

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



ADOBE

## I was charged an extra \$250 for a mistaken car rental upgrade

By Christopher Elliott  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**Q.** I recently rented a car from Thrifty in Los Angeles. The car I had reserved was not available when I arrived, which I only learned after waiting over an hour in line! Thankfully, a kind agent found an available car for me, and I was able to get on my way. Unfortunately, it looks like Thrifty also increased the price of my rental by \$250.

Each time I ask about the charge, I get a different response. When I originally signed the rental contract, the agent advised me to contact Thrifty's main office during my rental to correct the overcharge. When I contacted Thrifty during my rental, they told me to wait until after the contract was complete. Now I'm being told that I should have ensured this issue was addressed at the time of signing the contract.

I never asked for an upgrade. The Thrifty agent was just attempting to honor the original reservation. I've written to Thrifty and have asked for a refund, but it refuses. Can you help me?

LEAH PAGE, *Portland, Ore.*

**A.** Thrifty shouldn't have made you wait more than an hour, and it shouldn't have charged you an extra \$250 without your consent. The industry's standard practice when a location runs out of cars is to upgrade a customer to the next available class of car at no additional charge.

The kind agent should have been clearer about the additional expense of an upgrade or urged you to wait until the Thrifty location had a car in your class (which might have been a longer wait).

Unfortunately, I've been seeing a lot of these car rental shenanigans. The location runs out of cars, and then a "helpful" agent slides a contract under your nose that includes a hefty upgrade charge. If an agent ever tells you to call the 800 number to correct the overcharge, walk away from the rental. The moment you accept the keys to the vehicle, you're on the hook for the full amount, no matter what an employee says.

Even if you've already agreed to the rental, you still have a decent case. Make sure that you keep the original reservation; then send a copy of the confirmation, along with the new invoice, to the car rental company and politely ask it to adjust your rate. If that doesn't work, you can appeal to one of the executive contacts for the rental company — Hertz, Thrifty's parent company, in this case. (I list them on my consumer advocacy site, [elliott.org](http://elliott.org).)

You kept a great paper trail of correspondence between yourself and Thrifty. But the responses were predictable, stating that you signed the contract, so you have to pay. There were "sincere" apologies for the way you felt about your rental, but Thrifty would not budge.

That's troubling. You trusted the Thrifty agent to do the right thing, and instead, the company stuck you with a \$250 bill. Maybe you're renting from the wrong company.

You told me that you were so exasperated that you felt like dropping the matter. But I had a better idea — I contacted Thrifty on your behalf. The company refunded your \$250.

*Christopher Elliott is the founder of Elliott Advocacy ([elliottadvocacy.org](http://elliottadvocacy.org)), a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. Email him at [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org) or get help by contacting him at [elliottadvocacy.org/help](http://elliottadvocacy.org/help).*

## THE VIP LOUNGE

# Matisyahu

on his current snack picks, travel agent Darlene, and that terrible motorcycle trip he took

**N**early a month ago, Grammy-nominated reggae, hip-hop, and alt-rock singer-songwriter Matisyahu kicked off his latest tour, "Hold the Fire," named for his five-song EP released Feb. 2. But before that, the "One Day" and "King Without a Crown" singer, whose music digs deep into his Jewish roots and spirituality, was in Israel, where he made a music video at the site of the Supernova Sukkot Gathering — an open-air music festival where, on Oct. 7, members of Hamas attacked concertgoers, killing 364 and taking dozens of hostages. "The song is called 'Ascent' and it's going to come out in early March," said Matisyahu (born Matthew Paul Miller) in a recent phone interview. "It's a song about antisemitism. It's a powerful song and a powerful video." The 44-year-old West Chester, Pa., native, who was raised in White Plains, N.Y., said he is looking forward to performing in Massachusetts in March (at the Blue Ocean Music Hall in Salisbury on March 15 and at the Paradise Rock Club in Boston on March 16). "I love Massachusetts. The first place I ever played was the Paradise Rock Club in Boston, and here we are again," he said. "And Boston was the first place to sell my first album, 'Shake Off the Dust' [2004]. . . . It was at Newbury Comics." The father of six — whose two oldest sons are also musicians, and the second oldest, Shalom "DuvBear" Miller, 17, is performing with him on the current tour — lives in New York's Rockland County with his wife, Talia Miller, with whom he has two children. We caught up with Matisyahu, who has three dogs — Manila, Rosey, and Reba — to talk about all things travel.

**If you could travel anywhere right now, where would you go?**

I'm exactly where I want to be right now. I am traveling. Every single night I'm on a tour bus and I'm moving from place to place. I'm in America and I'm connecting with my fans all over the country — in 34 cities. Tonight I'm [in] Austin, Texas, and tomorrow I will be on my way to New Mexico. But if I was not on tour, and could fly anywhere, I would go to Tel Aviv to be with my people, the Jewish people and the Israelis. I was there before this tour and it was an incredible feeling to be surrounded by such resilient people.

**Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?**

The truth is I have a wonderful travel agent and her name is Darlene. I like booking stuff through her, and I found in particular that when I booked stuff through her, I would get room upgrades and little packages for the rooms. Plus, she has been to a lot of these places herself, so she knows what I'm looking for. I also let her handle my flights because if something happens with one of the flights, she usually is really helpful in helping me handle those situations where I might not know what to do exactly.

**What has been your worst vacation experience?**

I would say as a kid when I was in college [at The New School in New York City] I saved up some money and purchased a small motorcycle, 450cc — not



Matisyahu with his wife, Talia Miller, in Jerusalem in January.

that small, but small enough that it's not really capable of making massive trips on the highway at high speeds for long periods of time. I decided to take a trip to see my friends in Minneapolis. I had finished up school for the semester and had a vacation from work, so I got on my motorcycle and decided to go the long way. I thought it might be nicer to go up through Canada. Basically, it was a total nightmare. At some point, I got a raging sunburn. I tried to camp and got attacked by thousands and thousands of mosquitos. I had to drive in the middle of the night and got hit by rain. My motorcycle was falling apart, and I was trying to drive in the truck's streams in order to get pulled up the hills because my engine didn't have enough power. I almost didn't make it but I did. It was a pretty rough one.

**Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?**

I'd say I vacation to relax. If I go on a vacation, it's usually combined with work. Usually, if I'm going somewhere to do a show or to do something, I'll take extra days. On those extra days, I'm not much of a tourist. I don't really like going to tourist attractions. I like to find good restaurants and bars and eat well and drink well, smoke good weed, and not be bothered by too much stuff.

**What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation?**

To be honest, I don't do much reading on vacations. I would want to bring a book on the paradigm shift. There's a book written by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi called "Paradigm Shift," where he speaks about how after the Holocaust there was a complete shift for the Jewish people and I feel like there's been something like that currently, so I want to refresh some of those ideas and that would be a

good place to start.

**What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip?**

In my old days when I was less healthy, my go-to snacks would have been Cool Ranch Doritos and Sour Patch Kids. In my healthy days, I would have gone with seaweed snacks and trail mix. My current snacks are creamed herring; that's probably my little secret guilty pleasure. I like creamed herring, kimchi, and cheese and crackers.

**What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation?**

I'm not much of a souvenir guy. On this particular trip/tour, fans will give me little gifts. I would say the necklace that I'm wearing was given to me by a survivor of the Nova festival. It's a dog tag and has Hebrew inscriptions on it and the Star of David. It's very meaningful to me. I wouldn't call it a souvenir, but I would say it's the best gift someone has given me while traveling abroad.

**What has travel taught you?**

In general, by traveling you get to meet different people from different parts of the country or world. You get to have an authentic experience with different people from different places and that has probably made me less judgmental of a person in terms of geographic location of where somebody is from.

**What is your best travel tip?**

My tip would be to pack light and be organized with your packing. To be able to know where things are, not get lost in this maze of messy things or having too much stuff. I think it's always better, potentially, to have less and if you need to get some more socks or a jacket at the thrift store, you can. I think that's a good piece of advice when traveling.

JULIET PENNINGTON



## HERE

### RENOWNED CELTIC FIDDLERS IN WORCESTER

Fiddling duo Natalie MacMaster and her husband, Donnell Leahy, perform in Worcester at the Hanover Theatre March 9, with appearances by the couple's fiddle-playing children, too. MacMaster, winner of a Grammy and two Juno awards, has dazzled audiences throughout New England from Worcester to Newport. The accomplished fiddler and step-dancer from Cape Breton will perform Celtic numbers with Leahy, a world-renowned fiddler with Irish and Cape Breton roots, during their fun, high-energy performance presented by Music Worcester. The performance, geared to all ages, begins at 8 p.m. Tickets \$25 for students and youth; \$49-\$65 adults. [musicworcester.org](http://musicworcester.org)

## THERE

### DISCOVER KUALA LUMPUR ON FOOT

Take a free unscripted walking tour of Kuala Lumpur and explore top landmarks and tucked-away spots while learning about the city's heritage

visit, and eating food served on a banana leaf (a local Indian tradition) tastes better. Rai or one of her three licensed guides offers two-hour tip-based walks several days a week or customized tours if arranged in advance. The Chinatown Cultural Walk runs Tuesdays and Saturdays at 10 a.m., while the historical East-West Connection Walk takes place on Thursdays and Sundays at 9:30 a.m.; children welcome. [freewalkkualalumpurunscripted.com](http://freewalkkualalumpurunscripted.com)

### WHERE TO STAY IN KUALA LUMPUR

Stay at the InterContinental Kuala Lumpur hotel in the heart of the city and choose from four different room types and numerous dining options that range from an English pub and an award-winning Chinese restaurant to an international brasserie with Malaysian treats (visit during Ramadan — expected to be March 10-April 9 this year — and enjoy an impressive evening buffet with specialty items found only during this time of year). The spacious lobby has diamond-inspired glass pillars and cozy seating areas overlooking a waterfall and koi pond. The 473-room hotel offers a "classic" room with 452 square feet and king or twin options to the palatial 2,260-square-foot royal suite with its butler service and walk-in wardrobe. Club rooms can access VIP check-in and the Club InterContinental Lounge. As part of its community give-back program, the hotel donates old bed linens to the SURI women's organization so that the recipients — many single and underprivileged women — can upcycle them into handcrafted products such as passport and business card holders, and a local game called Batu Seremban, all sold in the hotel gift shop. Room rates at this IHG hotel start at \$100. <https://kualalumpur.intercontinental.com>

## EVERYWHERE

### TURNING TRASH INTO FUN AND FUNCTIONAL ADVENTURE WEAR

A Pennsylvania-born and -raised woman — now an international schoolteacher in South Korea — took her love of turning trash into eye-catching patterns and created a new line of women's activewear that work for all types of adventures. Tatiana Heckles, owner of Tu Tiki Designs, started making lightweight SPF-rated swimwear and leggings a few years ago, then noticed all the plastic garbage on the beaches near her home on Jeju Island. This month, the one-woman company has released a new line of leggings with fabrics derived from recycled single-use-plastics (SUPcycled materials) — to raise awareness and turn single-use plastics littering ocean shores into wearable items that last for many uses. These leggings — which blend SUPcycled materials, high-tech Korean spandex, and water-based dyes that are vegan and plastisol-free — offer a compression-like fit without any pinch points (meaning no overly gappy waistbands) so you can climb, bike, hike, swim, and adventure in comfort. The fun and colorful designs depict the materials from which they originated: You'll see artful geometric prints showing plastic water jugs, straws, bottle caps, or take-out containers. A new line of SUPcycled swim tops and bottoms will launch this summer and Tu Tiki's original leggings and swimwear will soon transition to the same summer-weight recycled fabric used in Lululemon's Fast and Free leggings. All products available worldwide and include flat-rate shipping costs of \$3.99 for the United States and \$4.99 for the rest of the world. \$72-\$98 leggings; \$54-\$68 swimwear. [www.tu-tiki.com](http://www.tu-tiki.com)

KARI BODNARCHUK