

DO YOU REALLY KNOW ALL THE TRAVEL OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO YOU?

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Booking travel on your own can lead to needless overspending as the upgrade options on tours, hotels, flights and rental cars persuade travellers to abandon their budget, mortgage the home, forget about the kids going to college and just enjoy the holiday.

Most travellers have an idea of how they would like to spend their vacation. However once they decide to book on their own they decide to amend their original plans to fit into what they find on the internet. This can lead to a lowering of expectations if they can't find the right flight that matches their dream itinerary, or the right price that they hoped would be available or that perfect tour that allowed them enough free time to enjoy a cappuccino in the piazza every afternoon.

Travellers in the know, go to a certified travel counsellor for their information and to buy their travel arrangements & services – and here's why.

A certified travel counsellor makes his/her living selling travel. It is not that they have always "been there, done that", it is that they are trained professionals whose livelihood depends on your satisfaction. If they have not personally been to the destination you choose, their industry training and experience in speaking with clients and selling products to that destination becomes a valuable third-party source of real-time reference information for you.

Travel counsellors also have access to an online computerized source of information called a Global Distribution System (GDS--sometimes referred to as a CRS-computer/centralized reservation system). The benefit to you is that they can access ALL the flights leaving your hometown so you don't have to hunt for that perfect flight. Your certified travel counsellor can do in a few minutes what it might take you hours to do. Anyone who has typed in the ideal flight and date for their trip and then have it thrown out of the system without explanation can relate to this typical do-it-yourself-online-booking frustration. Trained travel counsellors save you time.

Now consider the fact that there is also a whole area of travel options out there that travellers may not even be aware of. Aside from upgrades or car rentals or travel insurance or theatre tickets or that bed & breakfast you read about in the English countryside, trained travel counsellors can help you in the area of *niche* travel. This refers to unique, sometimes specialized interests. It could be the trend among Baby Boomers to seek out spiritual or cultural or life-affirming experiences. It could involve facilitating trips for travellers with disabilities. There are over 329 examples of niche travel including: birdwatching, fishing, shopping, antique-ing, photography, horticulture, wines and drinks, food and music, spas, golf, honeymoon, luxury, gay & lesbian travel--and each area of niche travel has a multitude of variations.

Travellers looking for a shopping holiday may be specifically looking for a seasonal shopping experience (Christmas in Hong Kong as an example) or they may be collectors of aboriginal masks or antique clocks. Food and Drink travel, inspired to a great deal by Food TV, could be subdivided by country, region and locality. It could involve cooking classes or visiting wineries or even picking tea leaves in a remote part of the world. In other words, there is no limit as to how imaginative niche travel can be.

The point is, if travellers don't know that this exists, they are likely to miss out on that perfect vacation or a new experience. A trained travel professional becomes your wish-fulfillment specialist. They are up-to-speed on both available and sometimes hard-to-find travel options, on specialized tours and where to research these kind of holidays. If a traveller is not into group tours, then a travel counsellor will arrange a customized holiday. A travel counsellor can respond to your needs by putting together a trip for you as a solo traveller (and by the way, there is a whole area of travel dedicated to solo female travellers), a

couple or a group. They can also advise about tour operators who offer the basic components of a tour (transportation and accommodation) and then you fill-in-the activities at your own pace.

Travel is a very sophisticated industry and there are a lot of options to fulfill your idea of a dream holiday. A travel counsellor "counsels" travellers about all the options available to them. They inquire into your needs, your vision, your dreams, your limitations and yes, even your budget and then work with you to come up with suggestions that you may never have arrived at on your own.

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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