

ASK THE ADVISER

19) TRAVEL, TRANSPORT AND HOLIDAYS - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

Recently I did something rather bold – I bought train tickets from Thurso to Glasgow. All went well until Inverness where we had to navigate the highly annoying barriers. It was clear that our cases would not pass through easily so we asked if we could use the wider gate, but were informed this was verboten. A few seconds later Liz was stuck fast and a person, hopefully trained in the use of a key, was summoned. Wife duly retrieved, we then had to join a lengthy queue to get onto the Glasgow train and again, equally inexplicably, we had to negotiate even more gates. These apparently are not opened until shortly before departure (why not for heaven's sake?) so scores of people all had to try and board at once, with no sign of a porter, inadequate seating, hopeless luggage space and a staff member who would do well to remember that the passengers are doing the train company a favour, not the other way round. From there on things deteriorated rapidly and on changing at Perth it descended into farce. On being asked by a railway employee if I had enjoyed the journey I advised, "Just carry on as you are – third-world service delivery and quality standards are within your grasp". He seemed pleased.

At Caithness CAB we regularly deal with travel problems so I thought a bit of advice would be handy. Let's start with train travel (or not in my case, ever again). For a start, remember that you are paying for a service and the rail firm needs to deliver it. If your train is late (and there is a very good chance it will be) then you are entitled to compensation. Here is ScotRail's published policy:-

Claim compensation if you've been delayed for 30 minutes or more on a ScotRail service. The value of the compensation depends on the cost of your ticket and the total length of the delay. Here's what you'll get:

Length of delay	Compensation
30 to 59 minutes	50% of the cost of your single ticket or 25% of the cost of your return ticket
1 hour to 1 hour 59 minutes	The full cost of your single ticket or 50% of the cost of your return ticket
2 hours or more	The cost of your single or return ticket

You need to claim swiftly and if you need help to do so, CCAB will assist. You will get vouchers and if you want to change these for cash you only have 28 days so move fast. Also, if you miss a connection you can claim for that as well. If you receive shoddy service as I did, then let them know about it. My letter will mention that the advantage of many third-world trains is that you are allowed to sit on the roof or cling to the sides and if a ladder had been handy I would have done so as it would have been much more pleasant.

Airline delays are very topical too. We booked our holiday through an excellent local travel agent and all went perfectly, but there are often problems and hold-ups. It is all a bit confusing but the facts are that if you booked a flight that departed from Europe or was with a European airline, you might have rights under EU law if your flight is delayed or cancelled.

For the EU law to apply, one or both of the following must apply:

- your flight is departing from the UK, European Union (EU), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland
- you're flying with a UK or EU airline to somewhere in the UK, EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland

That covers most of us so what are we entitled to? If your flight's delayed for 2 or more hours then you have a legal right to:

- food and drink
- access to phone calls and emails
- accommodation if you're delayed overnight - and journeys between the airport and the hotel. The airline should give you vouchers to get these things at the airport and if you don't get help then keep all receipts for expenses and claim from the airline later. Airlines only pay for 'reasonable' expenses - you won't get money back for alcohol, expensive meals or luxury hotels (unfortunately).

If your flight's delayed for 3 or more hours you are also entitled to get compensation if the delay is the airline's responsibility - for example, if they didn't get enough bookings or there was a technical fault. You won't get compensation if it was delayed because of something like bad weather or a strike. You're entitled to a set amount of compensation depending on the distance of the flight & the length of the delay. We can help you with working out exactly how much you are entitled to and will be very happy to do so. And remember, you don't have to take the flight if it's delayed for 5 hours or more. It doesn't matter whose responsibility the delay is and you are entitled to a full refund for the flight; a full refund for other flights from the airline that you won't use in the same booking, eg an onward or return flight; and if you're part-way through a journey, a flight back to the airport you originally departed from. Talk to someone from the airline as soon as you decide you don't want to take the flight. The last thing you need is to have to remember all this during the stress at the airport, but always speak to a member of airline staff, keep careful notes of everything and if you are not properly looked after and compensated then come and see us.

And finally, once again, we come to motoring problems. The biggest cause of complaint we see relates to the imposition of huge "parking charges" by the private operators who seem to be running what were once friendly and fairly easy-going car parks in Scotland. Drivers from Caithness frequently receive demands for £60 / £100 or more because of some apparent violation of "terms

and conditions” in such car parks, and often they simply pay up to avoid stress. We have challenged lots of these “charges” and remember they are **not** fines and this is Scotland so you have rights. Come and see us and we will assist you to appeal. There has already been a debate in Holyrood about this and I wrote to an MSP this week who is going to ask Hamza Yousaf, the Transport Minister, where we stand on progress towards sorting things out and will be pressing for action.

So there we have the basics and, just as an afterthought, if you have any issues with ferry delays give us a call or a visit and we will advise you where you stand under EU regulations. Similarly, if the wheels of the bus do not go round and round then, once again, get in touch and we will write the letters.

And finally, I have convinced myself that it is time to get out the trusty mountain bike again – no chance at all of any delays apart from the temptation to stop for a bar lunch”