

DEATH OF THE TRAVEL AGENT?

While the online booking websites would like you to believe the death of travel agents is true, it's the complete opposite. Travel agents are thriving in the present day with customer satisfaction skyrocketing through the roof. Customers want that human interaction to know they are getting the best bang for their buck. They want to know they're not missing something, and even though you can search through a ton of travel websites, are you REALLY getting the best deal??

What the online agencies promise you, isn't always what you receive. Then what do you do? Who do you call? Who do you talk to? Who do you get answers from? What do you do when you get to your hotel, or check in for your flight that you booked on a cheap website, and they don't have any record of you ever booking anything and are sold out? Or your airline had a schedule change that you didn't know about, and now you've missed your flight? Or they change your times that are unacceptable to you and your family? Now what? You're on your own to figure it all out. You plunk your hard-earned money down for the vacation you've been dreaming about and you deserve, only to be misled by pretty pictures and empty promises by an incredibly cheap price. Remember what Warren Buffet once said. "Price is what you pay. Value is what you get." Do you really want to take the word of an online agency, who spends billions of dollars to convince you that their way is the best way?

Travel agents are there to work for YOU, not the resorts, not the airlines, not the car companies, not the tour companies, not the cruise lines, but for you. They work to bring you great value and relaxing expectations. The trip you have been dreaming of. Your toes in the sand, cold drink in hand, wind rustling through your hair, sun beating down on you, no work or boss to worry about. It's all about you and your vacation.

Why do people take vacations? To take a break from work. Reconnect with family. A romantic getaway. To visit a destination that they have always wanted to visit.

A travel agent is the person who has studied these destinations. Has visited them. Learned about them. They devote their professional lives to travel and making travel better for their clients. Always educating themselves on another destination, another supplier, not being satisfied with what they know.

Travel agents spend hours if not days learning about different destinations, meeting with tour operator representatives, doing FAM (Familiarization) trips to different locations, so they know what they're selling, they know what properties look like, and they know the "do's and don'ts" of traveling in general.

Glitzy websites do the "bait and switch", showing off glamorous properties, only to not tell you that there is a trucking depot next to the resort, or that the beaches aren't good for swimming because of the rocks and undertow are too dangerous. Are you really wanting to take the word of a professional, who's job it is to make every destination look amazing and incredible? Or would you rather talk to an actual human being, who has made it their professional career to study, learn, and sell what you would want and would enjoy on a vacation?

People say they don't want to use a travel agent because they charge service fees. Yes, travel agents don't get paid unless you book a vacation, a cruise, a honeymoon, an airline ticket or something else, so we offer a professional service and should be paid for it with a service fee. If you think about it, you pay service fees nearly every day. You pay "shipping and handling" when you order something online. What exactly is "handling"? When you visit a doctor or a lawyer or the vet, you pay their fees before anything is diagnosed with their co-pay or retainer fees. When you eat out at a restaurant, you give the waiter/waitress a tip for great service, and don't think twice about any of that, but when a travel agent charges a service fee for their services, it raises red flags? A travel agent offers their services to help make your \$3,000 vacation (or whatever you pay), worthwhile for you. Isn't it worth it to pay their service fee for a knowledgeable person planning your vacation, having the peace of mind to know things will be done right, and being there for you if anything happens? (Cancelled flight, hurricane, terrorism, illness to name a few...) I don't know many people who have that kind of money and want to take a chance of losing it on a vacation they didn't book properly or get what they were expecting to get.

I'm told all the time by individuals that it's "cheaper online". It's not. A lot of people don't understand how travel agents work. Did you know a travel agent

can match whatever you find online as long as you're comparing apples to apples? The difference is, the vacation you are purchasing online, is more profitable for that tour company's pocket. If you booked through a travel agent, they would charge you a service fee, but then the agent would get paid FROM that tour operator or resort. We can get you the exact same price you are finding online, if that is the best deal for you, and sometimes, travel agents have discount codes to get you the package for LESS! We work for YOU! We want to you come back again and again for your travel needs. There is nothing wrong with looking online, getting ideas of where you would want to go, or what you'd like to do, but before you hit the "purchase" button, call a travel agent and let them finish it for you. Let the professional take care of your vacation needs.

Airlines don't pay any commission, so agents must charge service fees to help find you the best fares. Not necessarily one that will make three connections, have you overnight in a city and change airlines for the lowest price, but realistic flights for you. What airlines fly what markets? Who has non-stops versus connections? What airlines are more likely to cancel flights in certain markets? Travel agents know these answers.

Airlines have come out with "Basic Economy" fares, where you DON'T get seat assignments, carry on bags to put in the overhead (only under the seat in front of you), frequent flier miles, a "use it or lose it" fare, and you are last to board, getting whatever seats are left available. You see that cheap fare, but don't realize that is a "Basic Economy" fare until you hit the "purchase" button, and it's too late. Other airlines have questionable history in maintenance, or they will charge you for a seat assignment, charge for a carry-on bag, charge you to talk to someone at the airport to get your boarding pass. That great "cheap price" all a sudden isn't as great of a price as you originally thought it was.

Travel agents can also assist you with a group that is traveling together, whether it's a large family reunion, a school educational trip, a sports team traveling to an event, travel agents can work with the suppliers on getting you discounted prices and rates.

What about a romantic getaway, anniversary or honeymoon? I personally have been involved in setting up two marriage proposals for clients when they travel to an all-inclusive resort, so that their special moment can be captured in pictures, flowers can be set up for the special time, and that the client didn't have to stress about the little details. That's what we can do for you.

Want to do a destination wedding? Travel agents can assist you with that as well, from a 2-person wedding, to bringing 100 of your closest friends to help you celebrate it!

Travel agent “brick and mortar” stores are still out there, but they are thinning out. More and more agents are working out of their homes, still the forever professional, but not the overhead expenses that a store front would have. Agents are still being happy to meet with you, go over a vacation in person, and be that friendly face that you know you can count on to deliver that special trip you want and deserve.

Please feel free to check out our website at www.gopioneertravel.com, and flip through our digital brochures to start getting ideas on where you’d like to travel to next! We would love to be your travel agent partner of choice!!