

TRADE NEWS

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Travelport launches global campaign for more support from airline passengers with intellectual disabilities

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

Travelport, has launched a global campaign to improve awareness and use of the DPNA Special Service Request (SSR) code, which can be used by travel agents, among others, to alert airlines when a passenger has intellectual or developmental disability and needs assistance.

The campaign was initiated after Travelport found evidence of exceptionally low use of the code on bookings made through its global distribution system (GDS).

Travelport's six-month long campaign will reach more than 100,000 travel agents in over 30 countries. It features electronic direct mails (EDMs) as well as 'sign on alerts' and graphical 'prompts' delivered through the company's flagship Travelport Smartpoint tool, which is used by travel agents, among others, to search and book airline seats, hotel rooms and more.

The 'prompts' are also being shown when any flight is about to be booked to or from the United Arab Emirates, the country hosting the Special Olympics World Summer Games 2019 this month. Travelport has also created a campaign webpage (www.travelport.com/travelunified), which provides guidance for travel agents on talking to travelers about intellectual disabilities and associated assistance.

Gordon Wilson, President & CEO, Travelport, said: "Travel can be a particularly challenging time for people who require special assistance, so once we discovered such low use of the DPNA SSR code, we decided to take action. Our point of sale, Travelport Smartpoint, with all of its graphical and prompted capabilities offers the perfect channel to reach and remind travel agents across the world of the existence of this facility, enabling them to work in better partnership with our airline customers in the service of these travelers. We hope this campaign will not only make a difference in the travel industry but act as a catalyst for other organisations to investigate how their industry or the industry they serve can better support people with intellectual disabilities and make improvements where needed."

Linda Ristagno, External Affairs Manager, IATA, said: "We introduced the DPNA SSR code to assist persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are delighted that Travelport has launched this awareness campaign and encourage all our member airlines and travel agents to properly use this and all the other IATA disability codes to ensure that the appropriate support to our valued passengers is provided."

Emma Hawkins, Director of Education, Jigsaw Trust, a registered charity based in the United Kingdom that provides facilities, services and resources to educate and support people with autism, has a stepson with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). As such, she's had first-hand experience of the assistance that airlines typically provide for passengers with intellectual or developmental disabilities and understands how important arranging specialised assistance for these passengers can be.

"Not all intellectually disabled people need to get on a flight first with noisy or crying children, and not all need to get on last," said Emma. "In my stepson's case, once he's with an established group, he wants the group to stay together. We are a big family and can often arrive at the airport in a group of six or eight. If that's the case, he wants us all to stay together. So, when the airline says my stepson plus one can get on the plane, can go through security and passport control without queueing, that is no good to us."

"There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution that airports and airlines can apply that is going to improve the travel experience for people like my stepson. This is why the ability to enter specific details of both the passenger's intellectual disability and the assistance needed when booking a flight goes a long way to setting expectations upfront," said Emma.

Linda Celestino, Vice President, Guest Service and Delivery, Etihad Airways, said: "As the official airline partner of the Special Olympics World Summer Games 2019, we are proud to support the use of the DPNA Special Service Request to enhance visibility for our Airport and Cabin Crew teams when assisting People of Determination. In preparation for Special Olympics team travel across the Etihad network, our teams have received additional training on how to best support guests with intellectual disabilities."

Asim Arshad, Group CEO, Orient Travel and Tourism Agency said: "We fully support Travelport's campaign. SSR codes play an important role in ensuring that our customers receive the best possible flight experience and all need to be considered in the booking process. We are happy to act on this initiative and ensure that all of our consultants, as a standard part of the booking discussion, ask customers if any of the traveling party has an intellectual or physical disability and needs special assistance from the airline. Asking the question is the first step to ensuring appropriate support is provided. We encourage all travel agents across the world to follow suit."

Dr. Yousef Al Hammadi, CIO, Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019, said: "We are excited to see companies such as Travelport getting inspired by the values of the Special Olympics movement and creating innovative solutions to help improve everyday experiences and quality of life for People of Determination. The World Games are a catalyst for change, and this initiative is a wonderful example of how we can build a legacy of inclusion long after the Closing Ceremony."