



TRAVELLING PLACES

with Gina

Be careful of where you book your cruise

Recently I had one of the big cruise line officials in my office and they were telling me about a phone call they had just received - someone had booked through an online agency and paid for a cruise and now they could not contact the online agency. They had vanished and so had their money. The cruise line couldn't do anything because there was never a booking and they never received any payments.

Oddly, this theme of conversation has come up a few times recently so I thought I would write an article about the industry. Up until about five years ago the travel industry was highly regulated and had to be licensed; we had to have various qualifications and meet certain standards which required ongoing training. We were fully bonded to the TCF (the government run Travel Compensation Fund) with our books being audited and we had to run separate client accounts.

This accreditation was costly to retain but I always felt comfortable being part of this because it was a professional and ethical approach and gave clients peace of mind.

A few years ago, everything changed when the government was lobbied and eventually deregulated the industry.

Currently anyone can open an office or website and call themselves a travel agent. There is no compulsory regulation in the industry and the government approach is 'buyer beware'.

AFTA (the Australian Federation of Travel Agents) is the preeminent industry body that travel industry businesses can apply to be a member of. If accepted, then we can apply to become accredited with ATAS (AFTA Travel Accreditation Scheme). To secure this accreditation we have to adhere to many industry standards including submitting all of our financials for scrutiny by the industry body, running separate client bank accounts, undergoing constant professional training and meeting high industry standards.

ATAS protects you by acting as a clear indicator of quality and reliability. Look for the ATAS symbol with any travel organisation you are dealing with. You can also check membership by calling ATAS on 1300 363 416.

Another consideration is whether the company you are booking with has an affiliation to other industry bodies. For

example, Travelling Places is a Helloworld co-branded agency - this affiliation gives us the buying power of a large agency group and also offers you cover. If a Helloworld agency has financial problems, Helloworld protects your money by guaranteeing the funds held by their agencies.

Also, of importance is your travel insurance - do they offer supplier insolvency? This does not cover you if the travel agent has financial problems but if the supplier does - so if the airline or the coach operator fails then quality travel insurance companies step in to cover your loss. With insurance there are lots of loopholes to look for - we have three companies we deal with and we are happy to provide you with their information.

So, lots of things to consider when you are booking your next escape. If this raises any questions, please call the team at Travelling Places to discuss your query or call AFTA on the number at left.



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*conditions apply

