

CYPRUS & SUMMER 2009 UK MARKET SITUATION – NOEL'S VIEW

Arrivals to Cyprus are still slipping. The UK has fallen to 14.8% down as at the end of June and total arrivals are down by 10.8%.

Even I did not expect this steady deterioration for Cyprus, as figures for other destinations are beginning to stabilise. I was speaking to an agent that dynamically packages across Europe and was told that July and August for Cyprus did not look good. He mentioned that even, if some of the hotels were at last giving good prices, the rates of the flights in August were being kept so high that Cyprus was coming out a lot more expensive than Greece.

And here is our problem. Cyprus is not a good 'late sales' destination. Towards the end of Last year, and especially in January, the UK economy was in meltdown. Many were unsure as to whether they would have jobs in the near future and bookings just stopped – especially for more expensive holidays. This hiccup in bookings hit Cyprus very hard and the industry did not react quickly enough to correct this fall in sales.

Now, Cyprus is not able to compete with other destinations fighting for last minute bookings because it is simply priced out of the market.

Why is Cyprus stagnating at a time when Greece and Turkey late bookings are better than last year? Cyprus



has lost a great deal of its charter capacity and has replaced this with quasi-scheduled low cost airlines. It is a fact, which I have pointed out many times – though no one ever seems to believe me – that low cost scheduled carriers do not fill beds. If you want to fill beds then you want tour operators with charter commitments backed by commitments on accommodation. It is operators that are filling beds in the late booking destinations.

As the likes of Easyjet, British Airways, Monarch Scheduled and Cyprus Airways have increased capacity, so more and more tour operators decided that it was no longer worth the risk to take commitments on charters and have simply decided to package using the services of these airlines without the risk of chartering their own aircraft. Add to this the fact that Cyprus accommodation is overpriced and can no longer compete with that offered in Greece, Turkey, Egypt etc and you have a recipe for disaster.

You must also remember that charter aircraft have a much higher load factor than scheduled service aircraft. The tour operators with a commitment on a charter series not only package with accommodation but also sell flight seats only and push much harder. The result is a load factor 5% to 10% higher than that of scheduled carriers. The push to bring low cost airlines into Cyprus has merely helped property developers sell holiday homes to the British but has not helped the tourist industry. When we, who created tourism to the island, were trying to explain this to hoteliers and the Government, our voices fell on deaf ears.

Of course the Government has been under extreme pressure from the ethnic

community to provide lower fares between the UK and Cyprus. Both the community and Government believed that if they attracted low cost airlines that they would solve the problem. What both parties failed to understand is that low cost airlines do not provide low cost fares in July and August when the ethnic community wants to travel. The fares will be low in the off-season months but then will be higher than ever in July and August to enable the airline to recoup the low season losses. It's simple economics but, for some reason, everyone believed the lie spun to them by these carriers and thought they would be able to travel to Cyprus for next to nothing in August. In fact, the cheapest fares this August to Cyprus seem to be on Cyprus Airways!

So, what can we do? We cannot turn the clock back because it is now too late and other destinations have taken the place that Cyprus used to have. We simply have to accept that we will have a drop in numbers as long as we continue to provide expensive fares and accommodation and use this period of adjustment and consolidation to bring our infrastructure and environmental credentials up to Northern European standards. Forget the Cyprus and tourism industry we knew. We must now concentrate on low volume, high revenue traffic. At the moment we charge plenty but the service and value are poor and resorts like Paphos look terrible. Hotels will close as traditional UK operators desert the island in favour of more lucrative destinations but, in a few years, we shall find the right balance and the fixation on numbers will no longer be relevant.

PETER DROUSSIOTIS, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF CYPRIOTS IN THE UK AND EPISTEME – THE ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH CYPRIOT PROFESSIONALS

Tourism is of vital importance to Cyprus and its economy. The United Kingdom remains by far the largest source of overseas tourists to the island. In part, this reflects the significance of the large UK Cypriot community as certainly the most loyal and committed group of visitors to the island. But the Cypriot authorities must not take the loyalty of the UK Cypriot community for granted. Our 'paroikia' is constantly evolving. British Cypriots will always have an emotional attachment to the beautiful island of their ancestors and

will forever defend its interests in the UK. However, factors such as quality, 'value for money' holidays and sustainable tourism will become increasingly important to this very important group of visitors to Cyprus, in terms of their choice of holiday destination. AGTA UK is well placed to develop a strategy in order to market Cyprus and its many attractions to the younger generations of British Cypriots in alliance with the Cyprus Tourism Organisation and community groups and agencies which are able to reach these increasingly vocal and

influential community people.

The Federation of UK Cypriots is keen to lend its own weight to such joint initiatives.

Peter, speaking at the AGTA AGM



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AFFILIATE MEMBERS (CYPRUS)

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AGTA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

This year's AGM & dinner were held at the Cyprus Brotherhood, London on the 9th of June. The event was attended by 51 members, sponsors and guests and marked the Association's 20th year anniversary. Commemorative certificates of membership and or thanks were issued to members and sponsors. [See photos].

AGTA Chairman, Noel Josephides, gave an update on the current market situation. AGTA guest speaker, Mr. Peter Droussiotis, President of the National Federation of Cypriots in Britain (NFC) spoke about the Federation's activities in the UK. These, he said, were aimed at keeping the Cyprus political problem at the forefront of the UK government's and media's attention. Mr. Droussiotis also emphasised the importance of the UK market for Cyprus Tourism. [Note: Noel's and Peter's individual columns in this edition of AGTA NEWS].



AGTA DIRECTORY 2010

The process for the production of the 2010 AGTA members' directory is well forward - print run 10,000. The main aim of this annual brochure is to advertise Cyprus as a quality tourist destination to the trade and the consumer through a trade mail-shot during October/November and directly at exhibitions. [Note: Pages 2/3 of this AGTA NEWS provides a re-edited membership list and members are advised to update entries, as required. A memo regarding free entries/advertising in the directory is enclosed with AGTA NEWS].

WEBSITE

Consultation is currently on the way in order to determine further development of the Association's website www.agta.co.uk. We would welcome specific recommendations for consideration by council.

E mails to: yannis@agta.co.uk

UPDATED LIST OF MEMBERS: See pages 2-3 of this newsletter

Photos: JMA Photography
Design: Creative Link

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Summer 2009 AGTA NEWS Prepared/Released July 2009 by Yannis Efthymiou, Executive, AGTA (UK).

[Note: AGTA NEWS is a quarterly newsletter distributed to members and industry networking tourism partners. Comments on published items should be emailed to the AGTA (UK) Secretariat, E mail: yannis@agta.co.uk - Telephone: 020 8889 8395 - Web: www.agta.co.uk]