

Five ways that traditional travel agents are still adding value to travellers

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Mark Twain famously stated that "rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated". Likewise around 10 years ago many analysts were pronouncing a slow, agonising death for the travel agent. But just like Mark Twain, the rumours were false - in fact traditional travel agencies still represent a sizeable share of all intermediated travel sales globally.

For sure, globally traditional travel agencies have been facing continuous threats for some time, not least the threat of disintermediation and just more competition in the form of online travel agencies. If someone can get it cheaper elsewhere, why bother with you? And more recently they have faced an even greater threat as their 'expert role' is undermined by more sophisticated travellers with easy-to-use mobile apps at their disposal to search, book and even cross-reference information through applications such as TripAdvisor, Google Trips, Uber, Airbnb or Skyscanner.

And yet somehow your local high street still has one, if not more, bricks-and-mortar travel agencies? Just like many businesses that have modernized to stay alive, many traditional travel agents realized they could not stand still and have managed to stay relevant to their customers by introducing all kinds of new measures. In fact, recent studies in the United States reveal that even one in three millennials go to travel agents to plan their holidays.

Just what is it that a traditional travel agent offers you that makes it so relevant still in 2018 - and will do over the coming decade? Here are five points to consider:

1. **Most importantly a travel agent can still offer that 'trusted adviser' status.** Agents have learned to specialize as nowadays travelers want proposals that fit their particular tastes and interests, which is why many agencies have focused on travel typologies such as adventure, groups, cruises, luxury or even corporate trips.
2. Whilst of second most importance is **the technology on offer** that enhances that trusted adviser status. Agents are now **more connected than ever before and they have a great knowledge of what they sell**. They have been updated in terms of product and tools, they are well informed and well-traveled. So the holidaymaker continues to rely on travel agencies, betting on their experience to give advice and not just as a mere seller. Travelers do not look for information in the agency, they already have more than enough, and they look for clarity, security, recommendation and organization.
3. **The safest option to avoid surprises.** Although it may seem that they won't happen to us, many things can ruin your holidays: extreme weather, flight cancellations, and revolutions even. Many times agents have saved episodes of crisis and, thanks to their power of negotiation and their extensive network, have relocated their clients or gotten the last seat available on a plane after an overbooking. Travel agents will leverage vendor relationships to advocate for travelers when unexpected changes occur.
4. **Easy way for multi-leg bookings and organizing complex trips.** Digital travelers, although they are hyper-connected and up-to-date with the latest travel applications, tend to have more purchasing power and are willing to plan more complex and international trips. They realize that using a professional travel agent can improve the overall travel experience and the ease of reserving everything in the same place, what we call a "one-stop-shop model". The client will leave the agency with everything but the packing done.
5. **Lowest prices possible.** Believe it or not, travel agents have tricks up their sleeves that automated websites have never heard of. They know when a price is actually at its lowest

point. Also travel agents can put a price quotation on hold for 24 hours so the client has more time to make a decision. You will never have that option directly on a website where prices fluctuate by the minute, and might change before you even reach the checkout.

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