

PRESS RELEASE

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Travel Counsellors criticises latest ABTA changes as 'bad news for customers'

Independent travel agency Travel Counsellors PLC has said its decision to create a Financial Trust to protect its customers has been vindicated by ABTA's latest announcement that it will not pay customers should the travel agent that they book their holiday with collapse.

Following the latest meeting of the ABTA Board of Directors, ABTA has announced a number of membership changes including that it will 'cease direct payments to consumers in respect of failure of Members conducting retail activities'.

Travel Counsellors established its Financial Trust, which is independently administered by the Barclays Bank Trust Company, in September 2004 due to the loopholes in the financial protection offered by ABTA and ATOL. Now that customers will not even be protected against the failure of an ABTA agency that decision has been vindicated.

Travel Counsellors chairman David Speakman said: "This latest move by ABTA is extremely bad news for customers. Even if they book with an ABTA agent, if that agent fails the new rules means they will not get their money back. There is no doubt that establishing the Travel Counsellors Trust was the right thing to do. It gives our customers a copper bottomed guarantee that their money is 100% protected."

Unlike customers booking through ABTA agencies, Travel Counsellors' customers can be sure that when they book their travel arrangements that should either Travel Counsellors or the supplier that their holiday has been booked with fail, that their money is 100% guaranteed. The Trust means each and every one of its clients can be sure they will be fully reimbursed in the event of ANY supplier failure – including low cost airlines, scheduled air, package holidays, accommodation only and car hire.

A recent example of when the Trust came into effect was after the failure of low cost airline EUJet – three customers who booked by debit card and so were not covered by their credit card company received full reimbursement. If they had booked independently or through an ABTA agent they would have lost their money.

The Financial Trust is just one of a number of reasons why people choose to book their holidays with Travel Counsellors. Its agents, who have an average of 20 years travel industry experience, concentrate on providing exceptional levels of personal service. Working from home and using award winning technology they are available at a time to suit the customer – meaning unlike high street agencies they can be contacted during the evenings and at weekends.

To speak to your local Travel Counsellor telephone 0800 093 1388 or to find your nearest Travel Counsellor visit our website www.travelcounsellors.com

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EDITOR'S NOTES: Travel Counsellors PLC is one of the UK's largest independent travel agencies with turnover at the end of its last financial year (Oct 312005) of £150 million, a 17% increase year on year. Founded by chairman David Speakman in 1994 it currently has over 560 travel consultants nationwide who work from home with the support of over 110 staff at the company's head office in Bolton, Greater Manchester. During 2005 it also expanded into Southern Ireland, where it now has 15 consultants and the Netherlands, where it has six consultants to date. Travel Counsellors prides itself on the exceptional levels of personal service it offers its clients, a fact that was recognised in 2003 when it received the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise. Travel Counsellors places all customer money in a Trust account, administered by the Barclays Bank Trust Company, which guarantees a 100% refund in the event that a supplier collapses.

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