

North Shore travel agents brief Trent Zimmerman



Discussing key issues facing North Sydney travel agents are, around the table from left: Amanda Rixon, AFTA; Claudia Rossi Hudson, Mary Rossi Travel; Bruce O'Brien from Travel Associates Blues Point; Trent Zimmerman MP; Gary Berman of World Corporate Travel; Tom Tescher from Timeless Tours & Travel; Debbi Ashes from Helloworld Travel Lane Cove; and AFTA CEO Darren Rudd.

(August 20) With COVID-19 restrictions and border closures continuing to have a devastating impact on travel agencies, Member for North Sydney Trent Zimmerman heard firsthand from local travel agents this week on the need for tailored support.

The meetings were coordinated by the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA), with AFTA CEO Darren Rudd also attending.

Claudia Rossi, Managing Director of Neutral Bay-based Mary Rossi Travel, celebrates her businesses 50th anniversary in 2020 and spoke about the unique challenges travel agents are now facing as a result of COVID-19.

"One of my consultants has 40 bookings up in the air and still negotiating with suppliers," says Claudia.

"We're fortunate to have received a huge amount of community goodwill, and we have built strong supplier relationships over 50 years in the industry, but the reality is it will take 4 years for us to rebuild."

"JobKeeper has been enormously helpful, and we're grateful the Government took that enlightened step. Clients were starting to book interstate travel, but ongoing border closures have shut that down. We need tailored support for travel agents."

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Debbi Ashes, owner of Helloworld Travel Lane Cove, agrees agencies are in a difficult position, and says she's staying positive in the face of the COVID-19 challenge.

"I'm regularly communicating with my clients to let them know we're still here and we still get waves in our window from our loyal clients passing by the agency."

"I have no intention of closing my business, so we're focusing on intrastate travel – places like Lord Howe Island have seen a spike in enquires and bookings."

Debbi says more tailored Government support is essential.

"I'm expecting 12 months of almost no income, and while JobKeeper is helpful it doesn't cover rent or superannuation and ongoing costs. Agencies will need financial support until there's a vaccine developed and borders reopen. We're happy to be transparent and demonstrate where funds are being spent."

"I had a successful business for over two decades, and I will have one again. My father had a pharmacy in Mosman, and his advice to me when I started my business was you always have to take the good with the bad and expect the unexpected."

"That advice has served me well through business downturns like 9/11, GFC, SARS, Bird Flu to name a few and I know travel agents like me will get through this."

"Moving forward people will need travel agents as they are a vital part of the tourism economy."

- ENDS -

Media Contact for interviews: Andrew Stewart 0400 964 222 or astewart@alphaconsulting.global



L-R: Claudia Rossi Hudson, Mary Rossi Travel, with Trent Zimmerman MP and Debbi Ashes, Helloworld Travel Lane Cove.

Notes to Editors:

The Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA) is the peak body in Australia representing the retail travel industry. Founded in 1957, AFTA represents the majority of travel agents in Australia and includes all of the major travel agency groups.



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AFTA's role is to uphold the interests of members in matters relating to the operation of all travel agencies in Australia. In broad terms these issues are ones that are not addressed by agent chain or corporate entities on behalf of their members, and are ones that involve the industry as a whole.
