

Ask the consumer champions

'A booking site is refusing to refund my flight'

GH's consumer champions are on hand every month to solve your complaints. Because if you want something done, ask a Housekeeper

Months ago, I booked holiday flights through a third-party booking website. Weeks later, the airline changed the flight time by a day. I couldn't make the new times, so I tried to get a refund from the airline. They said I was eligible for one, but I'd have to go through the booking website. But when I contacted them, the booking website said a refund was impossible. I pushed back and was told that one of its departments would contact the airline on my behalf, but I couldn't speak to that team directly. I've been calling for weeks for an update. What can I do?
Harry, Cheshire

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY, NIGE BROWN



Jane Hawkes,
aka Lady Janey (ladyjaney.co.uk), customer service expert, answers:

If your flight was moved by a full day, that's a significant schedule change and, as your airline has already confirmed, you're entitled to a refund. Your contract is with whoever you paid for the service. In this case, that's the booking company and it's responsible for resolving this issue for you. It should process any appropriate refunds in a timely manner, without using internal processes as an excuse or trying to pass it back to the airline – especially when the carrier has already agreed you're eligible for a refund.

This kind of back-and-forth is a common tactic that leaves consumers out of pocket. Moreover, being unable to speak to the team looking after your case is frustrating and, quite frankly, poor practice on the booking company's part.

At this point, I'd stop making calls as the situation hasn't progressed and there's no paper trail. Make a formal complaint in writing and include your booking reference, original and changed flight details, airline confirmation that a refund is applicable and a clear request for a refund. Write: 'Under UK 261 regulations, I am requesting a refund due to a significant schedule change,' along with a clear deadline for a response. Express clearly in the complaint that you'll escalate the issue if the company fails to honour its obligations. Keeping everything

in writing and collating evidence strengthens your position if you need to take this further.

If the company fails to action the refund, consider seeking it via your method of payment. If payment was made (even in part) by credit card, you can make a Section 75 claim, which makes the card provider jointly liable. If you paid by debit card, you may be able to recover your money using chargeback, provided you're within the 120-day window. Contact your bank and explain that the service has not been provided as agreed due to a significant schedule change. This route is often effective because it applies financial pressure to the company to fulfil its obligations.

If a refund is still not forthcoming, check whether your booking platform is part of an alternative dispute resolution scheme. If so, you can escalate your complaint there at no cost.

As a last resort, consider small claims court action via Money Claim Online (moneyclaim.gov.uk). This process is relatively straightforward, low-cost and can prompt companies to settle before it reaches a hearing.

Remember, persistence does beat resistance. Assert your rights, stand your ground, keep records of all communication and don't be fobbed off. ■

Do you have a consumer rights dilemma that needs resolving? Write to us at good.housekeeping@hearst.co.uk