

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

VIP LOUNGE | AL WILSON

Al Wilson on street art, stick shifts, and Spain

Al Wilson, founder of Beyond Walls, a Lynn-based nonprofit that promotes large-scale street art and other artistic mediums reflective of the communities where they are displayed, believes that art is needed now more than ever. “It is reflective of what is going on now and it tells people: You’re not alone . . . your culture and your voice and what you’re going through is a shared experience,” the 43-year-old said. “As much as we’re isolated from each other during these difficult times, we’re in this together.” Wilson and his team have held a popular multicultural street art festival in Lynn for the past three summers, but due to COVID-19, this year’s event was canceled. Instead, Beyond Walls — in partnership with the North Shore-based nonprofit Harbor Voices — has created a new program called Truth Be Told, which gives young people from Lynn an opportunity to share (through a variety of artistic mediums) their personal experiences during the pandemic. Professional artists will then take their images, words, audio presentations, etc. and adapt them to be displayed in public spaces. “Everybody’s been hurting with this, but none are hurting as much as the kids,” he said. “We want them to know that their stories matter and that they are being heard.” Wilson, a Walpole native who now calls Marblehead home, loves to travel and has been inspired by street art from around the world. “Diverse cultures are something to be celebrated and this style of artwork allows the cultures that exist in these cities to be front and center,” he said. “And there’s no barrier of entry: Anyone can walk into a parking lot or walk along the street and not only not have to spend any money to see the art, but keep a social distance.” We caught up with Wilson to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Barcelona is among my favorite cities because of the friendly and open people, the amazing food, their top football [soccer] club, Gaudi’s one-of-a-kind style of architecture, and the breathtaking beauty of the Mediterranean.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Wherever I travel, I always try to eat and drink like a local. Sampling local cuisine helps give me a real sense of place and the culture. It may be snails in Paris, pig’s ears in Jackson, Miss., or bifana in Portugal. Serving local cuisine is one way that people share their stories.

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

Though I’ve been lucky enough to travel in Tangier and Fez (in Morocco), I have yet to visit Marrakesh, which is at the top of my next-places-to-go list. I love Moroccan food and culture, the colorful, hand-painted tiles and mosaics, the distinctive music, and the warm and welcoming people.

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

Since my parents are from the UK, I spent a lot of time visiting family there and I grew up drinking lots of tea. It may seem strange, but I tend to carry my favorite Yorkshire Gold teabags with me wherever I go.

Aisle or window?

I’m 6 feet 5 inches tall, so the aisle seat is usually the most comfortable option for me, as it allows me to



stretch out a bit more than the middle or window seat. If it is a shorter flight, I prefer a window seat so I can take in the landscape.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

When I was 15 or 16 years old, I went on an impromptu fishing trip with my uncle on the River Severn in Wales, the longest river in Great Britain. Tired after spending the day fishing in the beautiful countryside — and having enjoyed a few pints of hard cider — my uncle wanted to take a nap. So he allowed me to drive back to our family home in Walsall, which is just outside Birmingham. For a kid, driving a stick shift with my left hand, all while navigating from the “wrong side” of the road was pretty exciting.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

I have two: I like to explore areas off the beaten path in search of local street art. Besides Lynn, some of the best street art I’ve seen was on a recent trip to Lisbon and Porto. Then in the States, rather than spending a lot of money on accommodations, if I can, I prefer to spend a bit more on a rental car I want to drive, like a Mustang convertible. A giant American sedan is also pretty cool for highway cruising.

Best travel tip?

I tend to pack light, and bring wrinkle-resistant clothing that can be layered and worn in many ways. And I always pack a small, lightweight backpack for day trips.

Juliet Pennington

JULIET PENNINGTON

TROUBLESHOOTER

Did Vueling change my itinerary, or did my travel agent make a mistake?

Q. I flew from Florence to London on Vueling Airlines with three companions before the pandemic. We had booked the tickets through an online agency called Farebuddy.com.

A Vueling agent denied us boarding, claiming that we were supposed to have been on a previous flight. But that was impossible. I was holding a valid itinerary from Farebuddy.com that showed we were on the next flight.

Instead of correcting this mix-up by simply placing us on the flight — there were plenty of available seats — Vueling charged us again for this flight. We had to pay \$1,184 for the four of us, which also included transaction fees.

After we returned, our travel agency confirmed we had a valid travel itinerary and all contact information was correct. In many contacts with Vueling this past month, they claim we were notified of a change to our itinerary back in April.

I requested to know why and who the notification was sent to as we never requested a change to our initial itinerary. Vueling provided me with the name of another customer. Vueling seems to be adamant that this is our fault. I’ve appealed to Vueling’s executives but have heard nothing back. Can you help me?

HOWARD THARP, *Seattle*

A. If Vueling changed its schedule, then it should have notified you — not someone else — about your schedule change. And when it became clear that it hadn’t, the airline should have offered you a quick refund.

Airlines routinely reschedule their flights. When they do, they must notify passengers. Normally, customers have a chance to accept the new flight or decline it and receive a full refund. Something definitely went wrong with your schedule change.

This one is a little complicated and took months to resolve. But before I get to it, let me tell you how you could have avoided this. Always book with someone you know and trust. (I had never heard of Farebuddy.com until you contacted me.) Also, check with

your airline before your flight to see if you still have a valid ticket. Had you done those two things, you would have had a pleasant and uneventful flight to London.

It turns out Vueling accidentally charged you twice for your return tickets, so you were actually out \$2,181. You tried to file a complaint to Vueling invoking EC 261, the European consumer protection regulation for airlines. But EC 261 didn’t apply to your situation. Vueling insisted it had acted properly.

By the way, I list Vueling’s executive contacts on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

The paper trail you kept suggests that Farebuddy.com may have made a booking error. Vueling says it didn’t make a schedule change. Rather, you were never booked on the flights Farebuddy.com had confirmed.

After some back and forth,

Always book with someone you know. Also, check with your airline before your flight to see if you have a valid ticket.

Farebuddy.com and Vueling agreed to reimburse you a total of \$400 for your tickets. But that left you about \$1,781 short. I asked Farebuddy.com to review your case again, but it did not respond.

Finally, at my suggestion, you asked the American Society of Travel Advisors to look into the matter. Airlines Ticket Deals LLC, Farebuddy.com’s parent company, is a member of the trade organization. ASTA has a code of ethics that members must follow. A short while later, Farebuddy.com agreed to reimburse you \$1,650, which you accepted.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

HERE

LARK HOTELS DEBUTS EDGARTOWN INN

Revel in the laid-back joys of Martha’s Vineyard at The Edgartown Inn, the newest offering from Massachusetts-based Lark Hotels. Debuting steps away from the shops and restaurants in historic Edgartown Village, the property’s 12 rooms have been given a massive makeover by Boston-based designers Rachel Reider Interiors. Inspired by the farms and gardens of the island, the property boasts a farmhouse feel fused with modern touches, natural materials like linen, rope, and wood, and a light and airy color palette. Social distance guidelines are designed to keep guests and staff safe. Through 2020, a penalty-free cancellation policy allows reservation cancellations or changes up to 24 hours prior to check-in. Seasonal rates from \$209 to \$609, double occupancy. 508-939-4005, www.theedgartowninn.com

JACOB’S PILLOW OPENS CAMPUS AND ARCHIVES

Dance lovers will be happy to know that Jacob’s Pillow, the longest-running dance festival in the United States, is offering free summer programming online through Aug. 29. Simply RSVP to as many events as you want, then join Pillow artists and audience members from around the world on YouTube and Zoom. www.jacobspillow.org/virtual-pillow/. Tired of virtual events? Those visiting the Berkshires are invited to bring a picnic and stroll the Pillow’s historic grounds. In addition, the archives are



open for appointment, with same-day appointments a possibility. Face masks required; social distancing encouraged. Details for visiting hours and downloads of self-tour map available on website. www.jacobspillow.org/visit/visiting-during-covid19

RHODE ISLAND MARINE LIFE AND BEACH SAFETY

The Ocean State is going above and beyond to keep beachgoers safe this summer. In addition to COVID protocols — recommending face coverings be worn in public whenever 6 feet of social distance cannot be maintained



— the Department of Health has partnered with health and environmental officials and businesses to reduce the risk of developing skin cancer while educating visitors on the harmful effects of chemical sunscreens on the ocean and its marine life. To that end, a statewide initiative offers complimentary, environmentally-safe sunscreen dispenser stations at all state beaches, provided by Raw Elements USA, a certified natural sunscreen company. www.rawelementsusa.com

THERE

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

Those itching to hit the road this summer may want to consider the Harbor Hotel Collection’s Empire State Road Trip, designed to showcase three of New York state’s most popular regions and all the fun stops, natural wonders, and historic sites in between. The one-of-a-kind vacation includes outdoor recreation, cultural attractions, alfresco dining and stays at AAA Four Diamond waterfront hotels: Chautauqua Harbor Hotel on Chautauqua Lake; Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel located on Seneca Lake within the Finger Lakes; and 1000 Islands Harbor Hotel on the

shores of the Saint Lawrence River. A three-hour ride separates the properties, and travelers may choose to start their trip from any of the hotels. Guests who visit two or more hotels on consecutive nights will receive a complimentary Road Trip Snack Cooler filled at each stop with goodies for the drive, such as bottled water, fresh fruit, energy bars, and more. Rates 10 to 20 percent off best available rate, depending on how many properties are visited. 607-535-3759, www.harborhotelcollection.com/experiences/empire-state-road-trip

SPANISH IMMERSION CLASSES AT HOME

Adapting to recent travel restrictions due to the pandemic, language learning company Fluenz has launched a new online immersive program crafted by founder Sonia Gil and her team of accomplished Spanish coaches. Live one-on-one, face-to-face sessions, conducted via Zoom or Skype, offer intensive and rigorous methodology and real-time intimate and transformational learning — similar to their programs in Mexico City, Oaxaca, and Barcelona — but with flexible scheduling (and a more accessible cost) from the comfort



of your own home. Sessions are customized to each learner, with programs tailored to individual needs and objectives based on an initial assessment. Sessions can be scheduled at your convenience within a 30-day window. Once travel resumes, you can wow your friends with your new language skills. Select from two tracks, 30-hour Comprehensive Track (\$2,800) or 15-hour Fast Track (\$1,500). fluenz.com/spanish-immersion/online

EVERYWHERE

GET RAD WITH E-BIKES

Everybody’s talking about electric bikes these days, citing them as the perfect way to get a boost when cycling around town or country. Rad Power Bikes, the largest ebike brand in North America, offers a fleet of 10 options for your off-road adventures or daily commuting. Two new models debuted this year, RadMission 1, a single-speed electric metro bike with a 500W high-torque motor and 20-45+ mile battery range; and RadWagon 4, a 750W geared hub motor designed for those loading up to go somewhere, from taking the kids to the playground or a trip to the grocery store (available for preorder). A personal favorite for the rolling hills of New England: RadRunner 1 is a single-speed utility bike with 330 accessory combinations, including passenger seating, racks, and platforms, that features a 750W geared hub motor, long-range 48V 14 Ah Lithium-Ion battery for 25-45 miles of range per charge, and integrated headlight, taillight, and brake-light. \$999-\$1,699. www.radpowerbikes.com NECEE REGIS