

Vikki,

As I mentioned on Twitter, we are at our wits end with this matter. I'll give you a brief recap of the situation and let you decide if you think it's worth a phone call. At this point, we're about ready to throw in the towel...

Our cell phone number in Moscow: +7 9111363867 (More contact info is available at the bottom of this message.)

Background:

Being responsible travelers (we've literally been traveling the world since July 1, 2010), we got online this evening to secure seat assignments for our SriLankan Airlines flight. This was almost a full 24 hours before its scheduled departure.

Once on their website, we realized that we couldn't find the flight. Further investigation lead us to our email, whereupon we noticed an message from Orbitz informing us that the flight had been rescheduled 24 hours AHEAD of time. We had already missed our flight, a flight we had reserved almost 2 months ago, by two hours.

The email, we discovered, had been received while we were on another flight. Because of our travel circumstances, we could not have acted upon it within time to alter our plans.

We called Orbitz customer support immediately. We stayed on the phone with them for at least two hours, going up three levels by asking to speak with employees' managers when they were not able to help us.

By our understanding, each level of support called SriLankan Airlines on our behalf and each were told the same thing: SriLankan has flagged us as no-shows and because of that, they can stand by their policy of not offering a rebooking at the same price, nor refunding us the purchase price of the tickets without excessive cancellation penalties.

Furthermore, SriLankan has cancelled all legs of our tickets, so even if we were to catch up to our previously booked flights in Sri Lanka or in Dubai, they would not let us board. Also, their cancellation policies allow them to charge us 250 Euros for each ticket, leaving us with a total refund of literally just \$1 USD. That suspicious amount, combined with a schedule change that's almost guaranteed to "trap" at least a few travelers like us, leads us to assume that this shady business practice is an actual scam.

Extenuating Circumstances:

As I mentioned above, we have been traveling for quite some time. My wife and I are on a very limited budget as we backpack around the world, blogging about our experiences as we go. If we're forced to buy new tickets, they'll probably set us back \$1000-\$1500. \$1500 is literally a half month's worth of travel for us.

To make matters worse, it now looks like we may be stuck in Moscow as we look for new flights. I am not a Russian citizen and my visa expires on September 30th, the day after tomorrow. I can't imagine what sort of hassle it would be to navigate the bureaucracy to get an extension. I don't consider that an option.

Possible resolutions:

Since SriLankan Airlines is obviously unwilling to rebook us or refund our flight, we spent a considerable amount of time seeking resolution from Orbitz customer support.

*** Primarily, we just want to get to Bangkok, preferably on the same date we were originally planning. If it's not possible for Orbitz to organize that on our behalf, we expect a full refund for our ticket purchases. ***

Someone at Orbitz customer support offered to rebook us on another flight (at our expense) as a resolution to this matter. This is not acceptable as we are perfectly capable of doing that ourselves and if that's the extent of the support on offer, we'd most certainly book with one of your competitors instead.

Before I go any further, let me state that, yes, we do understand that Orbitz is simply a travel agent and that our chief complaint is with SriLankan Airlines and that SriLankan Airlines is the one that received the bulk of our money, not Orbitz.

But we are longtime Orbitz customers and the entire reason we choose to do business with Orbitz is because we expect them to protect us in matters like this. We expect that Orbitz has insurance that will cover the cost of its clients' tickets and that, in the grand scheme of things, \$700-and-change is a small amount to pay to keep us as satisfied customers.

If Orbitz can do neither of those things -- either rebook without charging us OR give us a full refund -- we plan to call our credit card company and dispute the charges. We do not think that Orbitz is acting fraudulently in this matter, but feel that SriLankan Airlines is and will let our bank/MasterCard make the final decision.

For what it's worth, we were last dealing with a customer support representative named Sophia on the phone. When my wife asked to speak with her manager, she said that she was at the highest level of customer support. When pressed, she said that she would take our number and have someone call us back within 24 hours. We left her with a local (Moscow) number, but don't expect that to be helpful to us. Within the next couple hours, we expect to rebook with someone else. If you're going call me with an offer to help resolve this, please do it very soon.

I don't envy you your position as a customer support representative. Both my wife and I are extremely frustrated right now, and while I can't guarantee that this frustration won't come through over a phone call, I will say that we're not the sort of people to scream into the receiver. We'll either work this out with Orbitz or we won't. We respect your company a lot -- we quite often book our flights through Orbitz -- but if we don't get some solid help in this, our one time of need, we won't be doing business with Orbitz again.

Sincerely,

Arlo Midgett

+7 9111363867 (Moscow cell phone number we can be reached at)

a_midgett on Skype, if you're able to use that

other internet-related contact (chat, SMS, etc.) upon request