

Four major travel agencies to boycott NATAS fair

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NATAS, which organises two travel fairs each year, has been holding the trade shows since 1987.

Each fair would attract tens of thousands of visitors and generate millions in sales.

The four agencies, SA Tours, Chan Brothers Travel, Dynasty Travel and CTC Travel, have been participating in the NATAS fair for as long as two decades.

The pullout of the agencies — which are considered the Big Four in

the industry — could have a significant impact on sales. The most recent NATAS fair, which was held in August, had 165 exhibitors taking up a total of 1,226 booths. The exhibitors comprise travel agents, attractions, hotels, national tourism organisations and other travel-related companies.

Sources told TODAY the four agencies would organise their own fair next year at Marina Bay Sands and admission would be free.



Chan Brothers Travel at the NATAS fair. The association has been holding such trade shows since 1987. TODAY FILE PHOTO

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When contacted, the four agencies would say only that a press conference would be held next week and the media would be informed of any developments in due course.

It is understood that other travel agencies and participants at previous NATAS fairs — which have been held at Singapore Expo — have been approached to cross over to the rival trade show.

However, some participants, such as cruise-ship operator Royal Caribbean International, were in the dark. Nevertheless, a Royal Caribbean spokesperson said it would continue to take part in the NATAS fair.

Responding to TODAY's queries, NATAS said: "We are aware that some agents may want to organise another event on dates that coincide with the NATAS fair."

Pointing out that it had "always been committed to providing an equal platform for all members, whether small, medium or large, to reach out to the public", the association added: "Moving forward, we will continue to strive to cater to the needs of our members and provide them with equal opportunities to make their mark in the local travel and tourism industry."

Citing falling visitor numbers at the NATAS fair, an industry player who is aware of the developments said the four agencies could also have been trying to negotiate a discount on participation fees.

The unhappiness could have been accentuated by the fact that NATAS had raised admission fees over the years.

The entrance fee for the NATAS fair was increased by a dollar to S\$4 in 2010. "When the market is good and people make money, they don't complain," he added.

He said his travel agency is adopting a wait-and-see attitude, adding that it would hold discussions with NATAS and might consider participating in both fairs.

NATAS said its next travel fair would be held from March 27 to 29. The venue has not been finalised. "We will do our best to make it a success," the association said.

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National Association of Travel Agents Singapore