

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

I had to clean my Airbnb rental. Can I get the cleaning fee back?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I recently rented a home in Jacksonville, Fla., for three nights through Airbnb. The pictures posted by the host did not match the property. The home was damaged and dirty. The sofa in the living room was peeling and dilapidated. One of the exterior doors had mold growing on it and would not close all the way. And the toilets were filthy.

I filed a complaint with Airbnb, and a representative told me that they contacted the host about a refund. But the host had refused. Airbnb offered me a \$14 credit, but I was not satisfied because I had paid \$649 for the rental.

I had to buy candles to kill the horrible odor and a Swiffer mop to clean the floor, and I also had to wash the dishes. After Airbnb didn't solve the matter, I spoke with Discover about a credit card dispute, but Discover recommended that I try to resolve this with Airbnb. Can you help?

TYSON LOVE, Jacksonville, Fla.

A. No question about it, your Airbnb rental was not fit for habitation. I reviewed the photos you took of the kitchen, living room, and bathroom, and I came to the same conclusion you did — this shouldn't have been an approved Airbnb rental.

Airbnb has a five-step cleaning process that hosts must follow. It includes cleaning, sanitizing, and checking each room in the house. If hosts don't agree to these practices, Airbnb will remove their listing.

When I looked at the images you had sent, it was obvious that the host hadn't even bothered to clean your rental. So, I was surprised when you said Airbnb had offered a \$14 refund and left you with no choice but to stay in the trashy rental. Airbnb should have found you alternative accommodations.

Airbnb offers guidance for guests who check into an unclean rental. "If an issue comes up that you're not able to resolve with your host — or your host declines or doesn't respond to your refund request — let us know and someone from our team will step in to help," it states.

It looks like you handled this one by the book. You took images of the dirty rental — the toilets, the mold, the peeling sofa. You also put everything in writing with Airbnb, asking it to return the cleaning fee you paid. Remarkably, Airbnb said it could not return your fee because the host refused.

I'm not sure if that's a good enough reason. After all, you have a host obviously disregarding Airbnb's rules here. What more evidence do you need?

You could have appealed this to one of the Airbnb company executives whose names I list on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org. A brief, polite email to one of them might have given your case the attention that it deserved.

I asked Airbnb about your case. A representative told me that it does not have a record of you contacting the company until after you checked out of the property. "He was not eligible for any additional refund outside of that partial refund he had been issued," the Airbnb representative told me. "That being said, our team was able to make an exception and refunded him for the cleaning fee."

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

Shelby Acosta

on having curves, scoring a deal, and the appeal of airport food

Actress Shelby Acosta has never been to Boston, so she said she is excited to "do all of the touristy stuff" when she comes to town to perform in the American Repertory Theater's newest production, "Real Women Have Curves: The Musical" (which runs from Dec. 8-Jan. 14). Lucky for Acosta, who was in "1776" on Broadway and on the show's national tour, several former castmates from "1776" who were in the original run at A.R.T. last year have given her a "must-see-and-do" list of recommendations. The El Paso, Texas, native, plays a factory worker in "Real Women Have Curves: The Musical" (based on the Josefina López play that inspired the 2002 film of the same name), which follows a first-generation child of Mexican immigrants who is torn between joining her family's garment business or following her dream of going to college. "I'm Mexican and I've actually never done a Latina/Mexican role — and certainly not one that celebrates different body types," Acosta, 30, said. "Latinas are all shaped so differently; not just from each other, but differently from other races and ethnicities. We're very proud of our curves and our bodies and this just celebrates that in a way that I've never touched on before." She added that "Real Women Have Curves: The Musical" is especially important because "it shows the diversity of what Broadway and what musical theater could be. And not only that, but it's adding to the Latin repertoire in musical theater, which is important because there's so little in that realm." We caught up with Acosta, who lives in New York City with her cat, Nash, to talk about all things travel.

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

It would probably be to Mexico City, specifically the Coyoacán borough to see "The Blue House," which was Frida Kahlo's home. She is my favorite artist/activist/poet. I also want to take in my Mexican culture and eat all the genuine Mexican foods.

Where was the first place you traveled to after COVID restrictions were lifted?

Cancun, Mexico. We got an all-inclusive package and one thing about me is I love a deal.

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

I mainly book on my own. I feel like I've practiced the art of scoping out deals on flights and stays that I pretty much have become a pro at it.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?

This sounds so appealing, but knowing me, I would 100 percent struggle. I am a phone girlie through and through. I love to take photos and share them and also my mom would have a heart attack not hearing from me for more than a day. So let's just say I do it for her.

Do you use all of your vacation time or leave some on the table? I use it all. I love a vacation. Out of office — don't text, don't call.

What has been your worst vacation experience? I got really sick on the last two days of a vacation I was on with friends and still went out and did things with them because I didn't want to bring the mood down, but it only made me worse. So I ended up just miserable.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the ad-



Actress Shelby Acosta on vacation.

venture of it all?

I mainly go on vacations to relax, but I love to venture out and see things that I have researched — but I make sure to schedule nothing for the next two days after if I am going out on an adventure. It's a mixture of all three.

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

Well, currently I'm reading "Inventing Latinos" by Laura E. Gómez. Hopefully, I am finished with it by my next vacation but if not, that's the one.

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

Ooohh, let's see. I would say the entire cast of "Real Women Have Curves: The Musical." They have to count because they are all celebrities in my eyes.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

A kiss goodbye, or maybe some nice new luggage. I'll take both.

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

OK, I am going to be so judged for this, but I love airport food. I get excited to travel simply to eat at the airport. It is so expensive and I could save so

much money if I didn't, but I cannot help it. For road trips, it's fast food all the way. I will add hours to my trip because I've stopped to eat somewhere.

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

I have a couple of tattoos that I've gotten done in different countries and cities I have been to. Those are awesome reminders of the places I've been.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

I mainly use Orbitz's "packages" tab because they build a package for you with hotel and flight all in one. I spend most of my time on that website.

What has travel taught you?

It has taught me a lot about different cultures. I love learning from all types of people and asking questions about their lives and culture. It's also taught me to not take for granted how beautiful this Earth is, and how lucky we are for the gifts it gives us.

What is your best travel tip?

Don't schedule so much that it stresses you out. Take days to do nothing, to take naps. It'll make the time feel so much more special and necessary.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

WINTER LIGHTS BRIGHTEN NIGHTS

The dark winter season has arrived, and what better way to dispel the gloom than a trip to Winter Lights, the popular holiday light extravaganza at the Shelburne Museum in Vermont. The museum bedecks 18 buildings on its 45-acre campus with thousands of glittering lights accompanied throughout by musical selections. Thursday through Sunday evenings from 5-8 p.m., now through Jan. 6, visitors can stroll the grounds and marvel at the museum's iconic landmarks aglow, including the 220-foot steamboat Ticonderoga and its companion 1871 Lighthouse, as well as the Beach Woods and Bostwick Garden. New offerings this year include lighting the Locomotive 220 and Grand Isle Rail Car at the Train Station, and drive-through evenings on Wednesdays. Visitors are strongly encouraged to purchase timed tickets in advance. Adults \$15; ages 3-17 \$10; under 3 free. On Dec. 7, the Ice Bar at Winter Lights is a special evening of merriment, featuring outdoor bars and snacks to savor from local food trucks. Tickets include tokens for food and drinks. \$85; 21+ only. 802-985-3346, shelburnemuseum.org/visit/winter-lights/

BOUTIQUE LODGING IN BURLINGTON

Looking for a cozy place to stay nearby? A 7-mile drive north from Shelburne on US/7 leads to Blind Tiger, Burlington. One of the newer offerings by Lark Hotels, the guesthouse offers 14 distinct guest rooms and suites. Once a private home built in 1881, the



brick mansion has been restored with high ceilings, intricate moldings, original art, and one-of-a-kind furnishings. Amenities include complimentary off-street parking, artisanal toast and yogurt breakfast bar, waffle kimono robes, and quality bath products and room essentials. December rates from \$220. 802-547-3172, www.lark-hotels.com/hotels/blind-tiger-burlington

THERE

FLY AND STAY REWARD POINTS LINKED

Global hospitality brand YOTEL and JetBlue have launched a new partnership that brings rewards and points accrual benefits to TrueBlue and Mosaic loyalty members. TrueBlue members of all levels can now earn 1x points per US dollar spent on rooms at YOTEL locations around the world

where they are eligible for exclusive discounted room rates, and, depending on status level, a complimentary amenity on arrival. TrueBlue Mosaic members will benefit even more with complimentary room upgrades and late checkout. With 22 worldwide locations, including JetBlue flights direct from Boston — New York, San Francisco, Park City, London, Manchester, Istanbul, and Singapore — YOTEL is best known for affordable luxury without compromising comfort, offering smart design and creative use of technology. A stay, for example, in the 212-room YOTEL London City — located in Clerkenwell, London's creative quarter and center of the design scene — starts at \$135. To book stays with points and receive perks, YOTEL.com has created a dedicated booking page for JetBlue customers to find their travel inspiration. www.yotel.com/jetblue

EVERYWHERE

PAMPERED PET TRAVEL SYSTEM

If your furry four-legged family members are as important as the two-legged ones, the Maeve Pet Protection System may be the right travel gear for you. Designed to blend safety with style, the innovative travel system was recently launched by Tavo, the makers of Nuna Baby. Starting with the basics, the Maeve secure pet carrier for your car includes durable and plush liners, two mattress pads, long and short interior leashes, and vehicle base. When paired with Roscoe, a lightweight stroller frame featuring a quick one-hand compact fold, this 3-in-1 system — carrier, base, and stroller — offers a premium level of protection for your beloved pet when you're on the go. Offered in five colors, with coordinating options and vegan leather accents for strollers. Available in three flex-to-rigid models that can carry up to 20, 25, and 30 pounds. 3-in-1 system from \$1,000. <https://tavopets.com/>

NECEE REGIS

