

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



AP FILE PHOTO

Guests are charged \$385 for keypad that was damaged from rain

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. My partner and I booked an Airbnb near Joshua Tree National Park, Calif., for my birthday. On the second day, heavy rain caused the keypad lock to malfunction. We couldn't enter any information after the first digit.

We immediately contacted the host, who assumed that we caused the keypad to malfunction with incorrect passcode attempts. He sent a locksmith hours later. The locksmith suggested that the rain had damaged the lock, and the host gave us a manual key.

Two weeks later, Airbnb demanded \$385 for lock repairs, claiming that we caused the damage. We provided video proof of the malfunction and texts where the locksmith cited weather, but Airbnb sided with the host. How can we fight this unfair charge? We just want to clear our name and avoid paying for something we didn't break.

PAULA LEE, *San Francisco*

A. Airbnb should have dismissed this claim immediately. Its Terms of Service says that hosts aren't liable for issues beyond their control, so why not guests as well? When the locksmith attributed the problem to rain, Airbnb had all the evidence it needed to side with you.

Your case raises an interesting question, which I seem to answer with some regularity: Who is Airbnb's customer really? Are they on your side or on the host's side? In your case, it appears Airbnb almost reflexively sided with the host. In fairness, I've had cases where the opposite happened. But generally, Airbnb favors the host in my experience, and this is something that guests don't really understand. They think they're the customers, but they aren't.

You did everything right by documenting the issue with videos, texts, and timely communication. You were patient — maybe a little too patient — and allowed the process to work. I would have escalated your case to a higher level a little earlier in the process. Airbnb often resolves disputes faster when you involve its executive team. Airbnb's managers read and respond to their emails, making it one of our highest-rated companies for customer service.

I'm troubled by your case. Based on the paper trail you furnished, it looks like you did absolutely nothing wrong. You handled the resolution process by the book and were polite and patient. It appears your host (who, I should add, was also polite) wanted someone to buy a new lock after his stopped working. This is not how the system is supposed to work. If you'd tried the lock open with a crowbar, it would be a different story, but it looks like you just pressed one button.

I reached out to Airbnb on your behalf. A spokesperson acknowledged the case but declined to explain why the charge was initially upheld. Fortunately, after our inquiry, Airbnb struck the \$385 charge from your bill.

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

Micky Dolenz

on packing lists, camping with the grandkids, and his love of science

In the 1960s, the Monkees were all the rage. The quartet's popular television show and chart-topping albums launched them into pop superstardom with hit songs including "Last Train to Clarksville," "I'm a Believer" — both with lead vocals by drummer Micky Dolenz — and "Daydream Believer" — with Davy Jones as lead vocalist. The death of Michael Nesmith in 2021 left Dolenz, 80, as the only surviving member of the band. (Jones died in 2012, and Peter Tork in 2019.) And while he has collaborated, performed with, and sang covers of songs by many other artists throughout the decades — including releasing an EP in 2023 called "Dolenz Sings R.E.M." — he said he loves performing and celebrating the songs he recorded with the Monkees. During a recent phone call, he said that people often tell him those songs are the soundtrack to their lives. Dolenz and his band — which includes, on vocals, his sister, Coco Dolenz — will perform at City Winery Boston on Nov. 11 and 12. The shows, "Of the Monkees — Songs and Stories," will include popular Monkees numbers. "That's a given at all of my shows. ... People know they're going to get the hits, which means I can also pepper the concert with other material, including some deeper cuts, songs by other artists, and stories related to the songs and artists," he said. "It's a lot of fun. It's not a one-man show, but a rock 'n' roll concert." Dolenz said he is looking forward to playing Boston, "eating a whole lot of seafood as many times as we can," and visiting his daughter and her family, who live in a Boston suburb. We caught up with the Los Angeles native and father of four/grandfather of four — who lives in LA with his wife, Donna, an artist and retired flight attendant — to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? There are very few places I'm passionate about going because I travel so much for work and have been to so many places. But there have been some special places that I like and have revisited. Japan is a good example — the history, the people, the food. ... But really, I like being home or going to my little local lake, fishing, camping. ... Not making a road trip or flying somewhere.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? My wife books things sometimes, but mostly my tour manager and head of operations handles travel plans — on tour and on vacation.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? Not sure you'd call it a vacation, but all my life I've been an avid wilderness camper/trekker. When I was younger, I'd put on a 70-pound backpack and climb up Mount Whitney (in the Eastern Sierra Nevada mountain range in California), but now I have an off-road vehicle that I can drive out into the wilderness and go camping. I like to go to wilderness destinations, not campsites. I try to avoid heavily populated areas.

What has been your worst vacation experience? It wasn't a vacation, but the first time we were in Japan on tour, in 1968, there was a lot of turmoil going on in the world, including in the Far East. The Japanese government ... had taken over a bunch of farmland outside of Tokyo to build an airport. There were huge protests, and somewhere along the line, protesters started blaming the West and Americans, and capitalism. We had a police escort from the airport to our hotel, and we thought that was cool — until we found out it wasn't because of our fans — and we had, and still have to this day, a huge following in Japan — it was because there were death threats against us. I remember going to play at the Budokan, a huge concert hall, and there were all



Micky Dolenz fishing at Lake Cachuma in Santa Barbara County, Calif.

these shields around my drums ... just in case.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? Yeah, I have a couple of them, but I will just focus on one: When we were very young, my father took us — I was the oldest of four — camping. I remember the first time we caught a fish and cooked it right there at the campsite. I've been hooked ever since.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? Let's call my camping trips my vacations. So not to learn. I would say relaxing, but fishing and camping out in the wilderness is a lot of work — but I really love that part of it. I love the survival element, and I don't mean survival like staying alive. I mean having a water purifier, backup food in case I don't catch any trout. ... I love going where there aren't any people, where you never see another human and you're out of range for cellphone use. Now that I have grandchildren, I love taking them.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? I can't read books anymore. I used to read a lot, but now, my attention span, like a lot of people's, sucks. With a book, I will keep trying to swipe the pages and click on links that aren't there. So yes, I do a lot of reading online. I'm a big science geek; I've always loved science, physics, astrophysics ... and I'm currently taking a course on philosophy and listening to a master class [taught by] Neil deGrasse Tyson.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? I would say [Albert] Einstein because of my interest in science — especially my interest in physics. I would have 100 million questions for him and want to talk about time dilation and general relativity.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Money, and absolutely first-class air transportation. And a

membership for an airline lounge.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? When I'm driving, I like to eat sunflower seeds — low salt and shelled. And for flights, I don't really snack. I try to eat a good meal before I take off.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? I went to New Zealand with friends of my parents when I was a kid, and one of the coolest things I got — and still have to this day — was a ruler made out of all the different woods of New Zealand. It was made by Maori [artisans].

What is your favorite app/website for travel? There are a bunch of websites I use for camping, but my favorite is The Dyrtr [app], which I use to find wilderness campsites.

What has travel taught you? I would say the realization that even though we have different cultures, languages, behaviors ... people are more alike than they are different. Like the French say, vive la difference. That's what makes people unique and different and makes it interesting to go to other places, experience other cultures, eat different foods ... different ways of living that are not better or worse — just different.

What is your best travel tip? Make a packing list. I have lists of lists and find, especially in my case, where I will be literally home for two to three days, have to unpack, clean [my clothes] and things, and hit the road for another tour in another part of the world. The trick is not just having a list, but doing it by category, so, for instance, I have electronics, clothes, toiletries ... and I have little check marks where I check the items I want to bring, then another check mark when I actually put it in the suitcase — not nearby, but in the suitcase. That has helped me enormously.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

Bedecking the winter season with a half-million dazzling lights, the New England Botanical Gardens at Watch Hill will again host its celebrated "Night Lights" event, running daily from Nov. 22 to Jan. 4. The colorful spectacle, which has grown into a regional sensation, illuminates the botanical garden's unique outdoor spaces and two subtropical conservatories with artfully crafted displays, all designed in-house by the garden's staff. The exhibitions change each year, so there is always something new for return visitors to discover. Why not make a night of it? Beyond the lumi-

nous gardens, visitors can partake in a variety of festive activities, including roasting s'mores, enjoying seasonal drinks, shopping, and fun photo opportunities for the whole family. As a special cultural highlight, the event will kick off on Saturday, Nov. 22, with a Diwali celebration in partnership with the India Society of Worcester, featuring Indian food, vendors, and henna. The season will also feature a number of themed nights, from Retro Disco to Ugly Sweaters to Holiday Pajamas and more. Tickets are now on sale, and your visit helps fund the nonprofit garden's mission to connect people and plants. Free onsite parking available. Adults \$25-\$27; seniors \$22-\$24; ages 4-12 \$15-\$17. <https://nebg.org/nightlights>

THERE

ALL-ELECTRIC HOTEL DAZZLES IN BOULDER

The newly debuted Limelight Hotel Boulder, on the CU Boulder campus, is more than just a sleek and stylish addition to the local hotel scene. As the largest all-electric hotel in the country, owned and operated in partnership with the University of Colorado, Boulder, the property was built to LEED Gold standards with sustainability at the forefront of its design. Merging sustainable living and sophisticated comfort, the property incorporates a bright, contemporary aesthetic in its 252 contemporary guestrooms and suites, with crisp grays accented by rich blues and pops of vivid yellow, and expansive windows offering mountain or downtown views. Amenities include a heated rooftop pool; cozy outdoor fire pits; dedicated co-working space; state-of-the-art fitness center; and a lively game room. In-room comforts include safes, plush bathrobes, humidifiers, high-speed wireless internet access, and on-demand movies. On-site dining includes the Ajax Tavern, a full-service restaurant serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and — opening this winter — the Crepe Therapy Café, a beloved Aspen and Snowmass crêperie helmed by James Beard-honored chef Mawa McQueen. The hotel aims to be a tranquil retreat after a day of hiking, biking,

and adventuring in Boulder's surrounding hills and trails, or shopping in downtown's pedestrian mall filled with art galleries, boutique shops, restaurants, and cafes. Plan Ahead Alert: the property is set to be Sundance Film Festival's "Home Base Hotel" following the festival's move from Park City, Utah, to Boulder in 2027. Rates from \$299. 844-674-2733, www.limeighthotels.com/boulder

EVERYWHERE

HEAD-TO-TOE CLEANSING WITHOUT A SHOWER

The Water Activated Bathing Cloths by Pharma-C might be the must-have addition to your travel pack that you never knew you needed. Perfect for when you're camping or wilderness adventuring — and a traditional bath or shower isn't an option — these ultra-thick cloths are pretreated with gentle cleansers that will lather up when wet. Each towel is enriched with aloe and vitamin E to cleanse oil and dirt from the skin while moisturizing and refreshing. No need to rinse, just wet, wash, and towel or air dry. The rinse-free formula dries quickly without leaving a tacky or sticky residue behind. Each package contains six 10-by-8-inch plush cloths. They're also good to keep in a gym bag for when there's no time to shower. \$19.99 <https://pharma-c.com/water-activated-bathing-wipes> NECEE REGIS