

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



LUKE SHARRETT/BLOOMBERG

An Avis rental counter at Louisville International Airport.

Double-billed by Avis for a van returned after hours

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I rented a minivan for 37 days with Avis through Priceline for \$1,770. My pickup and drop-off were at the Holiday Inn in Peabody.

The Avis shop was closed when I dropped the van off on a Sunday. I followed the instructions on the door and left the keys with the hotel clerk. I parked the van in front of the Avis door.

I expected a receipt via e-mail within a couple of days, but none came. Avis then charged me two times — once for \$1,459 and then again a few days later for \$1,125.

I could not get through the Avis phone jungle to find out what was going on, so I had my credit card block the second payment.

Since then, I have been going back and forth with Avis, answering several repetitive questions and providing copies of my reservations. I would like to get a revised rental agreement invoice for \$1,770 and have Avis cancel the second charge, then bill me for the remainder owed. Can you help me?

ROBERT CIPRIANI, *Beverly Hills*

A. Avis should have billed you for the correct amount the first time. Once you pointed out the error, it should have quickly reviewed its records and adjusted your bill.

But it didn't. I reviewed the correspondence between you and Avis, and you're absolutely right. The company keeps asking you the same questions, to which it already knows the answers. It feels like you are dealing with a bot (and maybe you are).

Here's my best guess about what happened. You returned your van on time, but for some reason, Avis didn't mark it as returned in its system. So it simply charged you for the extra days until it found the vehicle. That often happens with car rental companies. It's one reason I advise car rental customers to always return their vehicle when the rental location is open so they can get a receipt. Unfortunately, leaving the keys with a hotel clerk isn't enough, no matter what the car rental company says. But you couldn't have known that.

Blocking the second charge on your bill fixed your problem in the short term. But if you had refused to pay, Avis could have referred you to a collection agency or added you to its "Do Not Rent List." That would have affected your credit and your ability to rent cars in the future.

You needed to elevate your case to someone higher up the food chain than a bot. I list the names, numbers and e-mail addresses of the Avis executives on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/avis-budget/.

I noticed that, after a while, you began writing in all uppercase letters (that's considered shouting) and threatened that they would hear from your legal counsel. These tactics are understandable, but not always helpful in resolving your case. I have some strategies on how to advocate your own case on my site at www.elliott.org/answers/how-to-fix-your-own-consumer-problem/.

I contacted Avis on your behalf. A representative reviewed your invoices and adjusted the amount as you had requested.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Elliott's latest book is "How to Be the World's Smartest Traveler" (National Geographic). Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Rajesh Bose on India, eating anything on vacation, and packing light

Rajesh Bose is excited to be returning to his old stamping grounds when he appears in the Olivier Award-winning play "Life of Pi," at the American Repertory Theater Dec. 4-Jan. 29. Bose, 51, lived in Tewksbury until he was 7, after which he moved with his family to Pittsburgh. He returned to the Bay State to attend Emerson College, from which he graduated in 1993. "Boston has changed so much since I lived here. I'm looking forward to exploring it as an adult, since I think you see it differently as a student." Bose called "Life of Pi" a "truly beautiful" show and said he can't wait for Boston-area audiences to see it. The play is about a 16-year-old named Pi, who sets off with his family to emigrate from India. But the family's ship sinks in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and he is stranded on a lifeboat with a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan, and a Royal Bengal tiger. "The story is so much about family. I play Pi's father and as I'm working on this, I keep thinking about my own father," Bose said. "It's almost an homage to my dad." The play is heading to Broadway in March 2023. We caught up with Bose, who lives in Queens, N.Y., with his partner, Scanlynn Daniel, a business analyst, and their 8-year-old rescue dog, Abby, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

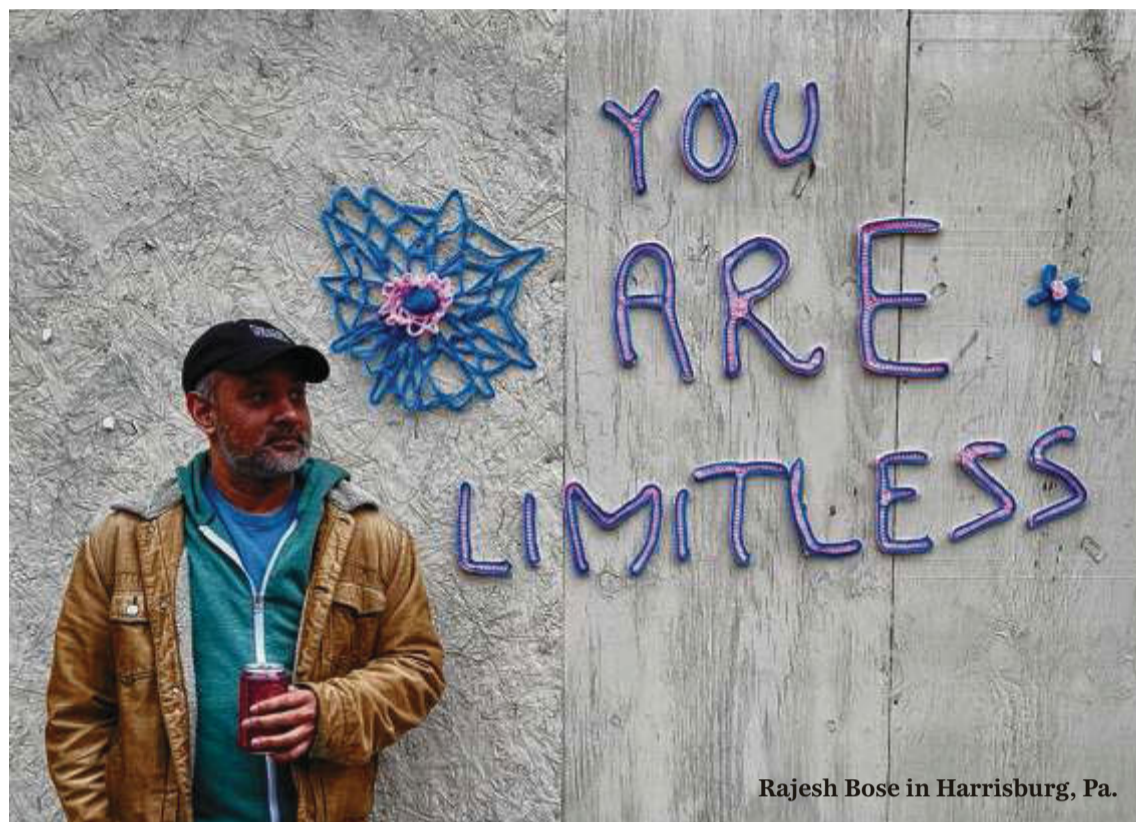
Any place that is warm and sunny. Living in the Northeast most of my life, I hate the cold.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

I avoid sweets normally, but indulge when I'm on vacation.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?

New Zealand intrigues me, as everything I've read and heard about it sounds beautiful. I would also love to visit Victoria, Canada, as my brother and sister-in-law live there. But planning a long trip as an actor is always a challenge.



Rajesh Bose in Harrisburg, Pa.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling?

Besides the necessary travel documents, nothing. I much prefer to pack light and usually have only one carry-on bag.

Aisle or window?

Window. It's much easier to sleep in the window seat.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

I traveled to India several times when I was a child. I particularly remember celebrating Holi

[an ancient Hindu religious festival] in Kolkata. It was magical ... as a 10-year-old seeing adults celebrating and acting like children was something I would have never expected.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Eating whatever I want.

Best travel tip?

Pack light. I've found over the years when traveling out of town for a job that I usually don't need half of the stuff that I bring.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

FARM-TO-TABLE-TO-BED IN VERMONT

Start your winter culinary adventures with a trip to Hill Farm by Sagra, a 50-acre sustainable farm, restaurant, and boutique inn situated along the Battenkill River in Vermont's Equinox Mountain Valley. The property touts immersive nature experiences, with accommodations in 11 recently renovated historic inn rooms, or three- and four-bedroom cottages. This 200-year-old dairy has added an educational vegetable farm, and prix-fixe, family-style dining with menus crafted by chef Austin Poulin — featuring local ingredients and native plants — that highlight the importance of regenerative agriculture and whole animal butchery. Enjoy activities that connect you to the land, including farm tours, culinary classes, harvesting activities, fly-fishing, hiking, natural dyeing, yoga, fire pit s'mores, and more. Skiing is available nearby at Stratton, Bromley, and Magic mountains. December rates, including farm breakfast, from \$199 midweek; and \$279 weekend. 802-375-2269, <https://sagra-farms.com/farms/hill-farm>

60TH ANNIVERSARY SKI RESORT DEALS

Take advantage of the upcoming 60th Anniversary celebrations at King Pine at Purity Spring Resort, a family-friendly resort for all ski ability levels in Madison, N.H. For a pre-holiday getaway, \$4 lift tickets are available on Dec. 22. The party continues into 2023 with Vintage Ski Day (win prizes for best vintage looks) and a presentation by ski historian and writer Tom Eastman at Trails End Pub on Jan. 7; all-

day birthday party on March 12 with kids' fun race, cake cutting, and more. Additional season-long specials include \$20 lift tickets on Tuesday nights; US active military \$10 lift ticket discounts; and discounts for groups of 20 or more. On-property services include lodging, dining, skiing, lift-served snow tubing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, ice-skating, and apres-ski fun. Lodging from \$155 per night. 603-367-8896, www.king-pine.com/Ways2Save

THERE

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Guitar manufacturer and American music brand Fender is not usually associated with the hospitality business.

To celebrate the relaunch of its iconic California Series acoustic guitars, the company has announced the rollout of an exclusive music package in collaboration with Dawn Ranch, a recently renovated 15-acre resort situated under towering redwood trees along the banks of the Russian River. Guests who stay in premium rooms have the opportunity to strum Redondo Player, Malibu Player, and Newporter Player instruments, in-room or on loan for the hotel's campfires. Complimentary access to Fender Play, an online learning platform, will be available for beginners and experienced players. Additional activities at Dawn Ranch include creative art workshops, yoga and meditation groups, nightly fire pits, hiking in the redwood forest, bird watching, and kayaking. Rates from \$250/night. 707-869-0656, www.dawnranch.com

FINE ARTS AND COCKTAILS REDUX

During the pandemic lockdown, we cheered The Frick Collection in New York's weekly YouTube program where museum curators presented engaging histories of works of art paired with creatively inspired cocktails. This fall, a new publication by Rizzoli International offers art and cocktail connoisseurs another way to engage with the popular series. The book, "Cocktails with a Curator" by Xavier F. Salomon with Aimee Ng and Giulio Dalvit, thematically pairs beverage recipes with highlights from the museum's permanent collection, along with personal



perspectives by the Frick's curatorial team. For example, a Jaded Countess (absinthe, vodka, lemon juice, and simple syrup) is paired with Ingres's portrait Comtesse d'Haussonville, and a classic Pimm's Cup is linked with Gainsborough's depiction of Grace Dalrymple Elliott. Includes 120 illustrations by Luis Serrano and forward by Simon Schama. Of course, one can always visit Frick Madison, the collection's temporary home during the renovation and expansion of its historic buildings at 1 East 70th St. \$39.95. www.rizzoliusa.com/book/9780847872466

EVERYWHERE

SMOKELESS PORTABLE FIREPIT

US-based smokeless firepit company Breeo hits a home run with its new easy-to-carry Y Series. Designed for portability with carry handle, collapsible legs, and optional travel case, this 31-pound stainless steel firepit is perfect for outdoor adventures of all kinds, including tailgating, camping, hunting, fishing, RV-ing, and beach gatherings. A built-in heat shield allows for use on decks, wood chips, natural stone, brick, and asphalt without other accessories or heat shields. Can burn three types of fuel — wood, pellets, or lump charcoal — and is compatible with the company's Outpost 19 Grill and SearPlate Griddle. One-dump ash removal provides simple clean-up in any setting. \$495. <https://breeo.com/pages/y-series>

HEATED CUSHIONS FOR CHILLY EVENTS

Stay warm when seated at outdoor socializing or winter sports events with the new battery-powered Hüga heated cushions, designed and hand-sewn in Maine. The seat cushion allows users to select the most comfortable personal level of warmth (low, medium, and high) through the push of a button. Includes long-lasting, rechargeable battery that provides six to 10 hours of heat; and micro USB cord for recharging. Webbing straps and side-release buckles turn the cushion into a backpack for easy-carry. Water-resistant and durable fabric available in navy, gray, camouflage, and white. \$144.99 (six-hour battery); \$169.99 (10-hour battery). www.hugaheat.com/collections/frontpage/products/heated-cushion-navy

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