

Suspension of Travel Agent Licence of 3A Holidays by Travel Agents Registry

Travel Agents Registry (the Registry) announced today (February 28) that the Travel Agent Licence of 3A Holidays Company Limited (Licence No. 353527) (3A Holidays) has been suspended in accordance with section 19(1)(c)(ii) of the Travel Agents Ordinance (the TAO) with immediate effect.

Following a series of complaints by travellers against the Mainland inbound tours received by 3A Holidays during the Lunar New Year, the Travel Industry Council (TIC) had launched an investigation hearing after which TIC suspended 3A Holidays' membership on February 21 on the ground of public interest. Thereafter the Registry immediately summoned controllers of 3A Holidays to an investigation-cum-hearing at 3pm today pursuant to sections 19 and 21 of the TAO to ascertain whether 3A Holidays had been carrying on business contrary to public interest.

After investigation, in relation to the four Mainland inbound tours (the Tours) which 3A Holidays has admitted responsibility for receiving, it is found out as follows:

- (1) 3A Holidays has admittedly been ignorant of the requirements of most of TIC's Codes of Business Practices and Directives;
- (2) 3A Holidays has failed to enter into written contracts with Mainland travel agents and service agreements with tour guides;
- (3) demarcation of rights and responsibilities between 3A Holidays and Mainland travel agents on the two main areas, namely, tour reception and tour guide arrangement, was murky;
- (4) 3A Holidays has not confirmed, and has refused to accept to have the duty to confirm, accommodation for tour members prior to their arrival. Its failure to ensure provision of proper accommodation has seriously infringed their interests.

Based on the above findings, the Registrar considered that the standard of 3A Holidays' tour operation and management as well as its crisis management of tourism incidents were poor. 3A Holidays had failed to discharge the essential duties of a travel agent. As a result, the Registrar is convinced that 3A Holidays is not capable of carrying on its business in the public interests.

3A Holidays has not only caused serious infringements upon the interests of the travellers in the Tours, the series of incidents have also jeopardised the reputation and image of the Hong Kong tourism industry. The information and explanation provided by 3A Holidays in the investigation-cum-hearing could not reasonably satisfy the Registrar that they could carry on its business in the public interests. Thus, the Registrar has decided to suspend the Travel Agent Licence of 3A Holidays pursuant to section 19(1)(c)(ii) of the TAO until the expiry of the licence on November 12, 2013 or approval of reinstatement of the licence, if any, whichever is the earlier.

During the period of suspension, 3A Holidays is prohibited from operating travel services prescribed in the TAO. On the other hand, 3A Holidays, in accordance with section 31 of the TAO, is obliged to continue to discharge its liability under any agreement, transaction or arrangement previously entered into before the licence suspension relating to the supply of travel service.

The Government will not tolerate any infringement upon the rights and interests of tourists or disruption of the order of our tourism market, and will take all necessary actions to uphold the reputation of the Hong Kong tourism industry. The Registry will continue its investigation into 3A Holidays. 3A Holidays is expected and requested to duly co-operate with the investigations to be conducted by regulatory bodies and law enforcement agencies.

Ends/Thursday, February 28, 2013

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