



ASSOCIATION OF SA TRAVEL AGENTS

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MESSAGE FROM THE ASATA CEO: ROBYN CHRISTIE

14 November 2011

ASATA'S RESPONSE TO THE TRAVELSTART PRESS RELEASE IN THE NEWS TODAY

The articles listed below are featured into today's media. ASATA was only asked for comment by Wendy Knowler, the Consumer journalist, and her article appeared in the Independent Newspapers group; including The Star, The Pretoria News, Cape Argus, The Mercury as well as IOL Travel News. Some of ASATA's response was not included in the article. The same press release from Travelstart was featured on the GoTravel24.com site without any comment from ASATA:

- **Shocking air fare price discrepancy**
<http://www.iol.co.za/travel/travel-news/shocking-air-fare-price-discrepancy-1.1177374>
November 14 2011 at 08:44am
By WENDY KNOWLER
- **Are SA travellers being taken for a ride?**
<http://www.gotravel24.com/southernafrica/feature-focus/are-sa-travellers-being-taken-ride>
November 14th, 2011

Herewith ASATA's original response in full:

ASATA, 11 November 2011

Turning survey results into intelligence is always an interesting exercise and obviously Travelstart have interpreted a version that reflects kindly on their on-line travel business, but it is harmful to an industry to create a perception that all travel agents other than themselves are rip-off's. It is interesting that Travelstart is a Member of ASATA and enjoy a good relationship with us, particularly considering we represent some of those "traditional travel agents" their survey refers to.

For too long we have underestimated the intelligence of our travellers. The results of this survey implies that they are ripped off on a daily basis which is clearly not the case. ASATA Members abide by a strict Code of Conduct and without seeing the details of this survey it is difficult to understand who is deviating from the norm. From an Association perspective who deals with Consumer issues, I can testify that 94% of all of our calls of complaint are about non ASATA Members including a deluge of travellers who have been let down by the internet.

It is also important to compare apples with apples. Not all travellers are seeking the cheapest price, many are seeking advice from travel experts, advice they are prepared to pay a negotiated price for. This intermediary service includes the negotiation of competitive rates, providing 24 hour access in the event of any unforeseen changes, not to mention having to interpret complicated fare rules to avoid unnecessary charges.

Interestingly over eight years ago the travel agent community changed their business models to the concept of charging their customers a 'service fee' or a 'professional fee' it was as a result of the airlines moving away from paying commissions to agents, therefore the survey is not well informed as to its assumption that the agent will move business in an attempt to maximise their earnings. Interestingly enough, it was assumed that the travel agent as we knew it would be replaced by the internet but quite the contrary has happened. The airlines in South Africa report that over eighty percent of their distribution comes from traditional travel agents, which dispels the rumor that the customers are flocking to the on-line travel sites. The market is well versed with the virtues of the on line booking agents but are equally aware of the consequences of when things go wrong which they do more often than not. It is at these times when the value of a relationship with a travel company becomes essential. Particularly one that in addition to belonging to the Association of South African Travel Agents (ASATA) also has nurtured strong relationships with suppliers that can be called upon in times of need. Until one is challenged by an unexpected event in ones travel itinerary you can never fully appreciate the importance of these relationships.

The Consumer Protection Act demands transparency in fees charged and ASATA Members have been well versed with the requirements thereof, but moreover the Consumer is very well informed as to their rights and do not hesitate in reporting irregularities.

South Africans are sophisticated travellers, they know what they want and neither traditional travel agents or on-line agents are smarter than them so to indicate that they are being ripped off to the extent of 85% is sensational and perhaps a little insulting.

Ends