

30 March 2007

Request to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office concerning the composition and information on The Standing Advisory Committee on Travel Advices

The FCO replied and confirmed the following points:

- The last meeting of the Travel Advice Review Group (TARG) was in September 2006;
- With regard to consumer input they have stated:

“Although participants are at liberty to offer advice that they consider relevant, there has to date been no specific travel consumer input. However, the FCO has now put in place new arrangements for discussing travel advice with its stakeholders, and included representations from travel consumers in this group”

- The current membership of the **Consular Stakeholder Panel** consists of:

Association of British Insurers (ABI)
Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA)
Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO)
Association of National Tourism Offices (ANTOR)
African Travel and Tour Association (ATTA)
Air Travel Users Council (ATUC)
British Airways
Charter Airline Group
Consumer Direct
Department of Health
Dunira Strategy
Federation of Tour Operators
Lonely Planet
Muslim Council of Great Britain
Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)
Passenger Shipping Association (PSA)
Saga Holidays
Tourism Concern
Department for Transport
UK Disabled Peoples Council
Virgin Airlines
Year Out Group

- The current membership of the **Travel Advice Review Group (TARG)** consists of:

African Tour and Travel Association (ATTA)
Association of British Insurers (ABI)

Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA)
Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO)
Association of National Tourist Office Representatives (ANTOR)
British Airways
Charter Airline Group
Chartered Institute of Marketing/Travel Insurance Group (CIMTIG)
Department for Transport
Department of Health
Dunira Strategy
Eventia
Federation of Tour Operators (FTO)
Lonely Planet Publications (London)
Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) UK Chapter
Passenger Shipping Association
Rough Guides Ltd
Saga Holidays Ltd
Tourism Concern
Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd
Year Out Group

- Summary of the TARG meeting September 2005:

"[Reviewing advices from 2004]...the events of Sharm Al-Sheikh had brought this into greater focus. TARG members spoke of their own experience in Sharm Al-Sheikh, especially in relation to the Travel Advice that was issued and the discussion also touched upon the effect of the London Bombings and the recent events in New Orleans"

"[Reviewing insurance following a presentation to the members]...customers didn't want to spend too much time on insurance matters despite the fact that it was a very complex issue. Independent travellers were seen as one area where having no insurance posed the greatest problem and several TARG members set out how they handled this"

"[Reviewing Hurricanes Katrina and Rita]...a dedicated hurricane team based in London, plus RDT teams in the affected areas are continuing the process of identifying British survivors. The discussion then moved onto the press perceptions of how this had gone so far, with lessons to be learned to follow"

Future topics to include sending warnings by text messages, sustainable tourism, making staff changes available to members:

"TARG members rejected the suggested additions to the membership"

The TARG members agreed with the terms of reference for membership

- Summary of TARG meeting January 2006:

There was a discussion on the NAO report on Consular Services

There was a discussion on the creation of and running of a Calamity Fund

There was a discussion on the issue of hurricanes, with it being observed that:

"The difficulty with hurricanes is that by the time you have pinpointed where they will make landfall it is then too late to do anything about it. Risk Management was

discussed, including ways to ensure that travellers understood why flights to the Caribbean are cheaper during the hurricane season. It was suggested, and agreed, to give this greater prominence in the travel advice for countries affected by hurricanes by including warning information in the summary"

The TARG then discussed travel Insurance, noting the InsureandGo had dropped their 'terrorism' exclusion and that Text2Insure were offering last minute policies through mobile phone technology

There was a discussion on sustainable tourism, seeking to balance travel warnings with "encouraging sustainable development".

The TARG discussed Avian Flu, noting planning issues noting the Insurance Industry providing exclusions for cover

There was a discussion regarding the gas crisis in Eastern Europe and how this might affect travel advices.

- Summary of the TARG meeting May 2006:

"[Reviewing the previous TARG meeting]...[?]brought members up to date with FCO planning for hurricanes and Avian Influenza. Both subjects generated a lot of discussion and it was agreed that Avian Influenza would be discussed in more depth at the next TARG. [?] then brought TARG members up to date with the situation about travel restrictions in border areas. It was agreed that this would be taken further forward with interested TARG members"

There was a discussion about the publication, British Nationals Abroad: A Guide

There was a discussions regarding the plans for the World Cup 2006

There was a discussion about travel trends for summer 2006, highlighting the increase in travel to South America..."The consensus of TARG members was that interest in South America was quite high this year, with some operators unable to keep up with demand". They had noted that visitor numbers to Turkey had dropped "mainly due to the AI outbreak there". They also acknowledged that numbers to Egypt continued to grow "despite recent events"

On the issue of travel insurance there was the following observation:

"...even when insurers did not cover terrorism in policies, many would still pay medical expenses and personal accident in the event of a client being caught up in a terrorist attack. Some policies do not have an exclusion on terrorism at all. TARG members wanted more consistency in the insurance industry, but this had to be balanced against the competitive and diverse insurance market"

There followed further discussions on the frequency of TARG meetings with TARG members expressing that they were "keen to the TARG to continue in its current form". They also decided that they wanted the Passenger Shipping Associations to become members of the TARG. They also discussed the nature of travel restrictions and what would trigger the removal of a travel restriction. The TARG members considered that the manner in which Nepal Travel Advice "was handled was well judged". They also discussed how travel messages could be "distilled" to the wider public looking further into the work of the Know Before You Go (KBYG) team.

- Summary of the TARG meeting September 2006:

The meeting began with a review of countries whereby there existed advice against all travel and all but essential travel to border areas.

There was a discussion on the nature of Travel Advice to Thailand, concluding that:

“TARG members felt that the right balance in travel advice had been struck and some members outlined the implications both for them, and the FCO, of what would have happened if a more cautious travel warning had been issued. TARG members also reported that they were aware that members were being more flexible with tourists who did not want to travel.

Turkey and Spain were also discussed as examples of good practice that was developing between tour reps and consular staff overseas as a result of major consular incidents over the summer. [Lebanon was discussed] TARG members were also brought up to date with advices for Sri Lanka.

The issue of terrorism was discussed. The TARG members examined warnings for countries where there was a ‘high threat of terrorism’. They conclude, “After the Turkey bombs, FCO Ministers had been keen that the risks from terrorism message should be made clearer to the travelling public. The KBYG campaigns currently targeting specific audiences, but this could only do so much. TARG members agreed that it was important that customers were informed of the risks before travelling and they confirmed that disclaimers were within their members’ terms and conditions of sale. A concern for TARG members was the increase in online bookings and whether customers were made aware of FCO advice this way”

The issue of terrorism and insurance was discussed. TARG members asked, “If travel advice changed for a country to “there is a high threat of terrorism” after a customer had booked a holiday would insurance companies be prepared to refund those customers if they chose not to go”

There was a discussion on the issue of Avian Influenza, hearing of the preparations being made by Government and seeking to understand the role of airlines in the event of a pandemic.

There was a discussion as to the future of TARG and it was suggested that they should merge with the Consular Stakeholder Panel.

There was discussion on the future development of Morocco, travellers health advices through the NaTHNaC website and a discussion on the latest developments in security.

- Further documentation supplied highlights the creation of TARG, its 2 year life span, the production of regular reports, submitted to the DGCA with a round up report once a year to The Foreign Secretary. TARG is accountable to the DGCA and The Foreign Secretary.
- In October 2004, it was decided that TARG would not be consulted on individual Travel Advice changes, those would continue to remain the responsibility of FCO Officials and The Foreign Secretary.

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