

14 May 2020

[REDACTED]

By email only: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act #19.159 - Travel agent / COVID complaints

1. On 15 April 2020, the Commerce Commission (Commission) advised you that we had received more than 100 complaints about travel, subscription and event cancellations and refunds related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. In response, on the same date, you asked for any complaint relating to a New Zealand based travel agent (but not its identity) and the issue complained about.
3. You confirmed that you are not interested in complaints related to airline direct purchases or online providers, for example Expedia, Trivago, Bookabach, Bachcare or Airbnb.
4. On 21 April 2020, in response to our email of the same date, you clarified that:
 - 4.1 the relevant date range is 1 February - 15 April 2020;
 - 4.2 you are only interested in complaints related to COVID-19;
 - 4.3 you are only interested in complaints about travel agents based in New Zealand and do not want complaints related to Expedia, Webjet, Trivago or Google (for example); and
 - 4.4 you are not interested in any supplier direct complaints, for example P&O or Royal Caribbean cruises, Air New Zealand, any airline or any supplier direct bookings.
5. We have treated this as a request for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Our response

6. We have decided to grant your request. For a more current picture, we have extended the date range to between 1 February and 13 May 2020.
7. The Commission has received 76 complaints about New Zealand based travel agents related to COVID-19 during the period from 1 February to 13 May 2020.¹ The issues complained about are as follows:²
 - 7.1 Cancellation fees - 40 complaints
 - 7.2 Credit instead of refund - 34 complaints
 - 7.3 Not refunded in full - 5 complaints
 - 7.4 Difficulties contacting travel agent - 2 complaints
 - 7.5 Credit expiry - 2 complaints
 - 7.6 No credit or refund - 1 complaint
 - 7.7 Delay in refund - 1 complaint
 - 7.8 Non refund of travel insurance - 1 complaint
 - 7.9 Inability to rebook - 1 complaint
 - 7.10 Credits held by travel agencies for refunded travel are unsecured (consumers are unsecured creditors) - 1 complaint
8. Please note the Commission will be publishing this response to your request in the Official Information Act register on our website.³ Your details will be redacted from the published response.
9. Please do not hesitate to contact us at uia@comcom.govt.nz if you have any questions about this request.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Sheppard
OIA Coordinator

¹ The number between 1 February to 15 April 2020 was 19 complaints.

² Some complaints are about more than one issue and have been recorded against all issues complained about.

³ <https://comcom.govt.nz/about-us/requesting-official-information/oia-register>