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ONLINE travel site, Travelstart, has outraged agents by posting survey results claiming that “traditional travel agencies take South Africans for a ride”.

The survey, conducted by Synovate – a research company commissioned by Travelstart – to find out how offline travel agencies compared with online travel agencies in South Africa, found that:

- Traditional SA travel agencies overcharge customers for international flights
- Flight prices, for the same dates, vary by as much as 87% between agencies
- Traditional travel agents sell the flights that earn them the highest margin
- 40% of the surveyed travel agents didn’t offer quotes over the phone
- Amsterdam, Frankfurt and London flights were the most inconsistent

“In the US, up to 50% of all flight bookings are made online,” said Travelstart ceo, Stephan Ekbergh

“This trend is slowly catching on in South Africa with 5% of flight bookings currently made online. Consumers are realising that online travel agencies offer them the advantages of lower prices, greater transparency, more flexibility, convenience, a wider choice, and more control over their flight booking experience.”

The survey, which was picked up and reported in The Star on Monday November 14, has sparked outrage among travel agents.

“Turning survey results into intelligence is always an interesting exercise and obviously Travelstart has interpreted a version that reflects kindly on its online travel business,” ceo of Asata, Robyn Christie, told The Star. “But it is harmful to an industry to create a perception that all travel agents other than themselves are rip-offs... to indicate that [South Africans] are being ripped off to the extent of 85% is sensational and perhaps a little insulting.”

For more details on the survey visit: <http://www.travelstart.co.za/static.jsp?pageName=are-you-paying-too-much-for-flights>

**Source: eTNW - Travel Info**