

TRAVEL AGENT INTERVIEWS

Paul Parker

Travel Agent Interviews

Agency Membership

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Paul Parker, ACC
Owner, Searcy Travel (An Independent

Affiliate of OASIS Travel Network) Searcy, Arkansas

Describe your career as a travel agent. How long have you been in the business? What attracted you to it?

My business partner, Gina, and I have a combined 30-plus years of experience in the travel business. I never planned on being in travel; my great aunt was a travel agent, so I think that she passed the travel bug onto me. My first experience with a cruise line was during college, when my parents booked a half-dozen cabins for a family reunion.

I was in the advertising business for many years, and began my career in travel as an Agent-Manager of a brick-and-mortar agency. I was out of my comfort zone, but I got a lot of help from people who had been travel agents in the past.

What is your approach to serving clients?

I use a personal concierge approach for every one of our clients. Our clients become friends and they can call, text and message me and our staff, day or night. While our doors close at five o'clock, we're available to them as much or even more than a cruise line. We help with everything travel-related—some things you might think we're crazy for doing—but it keeps them coming back to us, along with their family, friends and referrals. The local newspaper readers vote us "Best of the Best" year after year.

We position ourselves to be travel experts, better than a cruise line's website or their reps that answer their phones. We know excursions, cell phone plans at sea, menu items at dining venues and most everything else onboard. At my store, you'll find the most knowledgeable people, eager to help clients, whether they be past cruisers or first-timers.

How has your CLIA membership and certification helped you as a cruise travel retailer?

When I earned my ACC from CLIA, it was the beginning of a solid foundation of training and insight into our industry. After a successful run of nine years, I saw an opportunity to open my own travel agency, and here I am today, four years later and we're going strong. My CLIA certification gave me the professional confidence that contributed to my opening our agency.

What consumer trends are you seeing in cruise sales?

We're finding more people looking to cruise from home ports, because driving fewer than nine or ten hours and short flights are attractive to both new and past cruisers alike. We've become very familiar with home port events and activities, hotels with park-and-cruise packages, nightlife, dining, parking, etc. And many of it is commissionable, too!



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