

TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS

# Dawn Ogden

FAQs

Travel Professional Interviews

Agency Membership

Agent Membership



# **Dawn Ogden, ACC**

## **Travel Agent Concierge, Xstream Travel**

### **Allen, TX**

#### **Please describe your career as a travel agent.**

I have always truly enjoyed being the go-to-person for my family and friends, spending endless hours online exploring destinations for the next big vacation. I launched my home-based travel agency Dawn's Destinations Travel Service in March 2007 turning my passion for travel into a nice part-time income. My niche markets are now primarily cruise groups (class and family reunions) and romance travel (anniversaries, vow renewals, destination weddings and honeymoons). Cruisers are the greatest percentage of my travel business clientele!

#### **How long have you been a travel agent?**

2017 marks my 10-year anniversary in the fun and exciting industry of travel.

#### **Name a "highlight" in your career.**

Planning a large "65<sup>th</sup> Birthday / Retirement" group cruise was especially rewarding, because surprisingly many of the attendees were first-time cruisers. The simple gesture of placing amenities and bon voyage gifts in their stateroom really delighted them. They took a beautiful group picture while on board and presented me with a photo album full of great shots taken and memories made during their 5-Day Caribbean cruise. Lasting relationships and many referrals have come from that one cruise booking,

#### **Please give us a list/tips of your best practices when it comes to selling cruise vacations.**

Selling group cruises is my passion. During the 2013 CLIA Cruise Academy event, I took the "How To Develop Group Business" seminar. The following are just a few awesome tips that were shared on how to find group customers:

- Your existing clients and who they know in their social circles who travel

- Your own family and friends who have upcoming milestones to celebrate
- Associations you belong to
- Places in your community that you do business with
- Online communities

## **What is your biggest challenge when selling cruise vacations and how do you overcome it?**

The biggest challenge I face when selling cruise vacations is helping the first-time fearful traveler understand that cruising is safe. When I encounter this, it proves to be a good opportunity to educate the traveler. After qualifying them to determine the best cruise to recommend, I then take the time to review cruise brochures, deck plans and even the cruise line's website to show them how the cruise line is focused on safety and security with extensive crew member training and ship inspections. If their apprehension is due to a common fear of motion sickness, I'll share some very practical tips to prevent or treat it. Lastly, I've even suggested that they consider recruiting others to cruise with them to share in the fun and support them.

## **Are you CLIA Certified? If so, what designation and how has that certification impacted your career?**

I attained my Accredited Cruise Counsellor designation in 2016. Directly before attending the 2016 Cruise360 event in Vancouver, I also enrolled in the Masters Cruise Counsellor program and am currently working towards completed it by Spring 2018. The more I learn, the more I'm able to broaden my knowledge on cruise lines and itineraries that I have not yet promoted or exposed to my travel clients, such as river cruising and transatlantic voyages.

## **How has your CLIA membership and/or professional development helped you in your career?**

The benefits and impact of being affiliated with CLIA are extensive. Knowledge can yield both power and profit. One of the first professional development sessions I attended was "Building A Smart Business Plan". Amongst many things, that training alone helped me to better determine what type of travel business I wanted to focus on, how to best market my services, and how to set realistic goals and objectives to grow my business. Sales and service go hand in hand. Remember that how you service your clients today can greatly increase your new business sales tomorrow.

**Please add any additional thoughts about your role working with the cruise industry and selling cruise vacations that may not have been covered above.**

Attend travel industry trade shows and get to know the cruise line business development managers in your region. BDMs want to partner with travel agents and help us successfully promote their cruise brands. Always maintain current cruise line marketing materials in your office so you're abreast of the latest trends and upcoming new ships/itineraries to offer your travel clients.



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