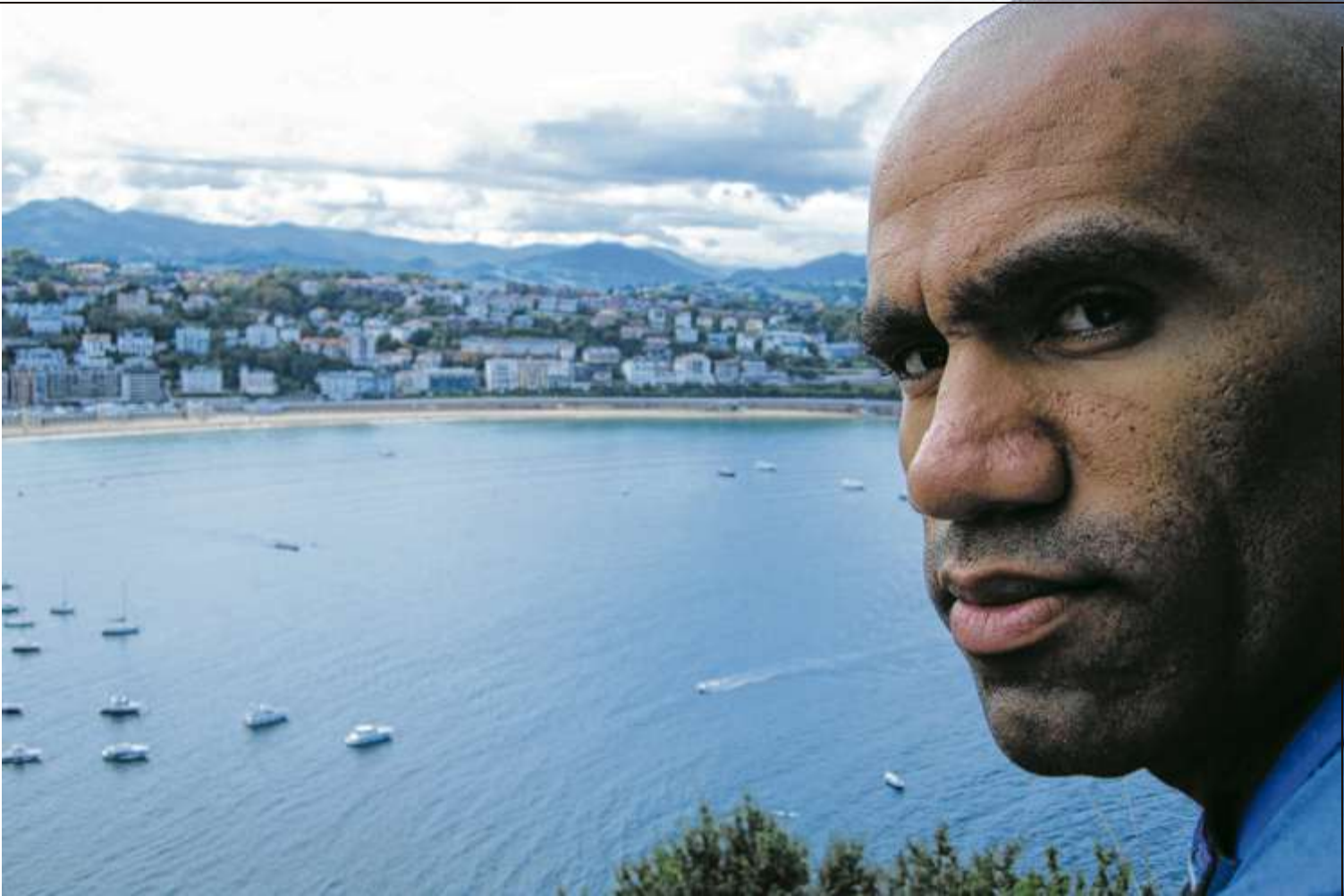


The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



THE VIP LOUNGE | DOUGLASS WILLIAMS

Douglass Williams on the Basque region, slushy drinks, and that trip he took with his mom when he was 12

Acclaimed chef Douglass Williams has practiced his craft around the world. And while his culinary skills have been sharpened during his travels, Williams, 35, said learning about different places and cultures has been “inspiring.” In Thailand, for example, he said it was “eye-opening” to see “the ease and simplicity with which the people live. Their culture is so rich and it’s not about money; it’s about people.” Williams, head chef and owner of MIDA in the South End, has been working with Off Their Plate, a nonprofit that provides meals to health care workers, during the pandemic, and said he was excited to begin offering outdoor dining at his Italian eatery. Williams competed on the Food Network’s “Iron Chef” in 2018 and was recently named as one of Food & Wine’s top 10 chefs for 2020. “I still can’t believe it,” he said. “It’s a dream come true.” Born in Atlantic City, N.J., Williams lives in Jamaica Plain with his wife, Debra, a marketing executive at Citizens Bank, and their 2-year-old twin sons, Raffa and Lev. We caught up with the award-winning chef to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?
The small towns on both sides [Spain

and France] of the Basque region. I was there on my honeymoon, so lots of great memories. But what I was most drawn to is the lifestyle built around the beaches in those small towns. It surprised me, and I was taken aback by the warm and relaxed culture. It reminded me of growing up in the beach towns of Southern Jersey — sun bleached hair, suntans, surfboards, great food, and happy, friendly people.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?
On vacation and pretty much all the time, I like to drink anything slushy — and of course with rum when on vacation.

Where would you like to travel to but haven’t?
Japan has been on my list for a long time. I was planning to do it years ago to train, but didn’t realize how expensive it was to get there and live there as a young cook, so I decided on Thailand at the time instead. Africa is also on my list. It’s the mother of all continents and is somewhere I’d love to travel to with my family when my twin boys are a bit older. I think it would be an amazing experience for all of us.

One item you can’t leave home without

when traveling?
I always take way more shoes than I need, but I never leave home for a trip without a great book and several hats.

Aisle or window?
Window as a child, because I loved looking out at the clouds and daydreaming. Aisle as an adult, because my legs are long now and I like to stretch and get up whenever I like.

Favorite childhood travel memory?
Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. I went there when I was 12 with my mom. It was enlightening. I was obsessed with Colonial times when I was young; the human condition as it relates to slavery, Ben Franklin, and everything surrounding that period. To this day, I still talk with my wife about that trip.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?
For some reason, when I’m on vacation, I like to eat copious amounts of ice cream.

Best travel tip?
One word: Nexus [a program that allows pre-screened travelers expedited processing when arriving at airports in the US and in Canada].
JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

I want a refund from United Airlines, but it sent me a voucher

Q. My husband and I were supposed to fly from San Francisco to Indianapolis last month. United Airlines notified us that the flight had been canceled and rebooked us on another flight that left the same day. The new flight made a stop in Chicago, and we were scheduled to arrive in Indianapolis just before midnight the same day. We asked for a full refund. But United offered us a voucher. We do not want a voucher. The flight got us into In-

grandmother used to say. So why didn’t it? United, like other airlines, is in a tailspin after the COVID-19 outbreak. It’s hemorrhaging money. It’s doing everything it can to keep the cash it has, even if that means not following all of the rules. The agent who promised you a refund had it right, but it looks like the refunds department overruled her. I can’t say I’m surprised. The airline industry is in absolute chaos at the moment. At a time like this, you have to get everything in writing — and even then, you can’t be sure the airline will do what it promises. There’s some confusion about schedule changes and refunds, and it’s somewhat related to your question. An airline can change your scheduled flight by a few hours (United recently revised its policy to two hours) and keep your money. But this wasn’t a schedule change; it was a cancellation and a rebooking. It looks like United was trying to circumvent not only the federal rules but also its own rebooking policy. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the United Airlines executives on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org. You could have reached out to them. Or you could have contacted the US Department of Transportation, which is in charge of enforcing these airline refund rules. I suggested that you file a complaint with the DOT. You did, and a short while later, you received a full refund of \$1,081.

It looks like United was trying to circumvent federal rules and its own rebooking policy.

dianapolis too late in the evening. I read one of your recent columns where someone had this happen to them on Delta. According to your article, the Department of Transportation mandates that the airline give you a full refund. I called United and the agent agreed to the refund after telling her about your advocacy group. She said I’d get the money back within 28 days. Instead, I received notice that my request for a refund was declined. Again, United offered a voucher. Can you help me?
SANDY BAKER, Saratoga, Calif.

A. United canceled your flight, which means that it owed you a full refund. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it, as my

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

HERE

BOSTON’S PUBLIC MARKETS RETURN
Get your fresh cod fish, cantaloupe, asparagus, and more at the Boston Public Market’s seasonal outdoor farmers’ markets, which reopened this month. The Dewey Square market on The Greenway runs Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., while the Boston Seaport market operates Saturdays from noon to 6 p.m. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, new safety measures are in place, with market tables spaced apart, additional handwashing stations, and queuing markers. Shoppers must wear face coverings and are encouraged to use contactless payment methods whenever possible. Pick up farm-fresh produce, seafood, bread and other baked goods, and a variety of New England specialty foods. Check the website for vendor updates and changes.
www.bostonpublicmarket.org.

GET MARRIED IN BOSTON
Tie the knot this year with a few of your favorite people at Boston’s Fairmont Copley Plaza. The hotel’s new We Still Do wedding package launches mid-August and runs through Dec. 30 (Saturdays and Sundays only) and accommodates small ceremonies with up to 10 people. The wedding couple can choose from the hotel’s elegant ballrooms, which offer plenty of room for social distancing. The package includes a sparkling toast, a wedding cake, and exclusive access throughout the historic hotel for photos — in the Presidential Suite, on the outdoor roof deck, and in ballrooms (when not in use). Optional additions include lives-



streaming the wedding to friends and family who aren’t onsite. Package rates start at \$1,000 per ceremony. 617-867-8562, www.fairmontcopleyplazaweddings.com.

THERE

APP PROVIDES COVID-19 SAFETY RATINGS
The TripIt app, which helps travelers keep their itineraries, bookings, and travel-related documents organized in one spot, has incorporated new information under its Neighborhood Safety Scores section. The Health and Medical category now includes COVID-19 data as provided by GeoSure, an organization that uses risk modeling to determine travel safety conditions. That way, as you travel to neighborhoods, you can get up-to-date information on the health safety environment in those areas. The Neighborhood Safety Scores feature also provides ratings in other categories, including theft, women’s safety, political freedoms, LGBTQ safety, and physical harm.
www.tripit.com.

MEDICAL CARE FOR HOTEL TRAVELERS
Stay at these US-based hotels and resorts and receive virtual care services

addressing any health concerns — including those related to COVID-19 — during your stay and upon returning home. Montage International has partnered with One Medical, a national digital health and primary care organization, to offer health services at several of its Montage and Pendry hotels and resorts, including Montage Palmetto Bluff in South Carolina. The care includes 24/7 virtual services and a 30-day membership to One Medical’s health services, meaning guests can connect with a One Medical provider through on-demand video chat or secure messaging during their hotel stay and once home. An app lets travelers work with medical staff remotely to di-



agnose symptoms and get a recommended care plan for their condition. The app also handles everything from prescription renewals to remote assessment of a skin rash, for instance. In areas where One Medical has offices, such as Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., guests can make appointments for primary care needs and even COVID-19 testing. 800-700-9977, www.montagehotels.com

EVERYWHERE

BIKE HELMET HELPS CONNECT PEOPLE
Get out for a bike ride with a friend and chat safely without having to ride side-by-side, shout at each other, or break any social-distancing recommendations. Sena’s new R1 EVO Smart Cycling Helmet comes with a microphone and built-in speakers that operate hands-free. Download the Sena app onto your smartphone, pair your helmet with the phone using Bluetooth, sync two helmets together — yes, you and your friend both need one — and then you can chat away in normal voices while up to half a mile away from each other. The company’s Mesh Intercom technology enables an unlimited number of helmets to work together, with only one helmet paired to a phone. The helmet has advantages when riding alone, too: Connect the R1 EVO to your smartphone and listen to your favorite music, make phone calls hands-free, and hear GPS directions. Don’t worry, you can still hear traffic and surrounding sounds. Other cool safety features: The helmet has built-in flashing-red taillights and can be operated using voice com-

mands (or push buttons). \$159.
www.sena.com.

REPURPOSE THOSE OLD T-SHIRTS
Time to take all those shirts you’ve collected from around the world — from tours, adventures, and races — and turn them into a cool memento that you can enjoy for years to come. Project Repat — whose founders, Nathan Rothstein and Ross Lohr, grew up in Massachusetts — take your T-shirts and turn them into cozy patchwork blankets. They call them “quilts,” but these high-quality blankets have soft fleece backs (you choose the color) and 12- or 14-inch panels of your favorite shirts beautifully stitched together on the front. It’s a simple process: Cut your shirts in half (the company offers clear instructions on how to do this), box them up, and mail; Project Repat even provides a printable shipping label so you can send the shirts without leaving home. Your shirts go to factories in Texas or North Carolina where it takes workers about four to six weeks (depending on demand) to produce and ship back your memory quilt. Quilts, which can be made with cotton and tech fabrics, are machine washable and come in lap to queen size. Prices start at \$75.
www.projectrepat.com.
KARI BODNARCHUK

