

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



CHRIS J. RATCLIFFE/WASHINGTON POST

The British Airways planes at London Heathrow Airport.

British Airways owes me a credit for a canceled flight from 2020

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. British Airways canceled my flight from Baltimore to London in 2020. The airline sent me an email that said I could either get a refund or a flight credit and that I had until the end of this year to decide. However, after calling British Airways numerous times, they claim they don't have any record of the flight.

I paid for this flight with a combination of miles and cash. I'd like a refund of my 150,000 points as well as the \$770 in taxes. Can you help me?

LOUIS HYMAN, *Baltimore*

A. It's highly unusual for an airline to lose a reservation like this. But a look at your correspondence suggests that's exactly what happened. You had a ticket, and then British Airways somehow lost it. Now the airline wants to keep your points and the cash you paid for other taxes and fees.

Normally, you would be able to send British Airways proof of your reservation, and it would then fix the problem. I see that you tried to send the airline copies of your reservation, which included all the information it would have needed to track down your missing ticket.

What happened? Look at the calendar. This was a pandemic reservation — one of hundreds of thousands. There were special refund rules for them, and if I had to guess, I'd say there was a special department within the airline that handled these refunds.

Anyway, British Airways got its wires crossed when you asked for a refund. I thought it might have erased your ticket because the flight was more than three years ago. Most airlines retain ticket data for at least 10 years, but they may move older ticket data to an archive database, where it can be more difficult to retrieve.

It's clear that you had a valid ticket and that British Airways canceled your flight. A brief, polite email to one of the British Airways executives I list on my consumer advocacy site might have helped. You have all the essential information for getting a full refund. You have ticket receipts and all of your correspondence, where you tried to resolve this problem through the airline's regular customer service channels. It's a slam dunk.

I reached out to British Airways on your behalf. A representative contacted you and apologized for the loss of your tickets.

"Due to the age of this record, it was purged from our system," the agent explained. British Airways referred your ticket to its refunds team, who retrieved the purged data.

"They have confirmed that a full refund of all taxes paid has been processed back to the original form of payment," the representative said. You also received a full refund of your points.

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

Hotel developer Dick Friedman

on the Dalai Lama's unique laugh, Martha's Vineyard, and packing light

He may be in his 80s, but real estate mogul and hotel developer Dick Friedman isn't slowing down any time soon. The former ski racing competitor and Harvard University ski coach still likes to hit the slopes, travel the world, and go horseback riding on Martha's Vineyard, a place he began visiting as a child and where he has owned property (now containing several homes) since 1982. "The Vineyard is special to me because I love the ethnic diversity of the people there, and I love the locals," said Friedman, who famously hosted President Bill Clinton and his family on the island for many summers, and is friends with numerous island celebrities, including Larry David. "My older son is a tuna fisherman and an oyster farmer. He lives [on the island] full-time with the two grandkids. It's one of the great places in the world, really. It's a spectacular place. The only time I don't like to go there is in August. It's crazy." The 83-year-old Brookline native, who is the developer behind many luxury hotels around the world, including the Liberty Hotel, the Charles Hotel, and the Four Seasons Hotel and private residences at One Dalton, which — at 742 feet and 61 stories high — is the tallest residential building in New England. He also developed, with partners the Reykjavik EDITION, Iceland's first five-star hotel, and is working on his next project, a Four Seasons Hotel in Dallas. A former Cambridge resident, Friedman lives at One Dalton with his wife, Nancy Klemm. In addition to their Boston and Vineyard homes, the couple has a home in Aspen, Colo. We caught up with the father of two adult sons and two granddaughters to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? I haven't been there in quite a while, but I would love to go back to Bhutan. It is a beautiful and peaceful place in the Himalayas, where they believe in a Gross National Happiness index. Sicily is another place I'd like to visit again soon.

Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted? I frequently traveled to Iceland because I was building the Reykjavik EDITION Hotel up there. For many months I was one of the only passengers on the plane, except for the fish they were shipping to the US.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? I plan my own travel itinerary but book trips through Diamond Air International, a VIP meet-and-greet service available through American Express Centurion. It's a terrific benefit that makes every aspect of travel — from departure through arrival — smooth and efficient, especially figuring out customs in unfamiliar airports.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? Unplugging can be tough given my schedule. But I do unplug when in the backcountry, [helicoptering] and powder skiing — or fishing in exotic places.

Do you use all of your vacation time or leave some on the table?

When it comes to vacations, I'm very lucky. Because of the nature of my work as a developer of hotels, work and travel are often combined. My business takes me across the country and around the



Dick Friedman (on the right in the yellow vest) with world champion skier Marc Girardelli at a charity ski event in Aspen in 2022.

world.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

I remember an awful trip to Costa Rica with my wife and my kids. Let's just say the hotel did not live up to its reputation. And I was terrified of its less-than-reliable-looking zipline in the jungle. I also had a horrible Christmas/New Year's trip to Egypt a long time ago which was a nightmare from the beginning, as I was traveling with several other couples and one very famous person had promised to take us on his private jet — which he didn't have.

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

All of the above.

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

Walter Isaacson's new biography of Elon Musk. Given that it's almost 700 pages, it will take me more than one trip to finish.

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

His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I have known him quite well for a long time and he is an unbelievable person to be around. There's an aura about him that is spectacular — and he's very funny with a very strange laugh; he laughs on the inhale.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

An Ambien.

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

trip?

I drink sparkling water to stay hydrated. On long flights, I usually travel at night, so I try to eat dinner immediately after takeoff so I can get some sleep. The food is bad and since it's always much better where I am going, I'd rather sleep.

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

I like to buy leather goods, ties, and shoes in Italy. I also collect Tibetan conch shells, decorative horns that are used as musical instruments in Bhutan as part of religious rituals and by shepherds tending their flocks.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

Airline ticket prices can significantly change, so I always check Google Flights Price Graph for the best options, which sometimes vary wildly in price from one day to the next.

What has travel taught you?

I've learned that there are interesting people everywhere and that you can learn a lot about a place by talking to locals, whether it's a taxi driver, waiter, a shop owner, or a museum guide.

What is your best travel tip?

Travel light. You don't need all the stuff you think you need. That's why I only take a carry-on bag — saves lots of time and gets me out of the airport and to my destination faster.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

A VERY MERRY 19TH-CENTURY CHRISTMAS

The celebratory holiday season is fast approaching. Make a pilgrimage to days of yore at Christmas by Candlelight at Old Sturbridge Village, an outdoor history museum situated on more than 200 scenic acres that depicts a rural New England town of the 1830s. Experience the history of Christmas festivities as you stroll through the decorated village and twinkling lights of the Christmas Tree Trail, alongside costumed historians, listening to stories and live music of popular seasonal songs. Additional events and participatory activities include hearth-baked gingerbread-making demonstrations; gingerbread house contest; mulled ci-

der and baking demos (Dundee cakes, marzipan, and shortbread cookies); craft lessons in tin lantern making, wooden toys, pottery and candle dipping; photo ops with Old Saint Nicholas and Mrs. Claus, horse-drawn carriage rides and more. Hot cocoa, cider, and soups and stews are available to keep you warm. Purchase before Thanksgiving for the lowest deals of the season. It's recommended to secure tickets online before arriving as some nights may sell out. Adults: \$34-\$45; ages 4-17: \$17-\$20; age 3 and under free. Open 2-8 p.m.; Nov. 24-26; Dec. 1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-23, 27-30. If you're traveling from afar and would like to stay the night, special Christmas by Candlelight lodging packages are available at the Old Sturbridge Inn and Reeder Family Lodges. (Linked via

website.) 800-733-1830, www.osv.org/event/christmas-by-candlelight/

THERE

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S NEW SIGNATURE LAND TOURS

Expand your travel horizons with three new itineraries spanning five countries offered by National Geographic Expeditions. Each trip offers opportunities to be surrounded by exotic wildlife, natural wonders, and archaeological sites. The new Signature Land group-guided trips will visit Bhutan (Land of Mysticism and Mythology, the 11-day, 10-night itinerary includes visiting major destinations such as Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, and Phobjikha Valley, from \$10,995); Colombia (Connections to the Land and the Past, a nine-day, eight-night tour from the mountains to the beaches, from \$5,995); and the Baltics (Enchanted Forests and Medieval Castles, the 11-day, 10-night itinerary visits destinations such as Vilnius, the Curonian Spit, Klaipeda, Riga, Sigulda, Gauja National Park, and Tallinn, from \$7,795). As with all of the company's expeditions, a National Geographic expert host will bring a one-of-a-kind perspective to the itineraries. As experienced storytellers, the experts provide an in-depth look at the history, cultures, and natural heritage of each destination. The Expeditions website also offers a head-spinning roster of itineraries to choose from around the globe. You can narrow your search by trip types such as river cruises, train travel, and family, as well as by interest, such as nature and wildlife, history and archeology, birdwatching, photography, and more. 888-732-2379, www.nationalgeographic.com/expeditions/

EVERYWHERE

TASTY AND NUTRITIOUS BACKPACKING MEAL KITS

After a full day of hiking, ever wish you could sit down to a tasty hot meal? If you're not staying at a fancy glamping let-us-feed-you campground, or if you're not traveling with a private chef (and who does that?), then Out-Paks by Tippins Foods may be the perfect solution for enjoying a nutritious, easy-to-prepare meal at your campsite. The company began producing its grab-and-go meal kits in May, with the goal of allowing you to bypass the need to spend time planning your meals and more time planning and enjoying your excursions. Each of the five Out-Paks offers a freeze-dried breakfast or dinner main dish, two side dishes, condiment, beverage mix, and an additional assortment of pre-packaged ready-to-eat snacks for the trail. For example, in addition to the cremini mushroom pasta entree, the Creamy Garlic Mushroom Pasta Pak includes white bean soup, dried papaya, edamame beans, protein bar, gummy bears, and a bite of dark chocolate. Additional meals offered include Spanish Rice with Chicken and Chorizo; Yellow Curry with Lamb; Fruit Medley Muesli Breakfast; and Breakfast Scramble with Corned Beef. (New options such as vegan and gluten-free meals are in development.) Designed to fill you up, each menu includes between 1,300 and 1,500 calories. To ensure quality and flavor, all Tippins freeze-dried foods are made from scratch, cooked, and freeze-dried in their Pennsylvania kitchen, and then packaged in recyclable, waterproof, and biodegradable cardboard tubes sealed with natural beeswax. \$20.99-\$24.99. www.tippinsfoods.com
NECEE REGIS