

Travel agent's expertise free

I have been asked many times during my career in the travel business, "What does a travel agent charge for his services?"

Unlike persons in the meat or garment business, the travel agent is not an intermediary who increases the cost of the product. People who think they save money by ordering their airline tickets directly from the airlines are, dead wrong.

The travel agent gets a commission from the airline, the hotels, tour operators, cruises or car rental company and will charge you the same price. His know-how and professional expertise is actually free to the traveling public.

This is a delicate issue from the point of view of the travel industry as well as in the eyes of the passengers. Many people do not trust a service that is free. Many travel agents are reluctant to advertise their free services because they fear it will downgrade their image in the eyes of the public.

WHETHER THE COMMISSION a travel agent makes is sufficient to en-

able him to cover his overhead, to spend money for study tours (with all the discounts he gets for such purposes) and to keep up a tremendous amount of information material he has to read constantly is a very controversial question and this is not the place to discuss it.

Another much debated issue is the service charge a travel agent should be entitled to collect for services performed where he does not derive any retribution.

These services may include procuring visas to foreign countries, handing out passport applications and providing pertinent information. The most frequent case is when a passenger requests reservations and then cancels. There is additional work involved to advise the airlines and hotels about the cancellation and most clients think that this is still covered by the free services policy.

The truth is many travel agents would rather take a loss than risk antagonizing a customer by collecting a very legitimate service fee.

So the question is, Should you or



PETER GERAN

should you not avail yourself of the services of a travel agent, and how do you know which is a good or better travel agent, and are all travel agents alike?

I WOULD LIKE to answer the second part of this question first. No, not all travel agents are alike. There is quite a high degree of specialization within the travel industry. Some agencies are wholesalers, i.e. they put together and sell them through other travel agents to the public.

The practice of wholesalers to sell also directly to the traveling public has, fortunately, diminished considerably in the last years and really should be part of the code of ethics of this trade.

Some agents will sell mostly airline tickets and package tours advertised by the wholesalers mentioned above. Others specialize in ethnic travel or special interest travel (senior citizens,

sports-enthusiasts, youth or student travel).

The incentive travel field is highly specialized and held almost like a monopoly by a few very large travel companies owned by corporations who promote the motivation end as well as the merchandising (trade stamps) angle. They deal mostly with large corporations who want to award free trips to their dealers, employees and their families.

A relatively small number of travel agents are able or willing to bother with custom-planned travel arrangements.

WHEN SELECTING your travel agent the same criteria should be applied as when selecting a lawyer or physician. Recommendations by friends, checks into their credentials (like the trade associations they belong to, their educational background) and personal contact to see how up-to-date they are with rules and regulations, with what is offered on the travel market and how much they know, by their own experience, about the destination you want to travel to.

Many times an experienced and well-traveled agent knows personally important people in the airline and hotel industry and is able to get you a reservation not readily available through regular channels, or a better cabin on a cruise ship than you would get on your own.

Remember the cheapest price is the best only if all conditions are equal. Sometimes the price is lower because less features (meals, sightseeing) are included. A charter flight leaving or arriving at odd hours might not be the best deal in spite of the low cost. And here comes in the know-how of your travel agent, which is free for your asking.

Got a question about travel? Write Peter Geran, The Inside Track, The Observer & Eccentric, 1225 Bowers, Birmingham 48012.

Ship to visit China ports

Holland America Cruises has received special permission from the Chinese authorities for the m.s. Prinsendam to dock in Shanghai in October of this year as part of the Trans-Pacific Cruise from Vancouver to Singapore.

Permission was also received for passengers on the s.s. Rotterdam 1978 World Cruise to visit Peking and Kwangchow (Canton) in February of next year. This marks the second year that Holland America World Cruise passengers have been invited to Peking and the fifth year to visit Kwangchow.

Special tours for both the Prinsendam and Rotterdam passengers will be arranged in Shanghai, Peking and Kwangchow. The price of the tours will be announced in the near future.

"However," pointed out Arle van Tol, managing director of tourism for Holland America, "during the past four years our company has furnished these tours to passengers at our cost."

The Rotterdam sails on its 20th annual Around-the-World cruise, departing from New York Jan. 17, from Ft. Everglades Jan. 19, and from Los Angeles Feb. 2, 1978. The ship sails, for the first time, in a westward direction through the Panama Canal via Hawaii and Japan.

Line adds new port

A new port of call is available on Midwest Cruises' Great Lakes, Saguenay and St. Lawrence Seaway cruise program this season. Quebec City, a historic provincial capital and quaint French Canadian port, will be visited on all seven-day cruises between Montreal and Detroit/Windsor and all seven-day round-trip cruises from Montreal to the Gaspé Peninsula.

The SS Lowell Thomas Explorer cruises in the area will begin May 21 and continue until Oct. 30. Other

cruises available include a seven-day roundtrip from Detroit/Windsor to Lake Superior and two four-day roundtrip cruises from Detroit/Windsor to one to Niagara Falls and Toronto and another to Mackinac Island and the Georgian Bay.

Complete information about the costs, itineraries and schedules of the Explorer are contained in brochures available from the offices of Midwest Cruises at 6101 N. Keystone Avenue, Indianapolis 46220.

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Rockies-Pacific Circle.

By air/rail/bus. \$1,314*
12 days:
Horizon Holidays can jet you to Toronto to connect with a Canadian Pacific flight to Calgary on the first leg of this fabulous western trip. From Calgary by CP Rail's "Canadian" for the breathtaking run through the Rocky Mountains, through Kicking Horse Pass and via the spiral tunnels (where the track twice turns a complete circle to overcome steep grades) and through the Fraser Canyon to Vancouver. Then by ocean ferry to Victoria, the very English capital of British Columbia, returning next day for sightseeing in Vancouver. From the Pacific by deluxe tourbus to explore a new route back to the Rocky Mountains. You spend two days at Jasper, which sits in the Rockies like a picture-postcard Alpine village, two more at Lake Louise, a blue-green gem in a matchless setting of snow-capped mountain peaks, and another at Banff, where you can ride a gondola to the top of Sulphur Mountain or golf on a championship course high in the sky. Then back to Calgary for the CP flight to Toronto and home. Package includes hotels, all dinners, 1 lunch and 6 breakfasts, sightseeing, transfers, taxes, tips and escort service.



Canadian Rockies Mountaineer.

9 days \$660* (Air fare extra)
Air Canada can jet you to Calgary, Alberta to join a Cartan Travel Mountaineer Holiday that will show you some of the world's most glorious scenery. From Calgary by motorcoach to the towering Canadian Rockies to spend three nights at the Banff Springs, a castle of a hotel ringed by high mountains. You can ride a gondola to the 7,500-foot peak of Sulphur Mountain (which is breathtaking) or play a round of golf on a championship course a mile high in the sky. Then to Lake Louise, a blue-green gem in a matchless setting of snow-capped peaks, where you can take your pick of tennis, swimming, sailing, canoeing, fishing, hiking and trail-riding. From Lake Louise via the spectacular

Icefields Parkway, past the incredible Columbia Icefields (the largest body of ice on the continent south of the Arctic Circle) to Jasper, where you'll spend two nights in the heart of one of Canada's most beautiful National Parks. Then through the Rockies to the busy, bustling city of Edmonton. Tour includes hotels, transfers, 6 sightseeing trips, 17 meals, tips, taxes and escort service.

The Skyline Tour.

11-day Rocky Mountain Pacific Package: \$780*
Air Canada can jet you to Calgary on the first leg of a fabulous UTL Holiday Tour of the Canadian west. If you time it right, you'll see something of the world-famous Calgary Stampede before boarding a deluxe tourbus for Banff, a delightful little holiday town ringed by towering Rocky Mountain peaks. At Banff, you can ride a gondola to the top of Sulphur Mountain, lounge in the hot springs, golf on a championship course high in the sky. You'll see Lake Louise, a blue-green gem in a matchless setting of snow-capped peaks, and follow the fabulous Icefields Parkway (past the incredible Columbia Icefields) to Jasper, which sits in the Rockies like a picture-postcard Alpine village. Then visit scenic magnificent Banff Columbia to Vancouver, with its

warm sandy beaches, its superb harbor and its downtown skyscrapers dwarfed by the Coast Mountains. You can explore the wilderness acres of Stanley Park, see a colourful Chinatown, shop in the boutiques of restored Gastown, take the Grouse Mountain Skyride to flower-filled meadows 4,000 feet above the fabulous city. Package includes hotels, some meals, sightseeing, transfers, taxes, tips and guide service.

Pacific-Rocky Mountain Spectacular.

7-days \$584.85*
Book-Couzens can jet you via Air Canada from Windsor, Ontario, to Vancouver, which sits with its feet paddling happily in the Pacific and its back planted comfortably against the towering Coast Mountains. Explore the wilderness acres of Stanley Park, see colourful Chinatown, shop in the charming boutiques of restored Gastown and take the Grouse Mountain Skyride to flower-filled alpine meadows 4,000 feet above the city. From Vancouver to Banff, a delightful little holiday town ringed by tall Rocky Mountain peaks. Ride a gondola to the top of Sulphur Mountain, ride a raft on the lazy Bow River or golf on a championship course high in the sky. You can visit Lake Louise, a blue-green gem in a matchless setting of snow-capped mountains, see the Columbia Icefields (and take a snowmobile ride across the largest body of ice on the continent south of the Arctic Circle) and explore the magnificent Valley of the Ten Peaks... before boarding an Air Canada jet for home. Package includes hotels, some meals, sightseeing, transfers, taxes, tips and escort service.

Victoria. A scenic ferry ride from Vancouver.

Canada So much to see

*Banff and the breathtaking Rockies are just 80 miles from Calgary.