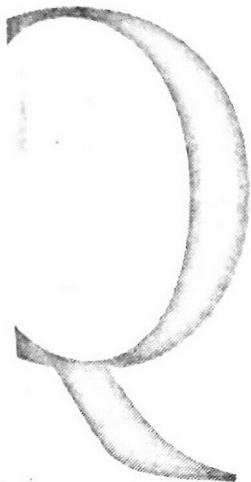


BY CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT  
King Features



I reserved a vacation rental in San Antonio through VRBO this spring and paid my deposit and fees. I made the final payment in July. I attempted to contact the owner to arrange access, but several emails and phone messages went unanswered.

I contacted VRBO by email, phone and certified letter. Today, I was told by phone that in order to receive a refund, I must show up in San Antonio and prove that I cannot access the property. Since there is no response from the owner, I can't risk traveling there with my family and small grandchildren, when there's a possibility we won't have anywhere to stay.

I called back today and asked to speak with a supervisor, but was told there is no supervisor. My vacation has been ruined. I'd like to get a full and immediate refund for my vacation rental. Can you help me?

— John Duncan, Longwood, Fla.

A: If you don't have a vacation rental, then VRBO should offer a full refund without making you show up in San Antonio.

VRBO offers a Book With Confidence Guarantee that, as the name implies, is supposed to assure you that your rental will be available when you arrive ([vrbo.com/info/about-us/legal/terms-conditions/bookwithconfidence](http://vrbo.com/info/about-us/legal/terms-conditions/bookwithconfidence)). But read the fine print: The guarantee applies only if you're wrongfully denied access to the subject property at the start of or during the rental term "as the result of the intentional and/or wrongful act of the advertiser" and if your deposit is not refunded.

That's a lot of "ifs."

Technically, VRBO was correct in telling you to show up and get denied. But that wasn't a reasonable request, since you were traveling to San Antonio with your entire family. What would have happened if the owner had maintained radio silence?

Oh, and that business about there being no supervisor to talk to? That's nonsense too. I publish the names, numbers and email addresses of the key VRBO executives (it's owned by HomeAway) on my consumer-advocacy site: [elliott.org/company-contacts/homeaway-com/](http://elliott.org/company-contacts/homeaway-com/).

I notice that a lot of your communication with VRBO was by phone. While you recorded the conversations, it probably would have been more efficient to stick to writing. That creates a nice paper trail that can easily be forwarded to a company executive or to me.

After I brought your problem to VRBO's attention, it not only refunded the \$4,015 you'd spent but also covered the cost of a new rental. It turns out your original rental had been tied up with some unexpected litigation — an understandable reason to deny your rental, but still no excuse to remain quiet.

Christopher Elliott is the ombudsman for National Geographic Traveler magazine and the author of "How to Be the World's Smartest Traveler." You can read more travel tips on his blog, [elliott.org](http://elliott.org), or email him at [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org).

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