

H.E. the Minister of Tourism
of the Dominican Republic
Mr Francisco Javier Garcia Fernandez
Av. Cayetano Germosen esq. Av. Gregorio Luperon
Sector El Pedregal
Santo Domingo
Republica Dominica

Friday, 15 December 2017

Dear Minister,

Proposed changes to the tourist card system

I am contacting you on behalf of our Members, in relation to a new Government Directive that we have just been made aware of. We understand that changes to the existing regulation in relation to the tourist card payment process have been passed, which will mean that the charge will no longer be collected from passengers on arrival in the Dominican Republic.

We are deeply concerned to learn that it is proposed that the airlines are expected to include the charge in the airfare effective 1 January 2018 and that these changes have been introduced with no consultation or assessment of the impact on the partners who are working to drive tourism to the Dominican Republic.

You may not be aware that these changes will require significant, burdensome operational changes and untenable financial burdens on many of our Members.

As a result of these changes, airlines will have to introduce a process to collect the arrival tax money from the customers who have already booked and then modify selling systems to capture the collection of these funds for reservations going forward.

ABTA, the UK's largest travel association, represents over 1,200 travel agents and tour operators including TUI, Thomas Cook, First Choice, Virgin Holidays, and Kuoni. Our Members sell £37 billion of holidays and other travel arrangements each year. Our Members have expressed their significant concerns regarding the proposed changes to the tax, which I have outlined as follows:

- As we are sure you will appreciate, tour operators prepare their brochures in excess of a year in advance. At present for example, they have three seasons on sale: winter 2017/18; summer 2018 and winter 2018/19. Their brochures give both an indication as to the amounts of any taxes, and how these taxes are to be collected.
- Members have significant forward reservations for the Dominican Republic for 2018/19 and the expectation of these customers is that they will be required to pay a tourist tax on arrival to the local authorities.

Any changes to this process would need to be communicated to existing bookings and systems would need to be adapted to collect the funds. Members will find it very difficult to ensure effective and timely communication of the changes to customers, and it is likely that tour operators will have to absorb the tax in relation to bookings already taken. This is a significant penalty for those travel providers with programmes already supporting tourism to the Dominican Republic and with the proposed changes occurring so close to the implementation date, this would prove a significant logistical issue for the industry as a whole.

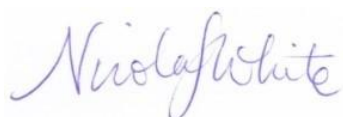
Whilst we fully appreciate the right of the Government of the Dominican Republic to introduce modifications to tax collection processes we would urge you to consider revising the current suggestion and introduce an e-visa mechanism similar to that of USA, Canada Turkey amongst others. This could be phased in over a realistic timeframe, whilst your current collection process on arrival is maintained in the interim.

Furthermore, we would strongly urge you to consult your colleagues in Government to determine whether any such changes to the tax collection process be deferred to at least allow the industry to adapt their systems and include the revised processes in their future brochure editions.

I am available to discuss this issue as the matter is of significant concern to ABTA and its Members and would appreciate an urgent response.

I look forward to hearing from you at a suitable time.

Yours sincerely,



Nikki White
Director of Destinations & Sustainability, ABTA

Cc: Pablo Espinal, Director
Mr Radhamés Martínez Aponte, Vice-Ministro Técnico
Mr Fausto Fernández, Vice-Ministro de Cooperación Internacional