

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

Event designer Ieasha James on Jamaica, California summers, and dreams of South Africa

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, event designer Ieasha James saw her business slow down, since most weddings and other spring and summer gatherings were canceled. But the turn of events didn't slow down James one bit. Rather, the Dorchester resident saw an opportunity to step up her philanthropic endeavors, helping those in need with everything from delivering groceries and care packages to providing Easter baskets for one family's nine children. "I honestly believe that's what I'm here for, to help others," said James, 39, who lives with her 4-year-old son, Christian. "I'm blessed to be a blessing to others." James, owner of Endless Flair Events, is also building her company's in-home dining segment, which she said is seeing rapid growth. "It's similar to what we do for big events, just for smaller groups in your home," she said. When James is not helping others or working to grow her business, she said she loves to relax and unwind in Jamaica. We caught up with the Cambridge native to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?
Jamaica. I love the culture, food, hospitality, and sea green water.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?
In Jamaica, it's the authentic jerk chicken, rice, and peas and [other] vegetables.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?
I would like to travel to South Africa. I haven't as of yet due to time, but it is on my list for 2022.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling?
I cannot leave home without lip gloss. I use a particular brand that isn't sold everywhere, so I would be miserable if my lips dried out.

Aisle or window?
Window most definitely. I love heights, so having the pleasure to look out the window during departure and arrival is so exhilarating to me.

Favorite childhood travel memory?
It would have to be the summers I spent in La Habra, Calif., with my family. I loved that I was able to experience Knott's Berry Farm, Universal Studios, and Disneyland every year.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?
I would have to say it's leaving the resort to venture into



the community to understand and feel the culture and meet the people.

Best travel tip?
Make sure you bring cash in addition to your credit cards, pack extra underclothes — because you never know what will happen — and don't forget your lip gloss!

JULIET PENNINGTON

TROUBLESHOOTER

If the owner canceled my VRBO rental, can I get a refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I saw your recent article about getting your money back after a VRBO owner canceled a vacation stay during the pandemic. I'm facing the same situation. We were supposed to stay in London in April, but the owners of our rental canceled our reservation. They are refusing to refund our money.

VRBO has been giving us the runaround for months. I would appreciate your assistance in helping us get our refund.

CHRISTINE YOUNG,
Mississauga, Canada

A. I agree, you deserve a full refund. After all, you didn't cancel your stay — the owner did. But VRBO's pandemic cancellation rules allow an owner to cancel your stay and keep your money. True, its refund policy "asks"

owners to offer credits for canceled stays and "strongly" encourages them to offer "at least a partial refund" if you won't accept a credit. But VRBO doesn't require its owners to give guests like you refunds.

It looks as if your owner offered you a full credit, which you didn't want. And that's understandable. As I write this, there's a 14-day quarantine for the UK. It's unlikely you'll be able to use that credit any time soon.

Your case is a little more complicated. I checked with VRBO, and its records indicate that you contacted the apartment owner on March 20, but then submitted a retraction of your initial request to cancel.

"We were not made aware of the retraction at the time of, and there was no indication of it through our messaging," a VRBO representative said.

That would explain why VRBO was giving you the "runaround." Its records suggest that everything was fine. The company assumed you had contacted the owner and negotiated a stay at a future date.

Still, something seems wrong about your case. It looks as if the apartment owner wasn't following the published refund policy on his site. And the messages from VRBO's internal systems that you shared with me showed the owner was indifferent to your problem. I don't think it's right for the owner to keep your money, regardless of VRBO's policy. If the owner canceled, then you deserve all of your money back.

You could have reached out to an executive at VRBO. I list the names, numbers, and e-mails of VRBO's managers on my nonprofit consumer advocacy site, Elliott.org.

After I contacted VRBO, it agreed to refund its fees but left the remaining refund to the homeowner. I think your next step is to dispute this charge on your credit card. You paid for something that VRBO couldn't deliver, and you deserve a full refund.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

HERE

HOP ABOARD A MAINE SCHOONER

Two boats in the Maine Windjammer Association fleet will take guests on overnight trips this summer beginning this month. The Stephen Taber and Ladona schooners have met all Coast Guard licensing requirements and state COVID-19 guidelines for lodging, restaurants, and windjammers to help ensure passengers will be safe. Owners of both schooners have incorporated rigid safety and cleaning protocols, and require guests to verify a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of sailing. What hasn't changed for guests: the stunning views of the Maine coast, the freedom of exploring the ocean by wind power, and the delight of eating fresh lobster prepared on a remote beach. The itineraries now include visits to uninhabited islands to help ensure social distancing. The 3- to 7-night trips start at \$698 per person. 800-807-9463, sailmainecoast.com

THERE

CONSIDER THIS WINTER DEAL

You're probably thinking "beach time" rather than "slope side," but now is the perfect time to snag a deal on a ski pass — with nothing at stake. Ikon Pass has created Adventure Assurance, a free program that protects passholders this coming season. Purchase an Ikon Pass now and you can defer the purchase price of your 2020-21 pass to the 2021-22 season any time before you use it — through April 11, 2021. Or, if you start using your pass and any Ikon Pass resort closes mid-season for eligible COVID-19 rea-



sons, you will get a partial credit toward the following season's pass; the credit will be based on the percentage of days the destinations are closed. Valid passes include the 2020-21 Ikon Pass, Ikon Base Pass, Ikon Base Plus Pass, and Ikon Session Pass 4-Day. Ikon Pass resorts in New England include Stratton, Sugarbush, Killington, Sunday River, Sugarloaf, and Loon Mountain. \$749 (Ikon Base Pass) to \$1,049 (Ikon Pass). www.ikonpass.com

ADDING PEACE OF MIND FOR FLYING

If the idea of flying makes you uneasy these days, check out Pilot's new FlySafe technology. This free browser extension shows travelers which safety precautions are being taken on all US flights and on inter-

national flights originating in the United States to help keep you safe from COVID-19. It works on many of the online booking sites you use to make your travel arrangements, such as Expedia and Google Flights, adding information to help you make informed choices. For instance, find out

which airlines require masks for all crew and passengers, block middle seats or limit seating capacity to distance passengers, have incorporated surgical-grade HEPA filters to help ensure healthy air inflight, and provide masks, hand sanitizer, and other safety items (not all airlines follow the same protocols). It also indicates which airlines have implemented social distancing measures during check-in and boarding, boosted sanitization measures for high-touch areas and for food and beverage service when available, and waived change or cancellation fees. The service lets you compare flights not only based on the airlines, but also on the aircraft, flight times, airports, disruption risk, and more. www.flypilota.com

EVERYWHERE

SAFE WATER ON YOUR WILDEST ADVENTURES

Power this year's off-the-beaten path adventures with safe and tasty water



produced in seconds by Grayl's Geopress Purifier. This simple-to-use purifier instantly removes bacteria, protozoa, and even water-borne viruses missed by many filters so there's no waiting for your pure and potable water. It also filters out microplastics, silt, chemicals such as chlorine, and heavy metals including lead. Fill the Grayl BPA-free plastic container with 24 ounces of water from a stream, campground spigot, bathroom sink, or questionable water source worldwide. Then place the Inner Press with the attached purifier filter into the container and press down firmly with the SimpleVent lid attached (partially open the twist cap to vent air during purification). Within about eight seconds, the dirty water passes through the filter and enters the clean Inner Press — ready for drinking. Best of all: No funky taste. The purifier cartridge lasts for about 350 uses before needing to be replaced. \$89.95. grayl.com
KARI BODNARCHUK



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