

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



GABBY JONES/BLOOMBERG

## I closed my bank account. Now Airbnb won't send me my refund.

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** I made a reservation on Airbnb last year for a three-month trip to France this winter. My host canceled at the last minute, and Airbnb agreed to refund me \$728.

I have not received the money yet. The reason: I closed the bank account to which my Airbnb account was attached. Airbnb won't send the money to my new account.

I forwarded a letter from Chase Bank, showing that the old account had been closed months ago and, therefore, could not have a payment processed to it. I have called and emailed them several times, and I've even contacted the Better Business Bureau, to no avail.

Airbnb is sitting on my money and claiming that it is the responsibility of me or Chase to put it right, even though Chase cannot reactivate an account that has been closed for so many months. I want Airbnb to pay me the money however they can, either by check or by direct payment to my bank account. Can you help me get my \$728 back?

BART COLEN, *Pingree Grove, Ill.*

**A.** Airbnb should have refunded you a long time ago. Why didn't it?

Airbnb's policy is to refund your money to your original payment method. So, if you used a credit card, it would go back to that card. And the reason for this is simple: It's safer and easier than trying to chase down a new payment method or writing a check.

But Airbnb claims it will accommodate you if you switch accounts. "If your original payment method's account was closed, the refund sent by Airbnb won't process," it says on its site. "If this happens, you can contact Airbnb to step in and help." It looks like Airbnb didn't step in to help.

This is common. From what I can tell, refunds will automatically go back to the original form of payment. Often, even employees have a hard time reversing the transaction. And who knows where your money went? Your bank may have it somewhere, or Airbnb still might have it. It's a real mystery.

(As a side note, I've always wanted to do an investigative story that traces a refund like yours. Is there some kind of slush fund the company has where all the missing refund money goes? Now this would be a story!)

The best way to avoid this? Don't close your account until you've accounted for every refund. There's no good way of preventing the confusion that results from a refund being sent to a closed account. I'm sure Airbnb means well by its promise to "step in and help," but my experience tells me that even companies with sophisticated payment systems have difficulty with this. And once they lose track of the money, you're absolutely right that it becomes your problem, which is profoundly unfair.

The fix: You can escalate this problem to a manager at Airbnb. I list the names, numbers, and email addresses of the Airbnb execs on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I contacted Airbnb on your behalf. A few weeks later, you came back with good news. "At long last, I got my refund from Airbnb," you said. Airbnb never told me what happened to your money or where it went, but at least it found its way back to you.

*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

# Mentalist Vinny DePonto

on a good journal, early morning flights, and the Notes app

**M**entalist Vinny DePonto combines theater, immersive storytelling, visual art, and yes, psychological tricks in his show "Mindplay," coming to the Huntington's Calderwood Pavilion Nov. 13-Dec. 1. These shows are on the heels of two sold-out and extended runs at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles and Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. It will head to an off-Broadway run in New York City after Boston. "This is an interactive experience," DePonto, 38, said in a recent phone call. "What I tell the audience at the beginning is that thoughts play a major role in the show. A mind reader needs minds to read." DePonto, who is from Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., said his interest in magic was ignited as a young teenager when he discovered — and then worked at — a magic shop in Hastings-on-Hudson, a neighboring town. "There are a series of tricks I've honed over the years to be able to extract thoughts from people," he said. "And while the idea of mind reading can be scary for audience members, they don't have to be afraid, since [the experience] exists in the envelope of theater, which is a safe space." DePonto added that while there is a "structure" to the show, each one is a "unique" experience. "Audiences will see some of the same things, but because minds are different, the shows often take different directions," he said. "It is an ethereal experience. It is here and it is gone. That is the beauty of theater." We caught up with DePonto, who lives in LaGrangeville in New York's Hudson Valley with his wife, Elizabeth, an occupational therapist, to talk about all things travel.

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

My go-to answer would always be Greece or Italy. I'm of Italian descent and I absolutely love being immersed in Italian culture. My wife is Greek and we try to go every couple of years to a little island where her family is from near Kos, one of Greece's Dodecanese islands. But if we're talking a place I've never been, I would love to visit Kyoto, Japan. As a theater artist, the precision and elegance of traditional Japanese theater, like Noh and Kabuki, fascinate me. It would be exciting to see their performances and rituals firsthand.

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

On my own. The process of researching flights, hidden spots, and local performances feels like crafting a story. It's all part of the journey, no?

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

Yes. Immersion is essential in art and life. We often get so trapped in the digital world that we forget how to explore the present moment. An unplugged vacation is a chance to uncover new worlds, to allow new connections to be made in the brain, [and to] not be distracted by the glowing rectangle we stare at day in and day out.

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

Getting sick on vacation always puts a damper on things. I once had a stomach virus in Switzerland that didn't kick in until after we took a gorgeous elevator



Vinny DePonto in Grindelwald, a village in Switzerland's Bernese Alps.

ride to the top of a beautiful waterfall. The rumbling of the water paralleled the sudden rumbling in my stomach. The elevator was closed to go back down and let's just say I rudely ran past a lot of people ... a long way down. I saw many really beautiful bathrooms in Switzerland.

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

When traveling, there are times you have to get up at 4 a.m. to make it to the airport for an early flight. I try not to do it a lot, but every time I do, I'm always reminded of when I was 8 and my family and I got an early flight to go to Disney World. I remember being so excited and that same thrill flashes in me in those early hours of the day when preparing to go somewhere new.

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

A bit of everything, but mostly to learn. Every place has a story, a hidden play unfolding in the streets. I travel to discover new characters and narratives. New ways to love.

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

"Invisible Cities" by Italo Calvino. Each time I read it, it feels like stepping into a new world — a perfect companion for wandering unknown places.

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

Federico Fellini. Imagine traveling with that mind. Every town would become a surreal dream; every encounter, a scene from a movie.

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

A beautiful journal, of course. Every trip deserves to be remembered with sketches, scribbles, and reflections.

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

I keep it simple. Some fruit like an apple, or banana with some peanut butter.

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

My wife and I wandered Florence for a few days and came across this mask shop. I bought a Commedia mask (Arlecchino, of course) and a beautiful Pinocchio mask handmade by this old Italian man. Both masks hang on our wall and bring us great joy.

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

I'm a heavy Notes app user. I often ask friends for recommendations before I travel and then compile an itinerary in Apple Notes and add important links, images etc.

**What has travel taught you?**

That no matter where you go, humans share the same longing to be heard, seen, and loved. Theater can be found everywhere — on trains, in markets, [and] in conversations with strangers.

**What is your best travel tip?**

Always learn a few phrases in the local language. It's like opening a small door into people's hearts. It's also helpful to learn "Where is the nearest bathroom?"

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### HOLIDAY TRADITION EMBRACES COMMUNITY VOICES

Gearing up for its 171st consecutive year, the Handel and Haydn Society (H+H) will once again be presenting "Messiah," a beloved Boston holiday tradition taking place at Symphony Hall. Dedicated to following historically informed traditions of Baroque and classical music, Artistic Director Jonathan Cohen is adding something new this year, introducing CitySing to share the joy of performing this much-loved music for the holidays. Conceived by Cohen to celebrate and showcase the vitality of the city's singing community, the inaugural CitySing features 30 members of choral ensembles from around Boston who will share the stage with 25 high school-age singers from the H+H Youth Choruses Chamber Choir, featured soloists, and the professional H+H Orchestra and Chorus. Fun facts: In 1818, H+H gave the first complete performance of "Messiah" in America with a chorus of around 200 singers; the upcoming Dec. 1 date will be H+H's 450th performance of the com-

plete work. Shows will likely sell out, so snag your seats sooner rather than later. Dates: Nov. 29 and 30; Dec. 1. Tickets: regular from \$58; students (18-30) \$15; child (ages 17 and under) \$15. <https://handelandhaydn.org/>

## THERE

### CLOUD FOREST ECO-RENOVATIONS

Those looking for a relaxing and eco-conscious getaway this winter will want to check out the carbon-neutral Hotel Belmar, a family-owned luxury lodge in Costa Rica's Monteverde cloud forest highlands. Recent renovations and enhancements to most of the property's 26 rooms aim to balance contemporary design — with clean lines and a palette of subdued colors — with the hotel's forest surroundings, inviting visitors to bask in natural light and enjoy the sounds of the forest. Materials chosen were selected for their low environmental impact, including sustainable wood, low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints, and organic velvet and natural fabrics that contribute to a healthier indoor environment. Championing best practices in sustainability, the ho-



tel fosters connections to nature and holistic wellness with enriching experiences such as thematic forest immersions, garden-surrounded yoga, and cultural programs. Hungry? Restaurant Celajes offers farm-to-table gastronomy for breakfast, lunch, and dinner with locally sourced ingredients as well as freshly picked fruits and vegetables from its carbon-neutral farm. Vegan and gluten-friendly options are available. Cerveceria Belmar, a beer garden and tap room, serves cocktails, wine, and craft beers made on-site with cloud forest spring water. A juice bar and tea room round out the healthy offerings. Rates in peak season from \$431/night; low season from \$261. Phone via WhatsApp: +506-8953-6084, [www.hotelbelmar.net/](http://www.hotelbelmar.net/)

## EVERYWHERE

### FACIAL MASK REJUVENATES TRAVEL-WEARY SKIN

After long flights exposed to filtered airplane air, cold days on the ski slopes, sunny hot beach afternoons, and other travel adventures (and misadventures), you may experience dry,

cracked, and red facial skin. The new Growth Factor Post-Treatment Mask by FACTORFIVE makes it easy to soothe and replenish skin without needing to pack all your bottled lotions and potions in your suitcase. Just toss the lightweight, single-use cellulose facial mask in your bag and you're ready to go. (The TSA-friendly product can even tuck in your carry-on.) What makes this product different than other masks is the active ingredient, adult stem cells (ASCs), developed by the company's team of scientists specifically to nourish and rejuvenate tired skin. The human stem cells are mixed with moisturizing and cooling botanicals, such as peppermint oil, hemp seed oil, and green tea extract that are also designed to reduce redness and inflammation. Reformulated without parabens, mineral oil, sulfate detergents, phthalates, urea, DEA or TEA, and not tested on animals. The 10-minute treatment will revitalize your weary skin and save you money by eliminating a trip to the spa. \$22. <https://factorfiveskin.com/collections/shop/products/post-treatment-mask>

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