

How a Travel Agent Works

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- **Sally Black** Founder and Mom Executive Officer, www.vacationkids.com



When people find out what I do for a living, weird things often happen...

Some will tilt their heads to one side and ask "Do Travel Agents still exist?" as if they were magically staring into the eyes of a unicorn. Others will immediately start over-sharing every travel

nightmare they, and everyone on the internet have ever experienced. Finally there are the folks that hit you up with a rapid fire, laundry list of questions like a hypochondriac during a doctor's visit. The other ever popular response is "Wow, so you must get to like travel all over the world for free-right?"

Truth be told, I have the best, most misunderstood job in the world. It's true, most people have no idea how travel agents work and how they can help. Hopefully, I can help clear up some of this confusion by explaining things about what we do....

Most desperate vacation-seekers, take the knee jerk reaction of heading online to make their reservations. The lure of internet convenience and control quickly turns into confusion, indecisiveness and anxiety not to

mention a huge time suck. How do I know?...because not a day goes by that I don't receive emails pleading for help from these exact problems from would-be vacationers.

Think of a travel agent as your tour guide that will lead you to the perfect vacation.

If you've ever wondered what a day in the life of a travel agent is like, here's a bit more about what we're all about and how we help our clients....

Travel Agents are "All Inclusive" - Hotels, vacation package companies and cruise lines all include travel agent commissions in their published prices. If you do all the work yourself online, they "pocket" the difference. Using the services of a travel agent means you get the customer service you deserve. You won't be spending hours on the internet, hanging on phone hold for eternity or wasting any precious time wondering and worrying.

Travel Agent Do Not Cost More - Travel agents basically earn their living by the commissions we earn from our sales of hotel stays, cruises, sightseeing and rental cars. The airlines haven't paid commissions to travel agents since the mid 1990's. This is why when my travel agency [Vacationkids](#) recommends infants should have their own airlines seats instead of flying free as a [lapchild](#), we're not trying to part you from your money, we're trying to make sure your baby stays safe. If you want to use mileage points too book your own flights, no problem. Online Travel companies do charge service fees. They build them into

the cost that you pay. There are some travel agents that do charge a minimal service fee for their time which is usually offset by their time and money savings. Make sure you do ask in your initial consultation. Others may ask for an upfront deposit, especially in situations dealing with very complex itineraries or group events.

Travel Agents Are not pushy - Any good travel agent knows it's not about making the sale, it's about creating happy clients. Happy clients become fans of your company, come back to you every year and recommend your company to others. Most travel agents rejoice when we can save our clients money with a great deal. We make our recommendations based on the specific needs and requests of our clients. We don't base our recommendations on industry sales incentives or bonus gifts. If we know of a better room or experience that will enhance our client's family vacation, we'll suggest. We just want our clients to make the best informed decisions to get the most value for their vacation dollars.

Travel Agents Match Online Prices - Some people just enjoy planning their own vacations. These are probably the same folks who like putting together IKEA furniture. No matter, make yourself happy find your best price and email us all the details. Your travel agent will either be able to match it or tell you why you're setting yourself up for a scam. I even had clients who will make their own reservations directly with a cruise line or tour company then call and transfer their booking to our agency. It's a win-win. They get and do exactly what they want while having us do all the follow up, follow thru while making suggestions to enhance their enjoyment. .

Travel Agents Have Rates That You Don't - Travel agents are privy to special flight prices, special hotel and cruise cabin rates that consumers will never find online themselves. This feature alone will save you money. Beyond pricing, good travel agents have the buying power to get extra amenities like ship board credits or insider tours that can also enhance your family's vacation.

Travel Agents Save You Time - Time in our most precious commodity and yet so many people are willing to waste it. HOURS can be spent properly researching a vacation. With the amount of conflicting information available online, it's easy to quickly get overwhelmed and confused. Many times, the questions perplexing travelers are one that agents can answer right off the top of our heads thanks to our years of experience. If you have detailed questions or need to plan a complicated itinerary, we do all the work for you. We can make the international phone calls to get your questions answered. We know who and how to reach out to in order to get the job done, saving you hours of frustration.

Travel Agents Understand The Fine Print- Most people don't bother reading any of the fine print terms and conditions of their travel documents until it's too late. This is what "trips" them up (pun intended) and costs them big bucks in the long term. Even if folks do stop to read it, they fully understand all the implications. Travel Agents are well versed in these rules, terms and conditions. We can help navigate and protect your family and investment.

Travel Agents Protect You - Most DIY vacation planners don't realize that medical insurance usually does not cover your family while on

vacation out of area or especially overseas. Many foreign countries will take your passport if you are admitted to a hospital and will expect payment in full for any treatment or surgery prior to discharge. A good travel agent will make sure you have the proper peace of mind with the right travel insurance to keep your family safe and protected.

Travel Agents Have Contacts - Travel agents do not get "free" trips. We invest our own money and especially our time to travel and visit the destinations we recommend. Sure we experience new travel options and learn about destinations. The most important reason why we make this professional investment is for the opportunity to meet face to face with the right important industry contacts. These important connections truly benefits the vacation experience our clients ultimately enjoy. We know exactly who to speak to in order to make special requests for our clients. This could mean things like connecting rooms, welcome gifts or advanced restaurant reservations. These relationships have proved priceless in emergency situations.

Travel Agents Have Specialized Expertise - At our agency, we specialize in Family and multi generational vacations. In a former lifetime, I was a pediatric nurse so I often use those skills to help my clients. I will often share and collaborate with other travel industry professionals to help clients enjoy vacations that exceed their expectations. Even within our agency, we have agents who are Disney experts while others have experience creating customized tours in Europe, Africa and Asia. If we don't have an in house person who can best serve our clients, we collaborate with other professionals who can.

Travel Agents Have Priceless Advice - First hand experience and knowledge are what will change a typical vacation into a real memorable experience. Even though good travel agents professionally invest in their own travel to gain this experience, not every Travel Agent can humanly know every destination in the world. That said, good travel agents have a "golden network" and know exactly who to call to get the answers their clients need.

Travel Agents Prevent Hassles - Most DIY travel people don't realize if there is a HUGE difference between great value and the cheapest price. For example, you may pay a really low price for your family's flight but that doesn't mean you'll make your connecting flight. This could result in an unexpected camp out at the airport terminal and the out of pocket loss for the vacation days you're missing. A good travel agent know certain airport require longer connection times than others to prevent problems. This is just one of many examples that "trips" up online travel shoppers and may explain so many of the unnecessary rants on travel review websites.

Travel Agents Babysit Your Reservations - Many folks have commitment issues when it comes to pulling the trigger and confirming their reservations. They always think they will get a cheaper last minute rate. Often they wait too long, forfeit availability and end up paying much more for their vacation. Most people don't realize that if their trip goes on sale, they can get a lower rate. A good travel agent will babysit your reservation and have any lower prices or sales applied to your reservation, even after you've made your initial deposit has been made. This is true for many cruises or Disney vacations. For Caribbean or

Mexico resort vacations, our agents can direct you to price guarantee coverage that offers you the same option.

Travel Agents Offer Affordable Payment Plans - Online booking require payment in full at the time you confirm your reservations. This means you could be paying huge credit card interest fees that will add to the total cost of your vacation in the long run. If you plan ahead and use a travel agent, you will only be required to pay a small deposit to confirm your family's vacation reservations. Final payment for your trip will usually be required 45 to 60 days prior to your departure. This means your travel agent can set up a monthly vacation layaway program that could save you hundreds on credit card interest.

Travel Agents Work As Your Troubleshooter - No matter how much you prepare, sometimes unexpected "stuff" happens while your on vacation. When you book with a travel agent, they are with you every step of the way. We are your personal advocate. If you run into any issues, your travel agent can make calls and usually fix the situation so you don't have to waste valuable vacation time problem solving. We usually know who to call and how to ask for the right solutions many times exceeding your expectations. In the rare instance that you need to make a travel insurance claim or need to follow up on a complaint after you return home, your travel agent advocate continues to work on behalf on your family. We make sure any problems are solved to your satisfaction.

I don't think my job is weird at all...honestly, I think I'm one of the lucky ones.

I am one of those rare individuals who looks forward to getting up, pouring a cup of tea and going to work every the morning. I have a 26 step commute to my home office where I connect every day with friends and great people all over the globe. My staff and I work virtually. They are happy and get to be at home surrounded by the people they love every day. We get to help our clients explore the world, check items off their bucket lists, share life changing memories with their loved ones and come home a suitcases full of amazing experiences. I am fortunate now to be doing this long enough that the kids I once sent off on vacations with their parents are now calling me up to help plan their destination weddings or to take their own kids on vacation.

Tell me, does this all sound like a bad day at the office to you?

Follow Sally Black on Twitter: www.twitter.com/vacationkids