

## UK news

UK tour firm used by teenager in gang rape case ends trips to Ayia Napa

**Summer Takeover's move comes amid anger over her treatment by Cyprus authorities**

**Josh Halliday and Helena Smith in Nicosia**

Fri 3 Jan 2020 16.54 GMT Last modified on Fri 3 Jan 2020 18.15 GMT



Summer Takeover, which arranges working holidays, said it would no longer operate in Ayia Napa ‘in any capacity’. Photograph: Petros Karadjias/AP

The UK tour operator behind the working holiday on which a British teenager was allegedly gang raped has said it will no longer send young clubbers to Ayia Napa following a week of rising anger about her treatment by Cypriot authorities.

Summer Takeover said it would stop operations at the resort “in any capacity” after the Guardian discovered it was still promoting the much-criticised budget hotel where the young woman was allegedly attacked by a group of Israelis in July.

The firm, which bills itself as “Europe’s No 1 working holiday company”, said on Friday it had removed all affiliation to Pambos Napa Rocks and had offered refunds to those booked on this summer’s sold-out tour to Ayia Napa.

It said in a statement: “Summer Takeover takes the safety of our guests extremely seriously. We will no longer be operating in Ayia Napa in any capacity. Any affiliation to Pambos Napa Rocks has been removed from our website and no dates are available [to] book.”

The holiday booking firm On the Beach said it had suspended advertising for the hotel: “The safety of our customers is of paramount importance. We take the allegations against the hotel in question very seriously. As such, we have suspended online advertising for the hotel for the foreseeable future and are monitoring the investigation of the hotel closely.”

The moves came amid mounting pressure on the Cypriot authorities to grant the teenager clemency when she is sentenced on Tuesday. She faces up to a year in prison and a £1,500 fine after being found guilty of wilfully indulging in public mischief by claiming she was raped by a group of Israeli men.

The case against the student hinged on a statement retracting her original accusation, [signed after hours](#) of questioning by detectives in a police station that was neither recorded nor attended by a lawyer. She said in court that the police had forced her to change her story, telling the judge she was scared for her life.

The Guardian has spoken to two respected witnesses who provided evidence in court for the defence about the unreliability of the retraction statement.

Dr Andrea Nini, a forensic linguistics analyst who is listed as an expert by the UK's National Crime Agency, said it was highly likely the statement was dictated to her by someone who does not speak English as a first language because of its use of irregular phrases, such as "I discovered them recording me doing sexual intercourse".

Cypriot police have denied dictating the statement. The force is also facing fresh questions about its investigation after it emerged officers closed the crime scene barely hours after the incident, with other hotel guests able to check into the room where the alleged attack took place.

Noa Shpigel, a correspondent for Haaretz newspaper in Israel, said she had interviewed guests who found a used condom and an empty bottle of duty-free vodka in the room after being allowed to check in less than 24 hours after the alleged attack.

Pictures taken by Shpigel show a condom and a gold-coloured vodka bottle allegedly left by the Israeli group accused of the rape on 17 July. The head of the police investigation claimed in court that the condom had been planted by Israeli journalists – a claim described by Shpigel as a "blatant and ridiculous lie".

Lawyers for the woman said on Friday she faces lifelong psychological damage if she is sentenced to immediate custody at Famagusta district court. It is understood Foreign Office officials made contact with the teenager and her family on Thursday after raising serious concerns about the fairness of her trial with the Cypriot authorities.

Privately, Cypriot officials have voiced regret about the case, with some intimating that a presidential pardon might be in the offing. However, the government spokesman, Kyriakos Kousios, [said earlier this week](#) that the administration had no desire "under any circumstances" to intervene in a pending case before the courts.

A presidential pardon would only be possible if the student, who was detained in Nicosia general prison for four weeks in the summer, is sentenced to immediate jail by the judge, Michalis Papathanasiou.

Nicoletta Charalambidou, the lawyer heading the teenager's legal team in Cyprus, said: "Her and her family are very anxious and afraid ahead of the sentence but they have also gained strength and support from the media and network of women now behind them. It's solidarity that has kept them going."

It is felt that a pardon by the Cyprus president, Nicos Anastasiades, could help assuage widespread anger over the way the case has been handled.

"It is now being openly talked about as a way of saving face," said Andreas Paraschos, the editor in chief of the island's Kathimerini newspaper. "This whole affair has been a stain on Cyprus. From the

outset so many things were handled wrongly with people who should have been pillars of society falling short of expectation. The negative publicity, alone, has been a huge price to pay.”

Despite the international outcry there seems little sign of lasting damage to the island’s party reputation. The hotel at the centre of the controversy was on Friday advertising a summer party with no minimum age for entry.

Several major holiday companies – including easyJet, LastMinute.com and Expedia – are also still advertising the hotel and many have purchased Google ads to appear prominently in search results for the accommodation despite its highly critical online reviews.

One of the hotel’s 119 “terrible” ratings on TripAdvisor was by an 18-year-old guest who complained of finding a man on top of her in her bedroom “attempting to rape me” just weeks before the alleged gang rape. The hotel has been contacted for comment.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/03/uk-tour-firm-used-teenager-gang-case-ends-trips-ayia-napa>

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