

HOW TO ADVISE YOUR CLIENTS TO HANDLE THOSE HOLIDAY HICCUPS

One can plan for months perfecting your client's dream holiday and yet they can still be susceptible to a few unexpected hiccups. To avoid and anticipate these challenges here are our top tips to help your clients enjoy a hassle-free holiday. Be sure to share them before they embark on their travels this Festive Season.

Traveling with children

Gone are the days when boarding the plane with your little ones are the simplest part of the journey. These days all the strict rules and regulations in place make it more of a hassle. There is a long list of requirements needed when crossing South African borders with a minor. In addition to a valid passport and visa, an [Unabridged Birth Certificate](#) is also required.

Remember, your client must go to the Department of Home Affairs themselves to apply and it usually takes up to six weeks for the certificate to be issued. It's thus essential to ensure your clients have allowed enough time for this prior to departure.

Without these documents, children are not legally allowed to board the plane or cross a border. This often results in the rescheduling of travel plans at an additional cost not to mention the added frustration.

Also ensure that they are aware that if only one parent is travelling with the children, an affidavit is required that proves the other parent has given his or her consent.

From February 2017 however it will be possible for South African passport holders to have parents' details printed in the passports of minors, which would remove the need for Unabridged Birth Certificates.

To prevent these situations from occurring, create a checklist months in advance to ensure your clients are all set for their trip, and have all the correct documentation in hand.

Natural disasters or flight cancelations

Often nature does its own thing and is out of our control. Should your client's flight be affected the airline usually covers the cost of another flight. However, in some instances travellers might have to

fork out big bucks and will only be compensated later on. This is a less than ideal situation as additional costs such as meals, transport to and from the airport and accommodation are often not covered. This is why we always advise agents to encourage travellers to get some form of travel insurance to mitigate a natural disaster or bad weather.

When it comes to assisting your client with rescheduling flights, ensure you direct your client to request the required information from the relevant desk soonest so that you can make the necessary arrangements and get airline authorisation. Stay in touch with them throughout this process too as they'll have the latest information from the airline.

Travel insurance would also cover instances where an entire vacation has to be cancelled or postponed due to a natural disaster.

Exchanging currency

Where your clients choose to exchange currencies really depends on where they qualify for the best exchange rate. Encourage them to get the necessary cash as soon as possible though as travellers often bargain on having enough time to exchange cash at the airport, but long queues might not make this possible.

Remind your clients to notify their bank if they plan using their credit cards overseas and to check for additional transaction costs to avoid unpleasant surprises on return.

Missed your flight. What now?

Clients should always be advised to arrive at least an hour and a half (domestic) or three hours (international) before departure to ensure that they have enough time to settle in. However, if in the event that they do miss their flight, they can either go directly to the airport ticket sales desk or contact you to assist with a new quote and booking.

It should be communicated that changes are subject to the airline allowing it and that there will be additional costs such as the airline's change penalties as well as any additional difference in fare and taxes. FlightSiteAgent also charges R250 per person admin fee on changes for international bookings and R99 per person on domestic bookings.

Time allowance for connecting flight

To limit clients' frustration and keep stress levels at bay, we suggest they allow for at least three hours between connecting flights. This will ensure that they're able to disembark, collect bags and make their way to the next terminal in good time.

Check in online

To ensure a seamless and quick check-in process, advise clients to check-in online 24 hours before arriving at the airport. This will not only save time but will also guarantee a seat. They will thank you for this tip when flights are overbooked.

Luggage requirements

There really is no general rule anymore. Some airlines offer free checked baggage, others don't. What does remain unchanged across the board however is 7 kg free hand luggage. Each airline has its own size guidelines, which can be shared with your client once the booking has been made.

If travelling locally, advise clients to pack light so that they don't have to tolerate long queues.

Accommodation

Always remind your client the day before departure to pack their passport/ ID, relevant credit card and hotel booking confirmation to avoid a potential holiday blunder. If they do forget, you could liaise with the hotel manager or reception to find out if a copy of the card is acceptable and then have it sent to them via email.

Assisting your client with these "what if?" scenarios will put you both in good stead: your client will be grateful that they avoided an expensive or time-intensive mishap and you will have reaffirmed your value as a trusted travel agent. It's a win-win.