



TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER
CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Alitalia mixed up passengers — and their bags

Q. I have been attempting to get reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses from Alitalia, and I'm hoping you can help.

The problem started when Alitalia checked me in as the wrong passenger on a flight from Miami to Rome to Tel Aviv. There was another E. Weiner on the flight. The problem was discovered by me while waiting to board the flight in Miami. My ticket was supposed to be from Miami to Tel Aviv via Rome. My boarding pass was only to Rome.

While the staff scrambled to correct the problem ticket and boarding pass, they said they would board the plane and find my bags. They gave me new boarding passes with my new baggage-claim tickets attached.

Unfortunately, when I got to Tel Aviv, only one of my two checked bags arrived. I was told that the other one would be delivered to me in Israel. The bag arrived while I was out touring, but my friends sent me a picture of the suitcase. I thought they were playing around with me, because the bag was not mine.

During this time period, the mother of the teenage girl whose bag it was had contacted my friends and requested that we not release the bag back to the airlines. One of my friends was not traveling with any luggage and offered to bring the bag back with him on his flight home to the Miami International Airport and return it to the girl's parents. Her daughter had received my bag but refused it.

My missing bag contained most of the possessions that I had brought for my trip. I had only the shoes I was wearing on the flight and a few outfits — certainly not enough for 10 days in Israel.

Seven weeks after my return to South Florida, the girl's mother called to tell me that the airline had contacted her to return my suitcase. She provided my contact information to the delivery person, and I arranged to have the bag delivered to me. I am requesting that Alitalia reimburse me for all the items I needed to purchase while in Israel without my bag.

ELLEN WEINER, Coconut Creek, Fla.

A. This is an exceptionally frustrating case. Alitalia shouldn't have confused you with another passenger; it should have ticketed you correctly, should have delivered your luggage to the right place, should have quickly reunited you with your lost belongings and — deep breath! — should have compensated you for your loss.

But seven weeks changes your perspective, wears you down. By the time you contacted us, you just wanted a sincere apology and a check for anything. You asked for \$799, the approximate value of the clothing and toiletries you had to buy, but under international law, you were entitled to up to \$1,400.

Alitalia shouldn't have taken this long to resolve your issue. Yes, it found your luggage, but way too late. The trick is to ask for compensation as soon as possible. When your luggage goes missing, talk to an airline representative and ask for an allowance to buy clothes and other necessities. Normally, airlines can authorize a few hundred dollars for clothes — I've even seen them pay passengers at the ticket counter in cash.

After you returned home, a series of polite but firm e-mails to one of Alitalia's customer-service executives might have done the trick.

This is one of the strangest cases I've seen in years. Alitalia should have systems in place to prevent one passenger from being confused with another.

Alitalia apologized to you for the loss and agreed to refund \$600 for your clothes and \$100 in baggage fees.

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 e-mail him at chris@elliott.org.

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THE VIP LOUNGE | TANIYA NAYAK

DESIGNING THE PERFECT TRIP

It includes a window seat, a knit wrap — and chocolate

When she's not pitching Ellen Degeneres's ED line (for which she is the brand ambassador) on the QVC network, Taniya Nayak can be found on decorating programs on HGTV and Food Network, where she is currently the featured designer on "Restaurant Impossible." A designer to the stars (she is currently working with Boston Bruins center Patrice Bergeron on his home being built in the Greater Boston area), Nayak, 43, was born in Nagpur, India, raised in South Weymouth, and currently resides in Milton with her husband, restaurateur Brian O'Donnell, and their 2-month-old English Bulldog, Flynn. We caught up with the in-demand designer, who will emcee this year's culinary fund-raiser Taste of

the Nation for No Kid Hungry (June 7 at Cruiseport Boston), to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation spot? So many, hard to pick one. I'll go with Croatia for the win. Great food, great tourist sites, great beaches, great people. . . . [And] Antiqua (below) — supreme tranquility. I shut off from the world and enjoyed the turquoise waters, clean food, and quiet time with my hub.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? Mexican and margaritas.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? Dying to go to Vietnam, Thailand, and Africa. I love to explore and see different places and experience different cultures. Plus, I'm a foodie and love cuisine from these countries. I want the "real deal" culinary experience.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? I have a navy jersey knit wrap that is my go-to. It's

lightweight but keeps me warm on a chilly flight and looks good enough to wear out to dinner.

Aisle or window? Window, so I can catch some much needed zzz's.

Favorite childhood travel memory? My mom would always pack Indian food — like chutney and cheese sandwiches or aloo paratha — for long road trips. My Indian peeps know what I'm talking about! It's pretty universal with us all (laughs).

Guilty pleasure when traveling? Some good chocolate in my bag. Makes handling delays and layovers a lot easier. Even some not-so-good chocolate helps.

Best travel tip? Always keep your chargers, a toothbrush/paste, undies, and a small make-up kit in your carry-on just in case — total life savers when you get stuck overnight from cancellations and delays.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

ARE YOU READY FOR THE SUMMER?

Tap your inner child and head to camp this summer to try kayaking, kite-making, glass-blowing, backcountry hiking, and tubing down the Battenkill River, among other adventures. The Kimpton Taconic hotel in Manchester, Vt., launches its new adults-only summer camp, complete with trumpet bugle wake-up calls, lights-out warnings, and campfire sing-alongs. Camp Taconic runs June 23-26 and Aug. 25-28, and includes camp T-shirts and smores (with scotch now that you're old enough). Escape to secret swimming holes, go on a photo expedition with a local photographer, and take alfresco barbecue lessons with chef Adam Raftery, a Vermont native. Cost: \$1,400 per person, or \$2,100 per couple, including three night's accommodations, and all meals and activities for eight to 16 participants each session. 800-546-7866, www.taconichotel.com.

FILM FEST HIGHLIGHTS CYCLING ADVENTURES

Gain inspiration about two-wheeled adventures at this year's Ciclismo Classico Bike Travel Film Festival, being held at three independent theaters in New England. See cyclists who quit their corporate jobs to ride across the United States; get an inside view of cycling culture in Havana, Cuba; and follow bikers as they journey from Kazbegi National Park in Georgia's Caucasus Mountains to a quiet campsite just a commuter train ride from Berlin. Catch the film fest at the Regent Theatre in Arlington June 1, the Firehouse Center for the Arts in Newburyport June 2, and Danbury Palace in Danbury, Conn., on June 17. The Arlington event also features live music from Slow Boat Home and a visit by Jim Sayer, executive director of the Adventure Cycling Association which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. 617-599-8509, www.ciclismoclassico.com/filmfest.

THERE

EXPLORE THE WORLD ON TWO WHEELS

Ready to take off on your own two-wheeled adventure? Seattle-based Bicycle Adventures has added 12 new tours this year, including a trip through Chile's Lake District, and new US rails-to-trails tours along car-free bike paths. The 10-day tour of Chile's southern Lake District takes riders by lush farmland, clear lakes, and snowcapped volcanoes (rates start at \$4,946), while the new 7-day tour on Missouri's Katy Trail covers 240 miles on the longest rails-to-trails system in the United States (\$3,124 and up). Or venture to the Pacific Northwest for the 5-day Mountains to Sound Bike Tour, which takes you from Seattle's waterfront to local vineyards and within eyeshot of the area's volcanoes (\$2,760 and up). Tours include guides, four- and five-star lodging, and meals, bikes, and full van support. 800-443-6060, www.bicycleadventures.com.

HISTORIC HOTEL REOPENS IN NEW ORLEANS

The iconic Pontchartrain Hotel, built in New Orleans in the 1920s, has undergone a revitalization project by AJ Capital Partners that will bring a fresh look and new dining options while maintaining the property's historic design features and charm. The luxury hotel, located in the Garden District, reopens in June. Visit the Caribbean Room, an renowned restaurant where tropical motifs and rattan furniture blend with the old-time murals, the Bayou Bar with its tavern-like feel, and the Silver Whistle Cafe. The new rooftop bar looks like a 1940s artist's loft — appropriate since Tennessee Williams penned "A Streetcar Named Desire" while living here — and will reward visitors with 270-degree views of the Mississippi River and downtown New Orleans. Room rates start at \$179. 800-708-6652, www.thepontchartrainhotel.com.

EVERYWHERE

BRING A BIKE ON YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

Taking your bike on a trip can be nerve-racking, but Thule's RoundTrip Pro protects your precious cargo and offers handy features to boot. The collapsible and easy-to-store bike bag has rigid, foldable panels that open up and slip into sleeves on each side of the bag, helping to protect your bike in transit. Attach your front fork to the integrated stand (it comes with adaptors for 15mm and 20mm through-axes) and strap the bike frame into place around the bottom bracket area. That travel base quickly turns into a bike stand, making it much easier for you to reassemble and then disassemble your bike at your destination. The poles for the stand store on the inner sides of the case. The 19-pound carrier holds road, mountain, or cyclocross bikes with a wheelbase up to 46 inches, and can swallow a lot of extra gear and gadgets. \$599.95. 800-238-2388, www.thule.com.

A REVOLUTIONARY ONE-HANDED CHARGING CABLE

With ASAP Connect, you can connect and disconnect your micro USB and Apple Lightning devices with one hand in an instant without damaging your device or cord — perfect for when you're traveling. This clever USB charging cable has a two-part connector: One piece inserts into the charging port of your Apple or Android device and stays there, while a companion piece on the end of the charging cable attaches to this via magnets. Thanks to this magnetic technology, you can grab your device and go without damaging the cable or port when you yank. Reversible charging tips let you connect on the first try (the USB end is also reversible), and a light on the cable end helps you connect in the dark. The nylon braided charging cable measures 4 feet long. \$21. Available in July. www.chargeasap.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK