

BACKGROUNDER: TRAVEL AGENTS AND WHOLESALERS IN BC

OVERVIEW

From making trip planning easy to ensuring the added protection of the [Travel Assurance Fund](#), there are many reasons why consumers choose to arrange their travel plans through a travel agent or wholesaler. In British Columbia, travel agents and wholesalers operating in the province are required to be licensed by Consumer Protection BC and make contributions to the Travel Assurance Fund. The fund is one of last resort that provides consumers with a possible source of compensation if purchased travel services are not delivered. It is important to know that licensing requirement of BC travel agents and wholesalers extends to online businesses based within the province, too.

THE TRAVEL AGENT AND WHOLESALER LAW IN BC

BC's laws that speak to travel agents and wholesalers, the [Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act](#) and the [Travel Industry Regulation](#), exist to protect consumers by: safeguarding consumer money, ensuring the sector operates by certain standards and providing added protection through the Travel Assurance Fund. It's important to know the travel laws Consumer Protection BC administers does not address instances when consumers voluntarily cancel travel services, or when consumers are unhappy with the quality of service.

2016 - 2018: TRAVEL AGENTS AND WHOLESALERS BY THE NUMBERS

Licensed places, activities and occupations¹:

- 2016: 1,232 BC-licensed travel agents or wholesalers
- 2017: 1,225 BC-licensed travel agents or wholesalers
- 2018: 1,241 BC-licensed travel agents or wholesalers

Consumer inquiries:

- 2016: 575 inquiries about the travel sector, representing 5% of all calls and emails (10,882). Topics of interest included general inquiry (26% of travel inquiries), licence status (10%) and quality of service (9%).
- 2017: 728 inquiries about the travel sector, representing 7% of all calls and emails (11,068). Topics of interest included general inquiry (25% of travel inquiries), quality of service (19%) and returns/refunds (12%).
- 2018: 761 inquiries about the travel sector, representing 7% of all calls and emails (11,177). Topics of interest included TAF general follow up (44% of travel inquiries), general inquiry (17%) and return/refund (8%).

¹ The number of licences shifted in 2017 to reflect a point-in-time count of licensees with active licences as of December 31, as opposed to prior year numbers that reflected the volume of licences issued and renewed during the year.

Investigations:

- 2016: For the 18 travel sector related files that concluded with an outcome, voluntary compliance was achieved 28% of the time (5 instances); topics of investigation included licence requirements, receipt requirements, financial statements; and enforcement action was taken 72% of the time (13 instances).
- 2017: For the 31 travel sector related files that concluded with an outcome, voluntary compliance was achieved 39% of the time (12 instances); topics of investigation included licence requirements, receipt requirements, financial statement requirements, and deceptive acts; and enforcement action was taken 61% of the time (19 instances).²
- 2018: For the 66 travel sector related files that concluded with an outcome, voluntary compliance was achieved 6% of the time (4 instances); topics of investigation included requirement for licensing, annual financial statement due date, required contents of receipts; and enforcement action was taken 94% of the time (62 instances).

Travel Assurance Fund:

Eligibility to claim against the Travel Assurance Fund is only available when booking through a BC licensed travel agent or wholesaler.

- 2016: Approximately \$13,359.00 was refunded to 19 consumers from the Fund for contracted travel services they did not receive.
- 2017: Approximately \$26,532.00 was refunded to 17 consumers from the Fund for contracted travel services they did not receive.
- 2018: Approximately \$43,521.00 was refunded to 20 consumers from the Fund for contracted travel services they did not receive.

BUSINESS OBLIGATIONS AND CONSUMER RIGHTS

By law, travel agents or wholesalers operating in BC:

- Must be licensed by Consumer Protection BC
- Must provide annual contributions to the Travel Assurance Fund for the first three years
- Cannot use their own personal credit cards to pay for consumer travel services
- Must provide consumers with payment or refund receipts that contain specific information (including the date, the amount received/refunded, a description of services to be supplied and more)
- Must include their licence number in any visual advertising about the business

By law, consumers:

- Have the right to receive the travel services they have paid for
- Have the right to seek compensation for the services they paid for but did not receive from a BC-licensed travel agent or wholesaler

² Please note that “travel sector related” files include the ones that are related to unlicensed entities and to determine whether a licence is required or not.

CONSUMER TIPS

1. **Check licensing status.** By law, anyone offering travel services in BC (either as an agent or as a wholesaler) must be licensed. Visit Consumer Protection website to [research a business's licensing status](#).
2. **Get a receipt.** By law, you must receive a receipt from your travel agent or wholesaler that includes the amount received, an itemized purchase price for the travel services to be supplied and the conditions for reimbursement. Also, we encourage you to make sure that you can read the content of the receipt if it is handwritten.
3. **Keep proof of payment documentation.** Ask for (and keep!) documentation for your travel services. This could include receipts, contracts, itineraries, boarding passes, hotel vouchers and more.

ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

To maintain the integrity of our investigative processes, we do not share detailed information about open files. Visit the [Enforcement Actions section of our website](#) to explore our recent licensing and enforcement actions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Explore www.consumerprotectionbc.ca for more information for both consumers and regulated businesses. Additional statistical information is also available in our [annual reports](#). We also share information and consumer tips on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and in [our corporate blog](#).

Have a consumer question or complaint? Contact our information services team, toll free, at 1.888.564.9963 or info@consumerprotectionbc.ca.