

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



GARY JOHNSON/ISTOCK

I closed my bank account. Now Airbnb won't send me my refund.

By Christopher Elliott
COLUMN EDITOR

Q I made a reservation on Airbnb last year for a three-month trip to France this winter. My host canceled at the last minute, and Airbnb agreed to refund me \$728.

I have not received the money yet. The reason I closed the bank account to which my Airbnb account was attached, Airbnb won't send the money to my new account.

I forwarded a letter from Chase Bank, showing that the old account had been closed months ago and, therefore, could not have a payment processed to it. I have called and emailed them several times, and I've even contacted the Better Business Bureau, to no avail.

Airbnb is sitting on my money and claiming that it is the responsibility of me or Chase to put it in right, even though Chase cannot reconcile an account that has been closed for so many months. I want Airbnb to pay me the money however they can, either by check or by direct payment to my bank account. Can you help me get my \$728 back?

GARY JOHNSON, Piquette Grove, Ill.

A Airbnb should have refunded you a long time ago. Why didn't it?

Airbnb's policy is to refund your money to your original payment method. So, if you used a credit card, it would go back to that card. And the reason for this is simple: It's safer and easier than trying to chase down a new payment method or writing a check.

But Airbnb claims it will accommodate you if you switch accounts. If your original payment method's account was closed, the refund sent by Airbnb won't process," it says on its site. "If this happens, you can contact Airbnb to stop it and help." It looks like Airbnb didn't stop it to help.

This is common. From what I can tell, refunds will automatically go back to the original form of payment. Often, even employees have a hard time reversing the transaction. And who knows where your money went? Your bank may have it somewhere, or Airbnb still might have it. It's a real mystery.

As a side note, I've always wanted to do an investigative story that traces a refund like yours. Is there some kind of slash fund the company has where all the missing refund money goes? Now this would be a story!

The best way to avoid this? Don't close your account until you've accounted for every refund. There's no good way of preventing the confusion that results from a refund being sent to a closed account. I'm sure Airbnb means well by its promise to "step in and help," but my experience tells me that even companies with sophisticated payment systems have difficulty with this. And once they have track of the money, you're absolutely right that it becomes your problem, which is profoundly unfair.

The fix: You can escalate this to a problem to a manager at Airbnb. List the names, numbers, and email addresses of the Airbnb execs on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org.

I contacted Airbnb on my behalf. A few weeks later, you can have had good news. "At long last, I got my refund from Airbnb," you said. Airbnb never told me what happened to your money or where it went, but at least it found its way back to you.

Christopher Elliott is the founder of elliottadvocacy.com, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers solve their problems. Email him at christie@elliott.org or get help by contacting him at elliottadvocacy.org/help.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Mentalist Winny DePonto

on a good journal, early morning flights, and the Notes app

Mentalist Winny DePonto combines theater, immersive storytelling, visual art, and, yes, psychological tricks in his show "Mindplay," coming to the Huntington Clubwood Pavilion Nov. 13-Dec. 1. These shows are on the heels of two sold-out and extended runs at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles and Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. It will head to an off-Broadway run in New York City after Boston. "This is an interactive experience," DePonto, 36, said in a recent phone call. "What I tell the audience at the beginning is that thoughts play a major role in the show. A mind reader needs minds to read," DePonto, who is from Brevard, N.C., said his interest in magic was ignited as a young teenager when he discovered — and then worked at — a magic shop in Hastings-on-Hudson, a neighboring town. "There are a series of tricks I've honed over the years to be able to extract thoughts from people," he said. "And while the idea of mind reading can be scary for audience members, they don't have to be afraid, since [the experience] exists in the realm of theater, which is safe space." DePonto added that while there is a "structure" to the show, each one is a "unique" experience. "Audiences will see some of the same things, but because mind-reading, the shows often take different directions," he said. "It is an overall experience. It is here and it is gone. That is the beauty of theater." We caught up with DePonto, who lives in LaGrangeville in New York's Hudson Valley with his wife, Elizabeth, an occupational therapist, about all things theater.

If you had travel anywhere right now, where would you go?
"My most recent would always be Greece or Italy. I'm of Italian descent and I absolutely love being immersed in Italian culture. My wife is Greek and we try to visit every year. I have a little island near Sicily that is from near Kos, one of Greece's Dodecanese islands. But if we're talking a place I've never been, I would go to Japan. As a theater artist, the precision and elegance of traditional Japanese theater, like Noh and Kabuki, fascinate me. It would be exciting to see their performances and rituals firsthand."

Do you prefer booking trips through a travel agent or on your own?
"On my own. The process of researching flights, hidden spots, and local performances feels like crafting a story. It's all part of the journey, right?"

Thoughts on the "vacation realtor" craze?
"Yes, immersion is essential in art and life. We often go on trips in the digital world that we forget how to engage in the physical world. An unplug vacation is a chance to uncover new worlds, to allow new connections to be made in the brain, [and] to not be distracted by the glowing rectangle we stare at day in and day out."

What has been your worst vacation experience?
"Getting lost in a vacation alone past a damper on things. I once had a stomach virus in Switzerland that didn't kick in until after we took a gorgeous elevator



Winny DePonto in Grindelwald, a village in Switzerland's Bernese Alps.

ride to the top of a beautiful waterfall. The rumbling of the water paralled the sudden rumbling in my stomach. The elevator was closed to go back down and he's just said I really ran past a lot of people... a long way down. I saw many really beautiful bathrooms in Switzerland."

Do you vacation to relax, to learn, or for the adventure of it all?
"When traveling, there are times you have to get up at 4 a.m. to make it to the airport for an early flight. I've been on a trip, a hidden play unfolding in the streets. It was to discover new characters and narratives. New ways to live."

What book do you plan on bringing with you to read on your next vacation?
"Invisible Cities" by Italo Calvino. Each time I read it, it feels like stepping into a new world — a perfect companion for wandering unknown places."

If you could travel with one famous person or celebrity, who would it be?
"Piercello Pitti. Imagine traveling with that mind. Every town would become a surreal dream; every encounter, a scene from a movie."

What is the best gift to give a traveler?

A beautiful journal. Of course. Every trip deserves to be remembered with sketches, articles, and reflection.

What is your go-to snack for a flight or a road trip?

I love it simple. Some fruit like an apple, or banana with some peanut butter.

What is the coolest souvenir you've picked up on a vacation?

My wife and I wandered Florence for a few days and came across this mask shop. I bought a Commedia mask (obviously, of course) and a beautiful Piccinocchio mask handmade by this old Italian man. Both masks hang on our wall and bring us great joy.

What is your favorite app/website for travel?

I'm a heavy Notes app user. I often ask friends for recommendations before I travel and then compile an itinerary in Apple Notes and add important links, images, etc.

What has travel taught you?

That no matter where you go, humans share the same longing to be heard, seen, and loved. Theater can be found everywhere — on trains, in markets, in conversations with strangers.

Always learn a few phrases in the local language. It's the opening a small door into people's hearts. It's also helpful to learn "Where is the nearest bathroom?"

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

MOLLY TRADITION EMERGES COMMUNITY VOICES
Gearing up for its 171st consecutive year, the Handel and Haydn Society (H-H) will once again be presenting "Messiah," a beloved Boston holiday tradition taking place at Symphony Hall. Dedicated to following historically informed traditions of Baroque and classical music, Artistic Director Jonathan Cohen is adding something new this year, introducing CitySings to share the vitality of performing the much-loved music for the holidays. Conceived by Cohen to celebrate and celebrate the vitality of the community, the inaugural CitySings features 30 members of choral ensembles from around Boston, including the stage with 25 high school-age singers from the H-H Youth Chorus. "Chick-finder" is a 10-piece band, and the professional H-H Orchestra and Chorus. Fun facts: In 1900, the first concert featured the performance of "Messiah" in America with a chorus of around 200 singers; in 1901, the first concert featured a 10-piece band. H-H's 450th performance of the com-

plete work. Shows will likely sell out, so snag your season sooner rather than later. Dates: Nov. 29 and 30. Dec. 1. Tickets: regular from \$55; student and senior \$40. handelandsayn.org

THERE

CLOUD FOREST ECO-RENOVATIONS
Those looking for a relaxing and eco-conscious getaway this winter want to check out the carbon-neutral Hotel Belmar, a family-owned luxury lodge in Costa Rica's Monteverde cloud forest highlands. Recent renovations and enhancements to most of the property's 28 rooms aim to balance contemporary design — with clean lines and a palette of subdued tones — with the hotel's forest surroundings, inviting visitors to bask in natural light and enjoy the sounds of the forest. Materials chosen were selected for their low environmental impact, including sustainable wood, low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints, and organic velvet and natural fabrics that contribute to a healthier environment. Championing eco-friendly practices in sustainability, the hotel

offers connections to nature and holistic wellness with enriching experiences such as therapeutic forest immersions, garden-situated yoga, and cultural programs.

Hungry? Restaurant Colago offers farm-to-table gastronomy for breakfast, lunch, and dinner with locally sourced ingredients as well as freshly picked fruits and vegetables from its carbon-neutral farm. Vegan and gluten-friendly options are available, too. Cerveceria Belmar, a beer garden and tap room, serves cocktails, wine, and craft beers made on-site with cloud forest spring water. A juice bar and tea room round out the healthy offerings. Rates in peak season from \$211/night; low season from \$261. Phone via WhatsApp: +506-6953-0094, www.hotelbelmar.com

EVERYWHERE

FACTIAL MASK REVENUTES TRAVELER'S SKIN
After long flights exposed to filtered airplane air, cold days on the ski slopes, sunny hot beach afternoons, and other travel adventures (and sun adventures), you may experience dry, cracked, and red facial skin. The new Growth Factor Post-Treatment Mask by FACTORFFY makes it easy to soothe and replenish skin without needing to pack all your bottled-to-go and cooling botanicals, such as aloe vera. The TSA-friendly product can even tank in your carry-on. What makes this product different than other masks is the active ingredient, adult stem cells (ASCs), developed by the company's team of scientists specifically to nourish and rejuvenate tired skin. The human stem cells are mixed with moisturizing and cooling botanicals, such as peppermint oil, hemp seed oil, and green tea extract that are also designed to help reduce skin inflammation. Formulated without parabens, mineral oil, sulfate detergents, parabens, urea, DEA, TEA, and not tested on animals. The 10-minute treatment will revitalize your weary skin and save you money by eliminating a trip to the spa. \$22. factorff.com/collections/whp/products/post-treatment-mask

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