostly in major cities — by myself and I don't even pay attention where I am. ... My attention [span] is not conducive to like, sitting in museums for four hours. I'm too antsy.

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



James Carville (sitting) with Martha Stewart and documentary filmmaker Matt Tyrnauer, this year at the Telluride Film Festival.

Maybe flying back from Hawaii when my youngest was 2 or 3. The flights coming back are overnight, and I think we went from Maui to Chicago and she screamed the whole time. I was stunned that a child could scream that loud and for that long.

**What is your favorite childhood travel memory?**

When we were kids — I was the oldest of eight — the biggest thing we ever did was go to Biloxi, Miss. That was our vacation. We'd pile into our old Dodge station wagon — no seat belts or anything — and go to amusement parks, eat fried shrimp ... and I saw sand for the first time. ... I thought it was paradise.

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

I'd say more to relax and to learn. I know the biggest thing in travel now is adventure journeys, but I don't have much interest in a five-star safari. I like traveling with Mary or by myself or maybe with a couple of friends and

finding stuff on my own.

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

Probably Kurt Andersen's "Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History." I'm fascinated at how Americans always fall for something and Kurt is probably the most insightful when it comes to that. I also love John Grisham. If it's a long flight and he has a new [book], I will get it.

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

It would have been the famous Omar Sharif — the best celebrity I ever met. It was at Hôtel de Paris Monte-Carlo. My mother, she just loved Omar Sharif because he was a bridge player — in addition to being this really suave, Egyptian [actor] — and I said, "Oh God, my mother loved you" and he said, "James, that's my problem: Everybody's mother loves me, but no one's daughter does." Then we downed a fifth of Johnny Walker Black ... and I'm not even much of a scotch drinker,

but if that's what Omar Sharif wanted to drink, that's what I was going to drink. ... He was a very nice guy. I'm a man who places a high value on a great raconteur. I love to be entertained in the bar. It's a skill that I have great admiration for, like these Irish storytellers and people who can keep you captivated just by themselves.

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

If you're flying internationally ... a sleep aid, like a pillow or anything like that. I do not get jet lag. I've worked in 22 different countries, everywhere around the world, and I just have this attitude: James Carville does not get jet-lagged. It's worked 100 percent of the time. If you just tell yourself, "I don't get jet-lagged," you won't get it. ... I've probably had jet lag, but I just will not acknowledge it.

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

Peanuts, almonds, mixed nuts ... lightly salted. The simpler the better.

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

In Yucatan I got this coral sailfish made by a local artisan that I thought was pretty neat. My wife and I also like to buy rosaries. ... I enjoy buying things that evoke memories — and I like to bring people gifts.

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

Probably FlightAware, where you can pull the schedule up and see if the flight's delayed or not [and] see what kind of airplane I'm traveling on.

**What has travel taught you?**

Every time I do it, I want to do it again. We took our children to a lot of different places, and I think at the time, they were like, "Do we have to go to another church, another museum? ... Can we go back to the room and watch cartoons?" But I think now they realize that [it was worthwhile].

**What is your best travel tip?**

When you go to Europe, leave as late as you possibly can: 10:30 [p.m.] is better than 6:30 [p.m.]. If you get into London or Paris at 7:30 [a.m.], you're done because of all the traffic. You want to get to the airport at like 11 o'clock [at night] ... you get in at 12:30 [p.m.] and by the time you get to your hotel, it's probably 3 o'clock and your hotel room is ready. Also, if you leave at 6:30 [p.m.], you face more traffic getting to the airport.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### OLD MEETS NEW IN BOSTON HOTEL DUBUT

The newly opened Pennyweight Hotel Boston's name includes a sly wink to the fact that its numerical address (155 Portland St.) is also the exact measurement of a pennyweight (1.55 grams), a unit harkening back to the 14th century that is still used today when measuring gold and sterling. Formerly the Onyx Boston Downtown, the hotel has been reimagined as a relaxing urban oasis, with 112 guest rooms and suites offering modern amenities, luxe bedding, and a clean, minimalistic aesthetic expressed in a soft palette of greens and neutral tones.

The Pennyweight's signature restaurant and bar concept, 155 On Portland, is an extension of the elegant lobby. Transitioning from an espresso bar serving breakfast, coffee, on-the-go pastries and breakfast sandwiches in the morning, to a cocktail bar offering elevated American bar fare, shareable plates, craft cocktails, and a curated selection of beer and wine in the evening, the first-floor eatery also boasts an expansive outdoor patio space with comfortable seating, mood lighting,

seasonal activities, and programming. Conveniently located one block from TD Garden, the hotel is also within walking distance to other area attractions including Faneuil Hall, Boston Public Market, the North End, Beacon Hill, and more. As a Curio Collection by Hilton property, the Pennyweight is part of Hilton Honors, a guest loyalty program where members who book directly through preferred Hilton channels have access to instant benefits and exclusive member discounts. Rates from \$250/night. 617-557-9955, www.pennyweighthotel.com

## THERE

### MISSION HOTEL REVIVAL IN SONORAN DESERT

Scottsdale, Ariz., is now home to The Scott, a resort and spa whose Mission Revival architecture fuses the beauty of the desert with the elegant geometry of Bauhaus design in a color palette reminiscent of Old Havana. The 204 guest rooms and suites, offering pool, courtyard, or lagoon views, feature mid-century modern furnishings along with brass and rattan details, hand-painted portraiture, murals, and the usual expected amenities such as pillowtop mattresses, feather pillows,

a Nespresso machine, in-room safe, and designer bath products.

The resort also boasts two pools: a sand-bottom swimming pool perfect for families, and the main lagoon pool with private cabanas and pool bar. Hungry? At the Canal Club, guests can enjoy modern American cuisine melded with Caribbean-inspired flavors while surrounded by a lush design inspired by 1930s Cuba. Live music and DJs provide an upbeat vibe on select nights and during Sunday brunch. Additional amenities include the onsite La Vidorra Spa, providing six treatment rooms and a menu of massages, facials, and other therapies; daily yoga classes; indoor/outdoor meeting and function spaces; and a resort shuttle providing transportation within a 3-mile radius, including to Old Town, home to some of the best eclectic and celebrated restaurants, bars, and art galleries in this area of the Sonoran Desert. Rates from \$489. 800-528-7667, www.thescottresort.com

## EVERYWHERE

### NEW BIKE BASKET KEEPS PUPS SAFE

Love taking your dog along on biking adventures? Attached to the front of the bike, between you and the handlebars, the Canine Copilot by Brook & Breeze might be the perfect solution for protecting your pup while pedaling and exploring new paths and favorite destinations.

Designed for the unique shape and posture of a dog, the ergonomics of the Canine Copilot allow your pup to participate in the adventure rather than being trapped in a crate, bag, or backpack. Created for small breeds, 33 pounds and smaller, features include: the Paw Platform, providing options for different postures throughout the ride that won't cause dangerous movements for the rider; a Tail Pocket, allowing long-tailed dogs to sit comfortably without squishing their tail in an awkward position (while also allowing the rider to have more room for knees while pedaling); and Shoulder Supports, specifically placed for lateral shoulder support that allows your pup to lean into turns. A three-point harness restraint system ensures the dog can move but isn't able to leap out of the basket. The lowered backing gives the rider easier access to touch and contact their pet while riding. Designed for quick removal and attachment, the basket utilizes a variety of attachment methods to fit different bicycle styles and sizes, including mountain, foldable, road, gravel, and commuter. Available in two colors. \$149. <https://brookandbreeze.com/products/canine-copilot>

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