

## Hong Kong Standard

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### Agency took us for ride: customers

By Lillian Kwok

**STORY:** THE sudden closure of another travel agency yesterday caught many of its customers by surprise.

Customers of Kwan's Travel Services said they had lost confidence in the travel industry.

More than 100 of them crowded outside the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong's headquarters in North Point to register for compensation.

Leslie Lee Chi-leung, who was among 500 travellers hit by the cancellation of tours, said he felt he had been deceived by the agency.

Mr Lee expressed his disappointment at the way the council had handled the case.

He said he had paid a total of \$2,400 for two people for a two-day-trip to Guangdong during the Lunar New Year holiday.

Last Sunday, just two days before departure, staff had told him that the tour had been cancelled and suggested that he and his travelling companion join a three-day tour for an extra \$500 each.

Mr Lee refused the offer and demanded a full refund. He said staff told him to return today to collect his refund.

"Where is the cheque now? How can I get my money back?" he asked.

"I am extremely angry with the agency. I feel they had intentionally delayed paying me back the money.

"I don't think the council has provided travellers with sufficient protection. It turns out that the council did very little to monitor the operation of the agencies.

"I have totally lost confidence in Hong Kong's travel industry."

Another frustrated traveller, who only gave his surname of Suen, said he had planned to go to South Korea over Christmas, but the tour appeared to have been permanently grounded.

Last November, he and 10 others had paid a total of about \$30,000 for a trip to Seoul.

Mr Suen said he had contacted the agency's staff and the council over the

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problems he had faced in trying to get a reimbursement over the past few months.

He said it was not until he called the agency two days before he was due to depart that he realised the trip was in trouble.

The agency told him flight tickets were not available owing to overbookings in Korea, but the party could join another tour for an extra \$300 each.

He complained to the council and finally a solution was reached where the party could reserve their money for up to one year for any tour.

Mr Suen said he was disappointed by the way the council had handled his case.

``It appeared that the council had sided with the agency. The customers' benefits are not protected.

``I won't trust travel agencies ever again."

Earlier yesterday morning, another customer arrived holding a bounced cheque for about \$60,000 allegedly issued by the agency.

Mr Ho went to the head office of Kwan's Travel Services in Tsim Sha Tsui, only to learn that the agency had folded.

He had hoped to get away for the Lunar New Year with his family but the trip was cancelled.

Mr Ho said he had received a full refund but the cheque had been post-dated and was later rejected by the bank.

``I did not know about the closure of the agency before I came here. I am very unhappy because it spoiled my holiday and cheated me of my money," Mr Ho said after reading a notice on the door.

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