

Consumer news

Consumer watchdogs challenge unfair fees at airports

Call to scrap air charges

AIRPORT CHARGES

Consumer watchdogs have called on airlines to come clean on extra charges levied on passengers at some UK airports.

So-called airport development fees (ADFs) at Newquay and Norwich fund improvements to facilities such as toilets.

When you fly from either of these airports, you have to pay the ADF – up to £20 for a family of four – at the terminal. Both airports reserve the right to turn you away if you refuse to pay.

But many passengers aren't even aware of ADFs until they arrive at check-in, and they resent paying extra. Which? member Brian Cleland, who flew from Norwich recently, said: 'It seems that we're paying a fee to get on the plane, something we paid for when we bought our tickets.'

Ryanair fails to warn Newquay travellers when they book online that they'll be charged £5 a head on arrival, while



Airports collect fees for needy causes, such as toilets

Many passengers aren't even aware of the charge until they arrive at check-in

warnings appear to have been added on Flybe fare quotes only after Which? prompted the airline. The fee is included in BA flyers' fares.

Trading Standards Institute travel spokesman Bruce Treloar called on airlines using these airports to make the fee clear to passengers when they book online.

'I can see a situation where a travel agent fails to tell the consumer about the fee because there's no mention of it on the airline website,' he said.

The consumer body the Air Transport Users Council also believes ADFs are unfair and is concerned the trend may spread to other airports. Which? agrees.

If you've encountered hidden charges, email news@which.co.uk with the details.

Lying parking company fined

COURT ACTION

A parking company at a major British airport has been convicted of lying about where it was parking people's cars.

Prestige Parking Ltd admitted it had not provided indoor secure car parking, as promised in its adverts, at Nottingham East Midlands airport, and had displayed the Park Mark safer parking logo when it had lost the right to do so.

The firm was caught out after a sting by Leicestershire trading standards officers (TSOs). It was fined £20,000.

Many customers reported that they had paid 'a few pounds a day extra' to have their car parked at a secure indoor lot, but the TSOs found that Prestige staff were leaving some vehicles at the airport's outdoor car parks and other sites nearby.

TAKE ACTION!

■ Specify if you want secure indoor airport parking, and check a company's small print for get-out clauses, such as not providing the requested parking due to limited space. Check the parking location and note your car's mileage. You can go to www.saferparking.com to check membership of the Park Mark scheme.

The way we were

25 years ago, January 1983

The Honda Accord, pictured, was a Best Buy, some remote controls still had to be attached to video recorders with a lead, and we tested door chimes that played *God Save the Queen*, *Oh Come All Ye Faithful* and *Come to the Cook House Door*. Elsewhere, we warned against using scouring powder or bleach to clean your dentures and

we visited Which? members to quiz them about a sales phenomenon – the microwave oven.



50 years ago, winter 1958

In our first washing machine test, the Best Buy Hotpoint Countess washed 2.3kg (5lb) of clothes. Today, most machines can wash three times that quantity – one machine in our latest test can get through 10kg (see 'Washing machines for how we live', p54).

The average cost of a Which? test at the time was around £450 –

though we did spend more than £2,000 on testing 50 pairs of nylon stockings.



We also invited women aged over 35 to be part of a user trial of hormone creams.

800,000

number of passengers using
Norwich Airport each year
NORWICH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

26%

rise in credit card fraud in the
first six months of 2007
APACS – THE UK PAYMENT ASSOCIATION

300 million

number of meals served
by the NHS annually
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



Members find that the Banking Code is being ignored

Banks turning down legitimate card claims

CARD FRAUD

Some banks are ducking out of paying legitimate card fraud claims by ignoring guidance in their code of practice.

Over the past year, several Which? readers with legitimate claims have seen their refund requests initially dismissed.

Which? member Hazel Harris had her Barclays debit card cloned. The copy was then used while Hazel was at a wedding. Meanwhile, Valerie Delpach's HSBC account was debited despite a cashpoint malfunction that meant she never received any money.

Under the Banking Code, you're protected from losses incurred as a result of card fraud

Banks refused to pay out until Which? challenged them

unless it can be proved you 'acted fraudulently or without reasonable care'.

We told Hazel and Valerie to challenge their bank, quoting the relevant clause in the Banking Code. Both banks subsequently paid up.

Another member, Duncan Stephenson from Lewes, lodged a claim after £497.61 was taken from his account by a 'shoulder surfer' – a thief who spies on people while they enter their Pin and then steals their card.

Nationwide rejected Duncan's claim, saying it 'suspected that reasonable care was not taken' until Which? challenged it, again using the Banking Code.

A spokeswoman said: 'On reviewing the case, we have now decided to uphold Mr Stephenson's claim. We have apologised for any inconvenience. We have also made changes to our procedures as a result.'

Duncan said: 'I felt that Nationwide implied I was trying to defraud the bank, so I'm delighted with the outcome.'

Financial Ombudsman Service spokesman David Cresswell said: 'We've seen 2,700 card disputes this year, 29 per cent up the previous 12 months. It's a growing problem.'

Sandra Quinn of Apacs, the UK card payments association, said: 'The burden of proof still lies with the banks to prove a customer has acted negligently.'

TAKE ACTION!

■ If you're a victim of fraud and you haven't been negligent, quote clause 12.12 of the Banking Code when you claim a refund. If your bank rejects the claim, go to www.fos.org.uk to contact the ombudsman.



Sorry state of patients' food

HEALTH CAMPAIGN

One in three patients is unhappy with the food they're served in hospital – despite £40 million of government investment.

Which? research has found that around one in four patients thought the food was so bad they bought their own or got someone else to bring it.

Hospital staff shared these concerns. Some said they wouldn't eat the food they serve to patients and admitted that improvements were urgently needed.

Our survey of 1,000 patients and 250 hospital staff members last year came six years after the government launched its Better Hospital Food programme. It said: 'Good food encourages patients to eat well, giving them the nutrition they need to recover.'

Patients we spoke to mentioned the lack of support when eating. One said: 'I had tonsillitis with an abscess and was offered a pie and chips to eat when I was struggling to drink.'

And 'repulsive' and 'disgraceful' were just a couple of the descriptions given by patients who also contacted us through our website, with one saying he'd lost weight as a result of inedible food.

Which? has launched its Impatient for Change campaign to try to improve the non-clinical aspects of patient care in the NHS, from hygiene to the standard of food. Visit www.which.co.uk/impatientforchange for more details.



It took Which?'s intervention for Duncan to get a refund