

Fly-by-nights should be targeted, say agents

STB urged to get tough on dodgy operators

By Natalie Chen / November 16, 2015



Travel agents want to see the back of 'fly-by-night' operators. Photo Credit: ShingLokChe/iStock

Travel agents are calling for the Singapore Tourism Board to do more to clean up the image of the local travel industry.

Agents complain that there are a significant number of travel agencies that operate in a dubious fashion or, as some say, are “fly-by-night” companies.

Said Crystal Sim, CEO, Albatross Travel and Tours, “These companies are giving travel agencies that operate ethically and legitimately a bad name and reputation. These people may sell cheap tours but they come with questionable conditions.”

She added, “The industry is already going through some tough times and all this hanky-panky by these so-called travel agencies is making things more difficult for us as it affects our industry’s credibility.

“STB should look into things and be more stringent with the criteria set for operating a travel agency.”

The total number of agencies climbed from 1,096 at end-2012 to 1,195 at the end of May this year, according to data from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), which issues travel agency licences. This was reported in the Straits Times.

The number of agencies closing down grew from 96 in 2012 to 114 last year.

The Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) said 19 agencies shutting down abruptly in three and a half years resulted in consumers losing millions of dollars.

Said Alicia Seah, director, marketing communications, Dynasty Travel, “There are some travel agencies which do not conduct themselves professionally and are thus not profitable. Then there are the ‘unlicensed’ travel agents who act as tour leaders for friends and abscond with the money – that, too, is a worrying trend.

“We are looking forward to STB regulating the industry and giving more protection to the consumers. In the long-term this will help in the brand building of travel agencies.”

Said Ong Ling Lee, director, Travel Agents and Tourist Guides, Singapore Tourism Board, “STB conducts regular compliance checks on licensed travel agents, including audits of their financial statements. Travel agents that fail to meet the requirements can lose their licence.

“Regulatory measures are also taken by STB to protect consumers’ interests. This includes the new licensing condition requiring travel agents to explicitly seek consumers’ decisions on the purchase of travel insurance that includes protection against the travel agent’s insolvency.

“The new condition serves to educate consumers of the measures they can take to protect their interests when they make their travel bookings.”