

SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2019

001 BAY AREA NEWS GROUP F7

**TRAVEL
TROUBLESHOOTER**

Overbilled by \$480 for an Expedia car rental

DEAR TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER » I recently rented a car in Tucson, Arizona, through Budget Rent-A-Car. I reserved the vehicle through Expedia.

Expedia sent a contract saying the two-month rental would be \$1,054. Budget billed my credit card \$1,534 — an overcharge of \$480. I noticed the overcharge when I returned the car. I tried to resolve the problem with an employee and a supervisor, but I couldn't. At that point, I needed to catch my plane. When I returned home, I called Expedia. After several rounds with Expedia representatives and a supervisor, Expedia said it couldn't resolve the problem. Can you help me recover the \$480 Budget charged?



Christopher Elliott
Columnist

— Elizabeth Welke,
Stillwater, Minnesota

ANSWER » Budget should have charged you \$1,054, as promised. If it didn't, then at least it should give you a reason for the overcharge. Did you keep the car an extra day or two? Did you get into a fender bender? Did it quote the wrong price?

Expedia should have explained the \$480 discrepancy and fixed it for you quickly. It did not. Could you have done anything differently to improve your chances? Absolutely. Stay off the phone when you're trying to resolve a billing problem. The solution to being overbilled for your Expedia car rental comes down to a rock-solid paper trail.

Start by sending a brief, polite email through Expedia's contact form. If that doesn't work, escalate your problem to one of the Expedia customer service executives I list on my nonprofit consumer advocacy site. You also could have reached out to Budget directly. I list Budget's contacts on my consumer advocacy site, too.

A closer look at your rental paperwork shows the likely culprit for your overbilled Expedia car rental. It appears either Budget or Expedia broke the rental into two monthly rentals, which may have caused the pricing error. It's unclear why they billed you twice. You might have been able to address this problem when you returned the vehicle and a Budget representative gave you a final bill. Your case is an important reminder to give yourself a little extra time when returning a car, just in case something goes wrong.

You did the right thing by trying to resolve your billing dispute in real time, when you returned the car, instead of waiting for your credit card bill. That increases the chances of a successful resolution. But since you had a flight to catch, the clock ran out, unfortunately.

If your online travel agency had continued to give you the silent treatment, you could have filed a credit card dispute. That's something you don't want to try until all of your other options are exhausted.

I contacted Budget on your behalf. A representative apologized and said the total from Expedia "was not billed correctly." You've received a \$480 refund.

Read travel tips on Christopher Elliott's blog, elliott.org, or email him at chris@elliott.org.

NAPA VALLEY WEEKEND

CALISTOGA CALM:

WINING,



PICAYUNE CELLARS

Head to the cheerful backyard at Calistoga's Picayune Cellars, where a hidden picnic spot makes a great setting for sauvignon blanc sipping.

DINING,



SOLAGE, AUBERGE RESORTS COLLECTION

Solage's acclaimed Solbar restaurant is a destination food experience with fresh seasonal fare, craft cocktails and piping hot beignets.

RELAXING



SOLAGE, AUBERGE RESORTS COLLECTION

Solage, Calistoga's Auberge Collections resort, makes a great home base for exploring the northern end of Napa Valley, but with enough amenities of its own — pools, spa and the Solbar restaurant — that you may not want to leave the property.

By Amber Turpin

Correspondent

The start to our recent girls trip to Napa Valley felt straight out of Amy Poehler's recent "Wine Country" movie. Tired and sticky after hours in sweaty bumper-to-bumper traffic, our iPhones brick-like because no one had remembered to bring a charger, we tumbled into Calistoga's lovely Solage Resort & Spa to check in. Then we piled back into the car — welcome glasses of wine in hand — to drive to our cottage on the other side of the property, only to realize that stemmed wine glasses do not fit into car drink holders.

It was an only-in-Wine-Country moment. Amy Poehler would understand.

After that opening act, though, the rest of our weekend smoothed into pure relaxation. In a wine region overwhelmed by its own popularity, Calistoga retains its serene charm, with more than enough to do to fill a weekend or more. Here's what's new.

DRINK » Cabernet and albariño

Calistoga offers some amazing cabernet sauvignon — Napa Valley is, of course, known for it — as well as many other varietals that thrive in the decidedly volcanic soil. One great place to start your quest is Brian Arden Wines, a family-owned passion project along the Silverado Trail. The winery's beautifully designed building, which was completed in 2015, boasts views of the Palisade Mountains, and winery chef Benjamin Weakley cooks up memorable wine-paired menus in the open kitchen on-site, using ingredients from the garden right outside.

Picayune Cellars recently relocated to the center of town, offering walk-ins a taste of owner Claire Ducrocq Weinkauf's pretty boutique wines, as well as a chance to browse her curated home goods, gifts and jewelry. Head to the cheerful backyard where a hidden picnic spot makes a great setting for sauvignon blanc sipping or albariño appreciation.

If you're looking for something other than vino, hit up Sam's Social Club, the appealing restaurant at Indian Springs, for a pint of beer. Brewed on-site in a variety of flavors and styles — Sam's Calistoga Pilsner and Sam's Spring Water Hazy IPA, among them — these suds are tailor-made for afternoon sipping on the sunny deck. There's a full bar, too, and several signature cocktails. We skipped the vodka-based Girls Getaway cocktail and opted for the Guys Getaway instead, a concoction of mezcal, rosemary syrup and bitters.

EAT » Gnocchi, chocolate and more

Solage's acclaimed Solbar restaurant may not be new, but executive chef Gustavo Rios is — and he's made this even more of a destination food experience. Think gnocchi with lobster, curried walnuts and beech mushrooms — plus beignets to seal the deal.

Speaking of dessert, don't miss 2-year-old Earth & Sky Chocolates, one of the few remaining businesses in one of the depot rail cars downtown. Inside this bright chocolate shop and factory, owners Christian Parks and Laura Koerth create sweet treats that are almost too beautiful to eat.

Another don't miss: Cheer Bar, a reimaged soda fountain, opened in April with three flavors

CALISTOGA » PAGE 8



INDIAN SPRINGS RESORT

Geothermal mineral springs put Calistoga on the map. So head straight for the Indian Springs geyser-fed pool, which has soothed visitors' tired bones since 1910.

Calistoga

FROM PAGE 7

of ice cream, upscale coffee, fresh squeezed juices, salads, smoothies and even avocado toast. The syrups are housemade, local produce is emphasized and there are old-school arcade games, too.

Craving brunch? Lovina took over the revamped Calistoga Kitchen space last year under new co-owners Jennifer Bennet (San Francisco's Zazie) and Shaun McGrath (Michael Mina, Americano and Calistoga's Sam's Social Club). The food is spot on, right down to the perfectly dressed greens aside your wild mushroom and house-made ricotta toast. There's sidewalk patio seating, a standout menu and nice folks slinging it all.

RELAX » Spa-ahhh

The town's geothermal mineral springs put Calistoga on the map. So head straight for the Indian Springs geyser-fed pool, which has soothed visitors' tired bones since 1910.

It isn't the only game in town, of course. Now that the retro-modern Calistoga Motor Lodge and adjoining Moonacre Spa & Baths are open, you can indulge in a soak at a variety of geothermal pools in a casual, hip environment. If you're here at the beginning of the week, linger for the hotel's Maker Mondays, complete with lessons from local artisans, or hit up the Spa Happy Hour from 3 to 6 p.m. Wednesdays for two 25-minute spa treatments and a glass of red, white or bubbly.

And Solage Spa has re-created Calistoga's natural waters with several soaking pools with different temperatures and mineral properties. The Starlight at the Bathhouse package offers an after-hours soak and steam re-



COURTESY OF AMBER TURPIN

Don't miss the beautiful sweets at Earth & Sky Chocolates.

treat, plus sparkling wine and dessert. Add a private, floating, guided meditation while you're at it — or CBD-infused mud enhancements.

STAY: Zzzzzzz's

It's best to be well-rested if you're going to wine, dine and relax this thoroughly — and Calistoga has a wide array of lodging options. The most anticipated is the Four Seasons Napa Valley, which will open this winter; reservations are being accepted for January. Expect luxurious appointments, an on-site organic winery and hidden vineyard cabanas for spa treatments and intimate dining.

The historic Indian Springs resort has undergone considerable renovation over the last five years, including the addition of a new wing of "view rooms," three luxe bungalows for families and small groups, and the Sam's Social Club bar and eatery.

One new option is the year-old The Bungalows at Calistoga. Three separate cottages — think Airbnb-meets-boutique hotel — are clustered on a small residential property across from Indian Springs. It's just a short stroll to downtown for more wining and dining.



INDIAN SPRINGS RESORT

The historic Indian Springs resort has undergone considerable renovation in recent years that includes the addition of a new wing of "view rooms," three luxe bungalows for families and small groups, and a new restaurant, Sam's Social Club.



WELDON OWEN

"The book is 50-50 twists on classics and ideas I developed for my site or friends' parties."

— Ashley Rose Conway, mixologist

Rosés

FROM PAGE 6

Q We hear you've been interested in cocktails since ... childhood?

A My father used to own a bar and he worked with a lot of spirits brands to develop recipes for companies and restaurants. He did that from home and I thought it was cool that he got paid to do that. I moved to the Bay Area seven years ago; there's such a wealth of knowledge and great people mixing and I learned so much. I worked for spirits companies, made drinks at friends' parties and four years ago started Craft & Cocktails (craftandcocktails.co).

Q We know rosé is crazy popular. Where did you get the idea to use it in cocktails?

A The ever-popular rosé! Two years ago, it exploded on the internet and in bars. I definitely saw the potential. Champagne cocktails? A French 75 with sparkling rosé. Sangria? Wine, but rosé.

I wondered how far you could go — and I found out you can go really far with it! The book is 50-50 twists on classics and ideas I developed for my site or friends' parties.

Q What would you serve at a summery garden party?

A I would definitely serve the Strawberry Rosé Punch. It's such a crowd-pleaser. It's really refreshing, but still really well-balanced with Cocchi Americano. Cocchi has bitter components to it, so it'll help be that backbone, but the punch is not bitter like a Negroni. And it's in a punch bowl so if you're throwing a party, people can help themselves.

Q Other favorite rosé cocktails?

A One of my absolute favorites is the Smoky Melon. You get a lot of rosé, notes of watermelon, mezcal and rose syrup for more concentrated flavor. I think it's really fun. And the What's the Tea Old-Fashioned is based on a camomile Tea Old-Fashioned at the (now-closed) Two Sisters Bar and Books in Hayes Valley.

Wish You Were Here



COURTESY OF JOAN FOSDICK

ICELAND: Hayward resident Joan Fosdick, left, and Novato resident Renee Fosdick Portillo took a spring trip to Iceland that included stops in Reykjavik, a boat excursion to see the northern lights and a trek to the broad, powerful Skogafoss waterfall on the south coast. "Dress appropriately and be ready to get wet," Joan says. "Iceland is very expensive, but very beautiful with great food and lovely people."

TRAVEL TIPS: "Temperatures were in the 20s and 30s, so bring your warmest clothes and snow boots. Charming gift shops, Icelandic fashion and sweater shops, and cute coffee and bakeries abound (on) the shopping street of Laugavegur in downtown Reykjavik."



COURTESY OF JOYCE KELLEY

MEXICO: Saratoga residents Joyce Kelley and Vic Cesena traveled to Puerto Vallarta recently on a trip that included a visit to a filming location for the 1964 movie "The Night of the Iguana," which starred Ava Gardner, Deborah Kerr and Richard Burton.

TRAVEL TIPS: "Wear comfortable shoes as there are many streets paved with cobblestones," Joyce says. "We recommend a walking food tour of downtown Puerto Vallarta and, if you are interested in art, Galleria Dante."



COURTESY OF THE KETTMANN FAMILY

ARIZONA: Matt Kettmann — a "fifth generation San Jose-an," he says, now a Santa Barbara resident — and his family, Joanna, Mason and Madeline, did a road trip from California to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and back, with a stop at the Grand Canyon.

TRAVEL TIPS: "After exploring the South Rim for a couple hours, where our kids enjoyed getting their junior ranger badges, we stayed at The Grand Hotel at the Grand Canyon in Tusayan, about 10 minutes outside of the park. The bar was hopping at night, making up for overwhelmed servers, and the breakfast buffet was the best we had on our whole trip."

Share your travels with us! Send your vacation selfies to jburrell@bayareanewsgroup.com. Be sure to tell us who's who, where they're from and where you are — and include a couple of travel tips to help fellow readers globe-trot, too.