

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

He's famous for being 'the mask man,' has fond memories of Whalom Park, and promotes politeness



With a background in public health, Dorchester resident Leonard Lee knew, when COVID-19 hit, that it would disproportionately affect minorities — especially those with pre-existing conditions. He also knew that he had to do something to help, because in the spring, face masks were hard to come by, and unaffordable for many, especially for Black and Latinx minimum-wage earners and essential workers. So Lee, 62, took to Facebook and asked friends, family, and colleagues to give up a cup of coffee for a day and donate the money so he could procure masks and disseminate them to those in need. The money started pouring in and, to date, Masking the Community has raised close to \$50,000 — far exceeding Lee's initial goal — and has given out more than 80,000 masks. Senior centers, shelters, MBTA police, and the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department — which needed masks for inmates and guards — are just some of the recipients of the free masks. Lee and his volunteers have also spent time in high-traffic areas in and around Dorchester and Roxbury, handing out masks to passersby. Along the way, Lee has become known

to many as “the mask man,” a name that makes him chuckle. “I'm just a regular ol' person who had an idea,” said Lee, who worked for more than a decade at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and now works for the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation overseeing the Melnea A. Cass Recreational Complex in Roxbury, and the Roxbury Heritage State Park, where he is also the general manager and curator of the Dillaway-Thomas House, a museum on the park grounds. We caught up with Lee, who has three adult children, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Cuba, because of the people, the food, the music, and the dance.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Gin and tonic, [with a] lime twist and vanilla bitters. I like to experiment with something new and different when I travel. And I just love food, all types . . . especially barbecue lobster.

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

My dream is to go to the motherland, the African continent and the land of my ancestors. I want to explore

South Africa and then experience Victoria Falls, “the smoke that thunders.”

One item you cannot leave home without?

I have to remember my eyeglasses so I can see. It's no fun squinting your way through a vacation trip.

Aisle or window?

Window, so I can see the clouds roll by. I daydream and see what different kinds of shapes the clouds take. It makes me want to create.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

Family trips to Whalom Park in Lunenburg. It's gone now [it closed in 2000 after operating for more than 100 years], but back in the day, we had a ball leaving the city and enjoying the park, the food, and going on the rides.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Finding live music and joining in. I play drums.

Best travel tip?

You are a guest in someone else's town or country, so always be polite. People will treat you better if you speak a few words in their language and say please and thank you.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Hotel charged a cleaning fee for smoking — but couple does not smoke

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. My husband and I recently stayed at the Red Roof Inn in Gallup, N.M. We checked in late in the evening. We asked if they had any first-floor rooms because we are senior citizens, and they accommodated us.

When we got to the room, it had an awful odor, but we didn't want to complain because they put us on the ground floor and we were tired and didn't want to move. So we opened the door and tried to air it out the best we could.

When they checked into a room that smelled like smoke, they should have said something.

After returning from our trip, I checked the credit card activity and noticed that there was a charge of \$100 for a smoking fee. I called a manager at the Red Roof Inn. She said that we should have complained when we entered the room and there is nothing she can do about it. She said we were lucky they only charged us half the fee. I told her we requested a nonsmoking room, because we do not smoke. Why would we then smoke in the room? She said the cleaning lady said the room smelled of smoke and so we were guilty of smoking.

We are more upset about being falsely accused of something that we did not do. We are starting to think that this is some sort of scam. Please help us.

MINDY HAGGERTY,
Pueblo West, Colo.

A. You didn't smoke in your room. Therefore, you should not have to pay a smoking fee — or half a smoking fee. Goes without saying, right?

So what went wrong here? Easy. I think you were too polite. When you checked into a room that smelled like smoke, you should have said something. You were still being po-

lite when you referred to it as an “odor.”

The last time I wrote about smoking fees in hotels, I had the audacity to say that if you smoke in your room, you should pay the cleaning fee. Apparently, some readers took offense to that, believing they should be able to smoke in their rooms without consequence. But that's the world we live in.

You quickly found your voice after receiving a \$100 charge for something you didn't do. When the hotel refused to reverse the charge, you posted warnings on several websites and filed a BBB complaint. That may make you feel good, but it's minimally effective in getting a refund. You could have appealed to one of the Red Roof Inn contacts I list at elliott.org/company-contacts/red-roof-inn/.

Red Roof did respond to you in writing about your complaint. It said when its housekeeper opened the room to clean it, “there was a strong smell of cigarette smoke.” The housekeeper contacted a front desk representative, who then accompanied the housekeeper to the room and verified that there was indeed a strong smell of smoke. Your room had to be closed for a few days while the hotel cleaned it. Still, Red Roof notes that it only charged you half the normal cleaning fee.

You rejected that explanation because you do not smoke. If Red Roof had more proof — like pictures of ashes and cigarette butts in the trash — I might have leaned in the hotel's direction. But it didn't. I contacted Red Roof on your behalf. Separately, you disputed the charges on your credit card. Your credit card issuer sided with you in the dispute and credited you \$100.

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

SKI RESORTS OFFER COVID PLANS AND EPIC PASSES

Ski season is approaching and Vail Resorts are initiating a comprehensive plan to ensure all guests, employees, and local communities remain safe during the COVID pandemic. Changes include requirements to wear face coverings in all parts of the resort, including riding in lifts and gondolas where guests will be seated to maintain social distancing. To manage the number of visitors on a given day, reservations will be required. Those interested in skiing at any of the eight Vail Resorts in the Northeast — Attitash, Crocheted, Hunter, Mount Snow, Mount Sunapee, Okemo, Stowe, and Wildcat — may want to jump on the Epic Pass offerings that prioritize access to lift tickets. As a pass holder, you'll get an early opportunity to reserve up to seven Priority Reservation Days for the core season (Dec. 8 to April 4) before lift tickets go on sale to the general public. The exclusive reservation window runs Nov. 6 through Dec. 7. 970-754-0005, www.epic-pass.com.

PHOTO EXHIBIT ON MARTHA'S VINEYARD

Those longing for a connection to the natural world during a time of global crisis may want to check out the photographs of Libby Ellis on display at The Carnegie Museum in Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard (through Nov. 7). In the exhibit, “Joyful Participation in a World of Sorrows,” the large-scale, black-and-white photographs' contemplative portraits of flowers, torn



leaves, tangled stems, ruffled petals, and hidden insects aim to reveal “joyful beauty during sorrowful times.” Ellis's award-winning work has previously been included in exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Eric Carle Museum, and other galleries around the United States. The Carnegie is one of more than 20 historic properties managed by the Vineyard Trust that can be visited while on the island. vineyardtrust.org/event/libby-ellis-joyful-participation-in-a-world-of-sorrows

THERE

NANTUCKET HOTEL DEBUTS IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Fans of Nantucket's White Elephant resort will be happy to hear a new sister property, the White Elephant Palm Beach, is debuting on Nov. 4. Located short blocks between the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, the 32-room luxury boutique hotel is housed in the former Bradley Park Hotel, one of the first resorts on Palm Beach's Main Street. The Mediterranean-revival architecture has received a five-star renovation, with guestrooms and suites boasting king-

size beds with Pratesi by Rivolta linens; and colorful-palm and flower print fabrics. Relax on the patio or around the pool in the U-shaped outdoor courtyard. Amenities include complimentary use of BMW vehicles, Priority Bicycles, and Radio Flyer Wagons; exclusive access to Barton & Gray yachts for excursions; and more. A seven-foot white elephant statue is one of 120 museum-worthy pieces on view by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jennifer Bartlett, and Kenzo Okada. Rates from \$650. 844-462-9483, www.whiteelephantpalm-beach.com

FLORIDA COTTAGE GETAWAYS

Looking for a family beach getaway that minimizes your COVID concerns? The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel are offering secluded cottage rentals for a “bubbled” vacation on the barrier islands of Sanibel and Captiva. Visitors can bird watch at J.N. Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge, comb the beach for seashells, or bike along 25 miles of

trails while staying at a diverse selection of cottage rentals. Offerings include Castaways Cottages: Nestled on a strip of land that separates the Gulf of Mexico from the Pine Island Sound, these one, two and three-bedroom cottages radiate old-school charm. From \$199/night. castaways-cottages.com; Cabbage Key Inn: On the boat-access-only island of Cabbage Key, cottages offer waterfront views even further off-the-grid. The popular Dollhouse Cottage includes a private dock and screened porch. From \$185/night. cabbagekey.com/accommodations; Tween Waters Island Resort: Nineteen standalone residences, with beach or bay view options, are named for famous residents such as Anne Morrow Lindbergh, whose novel Gift From the Sea was inspired by the island. From \$265/night. tween-waters.com

EVERYWHERE

WEB TOOL AIDS GROUP TRIP PLANNING

If you have trouble finding a destination that makes everyone in your travel group happy, your frustrations are now over with Wanderlist, a new free

planning tool offered by the travel-adviser folks at Virtuoso. The process starts when a Virtuoso adviser sends an online questionnaire to every member of your group. Using a visual and gamelike interface, it asks users questions about 160 destinations and more than 1,500 experiences. When complete, the tool syncs and streamlines the various opinions, ultimately producing a roadmap for future travels such as New Zealand in 2022. Africa in 2025, or your own personal dream destination for whenever we can all start traveling again. www.virtuoso.com/wanderlist

SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING FOR SANITIZERS

Whether going across country or across town, hand sanitizer is a necessary travel accessory these days. Those feeling bad about adding more single use plastics to the waste stream may want to consider eco-friendly Plaine Products's refillable peppermint hand sanitizer. Packed in refillable aluminum bottles, this blend of ethyl alcohol and antimicrobial/antiviral peppermint essential oil exceeds CDC recommendations to kill 99.9 percent of germs and bacteria — not to mention it smells great. (The company also sells refillable hair and skin care products.) When ready to refill, you'll receive a return label that covers the cost of shipping to send the empty bottle back. Baby safe, vegan with non-GMO ingredients. No subscription necessary. Available in 16-ounce (\$20) and 2.5-ounce travel size (\$5). www.plaineproducts.com

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