Making Travel Plans with an Agent vs. Online Booking

Making travel plans has become a much simpler process since the onset of the online travel agent. In the past, people had to rely on an agent to do most of their travel booking, but now they can do it themselves.

Jessica Griscavage, leisure travel consultant at McCabe World Travel, says when making simple travel plans, such as booking domestic roundtrip flights, it is not necessary to use the services of a travel agent.

“When planning a trip out of the country or a more detailed itinerary, a travel agent can offer value, both in using your precious vacation time in the most efficient manner and also with extra amenities like free breakfast, room upgrades, special touches, etc.,” Griscavage says.

Destini Copp, a Business professor for South University Online, says one of the main differences between using an online travel agent, such as Travelocity or Expedia, is the amount of human interaction.

“With a traditional in-person travel agency there is more human interaction which appeals to a segment of the market,” Copp says.

Copp says an online travel agent can provide savvy consumers with the opportunity to make informed decisions on travel plans by conducting research on the destinations and amenities they’re interested in. Although using these sites can be a great idea, she says there are some destinations where travel booking with an agent might be more beneficial, including international travel and all-inclusive packages.

“Travel agents can act on your behalf and help plan every part of your trip such as securing the car rentals, hotel reservations, airfare, and share what they know about restaurants, shopping, and provide suggestions on what you should bring on your trip,” Copp says.

Griscavage says the clients of McCabe World Travel are primarily leisure travelers.

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“We book clients every year on almost every cruise line, to every continent and to some of the most beautiful locations on earth,” Griscavage says.

Copp notes that while companies don’t typically hire a professional travel consultant to plan employee business trips, they often use the services of a corporate online travel agent such as Egencia or Concur. An online travel agent can help businesses to gain discounts on corporate trips, allowing the company to save money.

Benefits of Booking Travel Plans with an Agent

Griscavage says there are many benefits of making travel plans with an agent, instead of doing the work yourself online.

“McCabe World Travel is a Virtuoso agency that partners with the luxury hotels, tour companies, and cruise lines,” Griscavage says. “When we work with our partners, our clients benefit with amenities to include breakfast, upgrades, and often resort credits. Through our relationships we are able to VIP our clients.”

A travel agent serves as an advisor by listening to their clients needs and matching them with the best destinations and products, Griscavage says.

“The internet is a wonderful tool, however, with so many options out there, you need somebody reputable standing behind you,” Griscavage says. “Our agents spend their own time and money each year traveling around the world to learn about, and put together the best trips possible, for our clients.”
Copp agrees that travel booking with an agent can take some of the legwork out of planning a trip on your own.

“There is a vast amount of information available on the internet and some travelers may not know where to begin to plan their next vacation. Also, travel agents sometimes receive information from resorts and other vacation destinations that is not available to the general public,” Copp says. “Travel agents can also be the advocate for the traveler if something goes wrong during the trip.”

Fees for Travel Booking with an Agent

Griscavage says the fee for travel booking with an agent varies according to the trip.

“There will usually be a charge for issuing airline tickets because travel agencies make no commission from the airlines,” Griscavage says. “There is rarely a charge for simple tours and cruises because we do make a commission from them, even though they charge the client directly the same price we do. For complicated itineraries, we often charge a ‘plan to go fee’ to cover our research time. If the client buys the trip from us, the fee is put towards the cost of the trip. If they do not, the fee is charged to compensate the agent.”