

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER | CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Delayed refund for dream 'trip in vain'

Q. I recently booked round-trip airline tickets on British Airways to fly from Albuquerque to Inverness, Scotland. I made the reservation through Expedia, which included one night's lodging at the Culloden House Hotel. I also booked five nights at the Ullinish Country Lodge directly.

My flight from Albuquerque to Dallas was operated by American Airlines. I was scheduled to connect with another American Airlines flight to London, but my overseas flight was delayed because of a mechanical problem. That meant missing the only daily flight to Inverness.

An American Airlines representative made a tentative reservation for me to fly to Inverness on the next available flight. I asked if I could be re-routed through Dublin, but all flights were booked. It became clear to me that once my American Airlines flight arrived at the gate at London, American's responsibility to me would be finished. I would be stuck in London for the next 24 hours with no luggage.

My dream trip for my 67th birthday had come to an end.

An American Airlines representative at Dallas was able to book me on a flight home at 9:30 p.m. I arrived back in Santa Fe at 11 p.m. The representative also agreed to initiate a refund request for the unused portion of my ticket. She told me that I would receive a refund in six to 10 days.

When no refund appeared, I called American Airlines. Another agent made another request for a refund. It's been almost four months, and I'm still waiting. Can you help?

LESLIE HAMMOND,
Santa Fe

A. I'm sorry to hear about your 67th birthday trip. That's what folks in the travel industry call a "trip in vain." You flew to Dallas, only to have to return home right away.

I'm troubled by the perception that American Airlines didn't care about getting you to your final destination. American and British Airways are codeshare partners, which means they are taking responsibility for each other's flights. No one from American should have left you with the impression that the airline was "finished" with you when you arrived in London.

A call to your online travel agency, Expedia, or to British Airways might have yielded a different result. As your travel agent, Expedia should have figured out a way to fix your dream vacation — that's what good travel agents do.

"Trip in vain" policies vary from airline to airline, but generally, they should offer a refund of the unused portion of your ticket. The money would be sent to your travel agent, which then would return it to you.

I list the executive contacts for American Airlines (elliott.org/company-contacts/american), British Airways (elliott.org/company-contacts/british-airways/) and Expedia (elliott.org/company-contacts/expedia/) on my consumer-advocacy site. I think you could have successfully appealed this delayed refund to one of them.

As best I can tell, your refund followed a confusing path. If British Airways ticketed you, then it had your money. American would have had to ask British Airways for the refund, and then it would have been sent to Expedia. That may account for the delay, but it doesn't fully explain it.

At my suggestion, you reached out to one of Expedia's executives. Within a week, you had a full refund for your unused tickets.

Christopher Elliott is the ombudsman for National Geographic Traveler magazine and the author of "How to Be the World's Smartest Traveler." You can read more travel tips on his blog, elliott.org, or email him at chris@elliott.org.



MICHAELSTAVARIDIS

AN INVITATION FOR EVERYONE

Inclusive Fort Lauderdale ad campaign features transgender models

When it comes to vacations, inclusive usually means meals, and sometimes bar tabs, are covered. But the inclusive ideal behind the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau's new global marketing and advertising campaign isn't about appealing to the pocket.

The campaign's ads, which launched in January, include three transgender models, making Greater Fort Lauderdale among the first destinations to use transgender models as part of its mainstream advertising.

Richard Gray, a managing director of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau, said, "I started thinking about the T in LGBTQ. . . . We did a lot of market research into transgender travelers. They want to be welcomed and feel safe. I am convinced this campaign is the right thing for our destination to do right now."

The campaign launched with a high-profile preview in Times Square on New Year's Eve, featuring a billboard video

with Venezuelan model Isabella Santiago. Now, more adds will roll out in print, on the web, on television and radio, and through social media outlets, mainly targeting South Florida, New York, Boston, and Chicago.

An estimated 1.5 million LGBTQ travelers visit Greater Fort Lauderdale annually, spending about \$1.5 billion. "Tourism is our bread and butter. It creates jobs," says Gray. "Our elected officials get the new ads and how important it is economically."

The new advertisements depict adults having fun in the sun — drinks and food, dancing and sailing — and nothing in the ads screams gender identity or sexual orientation.

"We wanted to take transgender marketing to the next level and integrate it into the mainstream campaign," says Gray. "We want to blend everyone together — gay, straight, trans — without highlighting any one person. . . . It's very tasteful, it's very real. It's the right thing to do, to blend everyone all together."

Linda Laban can be reached at soundz@me.com.



HERE

CIRCUS SPECTACULAR IN VERMONT

Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus may be closing after 146 years, but the circus is alive and well at the New England Center for Circus Arts. The nonprofit organization is sponsoring its 7th annual Circus Spectacular, a two-day event at the Latchis stage featuring some of today's most renowned high flying aerialists, acrobats, and jugglers from around the world, including from Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Mechaniques, Celebrity Cruise Lines productions, Circus Bella, and celebri-

ty ringmaster Paul Binder, founder of the Big Apple Circus. The event will support NECCA's Circus in the Neighborhood, diverse programs including after-school instruction for special needs youth, workshops for cancer survivors, and off-site performances in area group homes and rehabilitation centers. Two shows only: March 4, 7:30 p.m., and March 5, 1 p.m. Tickets \$15-\$50. 802-254-9780, www.necenterforcircusarts.org/events/shows/spectacular/

FARM TO FORK FONDA DEBUTS IN BERKSHIRES
It's not too early to plan ahead

and reserve a spot in the Farm to Fork Fonda Ride in the Berkshires (Sept. 23 and 24). Dust off your bicycle and bring your appetite to the first excursion offered in Western Massachusetts by this series of non-competitive cycling events. Designed to support the "relationship between cyclists, farmers, and beautiful landscapes," ride options range from 10 to 100 miles, and include several on-farm rest stops where participants sample chef-prepared treats made from each farm's ingredients. Featured farms on the Berkshire ride include Hilltop Orchards and Bartlett's Orchard in Richmond, Colfax

Farm in West Stockbridge, High Lawn Farm in Lee, and Wolfe Spring Farm in Sheffield. Hancock Shaker Village will serve as the start and finish venue on Sept. 24, and will host a pre-ride Meet-the-Farmers Dinner on Sept. 23. Additional series in the Hudson Valley (June 11); Finger Lakes (June 25); Vermont (July 16); Pennsylvania Dutch (July 29); and Maine (Aug. 27). www.farm-forkfondo.com/berkshires/

THERE

HISTORY MEETS LUXURY AT NEW ST. AUGUSTINE INN

Those who enjoy the personal touches of a B&B combined with the modern amenities and service of an upscale inn will want to check out The Collector Luxury Inn & Gardens, St. Augustine Florida's newest accommodation making its debut March 1. Opening at the site of the former Dow Museum of Historic Houses, the property — dating back to 1790 — encompasses an entire block on the edge of Old Town. Nine repurposed houses contain 30 guest rooms, each with separate living room, balcony or porch, and fireplace. Visitors will find a fusion of modern Spanish and southern coastal styles including exterior coquina walls and museum-quality décor from the Dow collection of antiques. Complimentary amenities include daily European continental breakfast and evening wine and cheese reception. Guest programming includes historic tours led by the inn's resident historian and live

acoustic music at the inn's refurbished amphitheater. Rates from \$199. 904-209-5800, thecollector-inn.com

SPICY MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE

Calling all Christian Grey fans! Here's your chance to take a walk on the wild side with Desire's adults-only, clothing-optional Mediterranean cruise, April 28-May 5. Billed as a "luxurious and sensual adventure," the cruise begins in Barcelona and proceeds to Rome with port-of-call stops in Sete and Marseilles in France, Monaco's Monte Carlo, and Portofino and Florence in Italy. Cruise highlights feature provocative theme nights and daytime events, and couples' workshops. Amenities include clothing-optional areas, private playrooms, adult-oriented entertainment, and fine dining. Rates from \$5,766 per cabin. www.desire-experience.com/cruises/barcelona-rome-cruise-april-2018/

EVERYWHERE

LONELY PLANET'S HONEYMOON PLANNING GUIDE

You've found the perfect dress or tuxedo. You've cut the cake and danced. But will your romantic getaway be as fabulous as your wedding? "The Honeymoon Handbook," Lonely Planet's first guide exclusively for honeymoons, provides everything you need to plan the per-

fect, personalized trip to start your life together in wedded bliss. Featuring more than 25 locations for couples — from Andalusia to Zambia — the book starts with a quiz to determine what kind of trip to take based on what you love to do. Beyond destinations, the book offers ideas for safari, luxury, island-themed and other trips. Planning tips include how to pick hotels, planning a multi-stop trip, planning a realistic budget, and how to factor in seasons and climates. An LGBT-friendly indicator for same-sex couples rates each location from 1 to 5. \$17.99 <http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/world/the-honeymoon-handbook-1/>

LIGHTWEIGHT TRAVEL IRON

Sometimes one needs crisply-ironed clothes while on-the-road. Business and leisure travelers are both applauding the SteamFast SF-717, a compact steam iron that's easy to pack. Perfect for touching up wrinkled apparel when away from home, the portable appliance features a non-stick soleplate, travel bag, and dual voltage for overseas travel. Weighing less than one pound, it's a must-have accessory for the frequent traveler. \$29.99 800-711-6617, www.steamfast.com/fabric-care/SF-717-travel-steam-iron NEECE REGIS

