

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

VIP LOUNGE

On window seats, sparkly shoes, and composing music that celebrates Black women

World-renowned composer and musician Nkeiru Okoye loves everything about Paris — especially the shopping and how, she said, Black women are, “revered as beautiful” there. The New York City native, who was raised in Massapequa, on Long Island, and now lives in New Paltz, N.Y., is looking forward to spending some time in Massachusetts this month as the first composer-in-residence at the South Shore Conservatory. Her residency is part of the conservatory’s “Transform” initiative, which uses music education as a vehicle to promote social awareness and social justice. “Many of my pieces touch on social themes like African-American history — and especially African-American women,” Okoye said. “My work aims to change the narrative about Black women, because there are so many inaccurate stereotypes. I like to highlight the fact that Black women are professional and that we accomplish amazing, amazing things.” The piece Okoye has written for SSC Transform is called “Grayce and Sickle,” a tribute to Dr. Paula Johnson, a cardiologist and president of Wellesley College who conducts research on the correlation between genetics and medicine, with a focus on sickle cell disease, a genetic blood disorder that impacts many people of African descent. “Grayce and Sickle” will premiere on July 23 at the conservatory’s final Summer Musical Festival concert at the Jane Carr Amphitheater in Hingham. We caught up with Okoye, a Guggenheim Fellow, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

For shopping, Paris. You can’t beat it. I first went at 18, during fall break of my sophomore year in college. I did a semester abroad in London, studying contemporary art and electroacoustic music. This was my first time being abroad by myself. In Paris, Black wom-



Nkeiru Okoye lakeside in the Catskills.

en are revered as beautiful. OK, it got a little overwhelming, and [was] definitely based on stereotypes, but I’d rather be stereotyped in a way that gets me treated like a superstar.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

When traveling in the States, having Southern cuisine is comfort food. For me, it represents Southern hospitality and the richness of African-American culture.

Where would you like to travel to

but haven’t?

A friend showed me pictures of a small island town off of the coast of somewhere in the Caribbean — but I am not at liberty to say where. He’s taking his family there for a month. Most restaurants are beachside, the seas are sparkling blue, and you can feel years of e-mails, Zoom meetings, and the global pandemic melting away. I thought I hadn’t made time to visit the islands because I’m

usually working on deadlines or traveling for business, but seeing the photos convinced me I had found the right place to tempt me.

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

A pair of comfortable metallic leather shoes. Since I’m traveling for music-making purposes, having my laptop, music scores, great headphones, and a mini keyboard — in case inspiration strikes, or an emergency rewrite comes up — are all required. The sparkly shoes are just for me. Even though I am just about 6 feet tall, I am usually in 2- to 3-inch heels. And make sure to find pairs that are really comfortable.

Aisle or window?

Window. You get the most amazing view. I love the takeoff [and] watching towns get smaller until they disappear. Last time I was on a flight, the sky was filled with a double rainbow, and we got to see it up close while nearing the clouds. I love the eagle-eye view of a city at dusk or night, all lit up with bright lights.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

This one time, when I was about 9, we went camping at Disney World. It was during a particularly wet, rainy season, though. One night, the family-size tent nearly collapsed. So, we spent our last night in one of the hotels. Years later, our “soaked” visit to the Magic Kingdom still gets the giggles.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

Reading fiction books that have nothing to do with travel. I am a sucker for romance novels. If I’m not reading a new Debbie Macomber book for my Kindle app when away, it’s John Grisham.

Best travel tip?

I’ve learned to pack clothing that can be mixed and matched. My tip is to have one fewer outfit than you think you’ll need, but always bring one sparkly outfit.

JULIET PENNINGTON



HERE

CAPE FILM FEST RETURNS

The Woods Hole Film Festival celebrates its 30th anniversary with 52 feature-length and 98 short films July 31-Aug. 7, in person and online. The event includes Q&A sessions with filmmakers, workshops with filmmaker-in-residence Alexis Gambis, panel discussions, morning filmmaker chats, and an awards ceremony. Nine of this year’s films have New England connections, including “Lily Topples the World,” an award-winning documentary that follows 20-year-old Lily Hevesh from Sandown, N.H., who is considered the world’s greatest domino toppler. “Discover Wonder: The Octopus Garden” follows one of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution’s submersibles as it journeys 2 miles beneath the surface to explore one of the planet’s rarest and deepest octopus-breeding colonies. The festival’s in-person screenings take place at Redfield Auditorium in Woods Hole, the Simon Center for the Arts at Falmouth Academy, and the Cotuit Center for the Arts. Virtual passes \$90-\$225; \$14-\$20 for individual films, workshops, and panel discussions. 508-495-3456, www.woodsholefilmfestival.org.

NEWPORT HOTEL OFFERS POP-UP EVENTS

Celebrate the Hotel Viking’s 95th anniversary during new pop-up events on Saturdays through August. The hotel has partnered

with East Hampton’s Wolfer Estate wine purveyors to offer a special event on Saturdays between 11:30 a.m. and 9 p.m. on One Bellevue Patio, where guests and visitors can enjoy small bites and a variety of summer wines. While on site, visit the hotel’s new Spa Fjor and its Top of Newport rooftop bar, which offers views of neighboring mansions, a marina, and sunset over Newport Beach. Take advantage of the hotel’s special Wolfer Weekends package and enjoy a two-night stay (Friday to Sunday only), a complimentary tasting and small bites experience, and a free bottle of Wolfer Estate wine and a hat made by Kiel James Patrick (a Rhode Island clothing company). Package rates start at \$889 per night; \$18 per person for tasting flight (non-guests). 800-556-7126, www.hotelviking.com.

THERE

‘THE FLAME STILL BURNS’ FOR THIS BAND

Foreigner hits the road again for a 121-date concert tour through 16 countries with six planned New England performances. The legendary band made 10 multiplatinum albums that included such classics as “Cold As Ice,” “Hot Blooded,” and “Juke Box Hero.” Don’t

miss a chance to sing along with lead singer Kelly Hansen during performances at the Hartford Healthcare Amphitheater in Bridgeport, Conn., Aug. 25; Indian Ranch in Webster, R.I., Aug. 26; South Shore Music Circus in Cohasset, Aug. 27; Cape Cod Melody Tent in Hyannis, Aug. 28; Providence Performing Arts Center, Oct. 25; and Hampton Beach Casino Ballroom, Oct. 28. Performing with Hansen will be Jeff Pilson on bass and vocals, Michael Bluestein on keyboards and vocals, Bruce Watson on guitar and vocals, Chris Frazier on drums, and Luis Carlos Maldonado on guitar and vocals. Tickets prices vary. www.foreigneronline.com.

A HOTEL WITH A VIEW

Stay in a new upscale boutique hotel in the heart of Washington, D.C. The Kimpton Banneker Hotel just opened on 16th Street, six blocks from the White House. It’s named after Benjamin Banneker, one of the country’s major Black innovators who played a critical role in surveying the land that would become the nation’s capital. The property features 144 cozy guestrooms and suites, including a spacious two-bedroom presidential suite. Each room comes with yoga mats, nightly turn-down service, and sanitizing steamers. The onsite Le Sel restaurant features contemporary French fare made with local ingredients. The year-round Lady Bird rooftop bar (opening in August) offers light bites and cocktails, live

music, and views of the White House and Washington Monument. Hotel guests get fresh grab-and-go pastries, breakfast items, and locally roasted coffee each morning. Rates start at \$251 per night. 202-234-6399. www.thebanneker.com.

EVERYWHERE

A BURLY FREEZER ON WHEELS

RovR’s new off-road cooler offers a smooth ride across any terrain and keeps your adventure supplies organized and cold for up to 10 days. Pack up to 60 quarts of ice, food, and drinks into the RollR 60 — using the removable internal bin to keep dry items separate — and then head to the beach, campsite, or festival grounds. The cooler’s high-density foam insulation, airtight gasket around the lid, and easy-to-use rubber latches help you seal the top shut and keep the RollR’s contents cold. Use the built-in drain plug to ditch any meltwater. The 9-inch puncture-resistant tires come mounted on aluminum hubs for durability and have a chunky tread that easily handles any surface. Grab the cooler’s long aluminum handle and go — or use an adapter kit (sold separately) to attach the cooler to your bike for easy towing. A handy seat pad transforms into a pop-up bin; attach the bin to the top of the cooler using Velcro straps and fill it with beach towels, blankets, and other gear — a clever system. \$449.99. 720-587-9569, www.rovrproducts.com.

PERFECT YOUR MORNING BREW

Nothing beats a great cup of coffee to start your travel day. Bring your favorite blend and use Planetary Design’s new Basecamp French press to create your perfect cup of java. The French press, part of the company’s BruTrek brand, has a metal plate above the mesh screen on the plunger that stops the extraction process once you press the coffee to prevent a bitter-tasting beverage — ingenious. The French press has a double-wall, vacuum-insulated stainless-steel body that keeps your coffee hot for hours, proves easy to clean, and doesn’t leave a residual taste or smell after lots of use. The screw-on lid also helps prevent spills and retain heat, while the rubber base keeps the press from slipping around. It comes in 32- and 48-ounce sizes and works great with tea, too. \$60-\$70. planetarydesign.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

My refund is a no-show for this Show of the Month Club trip

By Christopher Elliott

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked a weekend train trip from Portland to Brunswick, Maine, last year through Show of the Month Club, a tour operator. They contacted me in June to cancel the trip due to the pandemic. In August, they contacted me again to verify my address so they could issue the refund.

I’ve received no money from Show of the Month Club. It’s been nine months. Can you help me get my \$600 back?

MARY ROBERTS, *Plaistow, N.H.*

A. You’re right — that’s way too long to wait for a refund.

Typically, a refund should take about two to three weeks. During the pandemic, you might give a company a few extra weeks. But nine months? That’s really testing your patience.

My readers have had this problem time and again during the past year. I can understand why a business, particularly a tour operator, would be slow to issue a refund. Some of the money you paid to the company may already have been paid out to a rail operator or hotel. And even if it’s still with the tour operator, that business might need the money to make payroll or cover other operating expenses.

The long-term solution is for firms to improve their business processes to issue a fast refund while not endangering the company. It’s a discussion that’s way above my paygrade as a consumer advocate.

Could you have avoided this? You had no way of knowing we were about to have a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. And Show of the Month Club seemed like a reputable operator, from your perspective. No, I don’t think there was any way you could have seen this coming.

What about a credit card chargeback? You can dispute your credit card charges under the Fair Credit Billing Act. You have to notify your bank so that it reaches the creditor within 60 days after the first bill. But for a transaction like this one, where you booked a train excursion months in advance, it probably wouldn’t work. Some banks will accept the dispute, but most won’t.

I contacted Show of the Month Club on your behalf. It refunded your \$600.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

