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**THE DIRECTOR OF AN AUSSIE TRAVEL AGENCY HAS UNLEASHED ON TOURISM BOARDS FOR THEIR “SHORT-SIGHTED” AND “OUT-OF-TOUCH” WAYS, WHILE ALSO DISHING OUT SOME HARD TRUTHS TO HIS PEERS.**

In a lengthy letter sent to *Travel Weekly*, Max Najar from Axis Travel Centre in South Australia criticised domestic tourism boards for not doing enough to support local agents and missing a golden opportunity to help unite the travel industry during its most trying time.

You can read Najar’s explosive rant in full below:

***I’ve been monitoring the comments and concerns of travel agents and travel advisors (there is a difference) in Australia and internationally, and think we need to grab a reality check.***

***Sorry if it hurts, but consider these facts:***

***Maybe travel agents are considered less than what we think***

***Some government ministers are a bit reluctant to provide financial support to professional travel agents ahead of domestic travel entities, as travel agents collect money from pax and pay out internationally-based airlines, cruises, tours, hotels etc, and that money goes offshore and employs overseas humans with small amounts of monies remaining here. This means that that the Australian economy does not benefit as a percentage greatly – let’s say 20 per cent stays in situ, with the residue going overseas – so the incentive to subsidise travel agents is not as great as we local agents may think.***

***Yes, I know the facts (not arguments) that we employ staff here, pay taxes and rents and costs here. These facts are sometimes overlooked by politicians in their aim to stay popular and get re-elected to gain their old-age superannuation payouts. I am NOT condoning this fact, but just bringing it forward (sorry).***

***Tourism boards need to go to Specsavers***

***Out-of-touch tourism boards are in many ways short-sighted, and some boards have very out-of-touch committee members representing their states.***

***Some are promoting external, internationally-profiting entities like Expedia and Google to let consumers book through rather than via an Australian company like Viva Holidays or an Australian-based and tax-paying and staff-employing travel agency. How stupid is this?***

***AN EXAMPLE IS THAT IN AUSTRALIA, SOME HAVE COME OUT WITH FREE, AND VERY RESTRICTIVE, TRAVEL VOUCHERS OR ADVERTS THAT DO NOT SAY “OR SEE YOUR LOCAL PROFESSIONAL TRAVEL AGENT”. HOW SHORT-SIGHTED THESE TWO ITEMS ARE.***

***It’s ABSOLUTELY TRUE that this scheme did instigate a good travel response and were used, and has injected money into the economy, BUT the tourism boards forget about using the most***

**potent marketing arm available – the travel agent. With around 4,000 travel agents holding a database of millions of clients, where is the logic in not using them?**

**It's also ABSOLUTELY TRUE that many thousands of vouchers have not been redeemed and will not be redeemed, as many clamoured to get them and have forgotten to use them. Or, they could not redeem them, or they expired, or they did not read the conditions properly, or were secured by persons who just wanted to pacify egos or maybe “consider” using them. We are talking about lots of wasted money here!**

**If the tourism boards included the sadly-misrepresented professional travel agent, these same agents would have been able to remind pax to use the voucher via their direct communication tools, included vouchers to add onto other travel components within a package, and marketed the package via their own avenues. And, because an agent had a vested interest, they would have created happy past clients and secured new clients for the future using their skillsets of product knowledge and a desire to secure some revenue in the long run.**

**What the stats are on what vouchers were issued and not used – which mean lost opportunities – might shock the industry if they peel away the media boasting. Travel agents involved in all this would have reduced the losses and non-redemptions substantially, as they would have had a stake to have the vouchers redeemed, making the end supplier even happier, the tax system working well and money going around our society rather than collecting dust or via an expired barcode.**

**TOURISM BOARDS SHOULD HAVE CONSULTED DEEPLY WITH QUALITY TRAVEL AGENTS BEFORE RELEASING THESE VOUCHERS, MAYBE EVEN HAVING TWO SETS OF ‘A AND B’ VOUCHERS.**

**Voucher A, for say \$200, could have been redeemable direct with an establishment or an agent, with the tourism board rebating a nominal amount back to the redeemed agency via each voucher's traceable unique number.**

**Voucher B, valued at \$220, could have ONLY been redeemable via an AFTA-accredited travel agent, with less conditions applicable, such as being transferrable, usability at more establishments, a longer TTL date to use, and commissionable as well.**

**By being creative, travellers would have had a choice between vouchers A and B, the entire travel industry would have been involved, everybody would be happy, and travel agents would be kept front of mind and viable.**

**The financial investment to work with travel agents utilising their in-house extensive marketing database, skillsets and having them market and remind pax of the voucher value would far outweigh any costs invested by any tourism board or government entity, whilst also reducing their marketing spend, which could be diverted into a simple donation towards subsidising travel agents who need money to survive.**

**Those travel agents that say “we do not make much, if any, revenue from domestic travel” are only sometimes correct, but not always, as The Ghan packages and many others are sometimes worth more than a New Zealand or Asia holiday package.**

**Securing some revenue is better than none, remembering also that creating a new database of pax is also important, as well as being out there and front of mind to retain pax.**

**A swig of water when physically parched while walking in a hot desert is better than no water, if one wishes a chance to survive.**