

INNOCENCE LOST IN TUNISIA; DEMANDS FOR NEW AGE IN TRAVEL

The sheer senseless waste of life in Port El Kanatoui in Tunisia is an affront to all decent peoples, no matter where they come from. The tales of heroism, courage and compassion, that have emanated from this terrible event, demonstrate the best response to the delusional criminals who perpetrate these vile deeds. We can only offer our deepest sympathies and support to the victims and survivors of this savage event.

What events in Tunisia reveal is the end of the Age of Innocence of Travel.

Since Friday, HolidayTravelWatch has been engaged in conversations primarily with those frightened to travel to Tunisia and latterly with the survivors here in the UK.

For many, the public stories of desperation range from:

1. Those seeking assistance from tour representatives and finding none (via Twitter);
2. Holidaymakers angry with the response of the UK Foreign Office team in Tunisia;
3. Britons seeking information and apparently receiving little or none at all (via Twitter & HTW);
4. Intending holidaymakers telling us that despite prior questions to tour operators, they had been told it would be safe to travel to Tunisia (HTW);
5. Holidaymakers frightened by events either being refused a change in their holiday or being charged for any changes made (HTW);
6. One holidaymaker reports to us that he was told that change was not possible because the advices from the FCO had not changed! (HTW)

Principally since the Egyptian & Tunisian Revolutions in 2010, this Organisation has highlighted the problem of selling holidays to what we refer to as 'Risk Destinations'. We define 'Risk Destinations' as those that are potentially unsafe, threatens the viability of a holiday contract and also possibly negates any travel insurance (subject to any view that is expressed otherwise by a travel insurance provider).

From Kenya to Sri Lanka to Egypt to Tunisia we have exposed the deficit in UK Travel Advisories and the heavy reliance made upon them by UK Tour Operators to enforce their contractual rights with UK Consumers.

HolidayTravelWatch considers that the events in Tunisia means that there must now be a wide acceptance that the 'soft' approach on Travel Advisories has now reached its sell by date and that for the sake of UK Consumers and indeed the Travel Product, a new age in travel must be defined.

The organisation notes that today, the British Government is sending out a task force to assess security within the Beach resorts of Tunisia. Peter Clarke, who was responsible for the response to the 7/7 bombings in London, states in The Guardian:

"(He said he did not believe) Britons would be put off taking holidays abroad, but might seek further reassurances from their travel companies about the threats facing places they were traveling to".

Further, it is hardly reassuring to UK Consumers to see that despite this event, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) Travel Advisories for Tunisia currently state that the '*incident is over*' but that travellers should remain '*especially vigilant*'.

In light of what we see as deficits in informing citizens and offering solid information at the time a holiday is sold, we call for:

1. A complete overhaul of UK Travel Advisories and their presentation;

2. In the reconstruction of such advisories, we call for a wider stakeholder involvement in the reconstruction of such Travel Advisories rather than consulting only with Travel Companies;
3. HolidayTravelWatch also calls for the end of the slavish reliance on Travel Advisories by Travel Companies rather than openly stating issues relating to a particular destination at the time of booking a holiday and what measures are in place to protect prospective customers;
4. We also call for a radical rethink on the offering of 'Risk Destinations' and how they are presented for sale through popular tourism.

The Organisation considers that simply calling for these measures is not enough. In what is now a complex and dangerous world, tinkering with Advisories is not going to be enough. The public need confidence that whilst government is seeking to build bridges with other nations for trade, its primary responsibility must always be toward its citizens.

Confidence must be restored in Travel Advisories and we therefore call upon the importation of the 'Precautionary Principle' into their formulation. By adopting the 'Precautionary Principle' we would suggest that this leads toward a system of risk assessment which should include:

1. Hazard Identification;
2. Hazard Characterisation;
3. Appraisal of the Exposure, and
4. Risk Characterisation

We would also recommend that within Travel Advisories, a wide range of journalistic sources are displayed, linking Consumers to key information about the destination they intend to travel to.

The key message of the UK Foreign Office is 'Know Before You Go'; we would suggest that few holidaymakers to Tunisia were aware of the March 2015 attack on holidaymakers, of the increased ISIS activity along the borders of Tunisia and of the reports that Sousse is apparently the main centre from which young people travel from Tunisia to the ISIS cells in Syria; would most Consumers know where to find this information?

Frank Brehany, the Consumer Director for HolidayTravelWatch states:

"My thoughts must firstly go to all those affected by this horrific event, but I must also salute the brave Tunisians who tried to help and to those who showed such compassion afterwards. I want to make quite clear the Tunisian people do not deserve what is happening to their country and need all the support that can be given, but, there must also be acceptance that whilst we call on the UK government and the Travel Industry to change its approach, the 'soft targets' of holidaymakers and tourism also need a radical rethink within Tunisia"

He adds;

"There have been many other events where innocent holidaymakers have been attacked and all too quickly forgotten. The world is an exciting and vibrant place to travel in but, it has also now become a much more dangerous place and Tunisia represents the loss of innocence in this age of travel"

He concludes;

"There is a sense that Travel Consumers are the economic footsoldiers in this globalised world. If this is true, then a new realisation must now be evident. The UK government must completely overhaul Travel Advisories and we must have a complete rethink as to the use of popular tourism to destinations that attract a political or personal safety risk. I hope our call is heeded because I do not want to be highlighting this call again over the names of those who have died in some criminal act on a shore far away!"