

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER | CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Fired up over smoking charge

Q I need help fighting a case with Residence Inn by Marriott Phoenix, where I recently stayed. When I checked out, I saw a \$250 charge on my credit card in addition to the \$89 for the room.

No one ever said anything about the charge. I called the front desk and was told it was a “smoking charge.” But I don’t smoke.

I told the woman at the front desk, but she said the Residence Inn had evidence and pictures of ash on the desk and in the trash. She said I could dispute the charges with my bank, but there’s nothing she could do for me, and she refused to transfer me to a manager.

I left a message for the manager, but never received a call back. I feel like Residence Inn is trying to make some extra money from me. Can you help?

SAMANTHA ARMSTRONG, Glendale, Ariz.

A If you don’t smoke, you shouldn’t have to pay a cleaning fee. But hotels don’t necessarily see it that way. As far as they’re concerned, if anyone lit up in the room, and they see evidence of it, then the person who is responsible for the bill should pay the \$250 fee. And that would have been you.

Is that fair? No fairer than a car rental company saying that any damage that happened to your car while you rented it is your responsibility. But it’s not a perfect comparison. After all, a hotel is a more controlled environment. If you were the sole guest in the room for one night, and you don’t smoke, then maybe someone else smoked in your room.

Don’t laugh. I remember bumping into a housekeeper at a hotel as I checked out. She was puffing away on a cigarette. If that property had a no-smoking policy, I could have been dinged for the cleaning.

I reviewed the corre-

spondence between you and the hotel. In an e-mail sent to you, the general manager correctly notes that it has a “strict” non-smoking policy. “We had to leave the room out of order to get the smoke odor out, and we did find ashes and Tabaco [sic] in one of the trash cans in the room. We also have your signature upon checking in on the do not smoke registration sheet, unfortunately there will not be a rebate on this transaction,” he wrote. But I didn’t see any photos of the alleged evidence.

I happen to agree with Marriott’s non-smoking policy. Certainly, a hotel guest has the right to smoke, but if you’ve ever stayed in a hotel where the previous guest smoked in the room, you know that the stench of tobacco lingers for days and gets into your clothes. I would pay extra to breathe clean air, a fact Marriott probably knows.

I also agree that the \$250 is fair. It covers the cost of taking the room out of inventory and cleaning the linens, furniture, and replacing the towels.

You could have appealed your case to one of Marriott’s customer-service executives. I list their names, numbers, and e-mail addresses on my website: <http://elliott.org/company-contacts/marriott/>.

It’s true that Marriott gets more than its fair share of cleaning-fee complaints, but not enough for me to think it is using these fees to generate revenue in any systematic way. It’s simply too risky. Still, I thought Marriott might want to review your case one more time.

I contacted the company, and it refunded the \$250 cleaning fee.

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.



JANET MENDELSON

I WAS JUST THERE

III

ad I known what was to follow, I might not have left the inflatable boat to approach Lamplugh Glacier in Alaska’s Glacier Bay National Park. Except for the glacier, the surrounding landscape was endless shades of grays and whites. Low clouds, water, and land. Only our jackets and orange life vests broke the scheme. Only our voices broke the silence. Maybe this is what it’s like on the moon, I thought. A National Park Ranger, Dan Zobrist, led our small group across the hard, charcoal gray, rock-strewn shore to a safe zone on the far end of Lamplugh’s face. The towering rough wall of ice with fearsome crevices is three-quarters of a mile wide, some 160-feet high. The ice begs to be photographed. It is bright with every conceivable tint of aquamarine blue and white marbled with grays, some browns. The frozen tidal river is slowly flowing to the ocean, rubbing against mountains, picking up silt. That’s Dan in the foreground, near icebergs the size of SUVs. He urged us to touch the ice. My bare fingers pushed through an inch of silt sludge to feel the cold, literally coming in contact with the last ice age. Suddenly my husband’s boot caught in a pool of silt quicksand and was fast disappearing. Dan pulled him out. But that was not what gave us pause. Two weeks later, on June 28, 2016, a massive rock avalanche from a mountain peak spread debris for six miles across the top of Lamplugh Glacier, producing a dust cloud visible for miles. The seismic tremors it caused registered 2.9 magnitude at the Alaska Earthquake Center. There had been no warning.

JANET MENDELSON

HERE

FUN WITH MUD IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Get down and dirty — or watch others get messy — at the Mt. Washington Valley Mud Bowl, the championships of mud football in North Conway, N.H. (Sept. 9-11). Ten teams from throughout New England play two-hand touch football in knee-deep mud, with seven players per side. Games in the double-elimination tournament are played at Steve Eastman Memorial Field at Hog Coliseum, with the finals on Sunday. Cheerleaders, kids activities, and food are featured. On Saturday, North Conway Village’s Main Street is where to watch the 34th Tournament of Mud Parade. Three-day tickets are \$15; day tickets are \$6 ages 14 and up, and \$4 ages 6 to 13; family tickets (two adults, two children) are \$15 per day. Proceeds benefit local charities. 603-356-5701, www.facebook.com/Mt-Washington-Volley-Mud-Bowl-107043226018261/?fref=ts



WOODEN BOATS ON DISPLAY

Fans of Hinckley, Hunt, and other Down East-style boats won’t want to miss the inaugural Bowen’s Wharf Newport Wooden Boat Show, running concurrent with the Newport International Boat Show and Newport Brokerage Show (Sept. 15-18). With both in-water basin and land displays, the show spotlights the craftsmanship of more than 30 participating wooden boats from builders such as Pease Boatworks, Concordia Company, Newport Nautical Timbers, and more. Head to the free opening night party at the Seamen’s Church Institute to view the exhibit Wood, Wind & Water (seamensnewport.org/), and pick up tickets for a screening of Wood, Sails, Dreams at the Jane Pickens Theater (www.janepickens.com/show-times-tickets). In addition to viewing wooden boats, attendees to the wharf marina at 1 Bowen’s Landing can enjoy live Caribbean music and water-front bar daily. Free. www.newportwoodenboatshow.com/

THERE

REMOTE ANDES ADVENTURE TREK

Looking for an alternative to visiting Machu Picchu? South American travel specialists JourneYou is offering a four-day trek — with panoramic views of the Andes, the valley, and pristine forests — to the ancient city of Choquequirao, an enormous archeological site in the Sacred Salkantay Mountain range and the Apurimac River Canyon in Peru. Considered to be the last refuge of the Inca, it is popularly known as the “Cradle of Gold.” A degree of physical stamina is required, as travelers routinely trek 6 to 9 hours per day, covering distances of 8 to 13 miles at altitudes of up to 10,170 feet. Small customized trips can be arranged on request, and departures are available at any time. Rates from \$690 per person, double, includes bilingual guide, entrance to Choquequirao, filtered and treated water, cook and support staff, horses, handlers and select camping equipment. Airfare not included. 855-888-2234, www.journeyou.com/en/travel-styles/adventure/peru/choquequirao-trek/#content

MEXICO RESORT’S EXCLUSIVE OFFER FOR GLOBE READERS

Leave the kids at home and treat yourself to a romantic so-

jour at Kore Tulum Retreat & Spa Resort, an adults-only, all inclusive boutique hotel at the beachfront in Tulum, near Mexico’s Playa del Carmen and Cozumel island. The 94 suites all feature indoor and outdoor Jacuzzi, LCD satellite TV, AC, and views of the gardens or the sea. In addition to the standard 24-hour unlimited food and beverage offerings that are part of the all inclusive price, the resort is offering Boston Globe readers an exclusive offer that includes a 30-minute couples massage and one private yoga class from the hotel instructor. Book between Sept. 1-Oct. 31, 2016, for travel through Oct. 31, 2017, and use the promotion code: GLOBE1. www.koretulum.com/en/home.html

EVERYWHERE

NOISE ISOLATING EARPHONES

It’s a noisy world, and those who are tired of turning up the sound to listen to music over the rattle of trains or the clatter of airline food carts may want to check out the newest high-fidelity earphones by Etymotic. Designed for active lifestyles — including travel and sport activities — the mk5Isolator Earphones effectively tune out ambient noise. The Isolator matches the ear’s response for natural sound reproduction al-

lowing even soft dynamics to be heard clearly. The low-profile, in-ear earphones fit comfortably under hats and helmets. \$59.00. www.etymotic.com/consumer/earphones/mk5.html

RECHARGEABLE LED STROLLER AND BIKE LIGHTS

Whether your vacation is to a brightly lit city or dark country village, it’s important to stay visible at night. Originally designed for skateboards, Third Kind lights are now available for bikes, strollers, and scooters. What makes these lights different from others is that they point down at the ground, making users highly visible to traffic from all directions, not just front and back, from a distance of over 1,000 feet. Creates an “area of safety” by lighting not just your bike or stroller, but also you. Strong, lightweight, and weatherproof. Micro USB rechargeable; includes charge cable. A light module allows you to select one of seven colors to match your mood, or set it to “party mode” and let all of the colors flash. \$49.99. thirdkindlights.com/

NECEE REGIS

