

Travel agents should charge a fee, says Sir Rocco Forte

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Agents have been urged to start charging for their services by hotelier Sir Rocco Forte.

Speaking at the Association of Independent Tour Operators Specialist Travel Agents conference this weekend in Warwick, the keynote speaker urged delegates to consider the value of the information they provide and the services they offer.

He cited New York travel agent Bill Fischer, who owns Fischer Travel Enterprises, as an example of just how much some agents can get away with. Fischer charges celebrity and super wealthy clients a \$100,000 'joining' fee and a \$10,000 annual retainer to arrange last-minute bookings, reservations at hotels that have no rooms left or seats on overbooked flights, for example.

He said: "I'm always amazed when I talk to travel agents as to how knowledgeable you are about destinations and services. Many of you know almost more about my hotels than I do, if that's possible, and I find that quite something."

Sir Rocco also reminded agents of the vital distribution role they play for suppliers, adding: "We have 800,000 customers on our database which I'm quite proud of but it is a fraction of our needs and you have huge databases which I can never hope to have."

He said his luxury hotel chain the Rocco Forte Collection had focused on the quality of service and its properties during the recession and urged delegates to do likewise, rather than competing on costs.

"A price-based [selling] strategy is completely the wrong strategy with the luxury market.

"As the market improves you've got to make sure you sell your products on the basis of the specialist skills you have and not just the price."

"There is absolutely no amount of money that can ever compensate for the experience, Industry contacts, real-time advice and amazing value that a well healed and experienced Travel Agent can offer a valuable client. You can not bring back lost time and erase a bad experience in life-so pay a fee, respect the advice and go with who delivers the very best to you.

Then add the fact that most advice , value-added inclusions, comparisons , experience and use of Industry contacts can save you thousands of Pounds or Dollars and you just got the deal of the Century! "