

CONSUMER ADVICE

Ask the experts

This week
Surprise charges from a car rental firm; tours to Japan; insurance for cancer sufferers; and sailing from New York

Car rental charges

Q Over the October half-term I travelled to Malaga with my wife and two young sons. We hired a car from Enterprise at Malaga Airport and paid a damage deposit of €250 (£185). As our flight home departed at 8am, the rental return office was closed so we dropped off the keys as directed.

Around six hours later I received a call from an Enterprise agent saying that the car had been checked back in and everything was fine. She said our deposit would be refunded within seven days. However, six days later we were charged another €90 (£66). When I queried this with Enterprise via email, I was told that there was a "bad smell" in the car. When I asked them to be more specific, I was told there was a strong smell of vomit.

I am certain that nobody was sick in the car and do not recall a smell when we lifted the children out of their seats. Enterprise has now sent me an invoice in Spanish which I am not able to read. Further communication with Enterprise's rental support team has come to a stalemate: it insists that the car needed professional cleaning and I am adamant that I returned it in perfect condition. What are my options now?

IAN MORTON

Gill Charlton, consumer expert

A I asked Enterprise UK to investigate your complaint at a higher level. It has replied saying that it appears the branch correctly charged you for the cleaning of the soiled seat upholstery which was only detected once the vehicle had been taken from the car park at Malaga Airport to the cleaning area.

A possible explanation is that one of your children was sick on the way to the airport but the odour only made itself apparent after the car had been sitting in the sun in the airport car park for some hours.

Enterprise says that the staining was such that it could not be dealt with by its regular cleaning team but required specialist cleaning. This is the reason given for the extra charge. It says it tried to get back in touch with you later that day to discuss the matter, but was unable to reach you.

The company accepts that it could have done a better job of communicating with you once the damage had been discovered. In the light of this, it has decided – as a goodwill gesture – to refund the full cost of the cleaning given the length of time it took to communicate the issue fully.

Enterprise is one of the good guys in the rental industry with a responsive customer services team which usually manages to sort out post-rental issues like this in an efficient manner. It is also a member of the European Car Rental Conciliation Service (ecrcs.eu) which helps customers with unresolved problems concerning vehicle rentals in Europe. If you are renting a car in Europe this summer it is worth considering one of the rental companies that subscribe to this scheme and are bound by the decisions of its conciliation service.

Japan plans

Q My best friend and I are looking to celebrate our 70th birthdays in 2018 with a special holiday and we are considering Japan. An escorted tour would be our choice so we get to see as much as possible without it being too strenuous. I have been browsing online but am getting confused by all the different options. I am not looking for the cheapest option but obviously want good value for money. Any suggestions you have would be very welcome.

JANET MARTIN

Trisha Andres, escorted tours expert

A I have three options for you, which I think offer good value and I hope will suit your budget – all have departures in 2018, as well as in 2016 and 2017. Saga (0800 096 0074; travel.saga.co.uk) runs a Japan: Land of the Rising Sun itinerary which visits Tokyo, Hakone, Takayama, Kanazawa and Kyoto. Highlights include a guided tour of Tokyo; a traditional tea ceremony in Kyoto; a visit to the Kenroku-en, one of Japan's "Three Great Gardens"; and a cruise along Lake Ashi. Departures between April 2016 and June 2017, as well as in 2018, from £2,999 including door-to-door chauffeur service, flights and some meals.

Alternatively, Wendy Wu (0800 988 8209; wendywutours.co.uk) is offering an 11-day Jewels of Japan tour which combines city and country with stops at Tokyo, Mount Fuji, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Miyajima. The tour includes special experiences, such as a soba noodle-making class, a ride on board a bullet train and a visit to the 2,080ft observation deck at Skytree, where at peak visibility you can see all the way to Mount Fuji. Departures between May 2016 and October 2017 as well as in 2018, from £3,890 full-board including flights.



QUESTION OF THE WEEK

The QM2 sails past the Statue of Liberty, above

Celebration cruise

Q Eight of us are planning a trip to New York next year to celebrate a big anniversary and we'd like to return to Britain by sea. However, we're not sure which category of cabin we should book. We'd like cabins with a balcony, and reasonable space and comfort, but we don't want to go for the grandeur or expense of a top-of-the-range suite. I know that some cabin categories give access to particular restaurants and public areas – could you give us a

guide to what the different categories offer?
 JANE ELTRINGHAM, CAMBRIDGE

Jane Archer, cruise expert

A As Cunard (cunard.co.uk) offers the only scheduled cruises between Britain and New York, you'll be sailing on Queen Mary 2, which has a few levels of accommodation. The Queens and Princess Grill suites are the most expensive and come with access to private restaurants. The least

expensive are Britannia cabins, which are available with a balcony. Choose this level and you'll be allocated a table at first or second sitting for dinner (6pm or 8.30pm) in the Britannia dining room. A better bet would be the ship's Britannia Club cabins. These have balconies and come with a table in the Britannia Club Restaurant where you can eat when you choose. A Club cabin on a voyage from New York to Southampton costs from £2,499 per person departing July 6 2017 based on two sharing and including a one-way flight.



Nick Trend

Nick is Telegraph Travel's consumer expert with a regular advice column



Gill Charlton

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



Jane Archer

Jane uncovers the best and worst about cruise ships



Trisha Andres

Trisha is a travel expert who specialises in escorted tours

quotes costing thousands of pounds and also rejections.
 MARGARET (FULL NAME SUPPLIED)

Nick Trend, insurance expert

A I'm very sorry to hear about your condition, though glad the chemotherapy is helping. It is perfectly legal and possible to travel without insurance, though some tour operators and cruise lines insist on cover. And it may not be as expensive as you fear – see telegraph.co.uk/insuranceconditions. But if you are tempted to travel without, I think you should consider the situation carefully in case you were to fall ill while away. If you are in Europe and have an Ehic card (see telegraph.co.uk/ehic) you

will be entitled to free or low-cost emergency treatment in most countries. But if you needed to be repatriated you would have to pay the cost yourself.

Outside Europe, you could face very high medical bills, and repatriation costs by air will be extremely expensive, so I would be cautious about this option. Whatever you decide to do, make sure you take medical advice about your plans.

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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