

# the CONSUMER

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food and  
travel safety

AVA: guardian of  
food safety

the skinny on  
weight-loss pills

food allergies

by Soh Hui Min

# consumer products, standards and testing committee (cpstc) - know who we are and what we do

**Small as we may be with limited resources, it has not deterred CASE to make an impact in the consumer scene all these years.**

With extensive tests and surveys conducted by CASE over the years, consumers have been increasingly kept aware of selected products and services in the local market and are more vigilant when it comes to transacting. Gradually, the local consumer scene was shaped according to required needs and legislation put in place to weed out errant vendors and raise current standards.

From conducting tests on aquarium water filters in 2004, to energy-saving lamps in 2005, to hair dyes in 2007, to gold jewellery in 2008, to children's toys in 2010 - CASE had several objectives in mind. First and foremost, products tested should be widely used and be difficult for consumers to carry out the tests themselves. Secondly, such

products usually concern the safety of the consumers. By doing such tests, CASE put the retailer's claims to test and check on their reliability and credibility.

Under CASE, there is a committee called the Consumer Products, Standards and Testing Committee (in short, CPSTC) to look into testing and survey projects. Other than price surveys that the committee regularly conduct on the prices of essential commodities, they also look into testing consumer products that may pose safety concerns. There is a two-pronged approach to such testing and survey projects. Other than informing and educating consumers using the findings from the tests, the committee also hopes that if there are none, standards can be put in place to protect the interests of consumers.

Over the years, CASE has made huge progress. As mentioned earlier, CASE tested various products previously such as aquarium water filters, energy-saving lamps and hair dyes and made significant discoveries through the tests. For instance, CASE investigated and discovered many significant findings such as: 66.7% of the energy-saving lamps tested did not measure up to the manufacturers' claims on light output; 10 out of 12 aquarium filter pumps tested failed to comply with the International Product Safety Standard: IEC 60335-2-41 etc. CASE's more recent tests on gold jewellery and children's toys revealed that not all gold fineness in jewellery are as claimed, and chemicals in toys

are at more than permitted levels. CASE also found that butchers were passing off thawed meat as chilled to earn more. Moreover thawed meat that are sold as chilled meat could pose a safety hazard as consumers may re-freeze the meat which may make it unsafe for consumption. The authority took action against the offending butchers and they were fined for such illegal practice. What if there is no CASE in Singapore to do such tests? Well, the claims may never be verified until an authority decides to regulate the products. Of course, consumers can try to send products for testing on their own but the sample size may not be enough for conclusive analysis and the cost will be a deterrent.

Testing is an expensive process. Despite the strain on CASE's budget, CASE will continue to conduct tests for the interest of consumers, and at the same time, lobby for relevant legislation to protect consumers.

Regarding legislation where CASE has been actively lobbying, we are glad that the government has taken action and implemented the Consumer Goods Safety Requirements Regulation (CGSR) which came into effect on 1 April 2011 to strengthen consumer protection against unsafe products. We will introduce more about this Act in our next issue.



# buying tour packages

## Buyer beware: When tour packages are too cheap to be true

When shopping for tour packages and the offer is too good to be true, it most certainly is.

Tour packages comprise of several components, mainly, air fares, accommodation, admission to attractions, ground transfers, guide fees and so on.

Thus, if you should come across travel agents who charge unbelievable prices, make sure you ask the agent about the tour components.

It may be that the choice of flight timings and accommodation may be less than ideal or that the consumers themselves may have obligations to meet, such as compulsory shopping. This means that the consumers, whether they like it or not, will be taken on a tour to selected shopping destinations, usually, to local specialty

product shops. In exchange for offering lower prices, overseas agents need to rely on commission from such shopping trips to earn profits.

Should you encounter such offers the next time, do a rough estimate on how much such a package should cost and check with the agent on the reason for the unbelievable prices. Then decide for yourself if this is the right package for you.

If you are not convinced or comfortable with the offer, it is best not to focus on the price and look for packages that best suit your needs.

## Things to check with your travel agent when booking your trip:

- Tour booking reference
- Price of tour (Does it include taxes, surcharges or any other charges?)
- Terms and conditions of your tour package
  - Deposit
  - Date of full payment
  - Date to inform confirmation of tour (NATAS recommended guideline is two weeks prior departure for tours of more than 6 days in duration)
  - Cancellation/amendment polices penalties (by agent/consumer)
  - Special terms/details of promotional package

- Tour Components
- Names of airlines/hotels used
- Air routes (Any transit? What are the flight arrival/departure timings?)
- Special meals request (Vegetarian no beef/children meals?)
- Type of rooms (Twin/double/triple rooms?)
- Special needs (E.g. Bassinet seats for infants/wheel chairs)
- Transfers (Sit-in coach basis or meet & greet services provided?)
- Itinerary (Inclusion of entrance fees for attractions/fees of optional tours?)
- Tipping norms/guidelines and or other customary practices in host countries

- Travel Documentation
  - Passport validity
  - Visa requirements / procedures
  - Date for passport submission/ collection
  - Health/fitness/vaccinations requirements
- Check if there will be any pre-departure briefings and if so, when.

This travel advisory is brought to you by the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS). NATAS is a trade association representing the travel agency community. For more info on NATAS, visit [www.natas.travel](http://www.natas.travel)



撰稿：苏慧敏

# 航空公司与你

近年来，消协所接到有关航空公司的案例也持续增加，从2009年的228起飙升到2010的510起。最常见的案例都与恶劣服务有关。



## 以下是一些消协所接到的案例。身为消费者的您，可曾碰过类似情况？

### (一)

消费者上网订了三张总值\$421从新加坡到海口的往返机票。在收到了航空公司的电邮后，消费者很惊讶发现班机的时间有更改，并与之前所确定的时间延迟9小时。消费者尝试向航空公司联络，但却无法与他们取得联系。消费者要求航空公司提供较早的前往班机，或较迟的回程班机。

### (二)

消费者订了两张总值\$337.43从新加坡到澳门的往返机票。消费者的机票是指定在四月一日飞回新加坡的。在三月三十日那天，消费者把回程日期改到三月三十一日。但是，电脑系统没有通知消费者回程日期无法更改，反而还征收了消费者额外收费\$130。由于回程日期没有更改，消费者在三月三十一日抵达机场后根本无法登机。机场服务人员也没有建议消费者补贴钱换取当天的机票。

因此，消费者必须购买另一张价值\$400的单程机票回新加坡。消费者要求航空公司退还\$530。

## 面对航空的问题，以下是一些消费贴士：

除了货比三家外，消费者在订购机票之前，应该仔细阅读取消、修订和退款方面等条款和条件。为了避免不必要的纠纷，在购买机票之前，消费者应该先查询机票是否隐藏着不明显的收费，例如柴油费，机场税等。

在确定预订或付款后，消费者可以把收据打印出来。若有差误，消费者应马上通知航空公司。在乘搭飞机的前几天，消费者应该向航空公司确定飞机是否按照行程起飞。消费者也应该尽早购买旅游保险作为保障。若需要协助，消费者可到消费者协会或小额索偿庭备案。

今年4月，消协在民航局的支持下，制定了一本与廉价航空的资料小册。消费者可到消协网站免费下载。

