

5 August 2020

Grant Shapps MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 1AA

Dear Grant

This is the second letter I have written to you as one of your local constituents and as CEO of The Advantage Travel Partnership, a travel business representing over 350 businesses across the country which employs over 5,000 staff with a collective turnover of £4.5bn.

At the beginning of July, we very much appreciated the implementation of air bridges. The establishment of several quarantine free destinations including Spain, Italy, Greece was a considerable boost to the industry. Many of our members began to feel like they had turned a corner and bookings were increasing.

However, since the announcement last week of Spain being taken off the Government's quarantine-free list and the subsequent FCO advice amended to advise against non-essential travel, the industry has experienced a surge in cancellations and a marked decline in consumer confidence to book. After a significant period of stagnation during months of lockdown, this recent development is a further blow to an industry struggling to survive further highlighted by this week's job losses and store closures.

In response to a critical decline in consumer confidence, The Advantage Partnership has undertaken a full audit of its supplier partnerships including airlines, hotels, tour operators and ground transportation in-order to analyse their flexible booking policies. Findings have been mixed and

options for consumers vary radically according to confusing terms and conditions depending on a number of factors including timeframes and charges to change a booking.

In order to try and mitigate the damage to the industry we have today launched 'The Flexi Pledge – Book with Confidence' campaign designed to encourage more operators to offer greater flexibility this summer and give consumers a renewed confidence to book. We are calling for the industry to commit to a '48-hour Flexi' policy for consumers at no fee.

In tandem, we are calling on the UK Government to support this initiative and provide the industry with 48-hours' notice when it deems destinations on the quarantine-free list need to be removed due to a rise in COVID-19 cases. Four hours' notice is not enough time for travel agents to communicate with their customers. This breakdown in communication has only damaged consumer confidence further and created anxiety for those travellers abroad. If we do not urgently begin to build that confidence back, the travel industry will be devastated, many more businesses will fail, more jobs will be lost and travelling will become a distant memory for many Britons.

We believe if consumers had 48-hours' notice to change their booking to an alternative destination or time they would be more inclined to retain their booking instead of cancelling. Equally, if the UK Government commits to providing the industry with 48-hours' notice the industry will be infinitely better equipped to engage with clients to satisfy their re-booking requirements and retain that all important booking for this year – saving businesses and jobs in the process.

I urge you to make a case to the UK Government to support this vital campaign and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Your Sincerely

Julia Lo Bue-Said  
CEO, The Advantage Travel Partnership.