



### European Consumer News

March 2011

This month's eBulletin deals with the rights of older consumers, an increasingly important group in Irish society. Our Consumer Query of the Month discusses what happens when you do not get what you paid for from an online discount voucher and this month's Success Story concerns a consumer who was billed twice for the same flight.

If you have had a problem with a purchase from another European country, please contact us on 01 8797620 or click [here](#). For information on your consumer rights in Europe, see [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie)

### Ann Neville Manager

#### Older and wiser!

There are more than 1.2 million people aged fifty plus in Ireland and their numbers are due to increase substantially over the next decade, with the percentage of the population aged 65 and above due to overtake the percentage of under-fives for the first time next year.

Research shows that the over-fifties in Ireland are the most likely to spend on holidays, new cars and restaurants. The common stereotype that older people are not confident with ICT use is less and less accurate, as 40% of this age group are active online, with flights among the most popular online purchases.

All of the above activities fall in the remit of consumer spending and to celebrate World Consumer Day ECC Ireland hosted a conference on the rights of older consumers in the European Commission offices in Dublin. The conference was introduced by former Minister for Consumer Affairs, Mary O'Rourke, who said: "Let's talk about people's wisdom and experience, not their age. Rights gained for consumers from the EU are vast and being older should help us be all the wiser!"

Topics discussed included finances, travel and internet security, with speakers from the Financial Services Ombudsman, the Commission for Aviation Regulation and the Garda National Bureau of Crime Investigation who talked about the potential risks of computer use. Guest of honour was Mabel Gargan who is a regular computer user at the age of 88 and who spoke about her experiences using IT.

To celebrate and assist this growing group of consumers ECC Ireland has launched a new microsite [www.silverconsumer.eu](http://www.silverconsumer.eu) which provides information and news of interest to older consumers.

### Consumer Query of the Month

**My wife and I purchased an online discount voucher for a short hotel break in the UK before Christmas. The package on offer included one overnight stay (available mid-week and at weekends), spa treatment or round of golf, and the voucher was due to expire at the end of March. When we called the hotel in mid-January to book our stay we were told they were fully booked every weekend until after the expiry of the voucher and they tried to get us to accept a mid-week stay. We explained that this was not what we paid for and that we could clearly see on their own website that the same deluxe rooms were still available. The hotel insisted that they only had a set allocation of rooms available for the online deal and that we could not book any weekend night. As I felt that I had been misled about the nature of the deal I contacted the online discounter requesting a cancellation and full refund. Despite numerous emails, I still have not received a reply from them. What can I do now?**

In relation to your complaint, please be advised that as per the Terms and Conditions displayed on the website of the online discounter, the voucher is redeemable by the consumer from the merchant (in this case the hotel). Please note that the merchant and not the online discounter is the seller of the voucher products and therefore the hotel is solely responsible for providing you with the voucher products and solely responsible for redeeming any voucher you purchase.

I recommend you check the Terms and Conditions of the voucher and if no restrictions regarding weekends, etc. are mentioned, please take screenshots of the hotel website showing that rooms of the same specification are available. You could then contact the hotel once again for an explanation in writing as to their failure to honour the voucher which was issued by the online discounter based on the information given by the hotel. If no satisfactory explanation in writing follows and the hotel continues to refuse to provide the service within the agreed time or to extend the expiry date of the voucher, you could report the matter to the online discounter, in case they can liaise with the hotel on your behalf to resolve the matter.

If no satisfactory resolution is reached in this way, you can contact ECC Ireland for further assistance.

### **Success story of the Month**

An Irish consumer attempted to book a return flight with a Dutch airline. She tried to pay for the transaction with her laser card but to no avail, so she used her credit card instead. When later she checked her laser card statement she discovered she had been charged twice for the cost of the air ticket of €1,766.66 (€3,533.32 in total). The consumer contacted the airline and was eventually reimbursed €1,766.66, but there was still another €1,766.66 to be refunded. ECC Ireland brought the complaint to the attention of our Dutch sister office, which in turn contacted the airline. Shortly afterwards, the consumer was refunded the outstanding sum of €1,766.66.

**If you want more information about this or any other cross-border consumer issue you can contact us on 01 8797620 or at [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie).**

The European Consumer Centre is funded by the European Commission and the National Consumer Agency.

**Disclaimer:** Whilst every effort is made to ensure accuracy, the European Consumer Centre cannot be held responsible for matters arising from any errors or omissions contained in this publication. The information provided is intended as a guide only and not as a legal interpretation.