

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THE VIP LOUNGE

Javier Muñoz on getting to the Arctic, packing nice clothes, and his deep love of Puerto Rico

To say that Javier Muñoz has played some exciting roles on Broadway would be an understatement. The Brooklyn native starred in “In the Heights” and “Hamilton,” playing the alternate to the lead, Lin Manuel Miranda’s Alexander Hamilton, in the latter. When Miranda left the iconic musical in July 2016, Muñoz took over as the lead and stayed in that role until January 2018. And while Muñoz, 45, has wonderful memories about his time playing Hamilton — and Usnavi de la Vega in “In the Heights” — these days he is squarely focused on “Wild: A Musical Becoming,” at the American Repertory Theatre Dec. 5-Jan. 2. With a creative team that includes playwright V (formerly Eve Ensler), and director Diane Paulus, and a cast that features Idina Menzel, “Wild” is, Muñoz said, a “beautiful, magical, and vital show,” with a story about the planet and the environment “that needs to be told.” He plays a conservative single dad who is stuck in his ways. “He’s a very challenging character, and I have to commit to ideas and things that are, very much at my core, the opposite of who I am,” Muñoz said. “It’s really an eye-opening exploration for me.” Muñoz said that he is enjoying familiarizing himself with Cambridge and Boston and can’t wait to perform for audiences here — especially after a long lockdown due to COVID restrictions. “It’s absolutely going to get your heart,” he said of “Wild.” We caught up with Muñoz, who lives in New York City, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Puerto Rico. This is where I am closest to my roots, my history, my heritage. When I’m there, everything — my mind, my heart — finds its rhythm and feels grounded. In New York City, I generally need to have some semblance of defenses up for one reason or another. In Puerto Rico, I am always at ease.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Depends on where I have traveled, but in general I love allowing for more freshly baked breads — which I do not partake of much at home during normal life. Carbs are the best, but especially when on vacation!

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

The Arctic. I love extreme cold weather, and I find the wildlife there beautiful and fascinating. I would also love to see the night sky from there as well.



Javier Muñoz and Lin-Manuel Miranda appeared at the launch of CODE (RED) to Fight COVID on Oct. 13 in New York City.

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

When I travel, I always need something that reminds me of my actual home, so something that triggers my senses like a favorite candle or a pair of slippers will trigger my sense of smell or touch and no matter where I am, that little bit of familiarity puts me at ease.

Aisle or window?

Window. I write a lot when I fly and the window seat inspires my imagination.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

A camping trip with my class in fifth grade.

The first night there, I was walking back to our campsite and there was no moon. This was the first time in my life I saw a sky full of stars. Being a city kid, I’d never seen the sky so full of stars before.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Shopping. I have such urges to buy everything I see that I like. It’s a problem.

Best travel tip?

Always bring one dressy outfit. You have no idea what special event might pop up — a dinner, a night out ... so be prepared.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

He missed his drop-off by a few miles. Thrifty charged him \$932.

By Christopher Elliott

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I’m contacting you about a \$932 fee added to my car rental bill by Thrifty. The fee is for returning my rental vehicle to the wrong airport terminal in Minneapolis.

When I made the reservation, I selected Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport as the return spot. The whole time, I had in my head that we would return to the MSP main terminal. I never looked closely at the rental agreement. I returned to the Minneapolis airport, and it didn’t even occur to me there would be two rental locations.

The terminals are 3.8 driving miles apart. Someone could have and should have said to me to drive the vehicle to the correct terminal. I would have been able and happy to do so with no problem.

This is not the same kind of hardship for a car rental business as when a customer returns a vehicle across town or in a different city. This was a simple 3.8 miles and was within the same Minneapolis airport system. This is not like the difference between Chicago Midway or O’Hare (which have different airport codes).

This is the same MSP airport system, and the terminals are 3.8 miles apart. A \$932 charge for such a short distance and honest mistake is too harsh and abusive. Can you help me get my money back?

MATT OYEN, *Little Canada, Minn.*

This is not the same kind of hardship for a car rental business as when a customer returns a vehicle across town or in a different city.

A. This is such a strange case; I could hardly believe it. I reviewed your rental agreement and it said you would return your car to Terminal 2 at the Minneapolis airport.

This was a one-way rental that you picked up in Santa Ana, Calif. So, it wasn’t as if you intentionally returned the vehicle to the wrong place. It looks like you just asked your phone for directions to the Thrifty return in Minneapolis, and it brought you there. But this was the wrong terminal.

Someone should have said something to you. And a further review of your paper trail shows that you did speak with someone who promised you a refund. But you didn’t get the promise in writing, and the refund never came.

I’m really puzzled by your case. It’s true, car rental companies routinely charge extra fees when you drop a vehicle off at the wrong location. But almost \$1,000 for 4 miles seems excessive. By my calculations, that works out to \$245 per mile. Come on!

By the time you contacted me, you had already reached out to the state attorney general’s office and contacted a lawyer. A lawyer from the attorney general’s office called you back right away and seemed interested in helping you. The lawyer would have cost more than your claim was worth. But no worries — you’re not out of luck.

I provided you with executive contacts at Thrifty and Hertz (Hertz owns Thrifty) at elliott.org/company-contacts/hertz/. I also recommended that you send a brief, polite e-mail to the contacts, explaining your situation and everything you’d done to resolve this problem.

If you ever rent a car again, I strongly recommend that you find the exact location for the return. A rental company may have multiple locations, and failure to return your car to the right one may result in an extra fee.

After you contacted the Thrifty executives, a representative called you and promised a full refund of the \$932 fee. This time, you got it.

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.



HERE

SHOP-AND-STAY SAVINGS IN MAINE

Turn your holiday shopping chores into a vacation with the Portland Harbor Hotel’s special package, Shopping State of Mind. The AAA Four Diamond hotel, situated in the historic Old Port district, is steps away from shops offering high-quality artisan gifts, unique clothing, leather goods, culinary items, and handmade wares from Maine. After a busy day of shopping, relax in cozy guest rooms featuring custom-made Thomas Moser furniture and plush bedding before enjoying a fireside cocktail and dinner at the in-house, chef-driven restaurant, Blue Fin. Stay longer and save more with this package that includes 10 percent off the daily room rate for a one-night stay; 20 percent off for two nights; and 30 percent off for three nights; as well as a shopping pass entitling guests to a 10 percent discount at participating local retailers. Valid through Dec. 24. Rates from \$147 based on a three-night stay. 207-775-9090, www.portlandharborhotel.com/specials.php

ITALY POPS UP IN PORTLAND

Those who do some holiday shopping in Portland, Maine, won’t want to miss the much-anticipated 16th annual Italian Show & Sale offered by Mar-

fitness gym and yoga studio; upgraded pool experience with stadium-style pool, fleet of luxury cabanas, and pool-side bar; and a half-dozen-plus refreshed culinary outlets and menus. Check website for all-inclusive offers and deals. Rates from \$739. 800-235-4300, www.viceroyhotelsandresorts.com/sugar-beach

LOWCOUNTRY STYLE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

The public and private gardens of Charleston inspired the stylish accommodations debuting at the Loutrel Hotel. Located in the historic district, and designed by architecture and design firm Michael Graves, the luxury hotel’s 50 guestrooms — outfitted in a soothing palette of verdant greens, blues, and golds — feature Matouk linens and towels, Deep Steep bath amenities, locally crafted snacks and Lavazza coffee. In addition, guests can enjoy a state-of-the-art fitness studio (with Peloton bike and Life Fitness equipment); tour the area on complimentary cruising bikes; savor a complimentary European breakfast; reserve a private dining room for special occasions; and sip innovative libations in the Veranda Lounge. Rates from \$309. 843-872-9600, www.theloutrel.com

EVERYWHERE

A JACKET FOR YOUR LEGS

Whether you are camping, sitting by a firepit, or cheering your favorite team from the bleachers, you’re guaranteed to stay cozy this winter with Mozy, an innovative wrap-and-go blanket that provides an extra layer of warmth for outside activities. Easy to put on, wear, and remove, the breathable and lightweight high-tech fabric allows you to seamlessly sit, stand, and move. The windproof and water-resistant nylon outer shell and plush heavyweight fleece

interior are engineered for 20- to 60-degree climates. Handy pockets can be used for storing your phone, gear, or other essentials. Available in three sizes. \$85. www.getthemozzy.com

INNOVATIVE BICYCLE BAG

Streamline your mountain and road biking experiences with the Handlebar Bag by Route Werks, a bag specifically designed for cyclists by designers and engineers who also happen to be cycle enthusiasts. Aiming to transform the experience of a traditional cycling bag, the handlebar cargo system features a customizable dashboard with an integrated tech mount to support the most popular computers and accommodate your phone; roomy internal storage, side pockets, and shock cord on top organize your essentials; single spring-loaded latch on the top for instant access to contents while on or off the bike; and unobtrusive hardware made of machined aluminum. To detach the bag, simply flip a lever and use the integrated shoulder strap to take your stuff with you. Carries 9 pounds maximum weight. \$179. routewerks.us

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