

Revisiting our Roots: Why travelers are returning to travel agencies.

By Jeremy Holm

or

Resurrection: The Return of the Travel Agent

When you consider that travel agents still sell 51 percent of all airline tickets, 87 percent of all cruises, 81 percent of all tours and packages, 45 percent of all car rentals and about 47 percent of all hotels, it demonstrates that travelers are demonstrating a return to agents who still have power to make the world go around.

A Penny Saved: Travel agencies help reduce costs

Travel agencies develop close relationships with travel suppliers (hotel chains, airlines, and cruise companies) that give their agents access to special deals and packages at reduced prices, many of which are not available to the general public. In addition, the latest in computer reservations technology allows travel agents the power to instantaneously access information that helps clients find the best value.

Even though many online booking engines claim to provide the best deals, the problem lies in the intricacy of your standard trip. Can a website *always* guarantee the lowest rate on everything? While modern travelers have no problem renting a car or booking an airline ticket, frustration can appear when additional factors are added in. Which hotel do you stay in? What restaurants do you eat at? How will local customs affect your plans? With these complexities one can easily find his or her stress level rising when booking what started out as a simple trip.

One real cause of extra money spent while traveling results from the logistics of the matter. Traveler X is leaving on a seven day trip so she needs a website to book a hotel room. Then she has to search another site for car rental. Finally she needs a search engine to locate local tourist sites. Anyone who has gone through similar trip-coordination understands (and has probably shared in) a cry of aggravation at the difficulties surrounding the planning experience.

While Traveler X may have saved 15% on car rental, since she needs a hotel the night she arrives she simply books the first available room that seems decently priced. What she didn't know is the resort next door has a sale going where she could book a suite for even less than the price of her family's small, double occupancy quarters. The truth is it's not a matter of not looking hard enough for these deals. Travel agencies have access to this knowledge because of their technology, their experience, and their industry relationships.

“Becky Potts Quote”

Although travelers may be able to save money on some things through online booking engines or by calling travel suppliers directly, chances are they will still be missing out on additional savings available only to travel agents that are not available anywhere else.

Can I help you? Travel agencies bring back personal service

Oftentimes online proponents argue against travel agencies saying that visiting with them is inconvenient in time and effort expended. But here's something to think about: while many vacationers view a travel agent as middle- to senior-aged consultants, what they don't realize is that most large agencies have complete state-of-the-art online booking engines available that *still* access their special rates and packages. And if that wasn't enough, the company's agents are just a phone call away and can answer questions about the cruise or package of interest.

While saving money is at the top of everyone's list, there is much more to travel than the "lowest fare" and *that* presents a solid line of reasoning for using a good travel agent. In today's technology-driven world of cell phones, Mp3 players, email, and text messaging, is it any wonder that we find ourselves craving a bit more personal attention when it comes to our travel plans? Who wants to trust their dream vacation to a website that is designed to look flashy, but has no vested interest in the person on the other end?

What do you do when your flight out of Atlanta has been canceled, leaving you stranded? Don't worry about calling the airlines. A travel agent can often have you rebooked and on the next available flight within the hour. Most travel consultants will go above and beyond the call of duty, even going so far as to make medical referrals if their client gets sick or handling money transfers if they get robbed.

“Black Pearl Quote”

In addition, many travel agents are ‘area specialists’. This means the agent has spent time vacationing or perhaps living in the specific city or country. They understand local customs and have a working knowledge of the culture. Priceless information, especially when trying to schedule a day of ‘touristy’ activities. How do you ask an online booking engine what to do as a family or where to view local art? The obvious answer is you can't. Even the mighty Google has its limitations.

While it may appear easier to book at the click of the mouse, it really is the touch of personal service that matters. From finding a private ski instructor in Switzerland to booking a safari in Africa, a travel agent has the experience and the personal interest to make your vacation dream a reality.

Convenience: Travel agencies help make your trip more relaxing

It's a traveler's nightmare. You arrive at your destination only to find your luggage lost, your car rental M.I.A. and to add fuel to the fire, all your foreign currency is in your suitcase so you can't even pay for a taxi.

Sound familiar?

Almost anyone who travels has a similar horror story. From unexpected fees to seedy hotels, travelers the world over know that do-it-yourself vacations can sometimes turn Heaven on earth into something else entirely.

Experienced travel agents work closely with their clients to meticulously plan each trip and to prepare for every port tax, document, and requirement down to the very last detail. Their experience will reduce headaches and increase satisfaction on the “trip of a lifetime”. The added bonus of working with an agent is that they are often travelers themselves and know what it is

like to be on the other end of the line. Their main focus is to arrange every element of their customer's trip so that all the customer has to do is relax and enjoy the vacation.

Using a travel agency is like a one stop shopping experience. If a traveler is trying to plan their own trip, they may have to visit *several* different online booking engines in order to plan *one* trip. By using a travel agent you can reduce the time and the effort spent by making one phone call and only paying one bill.

Travel arrangements can be tailored to suit business/vacation objectives, personal interests and budget worries. Although most consultants provide a wide range of services, some agencies may specialize in areas such as family travel, group travel, adventure travel, ecotourism, the mature market, incentive packages, travel for the disabled, and religious based tours. Travel agents also have specific areas of expertise---cruises, luxury travel, safaris, student tours, etc. and their insights can be invaluable.

Professional travel consultants build relationships with their clients to learn their interests, lifestyles, and dispositions. As if this level of personal care wasn't enough, many agents maintain individual profiles for their customers that include frequent flyer numbers, airline seating preferences, smoking or non-smoking designations and other specifications for a personalized trip. Not only will an agent be on hand to help if something unforeseen occurs, the best thing your travel consultant can do is match you up with the vacation that's right for you *before* you leave.

Conclusion:

So whether planning a cruise to the Caribbean, a getaway to the Cook Islands, backpacking in Machu Pichu, or just a weekend stay at Disney World, your local travel agent is an incredible resource that will save you time, money and, most importantly, your sanity.