

WHY USE A REAL, LIVE TRAVEL COUNSELLOR?

Steve Gillick CTM, President and C.O.O.

The Canadian Institute of Travel Counsellors

Many consumers have been re-evaluating their travel-buying strategy in light of the collapse of Jetsgo. There is no secret that dealing with a real, live Certified Travel Counsellor produces the most satisfying results--and even moreso in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec where travel industry legislation protects consumers who purchase travel from a registered travel agency in their respective province. Consider this...

So there you are in London. You booked your flight to Uzbekistan using the convenient website www.Iwanttotravelcheap.com. The ads that attracted you to the website used buzzwords and phrases such as "freedom to do as you please", "do it from your home", "easy as 1-2-3" etc. Now you're in London and you have been informed that the ongoing portion of your ticket is not valid. In fact, they have no record of your ticket--or your name. You don't comprehend how you can have a confirmed ticket in your hand, but apparently it's not valid. In a sense what has happened is a good thing. The three-week trek in Central Asia would never have materialized anyway, because no one informed you that you had to have a visa to enter Uzbekistan. Funny though, even if you had made it to see the snow tigers in the Chatkalsky reserve, you probably would have contracted malaria, because no one advised you to take precautions before you left home. Have a fun stay in London!

In our world of fast food, instant tellers and the need for immediate gratification when it comes to service, we are now being told about instant travel bookings. The question is, should you book on the internet?

When you book with a Certified Travel Counsellor, you are dealing with a top professional. You are also dealing with a real, live human being who not only provides you with full travel services and advice, but is 'there' to lobby on your behalf should anything go wrong with the arrangements. Case in point? Clients who booked their Canada 3000 flights with a Certified Travel Counsellor; Clients who booked their Jetsgo flights with a Certified Travel Counsellor, found that in many cases, their travel counsellor was already re-booking them on other airlines, before they even knew that anything was wrong. Those customers that booked on their own? Well that is where they are now: On their own.

Some internet booking sites claim to have 24/7 emergency contact. If something goes wrong, you don't know exactly *where* you are calling and you don't have the name of a salesperson as a reference. Do you really want to speak with Biff who is sitting in a Call Centre in Nebraska ? Are you going to feel comfortable that Biff *knows* that this is your dream vacation? Face it--you are just a booking reference number on Biff's computer.

Let's take it one step further. Is your Internet booking made with a legitimate company (i.e. one that actually has a license to sell travel or book flights?) Are you absolutely certain that the money you give to the company will actually be forwarded to the supplier and that your vacation will materialize the way you have dreamed it would? Are you sure you are actually saving money? Studies in the US tend to lean toward the idea that by far, travel agents save you money over internet bookings. Don't travel counsellors charge 'service fees'? Next time you book on the internet, check the detailed billing (if they provide one) and surprise, many charge similar fees. So where is the savings?

The latest consumer polls rank "vacations" as one of the highest priorities amongst 18-55 year olds. While the money you save for a trip may be listed as "disposable" income, it does not mean you want to dispose of it by donating it to an unscrupulous or non-existent travel company. The solution is to sit in front of a Certified Travel Counsellor. They are trained to determine your travel needs and respond to them. They are trained to explain how conditions in other countries may vary from those of your own country. They are trained to advise you to seek medical advice from a travel clinic prior to your departure. They are trained to explain which visas you may require for certain countries and, in many cases, the travel agency will have the visa forms right there where they can fill them out with you. Are you ready to start tracking down how to obtain a visa for Azerbaijan? Important also to your security and comfort is travel insurance. Has a professional travel counsellor advised you on the correct type of insurance you will need to safeguard your vacation?

O.K. O.K. so is it all right to contact www.lwanttotravelcheap.com and book your flight if that is the only travel arrangement you require? Well, keep in mind that when you contact www.lwanttotravelcheap.com they have a reservations screen in front of them with flight information but you have no idea if they have ALL the flight information you may require to arrange for your trip. When airlines are missing from their system, it means they cannot let you know which carrier might be less expensive and more convenient for your travel plans. A Certified Travel Counsellor, on the other hand, has access to a GDS (Global Distribution System). On their screen is information about every flight, every airline and every price available. As well, they can tell you the best deal for your schedule and for your budget. The travel counsellor can book the flight, offer you a seat selection, even arrange for a rental car to be waiting for you on arrival and theatre tickets at the box office.

The Internet is an excellent research tool. Do your research---then do what the majority of experienced travellers do--walk into a travel agency and ask for the Certified Travel Counsellor to book your travel services.

Certified Travel Counsellors specialize in “counselling” travel. Savvy travellers take advantage of these highly trained and educated professionals. They want the best value for their dollar. You savvy?

A full listing of Canada's Top Travel Professionals can be found at www.citc.ca/certifiedcoun.cfm or by contacting CITC at info@citc.ca; 1-800-589-5776; 416-484-4450.

Incorporated in 1968, the vision of the **Canadian Institute of Travel Counsellors** is to lead the Canadian travel industry to be the most skilled and professional work force in the world, and to ensure that the CTC / CTM designations are recognized, accepted and valued by the travel industry and consumers as the ultimate achievement in professionalism. Information on membership, certification, educational programs and publications is available at www.citc.ca

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