

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

This rescheduled yoga vacation is a real stretch

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. In late 2019, I put a \$500 deposit on a yoga retreat in Costa Rica. I paid the balance of \$2,550 a few weeks later. These payments were made to International Yoga, a tour operator that specializes in yoga retreats.

In March 2020, I received an e-mail from International Yoga explaining that the retreat was being canceled and rescheduled to April 10 to 17, 2021.

I'm a public school teacher and can only take vacation time during scheduled school breaks. The company did not schedule the retreat for the same week as 2020 (which would have worked for me). It was rescheduled to the week before.

International Yoga refused to refund my money. They are offering a \$500 credit to a future retreat, so that means I'm losing \$2,550. Can you help me get my money back?

ERIN PARISI,
Chelmsford



ADOBE STOCK

A. If your tour operator cancels your vacation, you should receive a full refund. But that's not always how it goes.

Have a look at the terms and conditions of your purchase. It says all payments to International Yoga are "non-refundable & non-transferable." And while it does say there are exceptions — for example, International Yoga offers a refund for a retreat canceled because of low enrollment — the contract clearly favors your tour operator.

State regulation, however, favors you. Under Massachusetts state law, a tour operator must offer a refund when it cancels a trip. You could have complained to the attorney general. The form can be found at: www.mass.gov/how-to/file-a-consumer-complaint. (Note: This applies to you because you live in Massachusetts. You wouldn't be covered if you resided in a different state.)

Still, as I review the correspondence between you and International Yoga, it's obvious the company is in a tight spot. Apparently it didn't have the money to cover refunds and asked customers like you for understanding. Giving them a chance to reschedule was the right thing to do.

I had an interesting correspondence with the owner of International Yoga. She suggested that I should be advocating for small businesses hurt by the pandemic. I agree with her that small businesses need someone to advocate for them. But they already do in the form of local organizations and national trade groups. Small businesses also have access to lawyers who can help them during a difficult time like this. Consumers like you have limited options. And that's why my advocacy team and I are here.

I contacted International Yoga on your behalf. It agreed to offer you a full credit, which you can use toward any future trip. You accepted.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Elliott's latest book is "How to Be The World's Smartest Traveler" (National Geographic). Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.



Fred Freeman and his fiancée, Sharon Leone, on the Rialto Bridge in Venice.

VIP LOUNGE

Hanover fire official on his Profile in Courage award — and his absolute love of travel

Hanover Fire Department Captain Fred Freeman was quite surprised when, during what he thought was a Zoom call with local officials about a proposed development in town, he saw Caroline Kennedy, daughter of former president John F. Kennedy, on the screen. Kennedy was on the Zoom call to inform Freeman that he was one of seven people from across the country chosen to receive the John F. Kennedy Library Profile in Courage award for COVID Courage for spearheading a program that brought mobile testing and services to Hanover residents during the pandemic. "I was quite surprised — and honored," said Freeman, 56, who was in charge of the town's community health response. "But this wasn't just me. It was quite a collaboration of town departments and everyone coming together. I'm very proud of everyone."

The Dorchester native, who is also a nurse and a paramedic, said he is proud, too, to be honored alongside other COVID heroes, as well as Utah Senator Mitt Romney, who will receive the annual Profile in Courage Award for standing up for what he believed — even though it went against the beliefs of many of his fellow Republicans. The former Mas-

sachusetts governor was the only Republican senator to vote to convict Donald Trump during his first impeachment trial, and one of seven Republicans to vote to convict during Trump's second impeachment for inciting an attack on the US Capitol following the 2020 presidential election. "I'm glad he's getting [the award]," Freeman, a father or two adult children, said. "I thought going against his party the way he did was very courageous." The virtual award ceremonies will be held on May 26.

We caught up with Freeman, who lives in Hanover with his fiancée, Sharon Leone, a Marshfield firefighter, and their rescue pup, Cheez-It, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

I dream about traveling the world every day. I have eight years until retirement. I've been to Rome, Florence, and Venice, as well as Oslo, Norway. We have a trip planned in August — dependent on COVID restrictions being lifted — to do the Tour Du Mont Blanc, which is a 100-mile hike, roughly 10 miles a day from village to village through France, Italy, and Switzerland. The plan is to spend a few days in Geneva, then start hiking out of Chamonix,

France. The tour goes through the Alps, around Mont Blanc. We hike through Chamonix, France, Courmayeur, Italy, and Trient, Switzerland. It's a 14-day vacation with 10 days of hiking. We chose the "Lux" package, which means that after hiking through the Alps, we'll stay in high-end hotels and inns along the way. Half-board is included, which means dinner and breakfast.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

We're just regular middle-class people — we both work for the fire department — but after the pandemic, we're splurging on this trip. My favorite food while vacationing is chateaubriand. I remember getting chateaubriand on the piazza right in front of the Pantheon with a street performer playing some Led Zeppelin music. They were pushing the limoncello, so I thought I had crossed over into heaven. It was a really cool experience.

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

Oh wow. There are so many places: Thailand, Vietnam, Chile, Vienna, Prague, and Budapest come to mind, but next on my list is Normandy, France. I love history and can't ever get enough of it. I would love to tour the World War II battlefields of Europe.

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

I actually pride myself on traveling light. My son, Freddy, and I once bought an all-access pass from Amtrak and traveled up and down the East Coast, stopping at all the major cities for a day and night. We had very small backpacks with only a change of socks, shorts, and T-shirts. We'd launder the day's clothes in the hotel for the next day. It was a great father-and-son trip.

Aisle or window?

The window, of course, for the view below the clouds. It gives perspective on our world and how we inhabit it.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

In 1977, at 12 years old, my parents put me on an Eastern Airlines flight from Boston to New York City to visit a friend of mine, Andy Atton. We saw a doubleheader at Shea Stadium, with Tom Seaver pitching and Pete Rose with the Cincinnati Reds of the 1970s. It was a little boy's dream. We also saw the newly built World Trade Center, and all of the New York City landmarks. One time sightseeing in NYC as a kid in a crowded elevator, I got off on the wrong floor and separated from the adults watching me. I wandered around until a security guard grabbed me and started making calls. As a kid, I was lost in New York City, having too much fun.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Gelato. I get vanilla. It drives everybody crazy that I get vanilla, but that's what I like.

Best travel tip?

Travel as often as you can. I love the Mark Twain quote about travel: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

CAPE HOTEL OFFERS POD EXPERIENCES

Pod vacations — groups of families or friends — are expected to be popular this summer, especially destinations located within a day's drive from home. If you're looking for such a family-friendly and easy getaway, check out the 21-room and -suite Sesuit Harbor Hotel. Set on more than 2 acres of landscaped grounds in the mid-Cape village of East Dennis, the hotel offers stylish accommodations with nostalgia-inducing amenities such as personalized breakfast picnic baskets and snuggles with resident goats named Lola and Brownie. Visitors can enjoy the nearby bayside beaches of Dennis (complimentary hotel bikes available) and can book add-on experiences such as kayak fishing tours, lessons at the Sesuit Harbor Tennis Center, and more. Rates from \$149. 508-385-3326, www.sesuitarborhouse.com

FLOWER SHOW BLOOMS ANEW IN NEWPORT

Horticulturalists and home-garden-putterers will be happy to know the Newport Flower Show is back this year, creatively reimagined as an indoor, self-guided tour of floral design exhibits at Rosecliff Newport Mansions. Visitors arriving at "Back in Bloom: A Ballroom Floral Fantasy"

will find the mansion's 2,800-square-foot ballroom transformed into a verdant oasis with themes such as "Garden Nymph," "Fireflies" and "Harvest Moon," while the salon will showcase floral creations by designers interpreting the theme of "A Garden at Nighttime." On the back terrace, a conservatory-like garden space will host al-fresco exhibition tables by local designers. Following CDC guidelines, the tour will move in one direction in spaces large enough to allow for social distancing, and will not include live lectures, demonstrations, food concessions, or shopping boutiques. June 18-20. Admission by timed entry; tickets available now. www.newportmansions.org/events/newport-flower-show



THERE

LUXURY RESORT RESIDENCES DEBUT IN PV

Travelers seeking to escape crowded resorts in Puerto Vallarta (or PV as the cool kids call it) who still want five-star, resort-style services and amenities will swoon over Maxwell, a new collection of oceanfront luxury resort residences. Perched along the southern edge of Banderas Bay, steps from the trendy and sought-after Romantic Zone district, the 14 modern, two- to five-bedroom suites and penthouses feature open-concept interiors, state-

of-the-art kitchens, private en suite bathrooms, and floor-to-ceiling windows that open to expansive balconies with dramatic ocean views. Amenities include 24-hour dedicated concierge, daily housekeeping, room service, wellness experiences, rooftop access with sprawling infinity pool — with swim-up bar, jacuzzi, lounge areas, and all-day dining restaurant/bar — secondary infinity pool, jacuzzi, gym, and a steam/massage room. The best part? With rates starting at \$270 per night for a three-bedroom residence accommodating up to six people, the term "affordable luxury" is no longer an oxymoron in PV. www.maxwell-pv.com

SPLASH INTO SUMMER AT ADIRONDACKS RESORT

Road trip time! Located about 300 miles from Boston, High Peaks Resort is a perfect basecamp for exploring the Lake Placid region of New York with friends and family this summer. Those looking for a good deal may want to consider the resort's "Your Home in Adirondacks," a package that includes daily breakfast at Dancing Bears Restaurant, complimentary upgraded Wi-Fi, Adirondack-inspired guest rooms, and access to all resort amenities including two indoor and two outdoor heated pools, indoor Jacuzzi, fully equipped fitness center, plus private access to Mirror Lake with complimentary use of kayaks, paddleboats, and stand-up paddleboards. Onsite full-service spa offers additional pampering. The resort is pet-friendly, so bring the pups along. Rates from \$126. 800-755-5598, www.highpeaksresort.com/packages/your-home-adirondacks

EVERYWHERE

ANTIMICROBIAL TRAVEL TOOTHBRUSH

You say you're finally ready to travel but have forgotten how to pack? And where the heck is your travel tooth-

brush? Dr. Plotka's Mouth Watchers Travel Toothbrushes are good items to acquire when updating your travel accessories. Invented by a Boston-area dentist, the toothbrushes feature ergonomic comfort grip and foldable design for easy packing. Long lasting dual-layered flossing bristles (10 times thinner than standard brush bristles) are infused with silver to eliminate 99 percent of bacteria growth on the brush within six hours. Available in two colors. \$5.99. 866-941-8478, mouthwatchers.com/products/travel-tooth-brush



VACATION PHOTOS ON BLANKETS

A fun way to memorialize your favorite vacation is with a blanket made by ThatBlanket, a company that prints your own photos on its sherpa or fleece blankets. High-quality materials and unmatched print quality allow your small pictures to come to life on a large scale. Wrap yourself in cozy comfort with an image of your special destination — be it a Cape Cod beach or Mount Everest or the Eiffel Tower. On the easy-to-use website, simply upload your photo, choose desired material and size, and wait for delivery. Blankets can accommodate a single image as well as a collage of images and text. From \$79.99. www.thatblanket.com

NECEE REGIS