

Avoid Cowboy Stag Weekends Operators in Eastern Europe

Submitted by: Stag Republic

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Stag Weekenders are taking a big risk by booking with companies without travel association accreditation, according to Stag Republic, a leading operator in Eastern Europe.

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Most people booking their holidays look for a travel agent they can be sure will not leave them out of pocket and without a place to stay. Strangely, many groups organising stag weekends in Eastern Europe (<http://www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk>) do not take the same precautions, risking not only their own money, but also that of their friends. They often hand over hundreds of pounds with no guarantee they are paying a legitimate company, or one that will not go bust by the time they arrive. So, what should you watch out for when organising a weekend away with the lads?

The first thing to look for is accreditation from the relevant country's travel association. "Any company that has taken the trouble to get the approval of a local travel association will display their logo prominently on their website," says Josey Walker, Managing Director of Stag Republic, a company offering stag weekends (<http://www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk>) all over Eastern Europe. Travel associations are the first port of call should any disputes arise between one of its members and their customers. Accredited companies must also satisfy a variety of strict rules regarding standards of service, refunds and processing payments.

Stag Republic is registered in Budapest and therefore has accreditation with MUISZ, the Hungarian association of reputable travel operators, as well as CECTA, the Central European Countries Travel Association. Other associations in the region include SACKA in Slovakia, ALTA in Latvia, ACK in the Czech Republic and PTTK in Poland. Companies based in the UK may have ABTA membership. "At least one high-profile competitor claims to be a member of the American Society of Travel Agents – an organisation that is not a travel association and does not have any relevance to Eastern Europe," says Walker.

He goes on to recommend going through a locally based agent with on-the-ground knowledge, but warns against using cowboy operations. "New providers are popping up all the time," he says, "and very few of them are legitimate, particularly in our newer destinations like Riga," Walker adds. "We know of one company under investigation for fraud - and it is still operating."

The current financial situation has not helped matters either, at least according to Walker. "With the pound at a record low and more people looking for cheaper holidays, many providers are cutting corners to quote lower prices. This is encouraging the illegitimate companies that don't pay taxes, answer to no one and rip off their customers." He goes on to give a string of examples of groups having to pay extra for paintballs, ammunition and go-kart laps, or not being offered basic services that should come as standard.

Although a stag weekend organiser offers more and different services to a traditional travel agency, its obligations to customers are no different. "It is important to remember we are tour operators first and

party organisers second,” adds Walker.

About Stag Republic

Stag Republic (<http://www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk>) is a Budapest-based company that has been organising made-to-measure hen and stag weekends in Eastern Europe since 2000. The company hosted over 6,000 people in 2008 alone and manages its own operation with stag weekends in Krakow (<http://www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk/krakow/>), Riga and Kiev. Stag Republic employs a team of English native-speakers in each of its destinations, and they all know how to party.

Visit Stag Republic’s website to browse our comprehensive selection of stag weekend packages (<http://www.stagrepUBLIC.co.uk>) and activities.

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