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PRESS RELEASE FROM HOLIDAYTRAVELWATCH™

HOLIDAYTRAVELWATCH CALLS FOR ENQUIRY INTO HURRICANE STRICKEN CRUISE SHIP

HolidayTravelWatch has received a complaint from a holidaymaker who was left bereaved following a recent voyage on the MV Athena. HolidayTravelWatch has also received a number of complaints from other passengers either suffering injury or contractual complaints following this cruise. The cruise ship left Falmouth on 10 September 2006, and steamed toward the Eastern Seaboard of the Canadian and US coast, for what was expected to be a 24 day cruise, visiting many ports of call, concluding with a visit to the Azores before returning to Falmouth.

Unfortunately, the ship encountered severe weather conditions, and by Tuesday 12 September was experiencing sea conditions which apparently included swells and waves up to 9 metres in height. HolidayTravelWatch has been advised that the conditions sent crockery crashing, that cutlery and crockery was held in place on dining tables by cling film, there were reports of falling mirrors and televisions, and it is understood that many holidaymakers were thrown out of their beds, some suffering injury. The cruise ship also missed calling into ports detailed on its schedule. HolidayTravelWatch understands that this was all due to the apparent effect of Hurricane Florence.

The holidaymaker, who suffered fatal injuries, fell whilst negotiating a small flight of stairs during the passage of the ship through these severe weather conditions.

HolidayTravelWatch extends its sympathies to the family for their sad loss.

HolidayTravelWatch has noted the comments of Mr Richard Ford, the managing director of



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Travelscope, the Tour Operator who organised the cruise.

On 4 October 2006, he was quoted by the BBC as saying,

"The chain of events is unfortunate and obviously there was a very tragic incident that occurred. But there were extremely unusual weather conditions for this time of year. They were well away from the hurricane and the ship had slowed down for the comfort and safety of the passengers and lots of announcements were made on board. Passengers were asked not to move around the vessel unless they really had to and stay seated where possible and the gentleman who died didn't do that.

When the vessel got to Halifax the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the local coroner came on board and they were very happy with all the safety announcements and procedures that had taken place with this particular incident". (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/cornwall/5405244.stm>).

In a further article produced by the Falmouth Penryn Packet and reproduced within the Bridgwater Mercury (11 October 2006), Mr Ford states,

"I'm a tour operator not a seaman. The itinerary was planned by the shipping company not us". (<http://archive.bridgwatermercury.co.uk/2006/10/11/67269.html>).

The feature writer within that article, understood to be an experienced mariner, stated,

"The National Hurricane Centre in the United States has monitored and tracked the paths of hurricanes for decades and it is a well documented fact that the paths of these tropical revolving storms in September pass to the eastwards of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland in the very area Athena was sailing".

HolidayTravelWatch supports the view that severe weather events occupy the Atlantic area during this period of the year. It is certainly not unusual for hurricanes or tropical storms starting in the central Atlantic, to pass through the Caribbean or the South Eastern Seaboard of the United States, and to then travel up and along the Western Atlantic.

At the time of the Athena's passage, it can be seen that there were 3 active hurricanes in the central/western Atlantic, between 3 and 24 September 2006. These were Hurricanes Florence, Gordon and Helene (<http://www.wunderground.com/hurricane/at2006.asp>).

With regard to the tracking of Hurricane Florence, the history of this hurricane can be viewed at (http://weather.terrapin.com/wx/storm_show.jsp?storm=06a&dtype=ASCII&area=ATL). It can be seen that Florence acquired the Hurricane status on the 10 September 2006.

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration published an advice on 12 September 2006, warning the coastal regions of Canada to prepare for the advance of the hurricane. They advised that winds were at 120km per hour, with an increase in speed in the following 24 hours. They predicted hurricane force winds would extend up to 165kms from its centre and tropical storm force winds extending out up to 445kms. The same report refers to large ocean swells all along the eastern seaboard. They refer the reader to High Seas Forecasts issued by the National Weather Service, (<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/data/NHC/TCPAT1>).

Frank Brehany, the Managing Director of HolidayTravelWatch states,

"I have written extensively on the subject of severe weather events, and how they affect holidaymakers. It is well known that the hurricane season, from August through to the end of September each year, brings with it the annual catalogue of hurricane and tropical storm events. It is

also recognised that the hurricanes or residue of these storms lead themselves along the Atlantic, often providing North West Europe with the after effects of its power".

He adds,

"This must have been a terrifying journey for all the cruise passengers and crew on board. However, we must move away from the issue raised by travel providers that these are simply 'Acts of God'. I am not sure that obvious and now predictable events are 'Acts of God', if they are, then they are surely 'Acts of God, but with notice'".

He concludes,

"If the reports we are receiving, and the facts of this holidaymaker's death are correct, then it raises important questions on how travel providers assess and deal with potential threats. In this case we ask:

- What was the understanding and knowledge of weather conditions in this area at this time of year when the itinerary was being planned?
- What discussions took place with relevant port, weather or maritime authorities, as these weather events unfolded?
- What assessments were carried out to assess the weather conditions and the suitability of those conditions for this ship?
- What advance weather warnings were given to passengers?
- Did the ship have a plan B to avoid the area of the intended cruise?
- Was consideration given to abandoning the cruise, at what stages did that consideration take place?
- What was the corporate view or position regarding this cruise?
- What warnings were given to passengers with the onset of severe weather, and were those warnings staged dependant upon the advance of the severe weather?
- Were doors to the exterior locked?
- Were there sufficient crew available to guide passengers?
- Were there sufficient crew available by stairways?
- How was the ships fabric prepared for this severe weather event; was there sufficient protection in place for the comfort and safety of all the passengers?

We accept that the RCMP and the Coroner from Halifax probably examined these issues. Did either of these bodies speak to the family of the deceased or for that matter any of the passengers? To promote a better understanding of what happened, we call upon the RCMP and the Halifax Coroner to publish their full findings.

It is important for travel consumers and for that matter travel providers to remember, that the Package Travel Regulations provides a responsibility on the Tour Operator to ensure that the contract can not only be delivered, but delivered safely. No amount of finger pointing will remove that fact.

The injury of any holidaymaker is bad enough, but the death of a holidaymaker raises important questions that require further investigation.

We are certain that the Tour Operator and the Ships Owner's would want full transparency on this issue, thereby promoting full public confidence on these important maritime issues. The circumstances raised by the Athena cruise extends itself not only to other cruises, but to all holidays sold in potentially weather sensitive areas.

We call on them to support us in our request to the relevant public authorities to investigate these

issues as a matter of urgency, and report to the public its findings on the circumstances of this particular cruise. This is the least we should do for the family of the deceased and for all those who have been injured or affected by this cruise”.

All holidaymakers affected by any of these issues should call the National Helpline 01217478100 or make contact through the Organisation’s website – www.holidaytravelwatch.com

HolidayTravelWatch is a National Consumer Organisation which provides information, advice and assistance to the holidaymaker or independent traveller, who experiences problems with their travel arrangements. In eleven years 120,000 people have benefited from the help provided by HolidayTravelWatch, with some 40% being empowered to resolve their own claims by the information the organisation provides on their consumer rights.

HolidayTravelWatch has campaigned in the past for improvements in travel safety and is proud to have been associated with some of the leading broadcast and print media projects aimed at informing the consumer. HolidayTravelWatch continues with that campaigning spirit and continues to work closely with the media and government departments alike.

Full details of the work of HolidayTravelWatch can be found on www.holidaytravelwatch.com

For further information on this press release and any other associated matters please contact Frank Brehany on 01217478100

www.holidaytravelwatch.com