

Public DEFENDER

John Rolfe

127

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Please help!

I need some legal advice

Paying rip-off rates

Information came at a cost for stranded passengers



Information or a sales pitch: Travellers seek information from one of the booths at Sydney Airport

Picture: Ross Schultz

PASSENGERS stranded in Sydney during the Virgin Blue ticketing debacle were charged inflated hotel rates by the “information” desk at the airport.

I can reveal that Travellers Services at T2 charged 10 passengers \$299 each for rooms at the Swissotel in the CBD — \$100 more than it was charging at its international terminal kiosk for the same hotel on the same day, according to transaction records for both terminals.

The decision to exploit the ticketing dramas and “bump up” rates during the chaos in

September was apparently made by the owner Sheryl Hookham.

The order to raise prices was conveyed to staff by her daughter Janet Hookham, who works for Easy Go Travellers Services Pty Ltd.

Travellers Services currently operates desks at all three airport terminals.

They are the ones with the yellow “i” for information, making them look as if they are there purely to assist tourists. But the truth is, when it comes to booking hotel rooms, Travellers Services is purely about making money

— even if it means ripping people off.

When I confronted Travellers Services about bumping up hotel prices on September 26, I was given four explanations, the first from Janet Hookham who said a “third-party service” was engaged — in this case the Swissotel’s concierge desk — thereby increasing rates by \$100.

Janet then phoned her mother, who provided me with explanations two, three and four.

Number two was that the “hotels hike the prices”.

Number three was that

there must have been a release of rooms at 6pm at the lower price and that the bookings made through the international terminal were done after the release.

A Swissotel spokeswoman told me their rates don’t fluctuate and that, as far as they were concerned, everyone who came through Travellers Services should have paid the same rate.

Then came the fourth explanation — the transaction records I had were “tainted”, that is, they were wrong.

I gave the Hookhams a chance to check the data and

a week to provide proof that it was wrong.

To date, they have not done that.

However, Janet said it was “not true” that staff had been instructed to bump up prices. And Sheryl said: “I’ve not done something wrong.”

I brought these matters to the attention of Virgin Blue, which reimbursed up to \$220 of stranded passengers’ accommodation charges.

A spokeswoman yesterday said Virgin Blue would be “talking” to Travellers Services. The ACCC has also been informed.

Fighting a DUI charge

JURGEN asks: I would like some advice on a low-range DUI charge. I was pulled over and asked to take a breath test. My reading was 0.073. I was taken to the police station and blew a reading of 0.062. I was charged and given a court date. The paperwork I was given from the breath test is not mine, it is someone else’s breath test printout, but the statement the police put with it had my details. My question is, when I go to court is it possible the charge can be dropped due to lack of proof or incorrect printout? This is my first offence and I would like to keep it that way.

Blog on drink-driving at noon today with legal experts Rebecca Gilsenan of Maurice Blackburn and Philip Stewart of Nyman Gibson Stewart



FROM what you have indicated, it may be possible to challenge the reading but for different reasons than you have in mind. It is likely there was residual mouth alcohol contaminating the roadside test, and it may be that the final analysis gave an inflated reading. The problem with the police paperwork is likely to be able to be corrected by the police, even if you leave it until the last minute at court to highlight the error. You should seek specialist advice, which ultimately might change your focus from attempting to exploit a loophole to instead attempting to have the matter dismissed without conviction.

Legal information is general in nature and not to be regarded as legal advice by Maurice Blackburn



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