

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER | CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

American was too slow in refunding fare

Q I reserved airfare last week from Tel Aviv to Las Vegas via American Airlines' website, and within 24 hours I called to cancel. An agent told me that since it was within 24 hours, I could cancel the ticket and I would "very likely" receive a refund. Based on this advice, I canceled the ticket and booked a ticket with slightly different dates. My mother is just recovering from cancer, and I was forced to cancel the second ticket again within 24 hours. I did so based on the reservations agent's advice that since I had done so within 24 hours, I would likely be OK in receiving a refund. I have not received a refund for either of the tickets yet, and I'm starting to get worried. Can you help?

SIMCHA EDWARD MARGOLIS, Indianapolis

American should have refunded both tickets promptly. Not "very likely." Definitely. Why? The Department of Transportation requires airlines to either offer full refunds on tickets canceled within 24 hours or the ability to "hold" a reservation for 24 hours. Until April 1, American offered the "hold" option, but it wasn't well disclosed, and it was the only major airline to have a "hold" instead of a 24-hour refund. So a lot of passengers booked a ticket through American, believing they could cancel within 24 hours, but then discovered they couldn't. (Some frequent fliers liked the "hold" option, but they were in the minority.) The agent you spoke with should have told you that the reservations were cancelable, as long as you did it within 24 hours. You can do that as often as you like, by the way. Book, cancel, repeat. The refund should be fast and painless.

So what went wrong here? It's hard to say. You made your reservations after April 1, so the refund should have been automatic. Maybe the agent was confused and failed to cancel your tickets as requested. But this merits repeating: If you cancel within 24 hours, you get a refund. Full stop. How long should a refund take? The government regulates that, too, at least when it comes to airlines. When a refund is due, the airline must forward a credit to your card company within seven business days after receiving a complete refund application, according to the government. So American was overdue on both refunds. I love the resolution on your case. You grabbed the customer-service contacts for American from my consumer-advocacy site (elliott.org/company-contacts/american) and e-mailed one of the managers. Just to be safe, you also disputed the charges on your credit card. Both charges were promptly refunded.

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 VIP LOUNGE | JOHN DAVIDSON

HE'S TAKING HIS VACATION TO THE STREET

If you don't recognize John Davidson, then perhaps you recall those trademark dimples. The 74-year-old entertainer has an extensive resume that includes work on the Broadway stage and in television shows such as "That's Incredible!" and "The John Davidson Show." He hosted "The \$100,000 Pyramid" and "The New Hollywood Squares," and was a regular guest host on "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson." Most recently, Davidson, who was raised in West Bridgewater and lives in Lenox with his wife, Rhonda, played the role of the Wizard in the North American tour of the Broadway smash musical "Wicked." We caught up with the father of three and grandfather of six, who will be performing at Club Passim in Cambridge on July 16, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation spot? Paris. I have been there about seven times for multi-week stays [and I] just can't get enough. I have taken my children there several times and even tried to get them to go for a year in high school, but it didn't

work. Even with the terrorism scare, it still has the class, the food, the wines, the great people with their French egos. . . . I love their sense of themselves. It is only surpassed by the American ego. I hate meeting Americans while I am there; American tourists are too often loud and obnoxious.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? French food, Italian food, and sushi. French wines . . . any wine. Actually, the drink I forget to drink enough of when I travel is water. Being a tourist is sometimes hard work. When you get dehydrated, it is even harder.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? An African safari, and more of India, more of southern Mexico, and more of Germany. I have had trouble getting over WWII and Germany. I wish I didn't feel this way. Hollywood images of Germans have not helped. I have only been to southern Germany — Baden-Baden and the Black Forest — and I had a wonderful time. I

bought a huge cuckoo clock. But my daughter has spent time in Munich and Berlin and raved about her time there. I am ashamed that I have not gone again. After all, every country makes mistakes. Look at all the stupid things the US has done. Germany has also given so much to the world and its people seem so nice, and usually clever and smart.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? My guitar. I like to busk — you know, sing on street corners. It is respected more outside the US. I have only done it a couple of times, but I plan to do it a lot more. It is a scary, embarrassing, exciting, and adventurous feeling — and it gives you a different sense of the people. Do something that embarrasses you every day.

Aisle or window? Window. In coach, my shoulders are too big and I get hit by people walking up the aisle. Also, the window seems more private.

Favorite childhood travel memory? We lived in Massachusetts and had to go by train to Pittsburgh to see my grandma. This was in the '50s. It was a Pullman and we traveled overnight. They made up the berths, upper and lower. The porters had such pride in their work. It was so neat sleeping on the train. Quite an adventure.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? A guilty pleasure when I travel is buying art. It's always fun to buy art in foreign countries that I would never buy at home. Now I'm not talking about expensive art, but I mean things for \$300 to \$500. It just feels like if I buy it in a foreign country, it's more worth it. Isn't that crazy?

Best travel tip? Carry small toys for crying babies on airplanes. I can't stand crying babies. When we traveled with our own children, we always took "airplane surprises" — sometimes as many as four per flight. They were cheap little things: games, books, construction projects. . . . Why do adults expect children to pass the time as adults do?

JULIET PENNINGTON

HERE

WINE AND DINE AT VERMONT FESTIVAL

Join top wine makers from New England and beyond at the Burlington Wine and Food Festival, June 12-18, when world-class wines will be paired with mouthwatering cuisine by some of Vermont's best chefs and artisanal food producers. Matt Cline, owner of Three Wine Company and creator of historical California varietals, will host a dinner series with Eric Warnstedt, an award-winning chef from Burlington-based Hen of the Wood. Don't miss the Grand Tasting, June 18, when you can try wines from Italy to Oregon while sampling Vermont cheeses and dishes prepared by 10 local restaurants, listening to live jazz, and enjoying killer views of the Adirondacks. Tickets for Grand Tasting: \$60 in advance, \$70 at the gate, includes unlimited wine and food tasting, seminars, and a souvenir glass. Must be 21 to attend. Free bike parking. www.burlingtonwineandfoodfestival.com.

WHISK DAD AWAY ON AN ADVENTURE

Take dad for an affordable adventure on the Cape Cod Cen-

tral Railroad next weekend for Father's Day. Dads ride for free June 18 (10 a.m.-3 p.m.) on the Cape Cod Central Railroad, Mount Hood Railroad (Oregon), and Texas State Railroad, and June 19 (4 p.m.) on the Saratoga and North Creek Railway (New York) and Rio Grande Scenic Railroad (Colorado). The caveat: You or another adult must go with dad and pay for a full-price ticket in the same class of service and on the same day (on all railroads except the Rio Grande). The trip includes an interpretive talk about Premier Rail Collection's trains and their history, kids' face painting and games, food samples from local vendors, and live entertainment. 877-726-7245, www.premier-rails.com or www.cape-train.com.



THERE

RAGNAR RACE MAKES IT TO HAWAII ISLAND

Hawaii's first-ever Ragnar running race launches this fall, October 14-15, taking teams of runners through a rainforest, alongside lava fields, and by pristine beaches on Hawaii Island. The route crosses seven climate zones and offers more elevation change than any of the 16 other Ragnar relay races nationwide. The roughly 200-mile race starts in Hilo and leads runners through Puna with its turquoise waves and black-sand beaches, through the lush area around Waimea, by the lava fields on the island's west side, and to the sandy finish at Hapuna Beach. The relay exchange points along the route will have Samoan fire

knife and hula dancers, shave ice, island music, and many supportive volunteers. Registration: \$1,860 (\$155/person) for a 12-person team, or \$1,240 (\$206/person) for a six-person team. Only 300 available spots. 801-499-5024, www.runragnar.com/home.

AMSTERDAM OPENS A HIP NEW HOSTEL

Step into Amsterdam's newest hostel in a trendy neighborhood on the city's east side, and you'll find a hip social space where guests gather for coffee, a bite to eat, beer tastings, and movie night. Generator Amsterdam, adjacent to the newly renovated Oosterpark, has a cafe that serves three meals and a range of healthy, artisanal and locally sourced dishes; The Auditorium, a lounge with everything from The Coffee Lab to lockable liquor cabinets where you can stash your own bottles; and The Library, where you can play ping pong or chill out with a book. The property offers bike rentals, meeting and work spaces, coffee master classes, and other programs. Consider the luxury Sky Suite Apartment, which has two bedrooms, a private kitchen, a living room, and views of Oosterpark. The Night Bar, an

underground speakeasy-like bar, will open later this year. Nightly rates: \$16.80 shared room; \$73 private room; \$112 suite. www.generatorhostels.com/en/destinations/amsterdam.

EVERYWHERE

STAY CONNECTED ON THE GO

The new Karma Go, a mini WiFi hotspot modem, lets you get online in the most unlikely places at top speeds. The sleek little device offers nationwide 4G LTE service using Sprint's network, and lets you turn your phone, tablet, and laptop into a fast personal Wi-Fi network, connecting up to eight devices at once. Karma Go is a bit larger than its predecessor — it measures 2.9" by 2.9" by .47" — but it's still slim enough to slip into a pocket. Pay-as-you-go data rates range from \$14 for 1GB (that's about 15,000 text e-mails to your best buddies) to \$99 for 10GB (equivalent to about 280 minutes of high-definition video), and your minutes won't expire. Also gain 100MB more data each time someone securely logs on using your Karma device. Or try the new contract-free Pulse



SAFEGUARD

YOUR CELLPHONE

Ready to take off on your summer adventures? Protect your phone's contents and avoid potential identity theft with a sophisticated yet easy-to-use app. The Aplock Face/Voice Recognition app uses advanced face and voice recognition to add an extra layer of security to your cellphone and keep thieves from hacking into the personal apps on your Android device, such as your banking, photo, e-mail, and social media apps. Download the app, choose your "unlock phrase," such as Verify Me, Unlock My App, or Open AppLock, or establish your own phrase. The app records your voice and image, and then you choose which apps you want to lock and the level of security. Download the app from Play Store.

KARI BODNARCHUK