

LICENSED INDUSTRY OVERVIEW: TRAVEL AGENTS AND WHOLESALERS IN BC

OVERVIEW

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](#) (TAF). The TAF is a possible source of compensation if a consumer doesn't get the travel services they bought and is only available if they booked with a licensed agent or wholesaler. 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. The travel laws administered by Consumer Protection BC do not address instances when consumers voluntarily cancel travel services, or when consumers are unhappy with the quality of service.

2019- 2021: TRAVEL AGENTS AND WHOLESALERS BY THE NUMBERS

Licensed places, activities and occupations:

BC-licensed travel agents or wholesalers	2019	2020	2021
	1,120	1,115	1,018

Consumer inquiries:

- 2019: There were 691 inquiries about the travel sector, representing 6% of all calls and emails (11,221). Topics of interest included:
 1. Return/refund (24% of travel inquiries)
 2. TAF claim general information (18%)
 3. TAF claim follow up (11%)
- 2020: There were 1,225 inquiries about the travel sector, representing 6% of all calls and emails (15,423). Topics of interest included:
 1. COVID-19 travel disruptions (34% of travel inquiries)
 2. Return/refund (27%)
 3. General inquiries (9%)
- 2021: There were 1,090 inquiries about the travel sector, representing 11% of all calls and emails (10,923). Topics of interest included:
 1. Return/refund (37% of travel inquiries)
 2. Travel disruptions (36%)

3. Contract cancellation (9%)

Investigations:

- 2019: There were a total of 28 travel-related investigation files. Of those, 25 files concluded with an outcome and 3 files were incomplete, unfounded or referred elsewhere. Of those 25 files with an outcome, 14 enforcement actions were taken, and voluntary compliance was achieved in 11 cases.
- 2020: There were a total of 27 travel-related investigation files. Of those, 23 files concluded with an outcome and 4 files were incomplete, unfounded or referred elsewhere. Of those 23 files with an outcome, 10 enforcement actions were taken, and voluntary compliance was achieved in 13 cases.
- 2021: There were a total of 35 travel-related investigation files. Of those, 21 files concluded with an outcome and 13 files were incomplete, unfounded or referred elsewhere. Of those 21 files with an outcome, 2 enforcement actions were taken, and voluntary compliance was achieved in 19 cases.

Contraventions when enforcement action was taken	2019	2020	2021	Total
	14	10	2	26
Operating without a licence	0	1	0	1
Providing false or misleading info, failing to provide info or failing to comply	0	1	1	2
Engaging in deceptive acts or practices	0	1	0	1
Failing to refund a consumer when a distance sales contract is cancelled	0	0	1	1
Failing to report address change	1	0	0	1
Failing to include required contents on payment receipts	13	5	0	18
Failing to meet qualifications for licence such as having enough working capital	0	1	0	1
Failing to include licence number in visual advertisement	0	1	0	1

Travel Assurance Fund:

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

- 2019: Approximately \$448,748 was refunded to 110 consumers from the Fund for contracted travel services they did not receive¹.
- 2020: Approximately \$30,842 was refunded to 7 consumers from the Fund for contracted travel services they did not receive.
- 2021: Approximately \$4,368 was refunded to 1 consumer from the Fund for contracted travel services they did not receive.

¹ In August 2018, we suspended and cancelled the licence of Sinorama Travel Inc. Vancouver, a Richmond based travel agency with affiliated businesses in several provinces. Thousands of travellers were affected and claims against the TAF were accepted until the spring of 2019. Of the nearly \$1.02 million dollars in TAF claims received in 2019, \$444,885 was approved and paid back to consumers from the TAF.

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

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](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and in [our corporate blog](#).