

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



BLOOMBERG/FILE

A Budget office in Los Angeles.

Budget waits 18 days to charge renter \$450 for dirty floor mats

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I rented a van from Budget for a family trip this past September. When I returned it, the agent checked the vehicle and said nothing about dirt. But 18 days later, Budget inspected the vehicle again and charged me \$450 for “excessive dirt and sand,” claiming that the floor mats needed cleaning.

They sent photos of the mats but didn’t explain how they calculated the fee. I’m a retired auto professional, and I’d never mistreat a rental. My group was all seniors in their 70s and 80s! Budget’s contract says they can charge a “reasonable” fee, but \$450 for vacuuming?

I disputed the charge on my credit card, but my bank has sided with Budget. I also contacted the Better Business Bureau, but it refuses to help. How can Budget charge me weeks later without proof?

MICHAEL MARGULIS,
Valencia, Calif.

A. Budget should have inspected the van when you returned it and quickly given you a detailed invoice explaining the \$450 fee. Budget’s own policy states that its cleaning charges will be “reasonable” (although it reserves the right to determine what is reasonable). California’s Consumer Legal Remedies Act also prohibits deceptive claims, including vague fees.

You should’ve taken photos of the van at pickup and return, even if you thought nothing was wrong — and even if the agent left you with the impression that nothing was amiss. Based on the photos and invoice that Budget provided, it looks as if it documented your dirty van more than two weeks after you returned it. This is an enormous red flag.

As I read the correspondence between you and Budget, it appears Budget thought that the excessive time lag was absolutely fine. But if a vehicle is so dirty that a \$450 deep cleaning is required, it’s something that an agent should have noticed at the time of your return.

The problem with a long lag time between a return and an invoice is that anything could have happened between this time. The van might have been rented to someone else, who might have returned it in less-than-perfect shape. An employee could have taken it for a joyride. We just don’t know.

You might have escalated this to one of the Budget executives whose names I list on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org. Even if the charge stuck, I think you were entitled to a better explanation for the cleaning fee.

Your case had too many problems, including the van shuttling seniors around and the 18-day gap. I contacted Budget on your behalf, and it refunded your 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

Newton native Tess Primack on ‘The Sound of Music,’ staying hydrated, and staying present

For Newton native Tess Primack, performing in the national tour of “The Sound of Music,” at Citizen’s Opera House Jan. 6-18, is “incredibly sweet.” Not only was she in productions of the musical when she was young — she played the role of Marta at 8, and later, as a teenager at a summer theater camp, she played the lead role of Maria, the spirited governess — but “The Sound of Music” was the first Broadway show she ever saw as a child. She said in a recent phone call from Toronto that playing before a hometown crowd (she still has many family members and friends in the area) “makes me feel extra sparkly” and “feels really special.” In the national tour, which kicked off in August in Utica, N.Y., Primack plays Sister Margaretta. “With my character, I love that I get to be around so many amazing people — especially so many amazing women because there are so many nuns,” she said. “It’s a glorious score to sing with so many incredible musicians and singers. It sounds so beautiful, and I think people will be astounded by the voices.” Primack, who has performed on Broadway (in “Fiddler on the Roof” in 2016) and who is a private acting coach who cofounded Broadway from Home, a virtual theater workshop, said that “so many people have such deep relationships with this show,” which debuted on Broadway in 1959 (the version she saw as a child was the 1998 revival). “They know all the songs, and it crosses over so many generations. It’s still the timeless story that people know and love, but not the movie. ... It’s closer to the Broadway production.” She said that performing in the musical and “telling such an important story” is a gift. “The fact that the show is about following your heart and it’s about a woman’s journey of self-discovery ... and standing up for what’s right are such important themes and really [resonate] with audiences.” We caught up with Primack, who lives in New York City with her kitten, Mishka, to talk about all things travel.

If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go? There are so many places I want to visit, but at the top of my list are Bali, Morocco, Istanbul, and Barcelona.

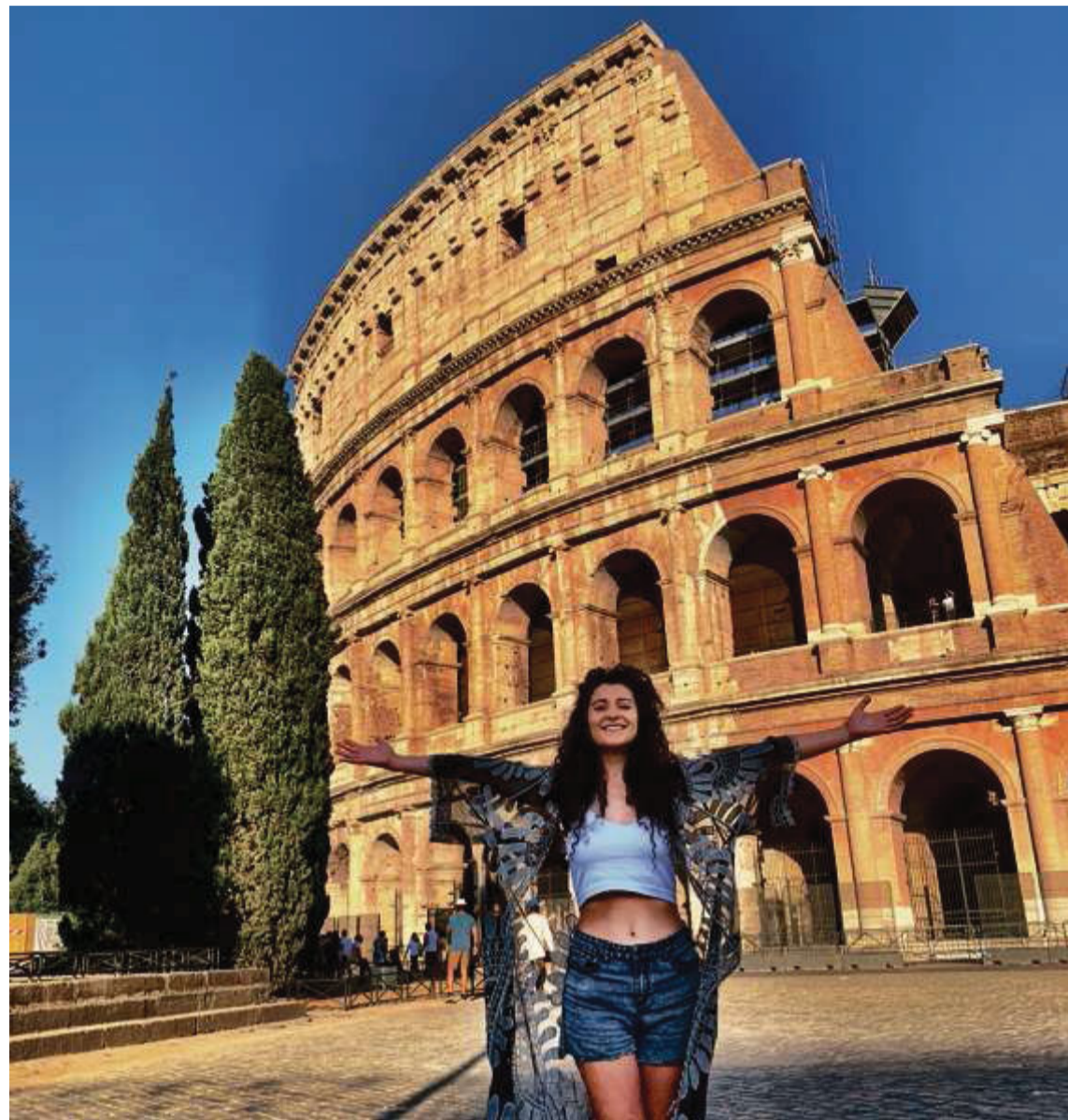
Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own? I book on my own. I just never used a travel agent, and I think for me, having flexibility when I travel is very important ... so I like the idea of creating my own schedule and being able to control it at any time, since things change all the time.

Thoughts on an “unplugged” vacation? I think it’s a wonderful idea, although I have never done it. I find when I take very few photos on a trip, it often means that I was more present on the vacation.

What has been your worst vacation experience? I can’t think of a specific worst travel memory, but the hardest moments have been when I doubted myself or my intuition. Travel is an invitation to flow with the universe and trust your own path — without getting in your own way by overthinking.

What is your favorite childhood travel memory? I’ve spent summers in the same house in Newport, Rhode Island, with my family since I was born, and I have countless memories there with my cousins and extended family. That ocean is truly my happy place.

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all? I’m all about the adventure and



Tess Primack in Rome.

new experiences. I like to plan one thing to do a day and the rest is up to fate. The most rewarding travel moments for me have transpired because I was willing to change plans and embrace the unexpected adventures.

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation? “Untamed” by Glennon Doyle. I like re-reading it when traveling somewhere new — it reminds me to choose authenticity whenever I can.

If you could travel with one famous person/celebrity, who would it be? Jonathan Bailey, obviously. He makes everything more beautiful, doesn’t he? Or Stanley Tucci.

What is the best gift to give a traveler? Packing cubes. Staying organized while traveling makes life so much easier. It feels like a simple act of self-care.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip? I usually bring ginger chews, my own special teas, and electrolytes. Air travel is very dehydrating, so I mostly stick to water or tea — especially when traveling for work, as singers need to stay hydrated.

What is the coolest souvenir you’ve picked up on a vacation? I was performing in a new musical in

Gesualdo, Italy, and the locals were very excited to have New York actors there. I was gifted a handmaid pillow with an angel on the top of it by a very proud seamstress. We didn’t speak the same language, but she was so delighted to give it to me, and it was an honor to receive. She reminded me of my own Italian Nona.

What is your favorite app/website for travel? I love using Atlas Obscura to reveal the funky personality of a place. Connecting with these artsy and unique destinations have revealed some lovely qualities in the most unexpected places.

What has travel taught you? The universe has your back. Don’t have huge expectations, and don’t pressure yourself for things to go a certain way. The more you surrender to the adventure, the more fun you usually have.

What is your best travel tip? Follow your knowing and curiosity. And perhaps share your location with a few friends so they can keep an eye on you while following your adventures. Lastly, pack light — not being weighed down by physical things is a fantastic feeling.

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

SUMMER POPULAR ARTIST SERIES TIX ON SALE

The arrival of cold solstice days in New England might be the perfect time to start dreaming — and planning — for summer. With that in mind, tickets for Tanglewood’s annual Popular Artist Series concerts are now on sale. Performers include Grammy Award winner “Weird Al” Yankovic, making his debut at the famed music and learning campus in the Berkshires with his “BIGGER & WEIRDER” 2026 tour. Yankovic’s full-production multimedia comedy rock show, featuring iconic hits as well as fan favorites, rounds out the hilarity with special guest Puddles Pity Party, the 7-foot sad clown with a golden voice (July 21). The summer also brings American singer-songwriter and guitarist Jason Isbell with his band the 400 Unit and country music superstar Carrie Underwood to Tanglewood’s Koussevitzky

Music Shed, a contemporary open-air concert hall offering roof and lawn seating (July 28; Aug. 29). Additional performers in this series will be revealed throughout the winter and spring. A full schedule of the 2026 Tanglewood summer season, including concerts by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Pops, and Tanglewood Music Center fellows, will be announced in late January, and tickets will be available in early March. Tickets may be purchased by calling 888-266-1200 Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday, 12:30-4:30 p.m., or at the Symphony Hall Box Office. www.bso.org/tanglewood

THERE

BOUTIQUE HOTEL HONORS MELVILLE IN MAZATLÁN

It’s fitting that the Pacific port city of Mazatlán, Mexico, located at the mouth of the Sea of Cortez — a critical winter habitat for several whale spe-

cies — welcomed sailor Herman Melville in 1844, seven years before he published his famed book, “Moby-Dick.” Visitors to the resort town today can stay in a new luxury hotel that pays homage to the literary giant, the Pueblo Bonito Vantage Centro Histórico Mazatlán. Formerly the Melville Hotel, and before that a 19th-century convent and school, the impeccably restored property is located in the heart of the historic district, two blocks from both a 13-mile oceanside promenade and beaches, and the Plaza Machado, the town’s landmark town square. Each of the 12 guest rooms combines antique and modern motifs, with rustic high-beamed ceilings, rich textiles, warm woods, bespoke furnishings, luxe bedding, and contemporary bathrooms with Vervan plant-based products. Guest services and amenities include a fitness center, outdoor pool and Jacuzzi, lobby shop with a curated collection of jewelry, handbags, and crafts, and the 1844 Bar, showcasing Mexican wines, specialty cocktails, and mocktails. The aptly named Melville restaurant serves breakfast and lunch in a relaxed indoor setting or open-air patio. At night, Melville pivots toward elegance, offering high-end Mexican fusion cuisine. Make time to visit the signature Aromatika Spa, a serene retreat for personalized wellness experiences, including swoon-worthy massages, indulgent facials, aroma-infused rituals, and more designed for deep renewal. The spa and restaurant are open to hotel guests as well as the general public. This intimate hotel is the first property to open under Pueblo Bonito’s upscale Vantage brand. Rates in January are \$135 for week-



days; \$270 on weekends. 800-990-8250, www.pueblobonito.com/pueblo-bonito-vantage-centro-historico-mazatlan

EVERYWHERE

EASY TO PACK BEACH ACCESSORY Goodbye scrunched-up towels and neck kinks! Elevate your warm winter getaway experience with The Azure’s Head Hammock, a simple accessory that supports your head while lolling at the beach, pool, or sundeck. Other models of this headrest have been around for a while, but what makes this new product special is the sturdy bamboo frame, soft cotton headrest, and the fact that each piece is handmade, meaning each is a truly one-of-a-kind creation. Each product is tested for durability, functionality, and aesthetic appeal. Lightweight and portable, 6 inches high, and 9 by 5 inches long and wide, the head hammock will easily fit in a suitcase or carry-on. Choose among six solid and striped variations, perhaps one for each of your family members or fellow travelers. \$30. <https://theazureco.com/products/merged-product>

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