

What is the Truth about Travel Agents

As a travel agent, it never ceases to amaze me the misunderstanding many folks have of travel agents and the role they play in the travel business. I'm always hearing things like, "Is there any money in that?", "Do people still use travel agents?" and "Why would you do that when people can do it themselves?"

What is the demographic of my clientele?

^Many have 'been there done that' in researching only to become confused with the TMI so they called me to decipher it all.

^Some are housewives and retirees who want, not only help, but opinion and advice

^Some want me to help them make the right buying decision working through different destinations and experiences

^Some want an advocate, anything from negotiating DEALS, giving Value-Added amenities and services +

^Some want something special that I can offer – re. Special Needs Travel, Honeymoon, Groups, etc.

^Some are looking for philanthropic endeavors for Fundraising for organizations

^Some want help regarding multi-generational travel and options to satisfy multiple age groups

^ Many are busy people who want to save time, not have the stress of decision making, and have a sense of confidence prior to their departure that they are doing the right thing.

^ Most of my clients know that I constantly am making a concerted effort to be "N THE KNOW" to better assist them.

And many more.....

Why have they chosen to use a travel consultant:

- 1) **TRUST** that we will work in their best interest.
- 2) **CONFIDENCE** in us that we do know what we are doing and understand their needs and wants..and dedicated to making it a BEST vacation.
- 3) Know that we are **CONSTANTLY LEARNING** to be of better service to them i.e. rules, services and deals.
- 4) Knowing that we have built **RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUPPLIERS** that they do not have access to.
- 5) Because we get SHORT-NOTICE NOTIFICATIONS to help those with flexible schedules to learn and GO NOW!
- 6) **GIVE PERMISSIONS TO USE THE INTERNET KNOWING THAT WE BOTH CAN USE THAT INFORMATION TO MAKE THE BEST VACATION CHOICE FOR EACH PARTICULAR CLIENT.** Ultimately saving money and actually helps me learn more about them and qualifying for different products.

Here are some misconceptions about using a travel consultant and my thoughts:

1. **People don't use travel agents anymore.** – With the invention of the internet and the boom of online agencies, many people do plan their own travel. **[But the one-on-one relationship and advocacy of a travel agent was missing.](#)** Back a couple of years ago, I read an article that said that **[Travel Agents Making a Comeback.](#)** Travel web booking by travelers dropped from 53 percent in 2007 to 47 percent in 2010. In that same year an American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) survey stated that 44 percent of agents said they had more clients in 2010 than they'd had the previous year. And, it is improving every year since.
2. **Most travel agencies are closed.** Well, many store-fronts have closed and most agencies became MOBILE agents, working through social media, phones and out of their homes. **Actually, the number of travel consultants in the US has grown, but how they work is different.** The handicap had been trying to find them, even for vendors to reach out to them. Social media and yes, even the internet, etc. has changed all of that. [My agency is comprised of 23 Independent Contractors who each have their own specialty. TAPS, my association Travel Agent Professional Society has worked for 11 years to building the relationships between the once called home-based agents and the travel providers i.e. Cruise companies, hotels, tourist boards, tour operators, etc. Last year MY agent had our highest revenue!!!.] I predict that the number of people using travel agents is going to continue to grow due to the **new regulations, fees and confusion that travelers encounter** when trying to use an online agency. **TMI too much information**

leaves them tired, certainly confused and want and needing someone to **HELP THEM MAKE THE DECISION** before spending their hard earned money.

3. **It costs too much to use a travel agent.** – While it is true that some agents or agencies charge a fee for their services, there are many more who do not. However there is much to consider here: A MAJOR MISCONCEPTION is that Travel Agents are just Booking Agents and of course many travelers CAN book it themselves THAT'S NOT WHAT WE ARE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Some agents charge 'Plan to Go' fees' that minimally will cover their time for researching etc. But IF you DO book with them, they reduce your final payment. Fair. However, *those who do charge a fee are simply charging, for the most part, for services outside of the mere booking process, but deal with schedule changes, asking questions of the vendors about Terms and Conditions, clarifying issues and concerns, basically saving you the traveler TIME, MONEY, FRUSTRATION, STRESS etc.* What happens when/if you make a mistake in your planning? (It does happen)... **The professional travel consultant is one who can and should help you avoid those things.** BE AWARE: Your selected Travel Consultant MUST be a registered CST and contributed to the Travel Consumers Restitution Fund – **so your money is protected.**
4. **What is an example of what exactly can an Agent do to help me during my vacation? Agents** are paid directly by the resorts, consolidators or tour operators in the same way the large online agencies are, however, unlike the OTA's, should you need anything before, after or during your trip, when you call us you get a live person on the phone who knows you, is aware of your plans: air schedule, hotels, etc. and will help you right then! Example of HORROR STORY.: hurricane in the Caribbean. Because of my relationship with the vendor(s) I was contacted immediately with information relative to what circumstances were on St. Thomas. I called the client's employer and the family members to inform them of the status of the employee/relative when there was no way for them to make contact with anyone! Preventing a NO-SHOW at work and reducing the fear from the relatives at home was my goal...learning that all was fine and an evacuation was not going to happen for several days was a total relief AND through my supplier I was able to get communication back to the clients so they too could rest at ease!!!!!! I helped relieve the family and the employer. Without an agent, the travelers would have been on their own and NO ONE would have known ANYTHING. THIS IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF MANY MANY MANY. Another bit of info: example **TRAVELOCITY (I worked there for 4 months to learn what my competition was back in 1999) You're just a # with the OTA's.**
5. **I can do what a travel agent does myself.** – That is probably true if you are just talking about booking and paying for a vacation.. **KEY POINT THOUGH: YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW!!!!** The question you have to ask yourself is this. **“What is my time worth?”** You can spend valuable time searching the online sites and printing out quotes (which may be different tomorrow) and reading reviews or you can call or email your travel agent and let them do everything for you. In the least, give them an opportunity to share an opinion and challenge to save you money.
6. **Travel agents can't get the same deals as I can find on the internet.** – This is a common myth that travel agents are not able to access the “deals” that are readily found via the online sites.
A). Often the prices you see are lead-in prices and do not include taxes, fees or transportation to and from the resort. You often do not see the total amount until you are at the final payment screen. On the other hand, when you receive a quote from a travel agent the total is the real total and what the entire package will

cost you. You just have to compare apples to apples. Air research: Lowest Price Worst Schedule (Phillipine's story)

B). Travel agents have access to those deals and often to others that are never advertised. We usually are able to get you extra amenities added at no charge because of our relationships with our suppliers. The bottom line for you should be **value** and you are more apt to find true value through your travel agent.

7. **Travel agents are all the same. –NO NO NO!!!!** With real estate the key words are LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. With regards to Travel it is KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE. Look for the Certifications and those agents who Specialize.

Again – **you don't know what you don't know.**

Conclusion: Travel is our life. We eat, breathe and sleep with schedules, itineraries and locations
We are experts and can actually help you make the most of your travel plans. Our knowledge and access to supplier sites and other travel references can get a reliable quote to you in a short amount of time and all you had to do was shoot a quick email. MOST IMPORTANT: It is about relationships – that agents have with vendors that helps in value-added amenities etc. , resolving issues and so much more.

So, if I've convinced you to try a travel consultant In the future, where can you find one? – a Good one? Today, with social media, you can find them through recommendations and referrals. Keep in mind that **travel agents tend to specialize in types of travel, destinations or any variation of specialties.** There are agents who specialize in cruises only, business travel, specific countries (Africa, Hawaii, Europe etc.), romance, riverboats, groups, Disney, adventure, faith-based travel... and the list goes on. If you are planning a romantic getaway you probably do not want a Disney specialist to find the perfect vacation spot for you. So, **Check with your friends or family, your Facebook contacts, Twitter or do a Google search for agents in your area. Look up ASTA.org, CLIA.or or The Travel Institute for recommendation and referrals. CREDENTIALS, Specialties, - Referrals – will make you feel more comfortable and help you make the right decision for you. It too is based on relationships and building TRUST and confidence in the consultant that they understand truly what you need and want.**

We do what we do because we love travel and because we love to help people with their travel needs. Most don't make a lot of \$\$ either, but they love what they do. We are your advocate, your planner and your research assistant.

I tell my clients who have always planned their own travel and testing the waters of a travel consultant and want to have some involvement in the research to **Continue to do so. I GET IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!! HOWEVER before you place one dime on a researched vacation that appears to meet your travel criteria, CHALLENGE ME TO MEET OR BEAT IT for Value.....In nearly every instance I can. PLUS you get me for the DURING AND AFTER.** OUR SUCCESS IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO the service we provide. We rely on REPEAT BUSINESS and REFERRAL