

Travel agents save clients an average of \$602 per trip

Consumers in the US report that travel agents save them the equivalent, on average, of AUD 602 per trip and four hours in travel planning – and the same may well be true in Australia.

New research shows that public patronage of agents in that country is higher than ever, and that travel agents save consumers time and money. The figure of USD 452 per trip equates to AUD 602 – and perhaps most importantly, US consumers consider that agents help them avoid costly mistakes.

The independent study, “Best of Both Worlds: Quantifying How Travel Agents Save Consumers Time and Money,” was funded by Carnival Corporation, the cruise ship giant, and conducted by market research firm TNS Global. Detailed findings of the final version of the survey will be available on ASTA.org by 30 May 2016, but preliminary findings are extremely encouraging.

“We couldn’t hold back the good news, and that is that travel agent usage is at its highest level since we began commissioning independent consumer research three years ago,” said ASTA President and chief executive Zane Kerby.

“At this point, consumers have tried it all. They’ve booked online, they’ve gone direct, and they’ve used a travel agent. **This study dispels the myth that booking direct with suppliers or spending hours online yourself gets you a better deal, or gives you a happier travel experience. Consumers told TNS Global that if you want a better travel experience, use an agent.**”

The findings should be music to the ears of AFTA, ASTA’s Australian counterpart, and to agents generally.

Key preliminary findings in the ASTA survey include:

- In the past 12 months, nearly half of consumers polled (47%) booked travel through supplier websites, followed by 25% on online travel agency websites, and 23% through travel agents. That 23% was the highest share in the past three years.
- When looking back on their past travel experiences, almost two-thirds (63%) of consumers said using an agent makes their overall trip experience better; 69% reported that agents save them time in planning and booking; 66% said agents help them avoid costly mistakes, and 64% say agents find the better deals.
- The key reason consumers who haven’t used an agent in the past 12 months say they went that route: “I want to do it myself.”
- Travel agents lead other booking channels in selling river cruises, and tie with online suppliers for selling ocean cruises and tour packages. Agents also scored well for selling all-inclusive resorts and travel insurance, nearly tying with online suppliers.
- **The top reason cited by consumers who have not used an agent in the past 12 months about why they would consider it, is if the agent can save them money (47%), followed closely by if the agent can find better deals than online websites and if the travel agent can help the consumer avoid mistakes.**

Edited by Peter Needham