

Background Briefing

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) works to maintain the highest standards in advertising by taking action to prevent ads from being misleading, harmful or offensive. Visit www.asa.org.uk for more information about our activities, to view the Advertising Codes or to access our database of adjudications.

Holidays and travel

Need a break?

Holidays are a major expenditure for most consumers. When a brochure or advertisement exaggerates or misleads, it can cause great irritation, expense and sometimes distress - particularly if a much-needed annual holiday is a let-down. The ASA makes every effort to make sure that you can trust the ads you see.

The rules

The Advertising Codes are clear that advertisers should not mislead consumers by act, exaggeration or omission. We expect advertisers to follow these principles:

- All prices should include all taxes or charges that must be paid. Any extras such as insurance, booking fees or surcharges should be clearly stated.
 - Any limitations on the offer must be clear. If, for example, a price is dependent on two people travelling together and sharing a room, then this should be specified. The date of travel must also be clear.
 - Itineraries must be accurate both in terms of places visited and the amount of time spent there.
 - All amenities that are advertised (such as golf courses, shops, child care) should be available - if they cannot be used during the off-peak season this should be made clear in the ad.
 - If illustrations and photographs are used, they must be up-to-date and accurate.
 - The brochure should also make every effort not to omit any significant drawbacks about the location of accommodation, for example nearby building works, busy roads or airports.
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Complaints

The ASA received over 1600 complaints about holiday and travel ads in 2009. Some of the issues raised by complainants included:

- **Tickets described as 'free'**
If an ad describes an item as free, but it is dependent on the purchase of something else, such as specific accommodation or return tickets, then details of that compulsory extra that should be made immediately clear.

- **Misleading availability of cheaper fares**

If ads include a 'from' fare, a minimum of 10% of reservable seats must be available at that fare, and availability should be spread evenly across the travel period (e.g. if the offer is for June, the fare should be available for travel throughout June).

- **Dubious comparisons of journey times**

Comparisons of journey times should be fair and conducted on a like-for-like basis. For example, when times for the same journey by rail and air are compared, the air calculation should include the transfer time between the centre of town and the airport.

ASA action

London & South Eastern Railway - March 2009

A number of complainants took issue with an ad comparing the 'fastest' possible journey times of a new high speed service with the 'average' journey times of the old service, because they were not comparing like for like. We agreed and the ad was withdrawn.

Eurostar Group Ltd - June 2008

Eurostar claimed "carbon neutral journeys". The ASA did not uphold complaints as the journey itself was being offset, ruling it would be unreasonable to expect Eurostar to cover other emissions such as those generated from Eurotunnel.

British Airways - September 2007

The ASA upheld complaints that the claim "PRAGUE one-way from £29 ... restrictions apply ..." was misleading because most of the cheap seats were available only on flights more than six months after the ad appeared.

Ryanair - August 2007

The ASA was not convinced by Ryanair's press ad comparing flying to travelling by Eurostar, stating "BRUSSELS FASTER AND CHEAPER". The ad failed to factor in the time taken getting to and from the airports.

Further advice

When booking a holiday with a travel agent or tour operator keep a look out for ABTA and ATOL symbols. ABTA is the UK trade body for travel agents and tour operators and ATOL is a financial protection scheme managed by the Civil Aviation Authority. By travelling with an ABTA/ATOL scheme member you should be financially protected if your tour operator goes out of business and have access to a range of help and advice services should anything go wrong.