

02MAR

FOUR HALFWIT TRAVELLERS HAVE EACH BEEN SENTENCED TO FOUR MONTHS IN PRISON, AFTER CONSPIRING TO ISSUE FRAUDULENT SICKNESS COMPENSATION CLAIMS AGAINST A UK TOUR OPERATOR.

Christopher Byng (38), Barbara Byng (64), Linda Lane (36) and Anthony Byng (66), all from Middlesbrough in England, were convicted of contempt of court at Teesside Combined Court last week after admitting to submitting false gastric illness claims against Jet2holidays, which could have resulted in them getting a payout of tens of thousands of pounds, including solicitor costs.

The four claimed that they, and the two children they were travelling with, had all suffered with various symptoms, including stomach cramps, sickness, diarrhoea, headaches and hot and cold sweats, as a result of food poisoning on an all-inclusive holiday at the Paradise Lago Taurito & Waterpark in Gran Canaria in November 2016.

They then issued court proceedings, which Jet2holidays defended. During subsequent investigations, with the support of law firm Horwich Farrelly, the tour operators discovered evidence that the claims had been fabricated.

- **The evidence included a number of social media posts from the family, including images and video footage of them enjoying their holiday swimming in the pool, using the waterslide and drinking in the bar, despite claiming to be ill.**
- No mention or sign of any illness was made, despite the severe symptoms they claimed to have been suffering at the time.
- In addition, Jet2holidays sent a survey to the family on their return from holiday that Christopher Byng completed.
- When asked how he rated the holiday, Byng said he was “very satisfied” with the choice, cleanliness and quality of meals the hotel offered, despite the allegations he subsequently made.
- Byng was also specifically asked whether anyone had been unwell on the holiday, but chose not to answer this, according to the tour operator.
- However, he did note in the survey that he would be “very likely” to book with Jet2holidays again in the next 12 months, despite alleging that his “holiday was ruined as a result of the illness”.

All four travellers pleaded guilty, with Christopher, Barbara and Anthony Byng all copping custodial sentences, and Linda Lane receiving a suspended sentence. They have also been ordered to pay legal costs incurred by Jet2holidays.

When handing down his decision, Judge Mark Gargan said false claims for holiday sickness were “**all too prevalent**”, and that these particular claims were “**not merely a case of exaggeration**” and were a “**complete invention**”.

Steve Heapy, CEO of Jet2holidays, said: “**We have led the way when it comes to tackling the issue of fake sickness claims, and we continue to do so.**”

***“ISSUING A FALSE CLAIM FOR COMPENSATION IS FRAUD, PLAIN AND SIMPLE, AND WE HAVE BEEN AT PAINS TO WARN PEOPLE THAT THERE ARE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES IF THEY CHOOSE TO DO SO.*”**

“**[This] ruling is the latest illustration of that, and it sends out a very stark message. We will not hesitate to take action against fraudsters, and the courts will not hesitate**