



With the opening of Ikea in Dublin furniture is in the news but this is not a new development as in 2008 the ECC found itself dealing with a lot of furniture-related consumer problems. So if you are thinking of trying to save money by shopping for a new kitchen or sofa on-line or buying from a company in the UK or Northern Ireland read on. This month's e-bulletin could help you avoid a lot of problems and ultimately save you money....

This month's consumer problem concerns problems with holiday accommodation.

If you have had a problem with a purchase from another EU country, please contact us on 01 8090600 or at info@eccireland.ie. For information on your consumer rights in Europe, see www.eccireland.ie

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Editor

1. Buying furniture abroad – dos and don'ts.....

Due to a favourable exchange rate with Sterling buying furniture from UK companies is increasingly popular among Irish consumers. Although this may allow you to bag a bargain you should be careful to observe the following precautions.

- Always use your credit card to pay for your purchases. Be very wary of any company that insists that you pay in cash only for large purchases such as kitchens. Cash payments or bank transfers offer no protection if something goes wrong and you risk losing the money.
- Check the terms of any offer carefully; terms such as 'we cannot guarantee that all elements will be in perfect condition' should raise alarm bells.
- Ensure that you understand precisely what type of wood/finish etc is proposed, when it will be delivered, and by whom, and, in the case of kitchens, who will install it. Ask for written confirmation of the above.
- With kitchens, check it when it arrives; while you probably will not examine everything, you should at least ensure that all large components are present and that it is the correct colour/finish.
- Always, always ask for a receipt, with full details of the products purchased and full contact details of the company.
- If possible, avoid paying large cash deposits on items that may take months to deliver (kitchens, sofas). With the surge in companies going into administration, you may find that your longed for new kitchen never arrives due to the company ceasing trading.
- Check the company name in Google or use Howard, the Shopping Assistant, on our website www.eccireland.ie. If the first few results contain negative comments, there may be a good reason to be extra cautious.

2. We recently came home from a family holiday in Spain. When we arrived we were given an apartment with a view of the garden, rather than a view of the pool which is what we specifically selected when we were making the booking. The room was not very clean and our daughter got an itchy rash everytime she went to bed, and could not sleep at night. What can we do?

ECC Ireland is regularly contacted by Irish holiday makers travelling abroad about problems with accommodation. In some cases the hotel is of a lower standard than that expected by the consumer, the rooms are not as described or there is a problem with basic facilities: no warm water, or insects in the room.

In most hotel-related problems it is vital for the consumer to be able to prove what exactly went wrong and to be able to show that hotel staff were notified of the situation as soon as the problem was discovered. If a consumer fails to do so, it may be impossible to resolve the problem in their favour once it escalates.

Consumers should notify their concerns to hotel staff as soon as possible. An alternative room will very often be offered and the problem can be sorted out immediately. If this is not possible, the consumer should gather as much information about the problem as possible. One of the easiest ways to do it is to simply take photographs.

In the case of allergy or bites caused by insects an opinion or statement from the local doctor will be necessary. In some of the more difficult cases, a consumer might have to check out from the hotel earlier and find alternative accommodation rather than ruin the holiday experience completely.

On their return, the consumer should make a formal complaint in writing, with supporting evidence illustrating the problem. The consumer should also state that the problem was brought to the attention of the hotel staff at the time but no assistance followed.

There is no specific legislation regulating these particular situations, so each case will only be as strong as the evidence supporting it.

If you want more information about this or any other cross-border consumer issue you can contact us on 01 8090600 or at www.eccireland.ie.

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