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W Singapore-Sentosa Cove hotel refunds victim of tour scam



The W Singapore-Sentosa Cove hotel refunded Madam Tan out of goodwill as she was a victim herself. It had earlier deducted over \$7,000 from her husband's credit card. ST FILE PHOTO

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She had paid travel agent upfront for stay, but hotel did not get the money

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Madam S.Y. Tan believed she had already paid for her family's recent National Day weekend stay at the five-star W Singapore-Sentosa Cove hotel, having given the money upfront to a tour agent.

But after checking out, the hotel, which never received the money from the agent, deducted more than \$7,000 from her husband's credit card.

The hotel has since decided to reverse the charge, after finding out that the couple were victims of a scam. While expressing relief that she has the money back, Madam Tan, a 40-year-old business executive, said she was "not quite happy" that deductions could be made from a credit card without the owner being first notified.

"We could have been very embarrassed had we continued to use the card, as the deduction almost reached the credit card ceiling of \$8,000."

A police spokesman confirmed they are investigating after Madam Tan lodged a report against the agent, who is also being probed for another alleged travel scam involving more than \$20,000.

It was through the agent that Madam Tan had booked three rooms and a suite for family members in August.

Recounting what happened, she said that she was told by hotel staff when checking in that, based on her booking, payment would be received from the agent. At the same time, details of her husband's credit card were given to the hotel to pay for any incidental expenses incurred during the stay.

When checking out three days later, she again confirmed with hotel staff that no deductions for accommodation would be made since it had already been paid for. But a month later she learnt the hotel had deducted \$7,294.

Madam Tan told the hotel that it should have alerted her before she checked in that it had not received anything from the agent. That would have given her the option of cancelling her family's stay.

The hotel apologised to her last month for not "reaching out to her earlier" as it was then "following up closely" with the agent on the payment after her departure.

But it also explained that guests would be liable for the hotel charges if the agent failed to pay. The hotel also said its policy was not to refund the charges on the credit card.

When the woman's lawyer Vijai Parwani sent a letter insisting on a refund, the hotel reviewed her case.

Last week, it notified her lawyer of the decision to refund the sum on a "without prejudice basis". It accepted it did not advise Madam Tan on check-in that her deposit had not been received, and that she had suffered loss after being cheated by the agent.

In an e-mailed response to The Straits Times, a hotel spokesman said: "We place our hotel guests' needs before our own and as she was also a victim and had suffered losses from her dealings with a third party, the hotel management has decided to refund the sum as a goodwill gesture."

It added that the hotel will be lodging its own police report to get the agent to pay up.

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