

Free cancellation offers. ASA ruling on Alpha Holidays

During the Covid pandemic travel companies, desperate to attract business, have been offering potential clients the benefit of being able to cancel bookings free of charge should travel restrictions change or simply if they change their mind. In this case Alpha Holidays made such an offer but then appeared to renege on it. The Advertising Standards Authority took them to task in this ruling.

FREE CANCELLATION

Listings appearing on Alpha Holidays' website, www.alpharooms.com, seen in February 2021, for the Solana Hotel and Spa in Malta, the Rixos Premium Dubai and the Fairmont Grand in Dubai, included a banner with the text "Free cancellation until [DATE]". Those dates were 29 April for the Solana Hotel and Spa in Malta, 18 March for the Rixos Premium Dubai, and 8 October for the Fairmont Grand.

Three complainants, who attempted to cancel their bookings and were charged a cancellation fee, challenged whether the "Free cancellation until [DATE]" claims were misleading.

Alpha Holidays Ltd t/a Alpha Rooms responded that the complainants had not been charged a cancellation fee.

The complaints were upheld. The ASA considered that consumers would understand from the claim "Free Cancellation until [DATE]" that they would be able to cancel their holiday without incurring a financial penalty as long as they did so by the date stated in the claim. The ASA considered that would be understood to mean not only that there would be no additional charges, but they would also be refunded any payment that they had made on the holiday.

Alpha Holidays had not provided the ASA with details as to their policy. However, the complainants had provided the ASA with emails from Alpha Holidays which showed that they had initially attempted to charge the complainants cancellation fees, before later offering them credit vouchers for the value of their bookings.

Because consumers would understand the claim “Free Cancellation until [DATE]” to mean that they would be refunded, with no charges, should they wish to cancel their holiday booking before the date stated in the claim, and the ASA understood that was not the case, the ASA concluded that the ad was misleading.

Click [here](#) for our FAQs on package holiday rights

Click [here](#) for advice issued to tour operators in May 2021 about refunds in general

[Source: ASA, September 2021]