

## The 'true value' of working with an Inbound Tour Operator

There are many reasons why the distribution channel and working with an inbound tour operator is important for our overseas visitors but often the most obvious one of safety and pastoral care is overlooked. Tour operator suppliers across the industry can receive their customers from a variety of booking mediums and channels. We know it, you know it, and the 'e-get rid of distressed inventory' agents know it. However an online wholesaler or e-agent, cannot deliver pastoral care, health & safety of customers while they are visiting New Zealand, which is fundamental to every customer's 'quality' experience. They are for loved ones off-shore, the people they most likely rely on when things go wrong. Below is a story that highlights the benefit of working with an inbound tour operator.

*ATS Pacific, one of our members had 1000 customers in Christchurch during the 22 February 2011 earthquake. After a few days the member had to report to Red Cross that "51" were missing. Can you imagine the sinking feeling you would have as the owner or CEO of that company in reporting to Red Cross missing people and also having to communicate via thousands of phone calls and enquiries from overseas family members? The staff and family members of ATS worked tirelessly over the next few weeks with more than 1200 hours of overtime (700 unpaid) - searching high and low, and after two weeks they were able to take everyone reported missing 'off' the Red Cross list. What a huge achievement and illustrates the enormous responsibility inbound operators have when people entrust their lives into our care.*



While the earthquake situation was chronic, this is not an isolated or special case - it's just what an inbound tour operator does when they need to do it. Inbound tour operators know what to do and how to find their people on the ground during times like these and that is one of the many benefits booking travel with an inbound tour operator provides. They are constantly faced with a crisis of some description – whether it is road closures, flooding, snow, accidents, earthquakes, clients unwell or someone urgently needing to get home.

The traditional distribution channel has changed but one thing that remains unchanged is that in case of an emergency, it is a person that 'looks' for another person – not an 'e-booking service. Enjoy the relationship you have with your inbound tour operator as they will be there for you and your loved ones should they be needed.

\*thanks to ATS Pacific for permission to share this story