

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THE VIP LOUNGE

Lisa Yancey on how travel breaks down 'ideas of otherness' and expands our humanity

For Lisa Yancey, founder and president of Yancey Consulting, traveling is about more than relaxing in a faraway locale. The entrepreneurial strategist, who advises businesses and organizations on dismantling inequities, enriching marginalized communities, building leadership, and amplifying diverse perspectives, believes that travel provides opportunities for growth. "To really travel, it's about exposure to different and to break down ideas of otherness to building our understanding and empathy of something that may be different," said the 47-year-old Atlanta native, who lives in Mount Vernon, N.Y. "To expand our humanity, to expand our empathy muscles . . . that's what travel does for me." Yancey, a Boston College Law School graduate, was a recent speaker at "The Lunch Room," the American Repertory Theater's virtual talk show that features artists, activists, and civic leaders for curated conversations and interactive Q&As (available for viewing on ART's website). We caught up with her to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Any beautiful place that I've never experienced before that I get to experience for the first time. I usually have filters for vacations: I need to be able to engage authentically with locals; I like places that are



pedestrian; I love markets with a bounty of produce for cooking; and there must be wine options. I also must be able to engage with nature — either with the sea or mountains. Nature is critical. Last, but certainly not least, I need reliable Wi-Fi.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Food? Tuna tartar/sushi. Drink? Wine.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?

Well, the next place I'm traveling this year answers this question. Mauritius [an island off the coast of southeastern Africa]. I haven't been there yet — but will, come June 2021.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling?

Sneakers.

Aisle or window?

Aisle on short flights — three hours or less

— and window on longer flights. I like the aisle 'cause I hate to have to ask for passage to the bathroom. On longer flights, I like the window because I get to control the light.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

Traveling to the Tennessee mountains. My mom planned a trip where the entire family — seven of us — hiked up McCloud Mountain. I have no idea how she did that with kids, but moms are super heroines. And, I remember becoming fully covered by the clouds and then having the opportunity to ride the trolley down the mountain. It was fascinating!

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Baths.

Best travel tip?

Do it often and splurge on at least one thing that gives you joy.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

How to unlock an Airbnb account restricted because of COVID-19

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I had a reservation through Airbnb for a three-day stay at a property in Washington, D.C., this past June. Before the stay, I contracted the COVID-19 virus and was unable to travel. In addition, two of my travel companions were in their early 80s and also unable to travel because they were in a high-risk group.

I contacted Airbnb and explained the circumstances. Fortunately, this fell under their extenuating circumstances policy. Airbnb allowed me to cancel the reservation and issued a \$1,687 credit to be used during a future stay. It also told me that they would be temporarily locking my account reservation ability due to my positive COVID test.

In early August, I decided I wanted to go visit my sons in Arizona and tried to book a stay using my travel credit. I discovered my account was still locked, and I'm unable to make any reservations.

I tried calling Airbnb, but you can't get through unless you have a current reservation. The automated system directs you to its online chat customer service agents for assistance.

It's been three weeks since I contacted Airbnb. I have six open case requests with the online customer service department and one open case with their Twitter help support. All of the customer service reps tell me the same thing: "Please be patient, your call has been escalated for special handling." My case has apparently been escalated to the "Trust and Safety" department.

The issue, however, is no one ever gets back to me. I've made zero progress. I just want Airbnb to open my account up so I can use my credit. The company is effectively holding my money

hostage. Please help if you can.

PAUL DREWS,
Stillwater, Minn.

A. It's understandable that Airbnb would lock your account after you told it you had COVID-19. But the company should have helped you unlock your account instead of making you open seven new customer support cases. Airbnb says it will "restrict" your account if you have COVID-19 "to help reduce the spread of infection." Again, that makes sense. What makes less sense is how you get off the blacklist. Your Airbnb account stays restricted until Airbnb receives "valid confirmation that you're able to travel again" — in other words, a clean bill of health.

That doesn't make sense. Most people recover from COVID-19 in two weeks or less, so locking — I mean, restricting — your account for no more than 14 days seems reasonable. If someone like you calls months after cancellation and tries to book a rental, common sense should prevail. Unfortunately, it did not in your case.

Writing to Airbnb was a good idea. Writing to it repeatedly, maybe not. I'd recommend forwarding your correspondence to an executive at Airbnb. I publish the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of key Airbnb managers on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/airbnb-customer-service-contacts/.

I contacted Airbnb on your behalf. It unlocked your account.

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

CELEBRATE KLEZMER AND ALL THINGS YIDDISH

You don't have to travel to Amherst to celebrate the 40th anniversaries of the Yiddish Book Center and the Klezmer Conservatory Band. Thanks to the magic of the Internet, both institutions have joined to present "40 Years in Yiddishland: The Yiddish Book Center celebrates the Klezmer Conservatory Band," a 90-minute video broadcast that will include a historical overview of the band's history, along with rollicking-good concert footage from over the years. Video excerpts will include acclaimed productions such as "A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden" (1986); "The Fool and the Flying Ship" with Robin Williams (1991); two PBS Great Performances specials; tribute greetings from well-known KCB collaborators, including Itzhak Perlman and Joel Grey; and more. Sign in Jan. 24 at 2 p.m. via Zoom, or live stream on the Yiddish Book Center's Facebook page. www.facebook.com/YiddishBookCenter. To reserve a virtual seat in the Zoom audience, which allows you to submit questions, registration is required. 413-256-4900, www.yiddish-bookcenter.org.

THERE

BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS, BEST NEWS

The Frick Collection in New York City is undergoing extensive renovations, meaning you won't be able to tour the magnificent art in its Gilded Age mansion any time soon. (Bad.) However, you'll soon be able to visit Frick Madison, the institution's temporary home



in the Marcel Breuer-designed building on Madison Avenue, formerly home to the Whitney Museum of American Art and most recently The Met Breuer. (Good.) Until that opens, and the pan-



dem subsidies, you can view the Frick's celebrated works online with its popular YouTube series, Cocktails with a Curator. (Best!) Offered every Friday night at 5 p.m., enjoy happy hour with a curator who remotely offers insights on one historic artwork. Suggested cocktail and mocktail recipes are selected to complement the work being discussed. Scheduled on Jan. 29: cocktails with El Greco's Vincenzo Anastagi. Additional video series are linked on the museum's website, including Travels with a Curator, What's Her Story? and Frick Five. Free. www.frick.org.

ALL-INCLUSIVE WILDERNESS RANCH DEBUTS

In a time when "socially distant" and "wilderness experiences" have become travel buzzwords, the Canyon Madness Ranch aims to catapult to the top of the buzziest destination lists. Debuting in April, and located on 14,000 remote acres in Northeastern New Mexico — a two-hour drive from Santa Fe, and a five-hour drive from Denver — the ranch provides equestrian pursuits, firearm-related sports, and a wide range of wilderness activities including archery, hiking, bouldering, river kayaking, canoeing, ATV/UTV rides and

more with certified or professionally trained guides and instructors. The 18,000-square-foot Teepee Lodge offers luxury accommodations for up to 16 guests in eight suites with balconies cantilevered over the edge of the river 800 feet below. Culinary offerings feature organic farm-to-table bounty, and exotic meats including buffalo and ostrich. Opening rates: \$3,500 per person per week (7 nights/6 full days), includes lodging, activities/excursions, food, and beverage (wine, beer & sake); Three to five nights: \$700 per night. canyonmadnessranch.com.

KING CAKES FROM NOLA FOR AT-HOME MARDI GRAS

Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans won't be the same this year (no parades or large gatherings allowed) but you can still let the good times roll with a traditional King cake delivered to your door for Feb. 16 at-home celebrations. A cross between a coffee cake and a French pastry, the King cake is an oval-shaped cinnamon roll with colorful, sugary icing. Thought to have been brought to New Orleans from France in 1870, the traditional colors of purple, green, and gold resemble a jeweled crown honoring the wise men who visited the Christ Child on the Epiphany. Lucky for us New Englanders, several bakeries in Louisiana will ship their cakes, made from fiercely-guarded family recipes, to the chilly north, including Randazzo's Camellia City Bakery (www.kingcakes.com); Cannata's (cannataskingcakes.com); and the Cajun Pecan House (cajunpecanhouse.com). Perhaps order one from each? And then visit your favorite bakery in person in 2022.

EVERYWHERE

TRAVEL PASS OFFERS FUTURE SAVINGS

We may not be traveling for quite a while but that doesn't mean you can't start dreaming and planning now. With future journeys in mind, global tour aggregator TravelStride has launched FlexiPass, a three-tiered voucher program valid toward the purchase of packages from a curated roster of 23 trusted global and local tour operators, providing options to visit hundreds of destinations across every continent through 2023. Once purchased, travelers can choose a journey to match their travel style from the broad selection of about 2,000 packages, or create a custom itinerary. For the best savings, purchase FlexiPass before Jan. 31 for the 2021-2022 season. Travelers can redeem their pass for a specific trip with one of the partner tour operators by Jan. 1, 2023, and must travel by Dec. 31, 2023. Tiers/savings: \$750 pass priced at \$625; \$1,500 pass priced at \$1,200; \$2,500 pass priced at \$1,900. flexipass.travelstride.com.

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