

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



BLOOMBERG

Airbnb's app logo.

Airbnb rental is located in a high-crime, dodgy neighborhood

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I had a long-term Airbnb booked in Washington, D.C., but my host canceled. Airbnb helped me rebook another location with a slight discount. I was just checking the new area out a few days ago when I realized that it is in a really dangerous area with super-bad murder and auto theft rates, as well as news articles mentioning my street by name.

I brought all this up with Airbnb's support staff and got the response that Airbnb doesn't really care about the locality, just the place. There have been multiple murders on my street, and I can't park at the place. I have to park down the street, so the locality is important as I have to walk through it each day.

I feel unsafe, and I really want to get a refund. I don't think it's fair that Airbnb offers a place like this. I also don't think Airbnb should have sent me this listing after my first rental fell through. Can you help me?

ROBERT HARRIS,
Harrisonburg, Va.

A. Airbnb shouldn't have stuck you with a rental in a high-crime neighborhood. According to its published policy, if your host cancels, it will help you find "a similar place." But that was not a similar place.

Here's where things went sideways. An Airbnb representative offered to accommodate you, and you accepted the new rental. You could have researched the neighborhood and crime statistics before you said yes — not afterward.

Some Airbnb apartments won't disclose the address until after you've rented. That's fine. I think if you'd said something shortly after you decided on the new place, Airbnb would have been able to help. Some Airbnbs have a generous cancellation policy, which would have allowed you to cancel your rental and receive a full refund.

I also agree with you that Airbnb should not offer a home in an unsafe neighborhood. And if people were being murdered on your street, I would say this is a red flag.

I reviewed the paper trail between you and Airbnb. It's difficult to read your interactions. You repeatedly state that you feel unsafe and would like a refund. An Airbnb "ambassador" — the word they use for a customer service agent — then repeats what you said and dismisses your complaint.

You furnished Airbnb with ample evidence that the rental was in a dangerous neighborhood. I can't believe it insisted on keeping your reservation. (Technically, it said you could get a partial refund and that it was up to your host, but still.)

An appeal to one of the Airbnb executives might have helped. I publish the names, numbers, and email addresses of the Airbnb customer service managers on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I love the way this case was resolved. You finally reached Airbnb by phone and talked them into a partial refund. I also contacted Airbnb on your behalf, and it upped the offer to a full refund of the \$1,500 you had spent on the apartment.

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

Alexandria Eberhardt

on Ireland, bed bugs, and that hilarious time a soft serve swirl cone was simply 'not possible'

In mid-October, Alexandria Eberhardt took over as the new executive director of the Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce. She said in a recent phone interview that she is excited about where the nonprofit organization, which serves more than 400 Bay State businesses and has more than 70 corporate sponsors, is and where it is going. "I've been able to get to know a lot of our existing community members, our small business members, our corporate partners ... and I am really just starting to have conversations about all of the things this chamber has been able to do and how we serve the community and our partners and members," Eberhardt, 36, said. "But then I am also seeing how we can take all of those great things that we've done and add to them moving into 2025." The Texas native, who said she has lived in seven states, called the work the organization does "powerful and important," and said that one of her focuses is on networking and community building. The Brown University graduate brings to the position experience in economic development and community leadership. She most recently served as president and chief executive officer of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, and prior to that was the director of industry partnerships for the state of Rhode Island. She is also an educator who has taught at the college level and is an avid flag football player who serves as a US ambassador and board member for the International Women's Flag Football Association. We caught up with Eberhardt, who lives in Townsend with her wife, Katherine "Kit" Eberhardt, a real estate agent, and their rescue animals (a dog, three cats, and two rabbits — "the rabbits are in charge," she quipped), to talk about all things travel.

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

Ireland. Every day I am there while traveling, it feels like I am also home. I was there in January 2020 with my family and it was such a special time. I loved every single second of it. I fell in love with the people and felt so at home.

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

My wife and I like planning our own adventures. We're huge fans of traveling. My wife and I are very itinerary-driven [travelers] and yes, we can do that with a travel agent, but we love the process of having conversations about what we want to do and where we want to go and then my wife will go and look up all of the options and literally map out our travels wherever it is that we decide that we're going, which is a fun part of the process for her and a fun part of the process for me to say, "Hey, what did you come up with?" and "This looks awesome." So we're getting excited about our trip because we're planning our trip together before we actually go.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?

I like them, but I don't get to do them often.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

While traveling when I was in graduate school, we had bed bugs at our hostel in London. It was the last time I ever stayed in a hostel.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory?

Disney at age 16. I have some hilarious stories



Alexandria Eberhardt and her wife, Katherine "Kit" Eberhardt, on Grand Cayman.

from that trip that my family and I still laugh about to this day. One was about a time we were at a soft-serve ice cream machine. You know how workers from other countries when they're at Disney wear the badges saying what country they're from? There was a French employee, and we were asking essentially for a swirl — half chocolate and half vanilla — and even if they didn't have the center [dispenser with a mix of chocolate and vanilla], which most do, but this one did not, to just do a swirl. The employee was telling us that it wasn't possible to do half and half, that it was either chocolate or vanilla, so we were trying to communicate that if you did half chocolate and then half vanilla, that would [achieve the same result], but she kept saying "'tis not possible." To this day, 20 years later, my family still talks about the half chocolate/half vanilla ice cream cone conversation that we had with an employee at Disney, and it just makes us laugh.

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

Absolutely for the adventure. We plan our vacations to maximize our time and do as much as possible depending on the country we are in.

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

I will probably bring about five books ... ranging from historical fiction to fantasy. I love to read.

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

Celine Dion. She is my all-time favorite singer. One time Celine made a comment that she's been to every country that you can possibly imagine, but hasn't really visited any of those countries because she was there to tour. I thought that would be a cool experi-

ence for myself [if the opportunity] arose to be able to have that experience with her and watch her get to visit these countries across the world as a visitor and not necessarily as a performer. ... I thought that would be amazing and fun.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

TSA Pre-Check, so if I am traveling with you, I don't have to feel obligated to wait in those lines with you.

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

Peanut M&Ms.

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

I don't typically buy souvenirs when I travel, but I did love the rum I brought back from Grand Cayman.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

My wife makes all our travel plans once we decide on where we are going, so her brain is my favorite app.

What has travel taught you?

To have patience, focus on the moment, and be flexible.

What is your best travel tip?

Always take the first flight out if traveling domestically. My mom and stepdad worked in the airline industry and one of the things I learned at a very young age — we've been flying since we were like 6 weeks old — was to always take the first flight out because most of the time that plane came in the night before, so it's less likely to have any issues with delays and so you have a lower probability of having any issues where your flight doesn't actually take off. So those 5 a.m. flights out of Boston? That's where we are every time we travel. JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES IN VERMONT

Create unforgettable holiday memories this year in the elevated slopeside community of Spruce Peak, located at the base of Stowe's iconic Mount Mansfield, an idyllic ski destination with beginner slopes, challenging black diamond runs, and everything in between. From mid-December through New Year's Eve, the village is hosting family-friendly holiday activities for all ages, starting with a production of "A Charlie Brown Christmas Live in Concert," a musical version of the stage production based on the beloved animated holiday special from 1965 (Dec. 12-24). Additional Peanuts-themed events include s'mores and hot chocolate with Snoopy; Snoopy-inspired sundaes at The Lodge; and A Charlie Brown Christmas Holiday Shop. Once you purchase tickets to the show, you'll be forwarded a link for booking your hotel at a 20 percent discount. www.sprucepeak.com/acbc ... But wait ... there's more! Beginning Dec. 21, Spruce Peak's Lights Festival celebrates the

season with ice dancing performances, complimentary photos with Santa, and the annual tree and village lighting extravaganza. The New Year celebration kicks off on Dec. 31 with events for all ages: Skate on the ice rink; indulge in gooey fire-baked raclette and s'mores; and watch the traditional torchlight parade down the mountain with a fireworks display over the peak. Need a place to stay? Central to the village is The Lodge at Spruce Peak, a Destination by Hyatt Hotel — Stowe's only ski-in ski-out luxury hotel — offering 250 recently refreshed guestrooms and suites, a pampering spa with outdoor pools, a fit-



ness center, and locally inspired dining and retail destinations. December Classic Guestrooms from \$224-\$949. 844-367-1672, www.sprucepeak.com/stay/the-lodge

THERE

COMBO GOLF, HOTEL, AND FLIGHT DEALS TO BERMUDA

Winter golf getaways just got easier to plan with three new packages offered by BermudAir Holidays, featuring deals that combine airfare, luxury accommodations, and tee times at one rate. All three packages include roundtrip flights on BermudAir (direct from Boston!), three nights at your hotel, and two rounds of golf at two different courses. Plans differ in price according to the hotel and golf courses in each package: Tee Off in Paradise includes a stay in a deluxe room at Newstead Belmont Hills, and golf at Newstead Belmont Hills Golf Club and Turtle Hill Golf Club (\$1,200); Swing in Style in Bermuda includes a water view room at Cambridge Beaches (an adults-only resort), and rounds at Port Royal Golf Course and Turtle Hill Golf Club (\$1,999); The Ultimate Bermuda Gold Retreat offers a superior room at Rosewood Bermuda, and tee times at Tucker's Point Golf Club and Port Royal Golf Course (\$2,999). No need to worry about the weather as Bermuda touts



itself as having year-round perfect golf weather, with daytime winter temperatures ranging from 65 to low 70s and summer temps climbing to a reasonable 85. Book packages through the website. www.flybermudair.com/promo/golf-packages

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