

CONSUMER ADVICE

Ask the experts

This week
Getting refunded for a costly ticket error, a ringside seat for the Palio, taking the train in France and all aboard for Canada



Gill Charlton

Gill's focus is complaints against or disputes with travel companies



Nick Trend

Nick is a consumer travel expert



Sophie Butler

Sophie is a travel expert and a regular contributor to Telegraph Travel



Trisha Andres

Trisha is a travel expert who specialises in escorted tours

Why we claimed against Expedia

Q My partner and I were due to fly with Egypt Air from London to George in South Africa via Cairo and Johannesburg on December 19. We had booked and paid for the flights through Expedia the previous January. When we arrived at the Egypt Air check-in desk at Heathrow we were told there was a problem. The number of the e-ticket in my name was not valid. We were referred to Egypt Air's sales desk. An agent there said we must phone Expedia and ask for a new ticket to be issued. We spent three hours on the phone to Expedia without achieving a resolution.

Subsequently, Egypt Air discovered that both the ticket numbers had been issued in the same name. This was at odds with the e-tickets we had been emailed which clearly showed both our names. Despite showing this confirmation to Egypt Air staff, the problem could not be sorted out at Heathrow and we were not allowed to board our flight.

We decided our only option was to buy new flight tickets. Fortunately we got the last two seats on a British Airways flight to Johannesburg departing seven hours later. We also had to buy a new flight from Johannesburg to Port Elizabeth to reach our hotel in George. The new flights cost a total of £3,027. At this point Expedia phoned us back saying it was trying to sort out the problem but we did not hear from the company again.

On our return I contacted Expedia's customer services on January 14 and requested that we be reimbursed for the new flights and be given compensation. We received an automated reply saying it takes up to 28 days to sort out complaints. A few days later an Expedia agent rang my husband's mobile and left a message saying she would call the next day. This did not happen. Instead we received an email saying Expedia had been unable to contact us and would be closing the case.

Gill Charlton, consumer expert

A Claire and her partner David Morris were so furious at Expedia's uncaring response that

they decided to take the company to a small claims court.

"It was surprisingly easy to fill in the online Money Claim form," says Mr Morris. "You just enter your contact details and write a brief outline of what happened."

As the claim was for more than £5,000 (this included a demand for £2,000 in compensation) the court fee was £410.

An agent in Expedia's Indian call centre telephoned Mr Morris about 10 days later saying he was authorised to make an out-of-court settlement. He said Expedia had tried to make contact several times. Mr Morris disputed this and told the agent there was no record of any such calls on his mobile log.

Initially, Expedia offered to pay for the new flights and the overnight stay in Port Elizabeth plus another £250 in compensation.

Mr Morris refused to accept this amount as it wasn't even enough to cover the court fees, credit card interest and the lost night's accommodation in George. Eventually they settled on compensation of £1,500 and the couple has now received a total payment of £4,569 from Expedia.

Siena Palio

Q We are two couples hoping to experience the Palio in Siena in August 2017. We do not really want to go on an organised trip but understand that we need to book a hotel that can get us tickets on one of the balconies overlooking the square to get a good view of the Palio. We would prefer not to stay in Siena itself but maybe somewhere on a train line out of the town. We would ideally stay three or four nights and fly from Cardiff or Bristol airport. Can you recommend any hotels or bed and breakfasts plus which airport to fly in to?

ANNABEL THOMAS

Nick Trend, Italy expert

A Castel Monastero (castelmonastero.com), is a high end hotel in the hills south of Siena which offers three-night Palio packages including transfers to Siena and access to a private window with excellent



QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Get a panoramic view of the Canadian Rockies from a glass-domed GoldLeaf coach

Q My husband and I are planning to go to Canada in 2017. The most important part of the trip is travelling on the Rocky Mountaineer. There seem to be so many tours to choose from. We also wondered about doing an Alaskan cruise while out there as this seems to be something not to miss? Could you please suggest a tour that encompasses the Rocky Mountaineer (GoldLeaf coach) and includes Moraine Lake? We plan to travel premium economy, for leg room and a more enhanced trip.

GILL EVANS

Trisha Andres, tours expert

A Canada Sky (01342 887805; canadiansky.co.uk) runs a 19-day "Canadian Rockies Experience and Silversea Alaskan Cruise" itinerary which visits the Canadian Rockies and includes an eight-day luxury Alaskan cruise and a two-day rail ride aboard the Rocky Mountaineer on a glass-domed GoldLeaf service.

Departures between May and August 2017, from £5,729pp including flights and some meals. If you're on a tighter

budget, an 18-day "Deluxe Alaskan Voyage and the Rocky Mountaineer" itinerary from Titan (0800 988 5873; titantravel.co.uk) takes in the Canadian Rockies and Alaska. It doesn't stop at Moraine Lake, but does visit nearby Lake Louise and surveys the Rockies aboard the Rocky Mountaineer (for £349 you can upgrade to a GoldLeaf coach) en route to Vancouver. From here, you'll set sail along Alaska's coastline.

Departures between May and September 2017, from £3,999pp including flights and some meals.

views over the piazza, plus a buffet supper and wine. The package also includes breakfast, dinner in the hotel restaurant and a spa treatment. This year's prices (including the night of July 2 or August 16, the dates of the Palio) start at €1,224 (£981) per person including taxes.

Castello di Casole (telegraph.co.uk/castellocasole), another upmarket hotel around 20 minutes' drive west of Siena, also offers a three-night package which includes suite accommodation and tickets in balcony seats near the start and finish line of the race. This year's price starts at €1,701 per night.

For accommodation near a train station, you could consider Palazzo Bizzarri

(palazzobizzarri.it) in Serre di Rapolano, a fortified palazzo, with just two guest rooms from €80 per night. It lies 30km from Siena and five kilometres from the train station. However, with this option, you'd have to organise your own Palio tickets through a specialist - try jacopodellatorre.com.

There are no direct flights to Florence or Pisa from Cardiff or Bristol, but easyJet (easyjet.com) and British Airways (ba.com) fly to Pisa from Gatwick; British Airways to Florence from Gatwick.

By car and train to Paris

Q I am looking to take two adults and three children on a trip to Paris. Could you

recommend somewhere we could drive to and then take the train into Paris. Are the trains expensive in France?

SALLY THOMPSON

Sophie Butler, travel expert

A You don't say where you are starting from, but the obvious thing to do is to park at either Ashford (ashfordintl.co.uk/parking) or Ebbsfleet (ebbsfleetintl.co.uk/parking) international stations in Kent, and catch the Eurostar (eurostar.com) from there.

Trains in France are generally a little cheaper than Eurostar services to Paris - the cheapest return from Calais to Paris, for example, is about £50. But by the time you have paid to take your car on the

ferry or through the tunnel, you will have lost a lot of time, and the total fare will probably be about the same. It would also mean leaving your car in a French station car park - which is fine, but you'd need to make sure it was covered by your insurance.

To buy and compare domestic fares in France see uk.voyages-sncf.com, which also sells Eurostar tickets.

Questions should be sent by email to asktheexperts@telegraph.co.uk. Please provide your name and nearest town and, if your query is about a dispute with a travel company, your full address, daytime telephone number and any booking reference. We regret that we cannot answer postal or telephone queries.

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