

**HOT NEWS**

**Dream holiday dashed by 'freelance agent'**

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SINGAPORE — It was a dream holiday for their relatives that turned out too good to be true for an expatriate couple here, who are S\$15,000 poorer after a "freelance" travel agent allegedly took them for a ride.

Indian expatriate David (not his real name) and his wife told TODAY that the agent, who went by the name of "Kaveena", had offered relatives visiting the Republic return air tickets, cruises and stays at the two integrated resorts.

But on May 23 — about a month before their relatives were due to arrive — the couple found that the cruise, flight and hotel bookings were all cancelled because payments had not been made. Despite repeated demands, "Kaveena" has not returned the money to the couple.

Said David, a 39-year-old IT professional: "We tried to contact the travel agent who avoided meeting us by giving lame excuses that her son had been admitted to hospital and that she could not meet us. She

carried on this excuse for the next three days."

Thereafter, the agent claimed that she was in Johor Bahru and that she could only be reached via SMS or email, David said.

David has filed a police report and lodged a complaint with the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE). A police spokeswoman confirmed a report has been lodged and investigations are in progress.

According to David, "Kaveena" said she was a freelancer who worked for multiple travel agencies. She allegedly issued the couple an invoice under "Dream Holidays Tours & Travel" while in the office of another travel agency in Orchard Towers.

A National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) spokesperson reiterated that it is an offence to operate as a travel agent without a valid licence.

The spokesperson added: "The travel agent should be representing the agency with which he or she is working and not multiple travel agencies."

Complaints against "freelance

travel agents" here are rare. CASE said it has received two such complaints over the last five years.

According to CASE, complaints lodged against the travel industry in general have declined over the past three years. CASE received 994 complaints last year, compared to 1,102 cases in 2008. The consumer watchdog received 542 cases in the first five months of this year, said CASE executive director Seah Seng Choon.

In light of David's experience, CASE and NATAS have advised consumers to be vigilant when they book or make payment for tours. Said a NATAS spokesperson: "If at any point consumers are suspicious of an agent's actions, they should request to see the travel agent's licence and confirm its validity with the Singapore Tourism Board." Mr Seah added that if a customer is unable to resolve a dispute with a travel agency, he can seek the assistance of CASE or file a claim with the Small Claims Tribunal.

Seeking legal recourse appears to be a remote option for David, who has been unable to trace the agent.

**After her 20-year affair, now hubby wants divorce**

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SINGAPORE — She was a teacher in his secondary school and he was a 16-year-old student when the alleged affair began.

Two decades later, after teacher and student married separately and had their own families, the husband of the woman is now filing for divorce.

In a Family Court yesterday, the man accused his wife of "unreasonable behaviour" and of engaging in an "improper association" that has allegedly continued since 1988.

His court papers stated that his wife, now in her 50s and teaching in an all-girls school, has been carrying on an "inappropriate romantic and intimate relationship" with her former student, now 38.

The divorcing couple cannot be named, as it could lead to the identification of their two adolescent children.

But the claims and counterclaims of the couple were laid bare as the hearing began yesterday for a divorce that was filed in August 2009.

According to the court documents, the husband had met his wife when the latter was his private tutor.

The husband, a businessman in his 40s, said he found credit card statements in 1997, seven years into their marriage, showing shopping and dining expenses. He added that his wife later admitted to meeting her former student.

But she allegedly did not cease contact with her former student as promised, even after a year, which was when her husband hit her. She filed a police report.

The couple tried to save their marriage but in 2008, the husband discovered emails between his wife and her former student, which allegedly showed "much flirting and sexual innuendo being tossed back and forth between the two".

This, after the couple had not been having sex for 10 odd years due to the husband's impotence, caused by chronic health problems, according to court papers.

In her defence, the wife denied the claims, including the alleged affair. She said she

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had actively cared for her family and that her husband had constantly placed a tight rein on her.

Represented by lawyer Koh Tien Hua of Harry Elias Partnership, she counterclaimed that she was often scolded and beaten due to her husband's violent temper and accused him of having an affair, instead, with their former maid.

In subsequent papers filed with the court, she said she had a "purely platonic" relationship with her former student.


The husband, who is represented by lawyer Kevin Lim of Wee Swee Teoh & Co, is denying her claims and is rebutting that his probes were justified due to the ongoing alleged relationship between her and her former student. The man also denied any abuse and said his relationship with their former maid was "entirely platonic".

The court hearing started after about two hours of closed-door hearings, as the couple could not come to a financial agreement.

The husband later told the court of an email correspondence of an alleged "unofficial school trip" that his wife and her former student made — when the latter was still schooling — where both slept in the same hotel room and "watched each other sleep".


During cross-examination, the husband also said the alleged ongoing affair had resulted in his wife treating the family poorly.

The court has adjourned the matter to a later date, when witnesses including the wife's former student and the couple's children are expected to take the stand.



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