



## **A Letter from ABTA's Chief Executive about holidays that have been affected by the coronavirus crisis**

The coronavirus crisis is creating extraordinary difficulties for everyone, in ways that none of us could ever have predicted. International travel has been brought to a complete standstill by government measures to contain the pandemic and this has led to hundreds of thousands of holidays being affected.

Here, I want to write to customers of ABTA Members specifically to explain the current situation with refunds for holidays that aren't going ahead as planned as a result of the pandemic, and to ask for your support.

Many customers have rebooked their holidays for a future date, but I completely understand why those who have asked for a refund may feel frustrated and concerned at the amount of time it is taking. In normal circumstances the rules to provide a refund for a package holiday within 14 days work well. But these are not normal circumstances and the 14 day refund rule is impossible for the majority of companies to stick to.

Many travel agents and tour operators are unable to provide immediate cash refunds because they have not yet received money back from airlines and hotels around the world that may have temporarily closed.

It's in nobody's interests for normally healthy travel businesses to go under. As well as the loss of thousands of jobs, the Government-backed ATOL financial protection scheme would be overwhelmed by a large-scale failure of businesses and it would take many more months for customers to get a refund.

The European Commission, which is responsible for the relevant regulations, has advised Member states to find "flexible solutions" to demands for refunds on cancelled holidays during the crisis. Many other European countries with similar challenges have already taken action to support businesses while protecting customer rights.

Despite our pleas for support, the UK Government has so far failed to act. For this reason, to provide some order to the chaos brought about by the current crisis, ABTA has developed temporary guidelines for dealing with refunds for its Members and their customers, where Members are financially unable to provide an immediate cash refund. These are based on a system of financially-protected Refund Credit Notes where the customer's fundamental right to a refund for a package holiday is preserved, as set out by law.

This type of system is similar to those introduced in many other countries and is the framework under which ABTA will guide its Members and hold them to account.

Notwithstanding the issuing of Refund Credit Notes, ABTA's expectation is that Members should refund customers as soon as they are able to.

This crisis will pass, and I'm sure like me you want to ensure that when it does we have a healthy and competitive travel industry able to provide you with the choice of holidays that you deserve.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Tish'.

Go to [abta.com](https://www.abta.com) to find out more about what to do if your holiday has been affected by the current crisis.