

Advert attack shows Webjet is threatened, says riled Kiwi travel agents

TRAVELinc Memo has received many letters and phonecalls from those in the trade who are offended about the Webjet advert. We share their reactions with you.

New Zealand travel agents continue to express their disdain for the latest Webjet ad that makes a point of knocking the traditional trade.

Lee Johns, My Travel Broker in Timaru, says she has only had three experiences with Webjet and her memories of these were not pleasant. They included the paying of high change fees, a client who received no refund when cancelling a flight even though Johns feels the fare would normally have only attracted a cancellation fee, and an example of a client sourcing a flight on Webjet from Dubrovnik to East Midlands and asking Johns if she could book it.

'It wasn't obvious to her (the client) but it required a plane change, including collecting luggage, and the connection time would have been almost impossible. I didn't book it for obvious reasons but found a more suitable option.'

She says she saw the advert last week and felt it was 'treating consumers like dummies'.

'I think most consumers are smarter than they give them credit for as I have yet to see any benefit in booking with them (Webjet). Most (fares) I have looked at are not cheaper.'

Kapiti's Lee Amor, of YOURTravel, likens the advert to what appears to be the 'Trump philosophy'.

'If you aren't good enough by just promoting yourself and your own attributes then attack, by any means you have, what you perceive to be your greatest threat.'

'Obviously bricks and mortar travel agents are hurting Webjet and they are now



The offending Webjet advert

extremely concerned. YOURTravel clients are consistently telling us that they now find booking through the internet to be very confusing.'

Glenn Warrington, at World Travellers Titirangi, says it is a shame that Webjet feels the need to attack travel agents.

'They obviously feel threatened to go to this extent.'

'The simple fact is you can't replace travel agents with an online booking website as it will never replace the knowledge or the experiences we have. Nor can it replace a person-to-person conversation by qualifying the client's needs and expectations for what could be a once and a lifetime dream.'

Meanwhile, Gerard Murphy, of Bon Voyage Cruises & Travel, added a note on YouTube. 'And when your flight gets cancelled try ringing Webjet and getting it sorted. A good travel agent will be on the other end of his/her mobile and with his/her online system that links to all airlines, get you rebooked and re-ticketed before you can say 'call centre doesn't speak English'.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fares are seldom cheaper

Dear Editor,

Over the years, particularly for last-minute European bookings, I have undertaken numerous price comparisons between Webjet and me.

More often than not, fares I come up with are on a par or even lower than Webjet – of course, unlike many agents, my margins being a solo operator are probably lower than average.

Periodically Webjet offers lower attractive fares on good routes, however, on trying to reserve up pops the response along the lines that these fares are no longer available.

Last year for clients travelling to India, I quoted a competitive fare. The clients checked Webjet, punched in a requested number of passengers (four) and up popped an amazing fare, which she thought covered the four of them not realising the rate displayed per passenger.

As for Southern Cross, their ad about consultants' ability to provide sound holiday options, only knocked insurance, they probably have a point. I have many clients that use Southern Cross based on cost and reliability.

Heather McKenzie
Travel Managers, Rotorua

Agents save the day

Dear Editor,

I'm responding to your front-page item on the denigration of agents' services/abilities by Webjet with a brief story demonstrating the benefit of using a real agent.

My lady has just returned from what could have been a journey in hell, made less stressful thanks to her agent. We had researched her

trip on the web but she decided she would prefer to have the agent she had used on numerous trips to finalise her arrangements and thank God she did.

Her itinerary was NZ – UK – Turkey – NZ (a journey she had undertaken numerous times before) and I had planned to go with her until a change in my employment ruled this out.

All went well to the UK, but less than 48 hours before she was due to fly LHR-IST, terrorists attacked the Ataturk terminal in Istanbul.

The Turkish Airlines London office phones were jammed and similarly their Turkish phone service was overloaded (not that I could understand what I was been told on the automated system) and the website was very slow. A call to her Wellington agent and 15 minutes later she was rebooked and confirmed to travel 12 days later with even the same seat allocation!

But, as they say on TV ads, wait there's more: three days before she is due to fly out of Istanbul comes the unsuccessful coup and firstly the closure of Ataturk airport followed by all international airlines cancelling flights. Again, her agent kept in contact with SIA and received and passed on regular updates not only about the flight but also any changes for check in timings and security. SIA resumed operations the day before she flew out and she was informed of this before it was even announced on the SIA website.

I doubt that Webjet would have been able to sort, let alone provide reassurance during such a travel nightmare!

Although I'm no longer directly involved in Travel/Tourism management I thoroughly enjoy keeping up with industry news and progress through your publications – thank you to the ProMag team.

Graham C Atkinson
Wellington