

Five reasons to consider hiring a travel agent

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A good travel agent can help ensure your travel is hassle free. Getty Images

If you enjoy spending hours online planning a vacation and taking in stride glitches that can arise, read no further. If your trip simply involves a few return tickets to visit family and one sleepover at an airport hotel, you can likely book it yourself.

But if your trip involves multiple flights or multiple people or you have a specialized itinerary, consider paying a bit extra to have a travel agent book it for you. In terms of time and grief, it might be worth it.

Saving booking hassles and maybe money

The cost of using a travel agent ranges from zero to several hundred dollars, depending on the type of trip and complexity of planning. Sometimes, you can recoup a few hundred bucks of that cost through discounts or perks that hotels or tour companies might offer to agents but not to individual customers. For example, a hotel will provide a food and beverage credit, an upgrade, early check-in or late check-out if available.

And travel agents can suggest alternatives that might not be easily found by an online search in order to save you money and time. "We can suggest another day to go for a better price," says Bill Allan, a travel advisor with Marlin Travel. "My client switched a day and got a direct flight that saved hours." Plus there's the time you don't have to spend surfing the internet for the best flights at the best price. A Google survey found that it takes 32 visits to 10 different websites to book an airline ticket.

Steering clear of trouble

If you aren't familiar with your destination, you can encounter some unpleasant or even dangerous surprises when you land. You might find yourself at a hotel in a dangerous area where you don't feel safe walking around at night, or instance, or your expensive room in Venice could turn out to be a shoebox.

A travel agent familiar with your destination — or who works for a network of agents and can call upon someone familiar with the area — will help you steer clear of that kind of vacation-wrecking choice.

Someone to help when things go wrong

My friend was in Mexico when a freak storm closed the airport for days. Her travel agent was able to rebook her flight and get her a room at a sold-out hotel in the area.

"I'll speak with an airline sales representative — they don't talk to passengers," says Allan. "Often airlines keep us informed of weather issues and grounded flights, so we can give our client the heads up."

Informed advice on challenging routes or destinations

Allan's client needed a last-minute trip Armenia, but didn't know where it was or how to get there. As for specialized trips, Dean Horvath of Horvath Travel booked a family on a South African safari, but at a camp with a corporate group. "They were hoping for more of a family atmosphere rather than a working holiday," he said. "We contacted the manager and next morning they were moved to a different camp. One phone call saved their trip."

Tailoring a trip to your specific travel tastes or needs


If you have a particular interest or want VIP treatment, consider hiring an agent who caters to that particular kind of travel. "We have an advisor who specializes in bone fishing, and another who'll take you fly fishing in New Zealand," says Misty Belles of Virtuoso. If you want to visit India, for example, a local Virtuoso travel advisor will contact a colleague who specializes in that country. "We build partnerships with everyone from cruise lines to African safaris to a private tour guide in Italy," she says.

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Feels like 17°C

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Friday	22°C
Saturday	26°C
Sunday	28°C

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