



PRESS RELEASE
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Travel Counsellors reports change in customer booking trend

One of the UK's leading independent travel companies Travel Counsellors has seen a change its customer booking trends, showing that customers are still looking to travel abroad in the current climate but are now booking their holidays later than in previous years, with a rise a popularity to medium and long haul destinations.

The company, which has over 700 home-based travel agents throughout the UK and a further 300 agents operating overseas, reported a 7% increase in customers booking and departing in February compared to the previous year. The average booking value for departures this month is £1,000, a 14% increase on the previous year, and bookings for departure after the end of 2009 have an average value of £5,200, 43% up on figures from last year.

Travel Counsellors' Managing Director Steve Byrne comments; "Our figures show that people are still booking to go away, but a greater proportion of customers are holding off booking until closer to the time they want to travel. In terms of departure profile compared to last year, we are finding that shorter term bookings have a higher value compared to last year, on average 12% up, which shows people are still spending their money on holidays but are more inclined to commit to a holiday closer to departure, rather than booking months in advance. Our figures show that, despite reports of doom and gloom, people still want and need to take their annual holiday."

The company has also seen a shift in its customers' choice of holiday destinations. Figures show that customers are now booking to travel outside of the euro zone in order to get more for their money, with medium haul destinations such Turkey and Sharm el Sheikh proving firm favourites, surpassing previous top destinations Tenerife and Lanzarote. The long haul destination of Dubai is also becoming more popular as the city continues to focus on tourist developments with the recent launches of new hotels such as Atlantis the Palm, which opened last September.

He adds; "Another key reason for this sales increase, alongside the later booking patterns, is that customers want to get value for money. We can see this in the shift in most popular destinations and by booking through an independent agency such as Travel Counsellors customers have a much more varied choice of holidays that can suit every budget and requirement."

The company also highlights that, following recent supplier collapses within the travel industry as a result of the economic climate, customers are realizing the value in booking with agents who can offer complete financial protection and customer service in today's uncertain market. An example of this is the collapse of airline XL last September, in which thousands of customers in the UK lost their money after booking directly with the airline. Travel Counsellors is one of the few travel companies in the industry to operate a financial trust, a unique financial guarantee that covers absolutely everything the customer books via their Travel Counsellor including hotels, low cost airlines, scheduled flights and car rental.

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About Travel Counsellors: Travel Counsellors PLC is one of the UK's largest independent travel companies with turnover at the end of its last financial year (Oct 31 2007) of £212 million, a 21% increase year on year. Founded in 1994 it currently has over 1,000 travel consultants who work from home with the support of over 200 staff at the company's head office in Bolton. The company operates in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, South Africa, Australia, Canada and the US. In the UK Travel Counsellors places all customer money in a Trust account which guarantees a 100% refund in the event that a supplier collapses. Travel Counsellors was the winner of the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2003-2008, the technology category of the 2005 CBI Growing Business Awards and was voted Travel Agent of the Year by readers of the Guardian, Observer and Guardian Unlimited in 2006 & 2007.

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