

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



THE VIP LOUNGE | LISI HARRISON

Best-selling author checks out on vacation, loves Mexico and margaritas, and hopes to get to Ireland

Best-selling author Lisi Harrison, whose “The Clique” series has sold in excess of 8 million copies and been translated into more than 21 languages, is heading back to middle school with her newly released book, “Girl Stuff,” the first in a paperback series about the ups and down of adolescence and female friendships. “It’s about three friends who . . . band together and their friendship helps them navigate all of the challenges and obstacles that come their way – and in middle school there are plenty,” said Harrison in a recent phone interview from her home in Laguna Beach, Calif. “So instead of stabbing each other in the back, they have each others’ backs.” The Toronto native, who attended Emerson College (where she received a bachelor of arts degree in creative writing), will be the guest speaker at a virtual event at Plainville’s An Unlikely Story (owned by “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” author Jeff Kinney) at 7 p.m. on Feb. 22. “I’m looking forward to meeting the fans and answering any questions they may have,” Harrison said. We caught up with the popular author, who has two teenage sons – Luke, 15, and Jesse, 13 – and a rescue dog, Freeda, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

I adore Mexico and have been countless times. Its heritage is profoundly rich and diverse. Mexico embodies an ineffable beauty derived from the land, light, and the warmth of its people, who are among the kindest, most welcoming humans I have ever encountered.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Considering my previous answer, I’m going with margaritas. No salt, no sugar, and no mezcal. I’m a tequila

blanco girl. To me, mezcal tastes like loafers. And yes, I’d love a side of perfectly salted chips and fresh ceviche, thanks for asking. The guacamole is fresh too, you say? Great. Add to cart. Note: I have a deep tan and 20-year-old skin in this scenario.

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

I’d love to go to Ireland. It seems so lush, friendly, and festive.

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

I need a book, a journal, and reading glasses. I know you said one item, but they come as a team.

Aisle or window?

I prefer a middle seat. Kidding. Window all the way. I need that sliver of non-occupied space to call my own. A sense that I can breathe without inhaling stranger fumes. That said, I should probably pick the aisle because I pee incessantly and am constantly climbing over those sleeping strangers I was trying so hard not to inhale.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

I was 6 the first time I flew. It was Christmas Eve and we were flying from Toronto to Jamaica. The pilot announced that he just saw Santa in the sky. I was searching and searching but I couldn’t find him. In the end I concluded I couldn’t see him because I was Jewish.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

I completely check out.

Best travel tip?

Completely check out.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Airbnb is ‘unable’ to support her account. What did she do?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I was looking for a cabin in upstate New York for a weekend getaway recently when I discovered I had been locked out of my Airbnb account. I received a notification that my account was “under review” by Airbnb. After six calls and several e-mails to the company, I received an e-mail that said that they will be “unable to support my account moving forward” and have exercised their discretion under their Terms of Service to disable my account. This decision was “irreversible” and

clear if a person examined the evidence against you before deciding to ban you forever. But based on what you’ve told me — and the predictable conclusion of your case — I would say that you did absolutely nothing that violated Airbnb’s terms. Apparently, looking for a nice cabin in upstate New York was your “crime.”

Airbnb doesn’t say much about its fraud-detection algorithm, and I understand why. If you talk about how you catch the bad guys, you offer them a roadmap for getting around the system. But I’ve received so many false-positive cases banning Airbnb customers, you would think they’d have done something to fix it by now. Instead, I continue to get a steady stream of cases, including yours.

I think a brief, polite e-mail to one of the Airbnb executives I list on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/ might have helped. But then again, given all the craziness of the past few months, your request might have fallen through the cracks.

Airbnb needs to get its act together with these random bannings. But there’s a more basic question that I have for the company: Why would you turn down customers during a pandemic — a time when your hosts need bookings more than ever? It makes no sense to tell customers like you to get lost, with no ability to appeal your decision.

I contacted Airbnb on your behalf, and it reinstated your account.

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

Christopher Elliott, the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, can be reached at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

would affect any duplicated or future accounts, according to Airbnb.

I was shocked. My account was deactivated without any explanation or warning. The history of almost 10 years of my stays around the world as well as all of my favorite lists are gone. I have no idea about the reason. I’ve always gotten five-star reviews from my hosts and never ran into any issues with this site. I must say, this is the most brutal way any business has ever treated me in my life, and it feels unfair. Can you please help?

NATALYA KOVALENKO,
Brooklyn, N.Y.

A. You’ve come to the right place. I’m tempted to rename this column the “Airbnb Troubleshooter.” Or maybe even the “Help Unlock My Airbnb Account Troubleshooter.” It’s only been a few weeks since the last case.

But your problem is different. It looks like your actions on Airbnb triggered an automatic review process. It’s un-

HERE

LOVE AND PIZZA PACKAGE

A romantic night out may not be in the cards this winter, so how about a romantic night in? Fairmont Copley Plaza invites you and your valentine to celebrate love any night in February with their Pizza My Heart package. Includes one-night in one of their luxurious guest rooms (monitored with stringent cleaning standards and elevated pandemic procedures); a “Roll in the Hay” cocktail special; and heart-shaped lobster pizza — with Maine lobster, mozzarella, roasted red peppers, Calabrian chili, and charred lemon — crafted with love by Chef Zaid Khan. There’s no need to leave the room. Just snuggle up in your cushy Fairmont robes and enjoy. A culinary team will bring your meal at a pre-determined time; contactless delivery is available. Rates from \$209. Available through Feb. 28. 617-267-5300, www.fairmont.com/copley-plaza-boston/offers/pizza-my-heart

TENNIS HALL OF FAME CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month is celebrated with two virtual lectures hosted by the International Tennis Hall of Fame, a Smithsonian affiliate in Newport. The first, exploring the history of black tennis in Rhode Island, looks at how black tennis clubs played an important social and cultural role in building African-American communities in Newport and Providence in the early 1900s. (Feb. 17; 7 p.m.) The second explores the gender and racial dynamics of tennis as told through the life of Althea Gibson, a Hall of Famer who broke the color barrier when she became the first African-



American to compete at the US National Championships (Feb. 24; 7 p.m.). Advanced registration is required. Free. (A suggested donation of \$10 can be made to support the International Tennis Hall of Fame.) www.tennisfame.com/black-history-month



THERE

B&B ENLIVENS MIAMI’S OVERTOWN REVIVAL

Check out the recently launched Copper Door B&B, an intimate 22-room bed and breakfast located in the historic Black community of Overtown in Miami. Culinary-trained hospitality industry veterans Jamila Ross and Akino West have transformed the 1940s-era Demetree Hotel, adding modern design elements while preserving the building’s historic features in its vintage styled, hotel-grade rooms and public spaces. The property is part of a movement that aims to restore Overtown to its previous role as a cultural hub for live entertainment, music, and dining. Conveniently located near the Miami River and its waterfront restaurants, Little Havana, Adrienne Arsht Center, Bayfront Park, Perez Art Museum Miami, Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science, and the Wynwood Walls. Now offering touchless check-in. Rates from \$105. 305-454-9065, www.copperdoorbnb.com.

WHALE TALES FROM MAUI

It’s been 50 years since Roger Payne’s compilation of recordings, “Songs of the Humpback Whale,” made its splashy debut, raising public awareness of the

intelligence of these magnificent mammals. This month, Payne kicks off a weekend of online presentations plus experiential and interactive opportunities led by international scientists, photographers, and conservationists who will share their latest work about whales and their marine environment at the 15th Annual Whale Tales (Feb. 13-14). Presented by Whale Trust, a Maui-based whale research and education organization, in partnership with The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua, and Drury Design, the event aims to bring the beauty of Maui and its humpback whales to viewers across the globe while raising money to support further research and conservation efforts. Registration required. A minimum \$60 donation supports whale research through the Whale Tales Beneficiary Fund. www.whaletales.org.

HOTEL DEBUTS IN COLONIAL OLD SAN JUAN

Travelers who prefer historic renovations to glass and steel accommodations will want to check out the Palacio Provincial in Puerto Rico. Making its 2021 debut in San Juan’s most historic neighborhood, the Colonial-era building’s 43 rooms been meticulously restored and reimagined with décor that combines the antiquity of the structure with modern cosmopolitan style. Conveniently located near historic attractions, as well as Old San Juan’s iconic street, Calle del Cristo, where guests can experience some of the destination’s top culinary offerings. Puerto Rico recently lifted some of its COVID-19 restrictions such as reopening its beaches and nature reserves. Pre-travel guidelines for entry can be found on the



Discover Puerto Rico website. www.discoverpuertorico.com/info/travel-guidelines (As a US territory, you do not need to provide a negative COVID-19 test result to return to the mainland United States.) Opening hotel rates from \$195. www.palacioprovincial.com.

EVERYWHERE

PERSONALIZED VIRTUAL WINE TASTINGS

Gather your wine-loving pals and host a virtual tasting-soiree with your own wine expert via The Supper Share, a concierge service that connects people with sommeliers who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic. Simply pick a date and time, choose a wine tasting set and let The Supper Share coordinate the rest. Wine packages range from \$55 to \$115 per person for three to four wines. Or customize your wine theme for an extra \$100 flat fee. Sommelier fee and shipping costs are extra. You’ll receive an intro to your sommelier, custom wine guide and calendar invite with Zoom link three days before your tasting. All proceed goes to the sommelier with a small percentage donated each month to the United Sommeliers Foundation. www.thesupper-share.com

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