

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Air Canada destroyed my suitcase. Can you make it pay?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Air Canada destroyed my Rimowa suitcase on a recent flight from Toronto to San Francisco. The airline instructed me to send the suitcase to a repair agent in Texas. The agent declared the suitcase unrepairable, despite the fact that they have no contract with Rimowa and no product expertise in this brand.

Air Canada then offered me a choice of inferior replacement bags, which I declined, and recently sent me a \$230 check in proposed compensation. I paid roughly \$1,000 for my Rimowa bag, and it was of a quality to last a lifetime. So, neither of these options is acceptable to me.

I have had multiple unsuccessful phone calls with Air Canada. I've escalated my complaint to the CEO by email using the contact information on your website. I have received no response. I would like Air Canada to either send the luggage to an authorized Rimowa repair shop and pay for the repairs or refund me for the luggage. Can you help?

DONNA WELLS-BOYLE,
Portola Valley, Calif.

A. Air Canada should have handled your luggage with care. And if your checked baggage was damaged while it was in the airline's custody, it should have promptly paid for a repair or replacement. Under the Montreal Convention, which governs international flights, Air Canada's maximum liability is \$3,800, which is considerably more than you were claiming.

Before I get to what went wrong, I have to say something about checking luxury designer luggage that is worth \$1,000. I saw this recently when I was standing in front of a five-star hotel in Barbados. (I was not staying there — too expensive!) Another guest had Italian designer luggage that was unfit to be checked, even on a private jet. It was strictly for show.

Elliott's guiding principles for luggage are durability and inconspicuousness. You scored well on durability. Your checked bag was made of sturdy plastic, and in your words, it was in "perfect" shape after many years and thousands of miles of commercial air travel. But you also want your checked bag to hold up to the rigors of travel without attracting too much attention, and pricey Rimowa luggage is a little flashy. You were lucky it wasn't stolen.

This doesn't let Air Canada off the hook. It accepted your bag, and you paid a fee to have your luggage transported. Sending your luggage to someone who doesn't understand how to fix Rimowa luggage is not my idea of assuming responsibility.

You bought the bag over 10 years ago and unfortunately do not have the receipt. The bag's serial number would tell me the exact year of purchase. It certainly is past what was its five-year warranty at the time. (I believe the bags are now sold with a lifetime warranty.)

You kept an excellent paper trail between yourself and Air Canada, which showed that you followed all the correct procedures. But here's where things went off the rails a little. As I mentioned, your luggage is well-worn, and you don't have a receipt for it. Air Canada can ask for proof of your purchase when you request a replacement. If you don't have it, you may not get the full amount. Also, given the bag's age, there's some depreciation.

It looks like you appealed this to one of the executive contacts for Air Canada that I publish on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. And it also looks like Air Canada didn't bother to respond. Not good. I asked Air Canada to review your luggage claim. Air Canada says that "after further review," they are sending you a second \$270 check. So, your total compensation with the two checks comes to \$500.

"I still think they owe me more," you told me, "but I'm going to call it a day at this point."

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

She's Mama Who in 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas,'

and she loves those Biscoff cookies on planes

This holiday season marks Sarah Milnamow's third year with the national tour of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." The Massachusetts native, who plays Mama Who, said the role — and the show — "never gets old." And while she has been in more than 100 performances, this is the first time that Milnamow, 27, will be performing the role in Boston. The yuletide musical will be at the Boch Center Wang Theatre from Dec. 10-23. "The closest we've come to Boston is Providence. It feels amazing because all of these people I've known my whole life, like childhood best friends, teachers, family, friends of parents ... they will all be able to see what I've been doing the past couple of years," she said in a recent phone call from Tampa, where the musical was being performed. "I think it will make me more emotional having them in the audience. Although I connect to the story every night, there will be a special connection on those nights when I am singing about love and family and performing for all of the people who built me up since I was a child. ... There's a special sentimental value." Milnamow, who lived in Shrewsbury before moving to Northborough when she was in kindergarten, graduated from the Hartt School, a performing arts conservatory of the University of Hartford, in 2020. She lived with her family in Northborough during the pandemic and in January 2022 moved to New York City. That same year, she was hired for "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." She called the message of the show "really beautiful" and "universally relatable." It is, she said, "about belonging and loving unconditionally, no matter what the circumstances. And on top of that, it's so whimsical and fun." This production "focuses on the heart," she added. "It elevates the joy that comes around the holidays and it elevates the importance of what holidays are really about: being with the people you love." We caught up with the performer, who lives in New York City when she is not on tour, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? I would love to go somewhere with beautiful nature and/or art, such as Scotland, Iceland, or Italy. I also would love to go to Turkey.

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? On my own. I can't afford a travel agent.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation? I see the value in it. I wouldn't mind one because [some of] my jobs are online and it would give me a break from thinking about them. However, sometimes I use my phone to decompress with games/funny videos.



Sarah Milnamow and her best friend, Kaitlyn Shreeve (left), at an elephant sanctuary in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2022.

What has been your worst vacation experience? Don't have one.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? Getting to go to Aruba with my family and childhood best friend, Kaitlyn, when I was in eighth grade. It was the biggest adventure of my life at the time. I don't remember anything super specific about it, but it was special because I got to bring my best friend.

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

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." It's a book I am working on.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? None really come to mind. I prefer to travel with people I know. I'm not a really big celebrity person.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Something practical like bug spray, a mosquito net, a travel first aid kit, etc.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? I do love the Biscoff cookies that they give us on planes.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation? My mom and I pick up shells from the beach and write the date on them. They hold really special sentimental value.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? Expedia has never done me wrong. I also love Airbnb.

What has travel taught you? That this world is so much bigger than all of us, and that is such a humbling feeling. Also, that [people from] different cultures are so warm and welcoming, and we can learn a lot from them.

What is your best travel tip? Do your research. Know your surroundings, what vaccines you need to get, etc. It's great to have fun, but you're also in uncharted territory, so be vigilant.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

SANTA RIDES THE RAILS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

What's better than Santa and hot cocoa? This winter, Bretton Woods Vacations has partnered with The Cog Railway to offer the exclusive Waumbek Wonderland lodging package, featuring a vacation rental plus a trip up Mount Washington on the Cog Railway to share hot cocoa with Santa and Mrs. Claus. This add-on holiday excursion can be enjoyed while staying at one of Bretton Woods Vacations' lodging options — from cabins to condos to family-size homes — located throughout the northern White Mountains, all a short drive to the Cog Railway. Waumbek Wonderland debuts the weekend of Friday, Nov. 29, and continues every Saturday and Sunday through Dec. 22. Santa makes an exclusive stop on Dec. 24 to welcome all guests coming to the area. If you prefer to visit after the holidays, the Cog Railway continues throughout the winter with trains making the journey up the rugged terrain to the newly redesigned and expanded Waumbek Station. Located in an alpine meadow below tree line, passengers leave the train for about 25 min-

utes to enjoy panoramic vistas from the southern Presidential Range to the Canadian border, complimentary hot refreshments, warming huts, and a blazing fire pit. Discounted winter rail tickets are available for Bretton Woods Vacation guests. Lodging ranges from \$275 to \$1,200 per night, depending on the property. 603-389-2121, www.brettonwoodsvacations.com/packages

THERE

EXPLORE NORWAY'S WESTERN WONDERS

Plan ahead for a new nine-day curated adventure to Norway's western fjords, an area of unspoiled scenery and centuries-old coastal culture in charming towns including Bergen, Ålesund, Øye, Loen, and Kalvåg. Offered by Gondwana Ecotours, a company specializing in small-group, guided tours to bucket-list destinations, this itinerary leads travelers from dramatic mountain passes and glaciers to fjords flanked by towering peaks and cascading waterfalls. Highlights include a rigid inflatable boat ride to view 7,000-year-old rock art at a remote archeological site; kayaking in a peaceful fjord; walks traversing ancient footpaths; a guided

tour of the historic wooden warehouses at UNESCO-listed Bergen Wharf; a sky lift from valley floor to stunning mountaintop views, and more. Includes eight nights at historic city and boutique hotels; all meals except one lunch; local Norwegian guide and Gondwana trip leader; transfers to and from the airport; all tours and activities; and private transport with professional drivers and ferry boat captains. There are several departures in July and August, with a max group size of 18. Prices start at \$8,495 per person double. 877-587-8479, www.gondwanaecotours.com/adventure-tours/small-group-guided-tours-norway

EVERYWHERE

WEBSITE SIMPLIFIES TRAVEL INSURANCE CHOICES

To buy or not buy, that is the question. A travel insurance policy that protects you from unexpected circumstances makes sense, but figuring out which is the best plan for your particular trip can be confusing. When considering the often-complicated options when

purchasing travel insurance, it's helpful to have all the facts and available plans in one place. The website TravelInsurance.com aims to do just that, promoting itself as a one-stop shop for travel insurance, and an easy way to compare and buy trip insurance coverage online, from looking for trip cancellation coverage to reimburse the costs of hotels, flights, and other prepaid and nonrefundable expenses, to finding medical expense coverage to protect you from the costs of overseas treatment and hospitalization. Simply enter your trip details into the quote form, including your destination, departure, and arrival dates, and number of travelers in your party. A series of policies at a variety of price points will pop up, allowing you to choose among many protections, and to narrow your search to items most important to you, such as car rental collision coverage or an emergency medical evacuation. The site also offers travel tips to consider when journeying to specific destinations, and helpful articles with travel news updates. 877-906-3950, www.travelinsurance.com

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