

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



DAN KITWOOD/BLOOMBERG

A British Airways plane lands at Heathrow Airport.

I'm still waiting on a refund from a canceled pandemic flight

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked two tickets to Paris on British Airways through Flight Network in 2020. British Airways canceled the flight because of the pandemic.

I have tried for years to get a refund from Flight Network, but after numerous calls and emails, I have not received the money. Can you help me?

ERIKA ENG, *Arlington Heights, Ill.*

A. You're kidding! It's been almost four years since the start of the pandemic, and you're still waiting for your money back? That's got to be a new record.

So, what went wrong? You booked your tickets through Flight Network, a Canadian online travel agency. (I publish the names, numbers, and email addresses of Flight Network's executives on my consumer advocacy site.) Flight Network has some of the worst online reviews I've ever seen, but that's not the reason for your delay.

The pandemic was a disaster for airlines. They canceled flights and lost billions of dollars in revenue. Airlines were also slow to refund tickets when they canceled flights. In fact, some airlines insisted on giving customers flight credits until regulators got involved. And if you purchased your tickets through an online agency, it could take even longer, since the refund has to go through the travel agent. But that's not the reason for the delay either.

A look at the paper trail between you and Flight Network shows that you eventually initiated a credit card dispute. This is a legitimate use of a dispute, as I note in my free guide on credit card chargebacks available on my consumer advocacy website. But it looks as if your dispute may have delayed your refund. (In one email, the agency asks for proof that you had dropped your dispute.)

British Airways was taking its time with getting your money back. It looks like Flight Network had your money, but couldn't do anything because of the chargeback. I know this is going to sound like crazy advice, but in this particular case, you might have had your money sooner if you had waited just a little while longer.

Does this mean that you should avoid a chargeback when an airline is slow to refund your purchase? No. Even with a potential delay, I still think that it's worth pursuing a chargeback if an airline or online agency is dragging its feet. Had you done that and succeeded in your dispute, you might have had your money in 2020 instead of late 2023.

You could have appealed your case to one of the executives at Flight Network or British Airways. (I also publish the names of the airline's executives on my site.) But knowing what I do about how refunds worked after the pandemic, I suspect that nothing would have moved the process along faster.

So, there you have it — a refund that took almost four years, but not a minute longer. I contacted Flight Network on your behalf. It confirmed that it had your refund ready and wired you the money for your canceled flight.

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

Comedian Alex Edelman

on London, Butterfingers, and why 'you gotta see the show'

Stand-up comedian Alex Edelman has appeared on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," "Late Night with Seth Meyers," and "Conan." His award-winning one-man comedy show "Just for Us" has been performed around the world and even landed on Broadway earlier this year. The Brookline native is bringing the show (which had a two-week run in Boston in April) to the Emerson Colonial Theatre Dec. 15–17. He said in a recent phone call from Los Angeles that performing before a hometown crowd is "always special" — and familiar. "A big part of who I am is this Boston guy," Edelman, 34, said. "So getting to do comedy here ... it suits me as like a funny little Brookline guy who gets to perform for other weirdo Bostonians." He called "Just for Us" a "comedy show and a theater show ... a comedy show with sort of a high-calorie content." While he said it is joke-heavy, it centers on what he called an "interesting incident" when, in 2017, after being trolled online by antisemites, he found out who some of them were and attended one of their white nationalist meetings in Queens, N.Y. When asked what happened when he was discovered by one of the members, Edelman said "you gotta see the show" — the same answer he gave when asked what the title of the show — "Just for Us" — means, before adding that the meaning "is a twist at the end of the show." We caught up with Edelman, who lives in New York City and Los Angeles — but said he also spends a fair amount of time with his family in Brookline — to talk about all things travel.

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

London. It's my second home. It's foreign and exotic all at the same time. I know the people there. So many of my wonderful friends and fellow comedians are there. I love it. I cannot get enough. The food and the museums get the worst rap, but there are some world-class places. Truly. I miss living there — all quiet strolls and cidery afternoons.

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

I drove to Zion in Utah. I'm a desert guy. I love slot canyons; "127 Hours"-type stuff. My girlfriend at the time and I hiked the Narrows together. It was just absolutely wonderful.

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

Myself. It eventually all just comes back to me. They're like "What do you prefer?" and I look it up.

Thoughts on an "unplugged" vacation?

I think about doing one every single day. I never will. I know that about myself.

Do you use all of your vacation time or leave some on the table?

I don't take nearly enough vacations. I take one a year — usually by accident or spontaneously.

What has been your worst vacation experience?

I have never had a bad vacation. There is no such thing. Maybe one. ... An ex-girlfriend took me to



Alex Edelman in Zion National Park.

Santa Barbara for my birthday but got freaked out by something outside the hotel and made us leave after one night. That wasn't great, but I got it and it was still cute.

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

Adventure and learning. I have never relaxed. Ever.

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

"The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity" by David Graeber and David Wengrow.

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

I've done "Somebody Feed Phil" on Netflix and [Phil Rosenthal is] an amazing traveler. I also love the show "Travel Man" with Richard Ayoade. He's incredible.

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

The phone number of someone on the ground who knows something.

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

Butterfingers. Can't get enough. Or these things called YumEarth Chewys [fruit chews]. If you know, you know.

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

I've found so many cool books — incredible books that I've brought back with me. I found a signed collection of Arthur Miller plays in Stockbridge. The Berkshires are an underrated vacation destination. Didn't go until the pandemic forced more local travel and God was it just a blast.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

Skiplagged and Atlas Obscura.

What has travel taught you?

The people will make it memorable; not the places.

What is your best travel tip?

Come with a plan but allow for spontaneity.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

LUXURY ESCAPE IN THE GREEN MOUNTAINS

Be among the first to stay at The Weston, a five-room, three-suite pastoral retreat in the Green Mountains of Vermont. The newly opened country-home-style hotel has been designed with elegance and comfort in mind, where English and American antiques and fine art blend with influences from the West Indies and the Far East. Those who delight in a luxury bathroom will appreciate the property's light-filled master baths with spacious vanities, walk-in showers, and soaking tubs. Need more pampering? Le Spa at The Weston offers a range of facial treatments and massages. (Sixty-minute "Muscle Melt" massage? Yes, please!) The almost 1-acre property also offers an indoor yoga studio, fitness center, steam and sauna rooms, bocce ball courts, and outdoor gathering areas complete with a fire pit.

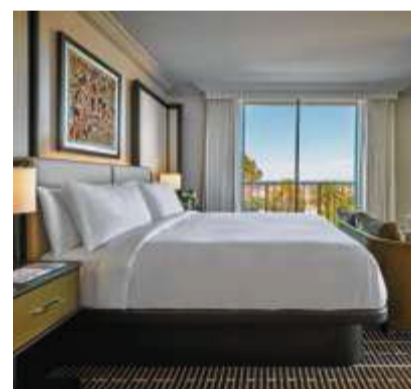
The Left Bank, the hotel's onsite restaurant helmed by Executive Chef Bretton Combs, offers a menu of timeless French dishes including classic bistro fare alongside continental fa-

vorites. In the morning, hotel guests can enjoy an la carte breakfast (think quiche Lorraine, granola, yogurt, farm-fresh eggs, pastries, and such) or request room service. The restaurant, open to the public for dinner, serves French-inspired menus crafted from locally sourced ingredients. Order the basics (seared Atlantic halibut; short rib blend burger) or indulge (caviar, escargot, cast iron-seared steak au poivre) while sipping contemporary cocktails and limited-production wines chosen in collaboration with Vermont Artisanal Cellars. Rates from \$450. 802-824-5000, <https://thewestonvt.com/>

THERE

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Those looking for an alternative to the same-old warm-weather winter getaways may want to consider the coastal enclave of Newport Beach, Calif. Located about an hour south of Los Angeles, the destination offers a selection of beaches and coves for swimming, picnics, fishing and aquatic sports activities, trails for hiking and biking, a lively center for the arts with music



and dance performances, a waterfront Ferris wheel and old-timey amusement park, Fashion Island, a premier, open-air shopping and dining mecca, and more. www.visitnewport-beach.com/

When visiting, you can stay in style at the newly opened Pendry Newport Beach, a 295-room hotel (with 114 suites) that offers your choice of ocean, harbor, and bay views. The thoughtfully redesigned guest rooms are a sophisticated reflection of California's laidback lifestyle, offering comfy-not-stuffy luxury with all the expected modern amenities. The hotel's wellness experiences include Spa Pendry, offering massages, facials, and body treatments as well as eucalyptus-infused steam rooms and a cryotherapy chamber. Additional amenities include an outdoor pool with lounges, 24-hour fitness center, a kids club and dedicated kids' zone, and three dining concepts, including SET Steak & Sushi, with both indoor and alfresco garden seating. Rates from \$395. 949-688-8001, www.pendry.com/newport-beach/

EVERYWHERE

ROAD TRIP READY

The new Roadie travel kit takes the worrying out of packing for your next road or camping trip. Containing 113 items that are easily forgotten when

on the go, the Roadie is the perfect must-have addition to store in your vehicle, with first-aid, travel, and everyday essentials meticulously organized into a quick-access, water-resistant, and tear-proof bag. Equipped with a wide range of first aid and skin treatment items (to handle everything from dressing and treating a wound to burn relief, as well as bug repellent, anti-itch cream, and more); medications (for allergies, headaches, cough relief, and more); and tools (including tweezers, digital thermometer, 6-inch trauma shears, first aid booklet, and more). In addition, a removable bag with 14 everyday must-have items, including a stain remover pen, wet wipes, SPF 50 sunscreen, dental floss, and such, can be stored in the glove box or center console. Need to replenish supplies? Color-coded pouches offer content lists and quantities, and a QR code allows for fast reordering of supplies. The Roadie includes three types of mounting hardware — Velcro mounting pad, Velcro strap, and buckle strap — that will adhere to different car surfaces and components for accessibility and secure storage. \$135. www.redi.co/

NECEE REGIS

