

The Real Secrets About Travel Agents That Travelers Don't Know by Cheryl Rosen / March 23, 2018

Nothing gets travel agents riled up like a negative story that just doesn't have the facts straight. So, when one appeared this week, TMR asked some of our readers who are travel professionals to share their insider secrets about the life and job of a travel agent. Here are some of those responses:

1. Travel agents get high from planning the perfect trip for you.

"The energy from a client who is really excited about her upcoming trip is rather intoxicating. I strive to make sure the trip is going to not just meet your expectations, but exceed them. There is nothing better than when a client comes back glowing from a trip I recommended and thanks me for suggesting that hotel, or picking out the tour they didn't know existed, or mentioning the alternative cruise line with the personality that fit them to a tee. The internet can claim they have the most selections and the best prices, but none of that matters if it's not what the client really wants."

— Cathy Udovch of Travelstore, Irvine, California

2. Travel agents are members of a secret network.

"Travel agents are the most well-connected people in the world. They cultivate relationships with hotels, resorts and tour companies worldwide, so they can offer clients amazing experiences. I've slept in the hotels I'm sending you to. Our personal recommendations are priceless."

— Margie Jordan, vice president of education at CCRA Travel Commerce Network, Fort Worth, Texas

3. Travel agents access your travel data 24/7 without your even knowing it.

"I always call the hotel or cruise line, often a couple of times, to make sure all my clients' information was relayed correctly. Travel agents have to be on their toes and do their due diligence to make sure all that information the client has entrusted to you gets to the right person — and often that doesn't happen. At the end of the day, the last thing you need is for a guest to show up to check in and the hotel or cruise ship doesn't have the information you sent them."

— Kimberley Porter, independent travel advisor at Journeys by Kimberley/Travel Leaders, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

4. Travel agents can be a pain in the neck.

"We spend hours advocating for our clients ... even if it means sitting on hold to fix things before, during or after travel, giving the client a lot more time to actually enjoy their vacation. I once had a client text me from the beach to set up their snorkeling trip because they didn't want to get changed and go to the lobby and wait in line. They got to drink margaritas while I did everything to get them out on a boat the next day at 8 a.m."

— Heather Bannon, luxury travel consultant at Unique Romance Travel and Destination Weddings, Katy, Texas

"I once called a cruise multiple times to have them delay leaving, as my client had landed at the airport and was en route to the port."

— Vicky Spencer Rouse, special needs travel expert at Special Needs Vacation by V, Louisville, Kentucky

"I contact each hotel to introduce my client and request VIP service."

— Jennifer Danvers, leisure travel agent at Camelback Odyssey Travel in Phoenix, Arizona

5. To a travel agent, every client is a VIP.

"My clients are VIPs to me, whether it's their first trip or their 15 — and a honeymoon is a personal investment for me. I take pride in being able to qualify clients correctly, matching their wants, needs, and budget with the perfect journey. I handle every detail and question before and during travel, including consultation calls, Q&A sessions for groups and destination weddings, Facebook groups and mixers for groups to get acquainted prior to travel, packing lists, to-do-before-you-go lists (stop mail, water plants), app and paper documents to review, 24-hour customer service during travel (text available as well); and step-by-step how-tos for navigating arrival at airports, transfer companies, and airports during immigration/customs processes, plus much more. I don't travel for free and I rarely take a vacation; I do travel often but it is always to attend a conference, training, tour properties, see and experience a new area so that I can better inform my clients and provide that top level of customer service."

— Jeni Chaffer, president of Journeys Travel Inc., Bourbonnais, Illinois

6. Travel agents know more than you do.

"I wish clients understood the time we spend becoming educated on different brands for accommodations, cruises and destinations. We take years to build relationships with trusted vendors so we can provide the best services. Many of us take time out during the day for webinars and then work into the evening to get planning done for clients. We can tell you the trip your best friend took is not the trip for you."

— Adrienne Sasson, travel consultant at Rubinsohn Travel and Tikva Tours, Margate, Florida

7. Travel agents have feelings, too.

"It really hurts us personally when you book a trip yourself after we've spent hours researching something because you found it for \$10 less."

— Jill Kallett Lustigman, luxury travel advisor at Protravel, Roseland, New Jersey

8. Travel agents are sticklers for rules.

"If a client is planning an international trip, we make sure that their passports and visas are in compliance. We have "saved" several clients from being turned away at the airport over the past couple of years."

— Laura Small Avital, owner of Mill Brook Travel, Plainview, New York

9. Travel agents are your local, family-owned (and often female-owned) business and deserve your support.

"It is important to support travel agents as local businesses versus allowing big corporations to pocket their money. It is also supporting female-owned business, which is so important right now." — Anne Gordon, leisure travel specialist at Live Life Travel in Saratoga Springs, New York

"When you support local businesses, you create a self-supportive family and allow our children to participate in extracurricular activities. There's so many things that clients help us do when they support local and not just big corporations."

— Cheryl Lynn, travel consultant at the Niche Travel Group in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

10. Travel agents love their job.

"My clients don't know that I could have made a higher commission on that other river cruise I never suggested because it wasn't going to be a good fit for them. They don't know that I got up at midnight and repriced their cabin because that's when

the "Big Sale" started and I knew how long they had been saving for this. And, most of all, they don't know how much I love traveling vicariously through them because I've just been too busy to get away lately."

— Dawn Williams Crowe, manager at Dawn Crowe Travel, Las Vegas, Nevada

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