

CONSUMER ADVICE

Ask the experts

This week
Too few airport check-in staff; e-visa problems for India; balmy Mauritius, and going for an stroll in Japan

EasyJet in the dock

Q On July 29 2013 I arrived at Luton Airport for an easyJet flight to Tel Aviv with my family of five. We joined the bag drop queue at 6.45am, more than two hours before our 9am departure. There were about 200 people in line and only three desks were open.

At 7.30am I raised concerns with a member of easyJet's staff. She assured us our bags would be dealt with in time.

At around 8.15am easyJet announced that passengers for the Tel Aviv flight should go to the "flight closure desk". We made our way there along with others.

At 8.18am we presented our boarding passes to the easyJet agent who made a note on one saying "rear steps" before asking us to excuse her as she needed to speak to her manager. On her return she said she was unable to check us in and we must go to the customer service desk.

A representative from EasyJet told us that we'd missed our flight and there were no available seats for a week as it was the summer school holidays. We were told notes had been put in the system to say check-in was very busy and there were too few staff to process passengers in time.

As you can imagine we were all pretty upset about losing our annual holiday. I called my travel agent who found business-class seats on an El Al flight from Heathrow to Tel Aviv that afternoon. We booked these and took a taxi to the airport.

On our return I sent an email to easyJet explaining the issues we had faced and asking for reimbursement of our costs. EasyJet said it had no case to answer as staff had called my name over the airport's PA system to come forward to check in and I had not responded.

I was in the airport for more than three hours and nobody's name was called to come forward to complete check in.

I feel that I have a strong case for compensation. Can you help?

ZEVY SHINE

Gill Charlton, consumer expert

A I asked the CAA – which is responsible for taking up passenger complaints about flights from the UK

– for its view of Mr Shine's case. It agreed it could be argued the family had been denied boarding. They should have been offered the choice of a refund or re-routing and compensation. "If all the facts stack up and it was its fault, easyJet should refund the tickets and, at a minimum, pay the difference between those tickets and the El Al economy fare", said a CAA spokesman.

Mr Shine asked the CAA to take up his case officially which it did but without success. On April 14 2014, the CAA wrote to Mr Shine to say easyJet had not responded with the information it needed to assess the circumstances of the case. It suggested Mr Shine take court action but warned that if further information emerged giving easyJet a reasonable defence he may lose his claim for compensation.

Mr Shine decided to pursue easyJet for damages of £6,106.70 for the new El Al flights, £115 for taxi fares, and denied boarding compensation of £600 per person. I asked Jacqueline Foster, MEP for the North West, who speaks on aviation issues in Brussels and is fed up of airlines trying to wriggle out of these situations, to advise Mr Shine before his court appearance.

His claim was finally heard in the Central London County Court by a Deputy District Judge on August 6. The Judge said easyJet had let Mr Shine and his family down and was guilty of breach of contract. He awarded an initial settlement of £7,657.77 which included court costs and two years' interest on the fares calculated at eight per cent.

At a further hearing on October 9, the Judge also confirmed Mr Shine had effectively been denied boarding and awarded him the maximum compensation under EU 261/2004 of £600 per passenger. This made a total award of £10,671.38 against easyJet which the airline has now paid in full.

This award is a big wake-up call for easyJet – and other airlines – that regularly fail to have enough staff manning bag drops for early flights. Time and again they blame the customer, either for arriving too late at the airport or for not coming forward in time. If this happens to you, get photographic proofs of your arrival time in the



QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Walking in Japan

Q I'd like to visit Japan and its main cultural sites with a tour company. I'd also like about a week's walking, not in the cities, nothing strenuous, and a bed and en suite at the day's end. And not too pricey. Any suggestions? JAN THOM

Trisha Andres, escorted tours expert

A Specialists in gentle walking holidays combine Japan's cultural highlights with

guided walks away from the cities. Accommodation is typically three- and four-star hotels, with stays at a *ryokan* (traditional inn), but none are particularly cheap. HF Holidays (hfholidays.co.uk), for example, runs a 13-day Imperial Japan tour from Tokyo to the ancient city of Kyoto, and includes walks along the Nakasendo path. Departures May–November, from £3,799pp half board, including flights. Ramblers Holidays (ramblersholidays.co.uk) offers a shorter nine-day Whistlerstop Japan guided walking tour which also takes in Tokyo and Kyoto,

and a day in scenic Hakone. It departs on April 9 and costs £3,199 including flights and some meals. For the more adventurous, World Expeditions (worldexpeditions.co.uk) has a Backroads of Japan tour which visits Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, with hiking built in, including a trail at the base of Mount Fuji, the Omine pilgrim path and Nakasendo highway and the Yamanobe Road. As it's introductory level, the hiking shouldn't be demanding. Departures March–November, from £2,190pp, include most meals but not flights.

Strolling down Philosopher's Walk in Kyoto, above

terminal and insist on being prioritised. If this does not happen, take down names and take the airline to court.

Indian visa issues

Q I am travelling to India later this month and my travel agent advised that I get an e-Tourist visa online. As this can only be done a month before travel, I filled in the form two weeks ago and uploaded it successfully.

The problem is that the site won't let me pay for the visa. For the first week there was an alert saying that the payment portal was not working. Now it is working again but once I put in the credit card details and press pay, it takes me to a page that says payment has failed. I have tried to pay using

both the Safari and Firefox browsers to no avail. I have contacted the Help Desk by email and by phone to no avail. What can I do? DEBBIE HUMPHRY

Gill Charlton, India expert

A By chance, I had a similar situation two weeks ago. The Indian High Commission's website doesn't work very well with Safari but usually responds to Firefox or Google Chrome. This time, using a different browser to pay didn't work for me either.

After reading online forums I found an answer: pay using your phone. I entered my e-visa application ID into the High Commission's website (indianvisaonline.gov.in)

using the Safari browser on my iPhone and payment went through straight away. My e-visa approval came through in 36 hours.

If this still doesn't work it may be that your application ID has been blocked because payment has failed more than five times. In this case, you'll need to make a new application before paying by phone. If time is very short, online agents have sprung up who will process Indian e-visas for a fee. They appear to have no trouble paying.

Mauritius in March

Q Please can you tell me what the weather will be like in Mauritius in mid-March – I am planning my

honeymoon for that time. YADAV SUNIL

Nick Trend, travel expert

A It shouldn't be too bad – average seven hours of sunshine a day, with temperatures peaking at 30C. But you'll be catching the latter part of the rainy season, so expect some heavy showers amid the sunny spells.

Questions should be sent by email to asktheexperts@telegraph.co.uk. Please provide your name and nearest town and, if your query is about a dispute with a travel company, your full address, daytime telephone number and any booking reference. We regret that we cannot answer postal or telephone queries.



Trisha Andres

Trisha is a travel expert who specialises in escorted tours



Gill Charlton

Gill's focus is complaints against or disputes with travel companies



Nick Trend

Nick is Telegraph Travel's consumer expert with a regular advice column

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