
Making Good on a Trip

Help from In Depth's ombudsman

Dive boats that ask for payment in advance, with no refund for no-shows, are ensuring that they'll have enough divers to make the trip. After his experience with a Florida dive store, reader Jack Stout of Baltimore, Maryland, wanted to know, What does the prepayment assure the diver? Jack wrote:

"On August 4, 1995, I decided to travel to Key Largo to dive the wreck *Duane*. I called Ocean Divers and was informed that they would be taking six divers to the *Duane* on Sunday morning, August 6. In order to reserve a spot, I was required to pay for the trip over the phone with a credit card. I was told the cost of the trip would be charged to my credit card even if I did not show up. I agreed to those conditions and was told to arrive at 7:30 a.m.

"At 7:30 a.m. Ocean Divers opened their shop, logged me in,

issued me tanks, and had me sign a credit card receipt. At 8:30 a.m., when only one other diver and I had arrived, the manager informed us that the other four divers had cancelled and therefore the trip to the *Duane* was cancelled. We were offered a 'refund' or the opportunity to dive the reef on another boat. The manager expressed her regret that I had traveled so far for nothing. It was made clear the trip was NOT cancelled due to weather, but because only two divers were going out and 'the boat will not go out to the *Duane* with only two divers.'"

Naturally, Mr. Stout was more than a little put out as he had made his reservation and agreed to pay up front, as he assumed the other divers had also done.

In Depth contacted Joe Angelo, one of three Ocean Divers managers. I told him of Mr. Stout's

complaint and asked him to explain Ocean Divers' policy. Mr. Angelo said, "I will research this and call you back, but you should know that it is the policy of Ocean Divers that any time there are two divers the trip will go, whether to the *Duane* or for a night dive."

Less than two hours later Mr. Angelo called me back. "What you told me is the truth," he said. "We had a woman working for us, but she was not a manager, and she did put these divers on a reef trip rather than to the *Duane*. That was a breach of company policy. She is no longer with us, but that doesn't help your reader. I would like to offer Mr. Stout a free trip out to the *Duane*."

While the value of the offer is somewhat limited, as Mr. Stout lives in Baltimore and may not be able to take advantage of it, Ocean Divers earns a few points for honesty and a prompt response.

Got a problem with a resort or manufacturer that you can't resolve? Write *In Depth*, P.O. Box 90215, Austin, TX 78709 (e-mail IDeditor@AOL.com, fax 512-891-9813). J. Q.

Diving for Dollars

Pork bellies down, stingray sightings up

Dear John Q. Trigger:

We need to take umbrage with the personal slam from the reader who complained about the "commodity broker who had a phone to his ear between every dive" in October's "Things to Watch Out For" column. [*Ed. note: The reader wrote that he was distracted by this behavior on Fisheye's boat off Grand Cayman.*] These phone calls were each under five minutes

during the one-hour surface interval, made as quietly as possible at the bow of the boat. The remainder of the hour was frequently spent being forced to listen to the loud exaggerations of some novice diver describing his death-defying encounters with sharks, stingrays, moray eels, or scorpionfish.

We are commodity traders, not brokers, trading strictly for our own accounts. This allows us the freedom to go diving fre-

quently in exotic locales but requires an hour or two of work at night and one or two check-in calls with our assistant in Chicago. We lose efficiency if we are not able to call on a cellular phone but we do dive where cellular service does not exist if there is reliable phone service on land. We're sorry if we offend some people. However, we will continue, since the only other way we could dive this much would be to write a newsletter, but you have already well filled that niche.

Gregory Rothman
and Michael Rothman
Chicago, Illinois