

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



Dude ranches, the lack of sporting events, and memories of Sicily

Tony Massarotti with his wife, Natalie, and sons Alex and Xavier on the “path of totality” during the 2017 total solar eclipse.

THE VIP LOUNGE | TONY MASSAROTTI

Tony Massarotti, better known as “Mazz” from the “Felger & Mazz” show on 98.5 The Sports Hub, admits that the cancellation of sporting events because of the coronavirus pandemic has created some “challenges” when it comes to fodder for sports talk radio.

“I believe we’ve been very fortunate though in that we had the [Tom] Brady story,” he said. “There was a huge buildup to his decision, then there was the obvious fallout from his decision, and then — independent of the emotional response — it folded into another question for us, which was who is going to be the quarterback for the Patriots?” said Massarotti, who, in addition to cohosting the popular daytime sports talk-radio show, has written (and co-written) several sports books. The 52-year-old added that he believes that Boston has the best sports market in the country. “There is a bonding element to sports in this city and I think people really miss it right now,” the former sports reporter and columnist said. “Obviously we miss being around people, period, but [sports] is a way that many of us relate to one another and to not have it right now is hard.” A native of Watertown (until he was 13) and then Waltham, Massarotti lives in Sudbury with his wife, Natalie, a lawyer, their sons, Alex, 15, and Xavier, 13, and the family’s Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Jupiter, who is almost 7. We caught up with Massarotti to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? As a family, I’d probably have to say a dude ranch. My wife’s family is from the Seattle area and we had family get-togethers at two different ranches in 2015 and 2017 — the first in Montana and the second in Wyoming. I’m hardly a horse person, but my kids

really enjoyed it and there was plenty to do — and no electronics! On the second occasion, we were on the “path of totality” during the eclipse. A memorable experience for certain.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? Hmm. Tough one because I like everything — Asian, shellfish, Mediterranean. Ultimately, I’d probably say I remember the food most from our honeymoon in Sicily — the produce, in particular, was fresher and more flavorful than anything else I can ever remember eating. I’m also a huge fan of prosciutto. As for drinks, I’m not a wine person. I usually try to sample the beer from wherever we are, though I’m always willing to have a vodka soda — fewer calories!

Where would you like to travel to but haven’t? Like everyone, I’m sure, I have a bunch. I’ve always wanted to go on an Alaskan cruise and we were booked [to take one] before the pandemic hit. I’ve heard great things about Scandinavia. As a kid, I was fascinated by ancient history, so I’ve always wanted to see the pyramids. No real reason I haven’t done them other than life getting in the way. Oh, one more — and totally self-indulgent: golf at St. Andrews [in Scotland]. Or Augusta [the home of the Masters, in Georgia] if I could ever find someone to get me on the course.

One item you can’t leave home without when traveling? Well, aside from the obvious phone addiction, I’d say a book of crossword puzzles. I have a bunch that my wife has bought for me as stocking stuffers over the years. They give me something to do on the plane or before bed, etc. I’ll take a good book, too, though I can lose interest quickly if it doesn’t engage me. But I have to have one or the other.

Aisle or window? Honestly, it depends on the time and length of the flight. We obviously travel with our kids a lot — we have two boys — so we usually sit in pairs and the kids like the window seats, so my wife and I often get stuck in the middle. But if I had my choice, I’d take the aisle most of the time because I like the space, maneuverability, and freedom. If the flight is early morning or at night, I’ll take a window so I can put my head against the side and nap.

Favorite childhood travel memory? We didn’t do a ton of traveling, but we did take a major trip to Melbourne, Australia, when I was 7 and visited with family. I went back there when I was in my 30s and also made sure I went to Sydney. I also have distinct memories of my first trip to New York City when I was probably 11 or 12, when a member of our extended family gave me a tour. I loved it. And still do.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? Definitely the dining experiences, though I suspect that’s true for many people. If we’re coastal, I almost always have to have fish — especially lobster, oysters, clams, etc. Oddly, I hated all that stuff as a kid. And if I’m in need of a pick-me-up, I’ll grab an iced coffee most anywhere I can, though I’ll go out of my way if there’s a Dunkin’ anywhere nearby.

Best travel tip? I traveled quite a bit when I covered Major League Baseball, so my first rule is this: Leave at least one open day before your departure and after your return. It helps minimize the stress and the transitions. Also, while on your trip, don’t try to jam in too much. It can make the trip less enjoyable. Pick a few things you really want to do, move at a reasonable pace, and enjoy them. If you’re inspired enough, you can always go back.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Help! Airbnb isn’t following its own COVID cancellation rules

Q. Airbnb does not appear to be following its own extenuating circumstances policy for coronavirus refunds. The company denied my refund request for upcoming stays in Madrid and Paris. Both currently fall under the Airbnb policy for cancellation and refunds.

Airbnb sent me an e-mail that said after reviewing my booking details, “We confirm that this booking is not within the scope of our special situation policy for the new coronary pneumonia epidemic.”

Airbnb also included a link to the policy, which confirmed that reservations for stays made on or before March 14, with a check-in date between March 14 and May 31, may be canceled before check-in. Airbnb offered an option of a travel credit or a full cash refund.

I would like a full cash refund. Can you help me?

KIMBERLY CHONG,
Mill Creek, Wash.

A. Here we go again. Last week I helped Elena Lopez, who had a similar problem. You’d think that Airbnb would get its act together. But no, it hasn’t.

Airbnb’s “extenuating circumstances” policy is simple and unambiguous. If you made your reservation before March 14 for a stay that begins anytime on or before May 31, you can cancel the reservation and get a full refund or a travel credit if you’re affected by COVID-19 and can’t travel.

You can review the entire policy on the Airbnb site.

As I mentioned last week, Airbnb has been asking for copies of government warnings relevant to your cancellation. So, to request a refund, you would need to fill out the form with a link to the appropriate government warning, such as the US State Department’s recent “Level 4” advisory to stay home.

I’m starting to believe Airbnb’s refund form has been designed to generate the maximum number of rejections. Just like our reader last week, you didn’t include the correct documentation (a link to that “Level 4” advisory).

Had this dragged on, you could have contacted one of the executive contacts at Airbnb, which I list on my consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I recommended you resubmit your claim with the correct link. You did. A few days later, Airbnb refunded your money.

If you need help with a coronavirus-related refund, please contact me. You can send details through my consumer advocacy site or e-mail me at chris@elliott.org.

HERE

TAKE VIRTUAL TOURS AROUND CONNECTICUT

Check out the Connecticut Office of Tourism’s website for dozens of ideas on virtual tours, classes, and talks across the state. Take a virtual tour of Mark Twain’s 25-room Victorian mansion in Hartford or Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine in East Granby, site of North America’s first chartered copper mine. Discover an app that provides information on and a virtual tour of New Haven’s Yale Center for British Art. And discover the many places you can observe and learn about animals, including Norwalk’s Maritime Aquarium, which offers a live Q&A session on its Facebook page during daily animal feedings at 3 p.m.; Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo, which has a “zoo cam” of its red pandas and spider monkeys, and live programs on its Facebook page every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 2 p.m.; and Mystic Aquarium’s Facebook series Aquarium Rehab, which takes viewers behind the scenes with animal care professionals. www.ctvisit.com/articles/virtual-activities-for-at-home-experiences.

PEDAL A NEW BIKEWAY IN MAINE

Start planning your future bike-touring adventures. The new 211-mile Bold Coast Scenic Bikeway meanders from West Gouldsboro (on the tip of the Schoodic Peninsula) to Calais, Maine (on the border of New Bruns-



wick, Canada). Along the way, it loops through Acadia National Park, follows sleepy roads past historical and cultural points of interest, and winds through small bike-friendly towns where you can grab a bite or stay overnight. Pedal across the 45th Parallel, by a tavern marking the site of the American Revolution’s first naval battle, and to a museum that showcases the history and culture of Maine’s Passamaquoddy people (check out the Waponahki Museum in Pleasant Point). The Discover Bold Coast website has downloadable and printable maps. The interactive digital map lists everything from farmers’ markets and brew pubs to lodging and recreational options, and even handy resources along the way (think: libraries, visitor centers, and bike shops). 888-665-3278, www.discoverboldcoast.com/biking/bold-coast-scenic-bikeway.

THERE

NEW TOURS FOR 2021

Follow the classic “silk route” through Central Asia,

zon’s lush jungles during new trips offered by Seattle-based Zegrahm Expeditions. These tours take a maximum of 10 to 14 travelers, include experts on everything from ornithology to marine biology, and provide itineraries with built-in flexibility to let adventures unfold. New trips include a 17-day expedition to New Guinea led by a social anthropologist (July 28-Aug. 13, from \$12,990 per person); an 11-day adventure to Brazil’s Pantanal region — one of the world’s largest wetland areas (home to macaws, ibis, and spoonbills) — and the Amazon (Sept. 26-Oct. 6, from \$14,990); and a 14-day



trip to India during the Kumbh Mela Festival, the world’s largest religious gathering, with visits to the Taj Mahal, Varanasi, and other UNESCO World Heritage Sites (March 14-28, from \$13,990). 866-327-9140, www.zegrahm.com.

VISIT SOUTH AFRICA FROM HOME

Prefer to head off on a virtual adventure now? Go on a live three-hour safari drive in South Africa’s Kruger National Park with an expert game ranger through Wild Earth (thanks for the tip from Globe reader Elaine Broderick, who has watched these drives for nearly 10 years and, as a result, visited South Africa twice). Ride along in a jeep and stop to see wild animals, reptiles, and birds along the way during these narrated, unscripted, and subtitled programs. You may spot lions, elephants, leopards, hyenas, rams, hippos, and many more, and learn about their habits and lifestyles from experts. Wild Earth’s Safari LIVE broadcasts appear on its website from 9 a.m. to noon and midnight to 3 a.m. daily (equivalent to sunset and sunrise in South Africa). Catch the taped programs on its YouTube channel. wildearth.tv/safarilive.

EVERYWHERE

A FEATHERWEIGHT REUSABLE WATER BOTTLE

Take one of HydraPak’s new Flux water bottles on your next outing, whether you’re going for a walk around your neighborhood or hitting the hiking trails. The Flux is shaped like a regular hard bottle, but it’s made of a durable and highly flexible plastic material (a BPA- and PVC-free thermoplastic polyurethane, to be exact) so it weighs 60 percent less than a standard bottle and it collapses for easy packing — just compress the empty bottle and slip the grab handle around it to keep it in place. Its spill-proof drink nozzle has a self-sealing valve, so water won’t accidentally leak out. Remove the nozzle and you can attach any 42mm threaded water filter, letting you refill with potable water in the wilderness. The Flux comes in two sizes: 1 liter, which weighs 2.7 ounces, and 1.5 liter, which weighs 3.4 ounces. \$20-\$25. hydrapak.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK