

# Could a return of the travel agent be the key to stress free travel?

by [Scott Carmichael](#) ([RSS feed](#)) on Jan 6th 2011 at 11:30AM



The always excellent Joe Sharkey of the New York times has a fascinating article on [how a travel agent could be your best friend when you are stranded](#).

Obviously, [the nasty snow storms in December](#) are what triggered his article, and in it, he describes how a travel agent can perform miracles most of us have to wait in line for at the airport.

Now, I can clearly remember the last time I used a travel agent - it was the year I got my first cellphone (1992). After that, I always took care of myself. First using a dumb terminal, then with primitive Internet based booking tools, and then moving on to the current generation booking sites.

And to be honest, I thought I'd never look back. In my opinion, the travel agent only did things I could already do myself. When I booked my honeymoon cruise, I tried walking into a local agency, but ended up finding a much better deal online.

So, why the sudden interest in the services of a travel agent? When people found out that the airlines don't have the resources to deal with a large crisis, they got angry. And rightfully so - some passengers spent five hours on hold, only to be told that their next flight out would have to call back the next day.

[Photo from [Flickr/adrian.acediscovery](#)]

Of course, there is a price to pay when you hand over your booking requests to someone else - fees of around \$37.50 per ticket. Add that to your [baggage fee](#), fuel surcharges and other charges, and the price may simply be too high.



Additionally, business travelers are usually already protected by their corporate travel booking service - which means the vast majority of customers for a travel agency would be consumers - a group most likely not too eager to fork over extra cash. And of course, there are also top-tier elite members of the airline that have direct access to their own service desk - usually bypassing any long hold times.

Gadling spoke with several travel agents for their views on why booking with them isn't as crazy as it may seem. Luxury travel consultant **John Clifford (@LuxTravel)**, **President of [InternationalTravelManagement.com](http://InternationalTravelManagement.com)** shares his expert tips:

*The "internet information overload" has reached critical mass, and now aside from this overload, we have "crowd sourcing" to take into consideration such as recommendations from friends on Facebook, colleagues on Twitter, anonymous Yelp reviews and the like?*

*How in the world does anyone cut through the noise and make sense of it all? Sure they may espouse the greatest upgrade they got at a luxury chain hotel but that was because of all their loyalty points. It would not pertain to your stay, so how does that help you?*

*But trained, travel professionals, or "travel consultants" of today do. They/we've made it through the internet boom of the 90's and redefined ourselves to be "lifestyle guides" that really take the time to listen & learn about each individual, and like a skilled artisan, carefully craft suggestions that are ONLY pertinent to travelers' needs & wants.*

*If you consider only the facts of world developments, wars, strikes, natural disasters, storms, etc -- that alone is proof enough for many to realize the old saying rings true, "without a travel agent, you're on your own".*

*Self booking is just that - it's just the BOOKING or the very first step of a trip.*

*The entire travel cycle of experiences starts that moment and making wrong or uneducated decisions can reverberate through your entire travel experience and if you booked online, you have only yourself to get you out of a jam, out of a hotel room that looked cool on the web but in fact is a dump, or having accidentally booked yourself into Bucharest (Romania) instead of Budapest (Hungary) which a former client actually did and called me to help get him out of it.*

*Travel is becoming less transactional and more experiential. Even the harrowing experience of this last week where tens of thousands were stranded in NY during Christmas weekend were left without help, gate agents at airports reduced, call centers understaffed due to growth of online booking, web sites overloaded and not functioning and airline agents on twitter*

posing as customer service angels, when in reality only directing consumers to "be patient", "wait it out", and commiserate with those stranded.

I saved numerous clients from the recent storms, even my CPA who has never used me before as his wife likes to "play travel agent"

He was flying NYC-San Diego on an American Airlines flight (and a connection as well) and after holding for hours on the phone, American advised his wife it would be days before he could get home and he could sleep at the airport without any free stays, as "acts of God" are not covered.

After hours, he called and requested my help and getting his message on my iPhone, I immediately sprung to action and snagged him a low cost seat on the non stop JetBlue flight from JFK-San Diego, knowing they're a smaller airline that is more creative & reliable in a pinch, and one that didn't have to rely on a hub-and-spoke network to get him home like American did.

He did get home the next day instead of 4 days later.

**And Deborah Peniuk, Owner & Travel Writer of [AYA Life](#) added:**

The internet can be a great place to purchase certain travel products. I consult with clients on their best options for free; help them discover savings that don't have hidden restrictions. There is a huge difference, so don't confuse "transportation" with "vacation." They are generally not interchangeable.

As your travel agent, I can work to immediately reschedule or cancel your trip in the event of a natural disaster (or Mother Nature not playing nice). Less worries for you! I help my clients to avoid online scams and "false" advertisements that are rampant online. I also take considerable time to explain to my clients the logic of travel insurance and recommend it every time!

Good luck trying to get the flight that you are late for changed if you're in transit. If the WiFi in your airport goes down you'll need serendipity to successfully maneuver the online morass. I strongly suggest checking the FAQ section; cancellation penalties and restrictions are usually hidden in the fine print. I've had clients who have called in a panic with huge apologies, wishing they'd booked with me (for my minimal service fee) instead of the huge dollars they end up paying to change their online booking.

We are consumer advocates: if you have a problem during your trip, as your travel agent I can act on your behalf to see that proper restitutions are made. You have a real person who is a phone call away to go back and complain to. As your travel agent, I will work hard to rectify issues and fulfill the trust you put in me. I add a "personal touch" to your travel planning experience and I offer help and advice that no website can provide. Wouldn't you rather have a travel expert plan your trip? My Blackberry is never far from my ear!

In other words - you need to determine how much your time is worth - there is no denying that booking through a travel agent will cost a bit more, and it may not be as convenient as heading over to your favorite travel website and clicking "buy now". The best way to think of the travel agent is as just another insurance - you may make 20 trips without actually needing their additional services, but once a blizzard hits during that 21st trip, you'll be happy you paid a bit more once your travel agent gets you rebooked in minutes rather than hours.

What do you think? Could the additional services of a travel agent convince you to try them out instead of booking directly with an online travel site or airline booking engine?

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Would you consider using a travel agent?



Yes



No



I already doVote

<http://www.stumbleupon.com/su/2Aty2z/www.gadling.com/2011/01/06/could-a-return-of-the-travel-agent-be-the-key-to-stress-free-tra/>