

CERTIFIED TRAVEL COUNSELLORS PROVIDE A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

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Undoubtedly, one of the biggest reasons for buying travel services from a Certified Travel Counsellor (CTC) is the network of support they provide the traveller.

Before the trip your travel counsellor works with you to discover your needs and then respond to them. Travel is a service industry, and servicing your needs is a first step toward successful travels. Your travel counsellor knows how important that aisle seat is to you, or the special meal you ordered, or the wheelchair accessible taxi waiting at the airport, or the room that actually looks out over the ocean. At this stage in your trip, the travel counsellor's job is to confirm these arrangements. But here are many true stories of travel counsellors going even one better for their clients.

There is the time where a travel counsellor met the manager of a Caribbean resort during a familiarization trip and mentioned that her client was coming there for a 25th anniversary. The manager dazzled the client with a room upgrade, flowers and a bottle of wine on arrival. There is the story of the travel counsellor who contacted the cruise company every week for their client to ask about upgrades and the result was a 5 category upgrade in accommodation from what the client originally booked. While these things may not be possible all the time, it does point to the fact that personal interaction allows for personal attention.

Anything else? Yes. These days many clients research on the internet, but this tends to result in 'information overload' (also called 'analysis paralysis') . With sites galore on hotels in Thailand, how do you know which one is best for you? Can you trust the on-line reviews? Are the hotel descriptions accurate? Can you capture the atmosphere of that perfect resort you are looking for just by browsing the net? A travel counsellor is there to sort through the morass of blogs, ads and reviews and provide you with the answers you need. This is where the experienced 'counselling' of a certified travel professional comes into play. This is where the expertise of a travel professional (i.e. one who **counsels** travel for a living) benefits you in dividends.

During the trip a certified travel counsellors is there for you. This is not a motherhood statement. It is a fact that the person with whom you bought the service can be contacted should anything go wrong with the arrangements. Case in point--when Canada 3000 went bankrupt in 2001, many travellers who booked with a travel counsellor had reservations confirmed on other airlines before they even knew of the bankruptcy. Their travel counsellor was looking out for them. Those who booked on their own--were left on their own.

Case in point--when a traveller is booked to a destination and turmoil arises in that country causing Canadian Consular Affairs to issue a travel warning, the travel counsellor will contact the client to ensure they are aware of this change in circumstance. Likewise, if the entry requirements change from the time of booking to the time of departure, a travel counsellor is there to contact you with advice. Those who book with a certified travel counsellor, travel with the confidence of knowing that they have a personal travel lobbyist standing by to assist, should anything unexpected occur.

After the trip a travel counsellor is there to listen to your praise, take in your suggestions and help resolve any issues that may have arisen on your travels. But this is also where "service" comes into play. Whether it is keeping your name active in a database to inform you of special prices to your favourite destination, or inviting you to a destination information evening, the travel counsellor-traveller relationship continues.

There is no substitute for personal interaction. As much as online booking engines try to emphasize choice and freedom and independence, the bottom line is that the traveller is responsible for their own actions. Push the 'enter' key and hope you made the right decision. A travel counsellor adds a dimension to the booking equation that you won't find on the internet: Attentive counselling, experience and expertise, one-on-one contact and a personal travel lobbyist working on your behalf.

A full listing of Canada's Top Travel Professionals can be found at www.citc.ca/en/directory 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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