



Suppliers actively using **getclosure!** 643

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## Interview with the Association of South African Travel Agents



### RATINGS

#### Top Suppliers for the last 7 days

Cell C	★★★★☆
University of South Africa	★★★★☆
Telkom	★★★☆☆
SABC TV Licences	★★★☆☆
ABSA	★★★☆☆



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### SUBMIT A COMPLAINT!

Simply enter the name of the supplier and click "submit complaint".

Enter supplier name here

### HOW IT WORKS

1. You submit a complaint
2. **getclosure!** sends complaint to supplier
3. **getclosure!** reminds supplier to respond
4. Supplier responds to complaint
5. **getclosure!** sends response to you
6. You can:
  - o Reply
  - o Close your complaint
  - o Investigate other options

### GREAT SERVICE?

If you have experienced great service recently and would like to **submit a compliment** simply enter the name of the supplier and click "submit compliment".

Enter supplier name here

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### TESTIMONIALS

As I have mentioned: THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!!!  
After lodging the complaint with getclosure! it wasn't one day and I have received what I

The Association of South African Travel Agents is a non-profit association that represents the interests of over 500 travel agents, wholesalers and tour operators. ASATA investigates and mediates complaints against ASATA members on behalf of their consumers; offering its opinion on the matter and suggesting a course of action.

Diane Potgieter, the industry manager of ASATA, answers a few questions for **getclosure!**, describing how the association operates and the way in which it handles complaints.

#### 1. What is the primary function of ASATA?

ASATA's emphasis is on free trade without violating rules and regulations. Accordingly we have entrenched a Constitution and a Code of Conduct that self-regulates the travel industry and provides the consumer with a benchmark and the comfort that the Members are compliant with ASATA's guidelines. As an indicator of the effect of our governance processes, more than 97% of the complaints we receive from the Consumer relate to non-ASATA members!

ASATA is administered by a full-time Secretariat headed by a Chief Executive Officer, with the day-to-day functions being monitored by a Members Council and its continued role and direction are guided by a Board of Directors. All the Members of the Regional Committee's, Council and Board are elected by the Members at an Annual General Meeting.

The association interfaces with key opinion leaders in the industry and senior Government officials in representing its Members on all issues of common interest to ASATA Members. This includes policy, planning, operational and regulatory issues, ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the travel industry.

The primary focus of ASATA is directed at any issue related to improving the continued sustainability and profitability of its Members and ensuring the delivery of a professional service to the travelling consumer. This is achieved through strong relationships and open dialogue with all stakeholders.

#### 2. Describe a brief anecdote or case study to illustrate how your association operates.

We once received a consumer complaint from an elderly couple, both over the age of 80 years who had travelled from Johannesburg to London return on one carrier, and then from London to Milan on another carrier, and returning from Rome to London. On their return, the couple's flight out of Rome was delayed by 20 minutes due to inclement weather. After a chaotic rush at London's Heathrow airport, they eventually missed their flight. Naturally, additional expenses were incurred as the couple had to spend a night in London before continuing their journey.

On their return to South Africa, the couple contacted the agency to lodge a claim. However, the consultant did not feel she was to blame for this incident as the couple missed their flight due to flight delay which was out of the control of the travel agent. On further investigation it was found that the two-hour connection at London Heathrow was completely inadequate for these clients to make their next flight on time. Although the reservations system suggests a two-hour connecting time, the consultant failed to check the following:

- Terminal change: the clients arrived in one terminal and departed from another which takes some time – particularly in larger airports
- The passengers had separate tickets and as such would not be able to check their luggage through from Rome to Johannesburg – they would need to collect their luggage in London, change terminals and check-in for the London-Johannesburg flight
- Being an international arrival, the passengers would have needed to clear immigration, passport control and customs
- One of the passengers was wheelchair bound, meaning she would be last to disembark from the aircraft on landing, also causing a delay

Despite the slight flight delay, it would have been a near impossibility for the passengers to

wanted from SA GetAways and a FULL report from getclosure!  
I never thought it would be so easy to solve the problem over the internet with no physical contact. - M.R

July 2008

## ALL TESTIMONIALS

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have boarded the connecting flight on time. ASATA's recommendation was therefore for the agent to reimburse the client the additional expenses incurred.

### 3. How long have you been the Industry Manager of ASATA and what do you enjoy most about your position?

I have been employed with ASATA for three happy years. I enjoy the variety that my position offers, as no two days are ever the same. Being a small team, my portfolio changes according to what the day and task requires, and we all jump in and assist with the various projects being initiated or implemented. I think it is the flexibility and variety that my position offers that provides the most enjoyment.

### 4. What does your average work day entail?

- Liaising with travel industry suppliers for administration/resolution of various technical issues
- Assisting with member's queries (to do with other members/partners/compliance issues, etc)
- Corresponding with various consulates/associations/government departments
- Reviewing advertising issues and attending Advertising Standards Authority tribunal meetings
- Co-ordinating, preparing and hosting meetings for our Members Council
- Attending Regional ASATA meetings
- Remaining abreast of compliance issues (eg. PCI-DSS, Consumer Protection Bill, Companies Act, etc)

### 5. What qualifications and qualities do you need to work for an association like ASATA?

There are various functions within our association which require different skills sets. For my function, travel industry experience with an in-depth understanding of the broader industry is essential. As we are an interface for both members and the consumer, service excellence is paramount. Respect, impartiality, empathy, efficiency and effectiveness are definitely required skills, whilst a passion for the industry is certainly desired.

### 6. When should a consumer lodge a complaint with ASATA?

A procedural document is available on the [ASATA website](#). Complaints should only be lodged with ASATA once all attempts to resolve the dispute with the ASATA Member travel agency have been exhausted.

### 7. What 3 tips can you offer our readers?

- 1) Always use an ASATA Member for all travel arrangements
- 2) Try to keep as much of the advice and booking information as possible in writing
- 3) Check all your documentation to ensure that it is correct

### 8. Who are the top performers in the travel industry?

All those who have a policy of service excellence and a service attitude.

### 9. How many complaints has your office handled over the last year?

As mentioned in the first question, we do receive many complaints – on average 5 – 10 per day. However, most of these relate to non-Members of ASATA. Over the last year we have dealt with 28 complaints, which is certainly a good reflection on our ASATA Members, given that we have over 600 members. In many of the cases we have dealt with we simply needed to explain to the consumer what the role of the travel agent is and where their responsibility lies. Travel agents obviously have no control over flight delays or the treatment of hotel personnel towards guests.

### 10. What is the average time taken to deal with complaints?

This depends greatly on the nature of the lodged complaint. In the matter of a simple explanation, the complaint may be handled within hours. In other cases it may be necessary to request suppliers (airline, hotel, tour operator, reservations systems) to search through historical data in order to retrieve customer feedback forms, technical reports or reservations

history to determine the cause of particular problems with a traveller's booking. This can take days to weeks.

#### **11. What is the average cost per complaint handled?**

ASATA does not charge consumers for complaints handling. Of course there may be an intangible cost in terms of time and effort on the part of both ASATA and the parties involved in resolution of the complaint – however, no fee is charged.

#### **12. Please provide statistics complaint outcomes achieved and consumer satisfaction levels**

Although a satisfaction monitoring system will only be implemented during the course of 2009, we estimate that we achieve satisfaction levels between consumers and ASATA Members of approximately 90%. It is important to emphasise that ASATA is not an ombudsman, but facilitate the meditation process in order to resolve disputes and seek to find an amicable resolution for all parties.

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