

Are Kids Clubs Safe? The Concern Remains!

The recent case of the Abduction of Madeleine McCann, has highlighted the dangers that lurk below happy smiling resorts. The issue of child safety has undergone a thorough review of how we manage our children's safety and how the authorities react in the event of a serious incident arising.

We have already commented that such issues require cool thinking, and a compassionate approach in what is already a very difficult situation.

Last October we highlighted a story involving the employment of a resort representative in a children's club. We saw that the company employed this representative and his girlfriend following a telephone interview.

This public spirited individual was concerned that young people were being employed without qualification, and more importantly, without a conviction-free certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). We challenged the approach of this tour operator, and reported them to the CRB, concerned that holidaymakers were perhaps being unnecessarily exposed to danger. Surprisingly, the CRB advised us that there was no requirement for such checks to be carried out on intending children's representatives abroad, but that it would be best practice if they did.

At the time of the Madeleine McCann enquiry, we took part in an interview on Scotland Live. We highlighted the 'representatives case' as raising an issue of concern. The representative from the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) commented that he would be concerned if the offending tour operator were an ABTA member as this would fly in the face of their training and code of conduct.

This organisation does not consider that the travel industry is committing wholesale acts of placing children in jeopardy; the industry after all is made up of Mums and Dads, it is inconceivable that they would introduce parents and their children into risk situations.

Consider then the following holidaymaker's story. Mr Y purchased a ski holiday with an ABTA & AITO tour operator. He had been with this operator on previous holidays, and preferred the more exclusive club environment of the holiday. It was the first holiday whereby his 4 year old daughter could take part in the skiing activity. She was duly enrolled into the resort ski school, through the combined service of the children club in the hotel. Mr Y already had some concerns as to the operation of the club for two reasons.

The first concerned the lack of play facilities; this was a club that appeared to rely heavily on the use of a TV and video recorder. Secondly, there was an issue of security. The kids club backed onto a back door running adjacent to a main road. One evening, the kids club was broken into and a number of ski items were stolen. Mr Y's concern as to security was not eased when he discovered that this was not the first time that this 'kids club' had been broken into.

It was however that management of his daughter's care which led to him expressing anger at how his daughter was treated. Morning was spent in the kids club, followed by lunch. The children's representative then asked another hotel guest to take charge of this little girl, and deliver her to her ski school!

The lady was stunned by the request, but nonetheless agreed to take he into her care. This holidaymaker was so concerned by this lack of foresight, she informed Mr Y.

He was shocked to discover what had happened, particularly as he had witnessed the children's rep snowboarding down the mountain that afternoon. Mr Y complained to the hotel manager who apologised profusely, and this was followed by an apology from the children's rep.

Mr Y was so concerned about this lapse in judgement, he wrote to the tour operator. He wrote in March 2007, and is still at this time waiting for a response. However, he has been advised that the Managing Director is travelling around various resorts/countries, and will review the issues at the end of the season!

These events occurred before Madeleine McCann was abducted, and we have heard the responsible and structured response from ABTA on the issue of child safety.

However, it would appear that not everyone is awake to the message. It is simple; holidaymaker's trust you for their safe passage and care on holiday. A greater care is passed to the Industry when parents entrust their precious cargo into the care of others. Let us hope that we do not have to tie up any more yellow ribbons, simply from their lack of care!

HolidayTravelWatch
26 June 2007

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this article, and would like to receive advices, then please contact HolidayTravelWatch without delay.

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