

Travel Agent or...Do it Yourself?

BY KAREN COPP

Recently a large BC travel agency announced they were closing their storefront offices. One of the reasons mentioned was that more and more people are booking on the Internet. I find this very surprising as we are finding more and more people that tried doing it themselves are now coming back to the travel agency. They have found out that if there is a problem there is no one to help them and the money they saved was not worth it.

Last winter when the weather was causing flight cancellations, we took several calls from travelers who had booked direct with the airline. When flights were cancelled and they could not get through on the phones they were calling us and asking for help. The same thing happened when Conquest Vacations suddenly went out of business. Unfortunately since we did not make the original booking we were unable to help them, but we were able to help our clients that booked with us because we had access to their booking.

Last week a person called wanting to know if we charge a service fee. When I said yes she immediately hung up without giving me the chance to tell her what she would get for that small service charge. There are many different ways to book

your travel needs, so why should you use a travel agent and pay a service charge?

"Your travel agent is your advocate should there be last minute changes, or problems that arise with your booking. The travel agent is working for you and will work with travel suppliers to your benefit.

"Travel agencies provide non-biased information with access to all airlines and travel companies, unlike some websites that only promote what they want to. Experienced travel agents can offer you advice on what to buy. You can look to your travel agent to ask your relevant questions, and offer cost saving strategies. It is not just about price but in making suggestions that can add value and enjoyment to your holiday. For instance you might find a great deal on a one week package to Mexico - this great deal is for a 2-star property, which is the kind that you get what you pay for. However, the travel agent may check with a different travel company and find you a 5-star property on sale for only a little more than the great bargain you found. Guaranteed you will come home a lot happier having spent your hard earned vacation at a great resort.

"Travel agents build relationships with their clients similar to accountants, lawyers, doctors etc. A travel agent learns your preferences, changing travel needs, can securely store your travel information, ie travel membership numbers, hotel preferences, payment details etc, and can help you get the most of your trip.

"Travel agents are familiar with the various rules associated with travel and travel insurance and can explain all options to you to make sure you get the best one for your needs. Travel insurance is one of the most important purchases you can make for your trip and you need to have all the facts.

"When it comes to searching hotels, air, cruises, etc. most times the only difference in price is going to be the travel agent's service charge and sometimes your travel agent can do better including the service charge, so don't be afraid to pay a fee to get the best representation and help. You want to make sure you have someone there for you should there be a problem.

Travel agents in BC must be registered to sell travel. They contribute to the Travel Assurance Fund to make sure your money is protected. Why would you want to trust your travel to anyone else?

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Lorraine Zarowny, CTC

Lorraine loves to book family travel and Disneyland and Disneyworld are her specialty, as well as all inclusive vacations. Call Lorraine today!