



Travel advisors can assist families with trip planning to ensure that the activities and pacing are conducive to kids.

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| TRAVEL |

Do people still use travel agents?

Yes—and now they're called travel advisors. They could be more helpful than you may think.

3 MINUTE READ

BY ELAINE GLUSAC



If the idea of using a travel agent to plan your next trip sounds like recommending a rotary phone to confirm your flight reservation, think again. Travel agents—often known as travel advisors today—are alive and well in the age of [Google flight searches](#) and [HotelTonight](#) app bookings, flexing their muscular connections to hotel, tour, and cruise companies to get their clients good deals, convenient itineraries, and tailored experiences. [Virtuoso](#), a network of advisors specializing in luxury travel, increased its membership by 14 percent (to 20,000) in 2018, testifying to the strength of the industry.

When should you use an advisor? For simple getaways, it may be easier and cheaper to go it alone. “If you’re going to Vermont for a fall weekend, it probably makes no sense to use a travel agent,” says Kevin Brasler, executive editor for the nonprofit watchdog group [Consumers’ Checkbook](#). “Where a travel advisor can add value to the equation is when the itinerary is slightly more complicated or you have children or grandparents along,” says Mollie Fitzgerald, co-owner of [Frontiers](#) travel company. Advisors also can help plan trips that align with personal values such as conservation and sustainability.

Advisors not only expedite planning, but they can be your back-up should anything go wrong. When a flight is canceled, a hotel reservation is lost, or a natural disaster strikes, they are there to help. Ultimately, their connections can become your conduit to a smoother and more stimulating trip.

If you decide to use an advisor, here are some tips for how to do it:

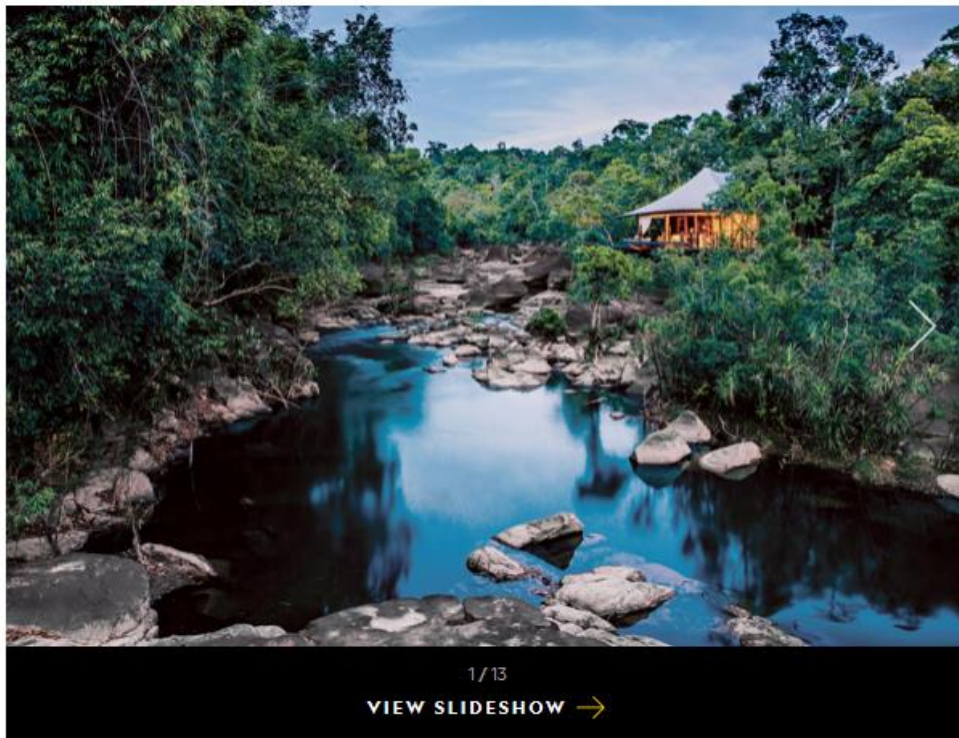
Browse advisor databases

Clients often find advisors through word of mouth, but the [American Society of Travel Advisors \(ASTA\)](#) maintains a [database](#) that allows travelers to search by destination, type of journey (such as eco-tourism or genealogy), and cohort (such as LGBTQ+ travelers). On Virtuoso's website, the searchable database includes bios for the advisors and maps showing their recent travels. Many advisors are generalists, but those who specialize in certain regions or kinds of travel often can provide better service, particularly for places where language barriers or safety are concerns.

Zero in on your specific interests

Spend 15 minutes upfront chatting with an advisor by phone about your travel passions. If, for example, you want to ensure that your trip provides some benefit to the local community, an advisor can help guide you. An advisor also may organize extras such as a behind-the-scenes tour of a wildlife sanctuary in [Kenya](#), cooking classes with local ingredients in [Vietnam](#), or participation in an archaeological dig in [Greece](#). "Our advisors arrange things people don't know they can ask for," says Misty Ewing Belles, spokesperson for Virtuoso.

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SHINTA MANI WILD, CAMBODIA

Designer Bill Bensley constructed [Shinta Mani Wild](#) on the border of Southern Cardamom National Park in west [Cambodia](#) to help protect the surrounding 860-acre forest. [A National...](#) [Read More](#)

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Don't be afraid to talk budget

If you're not sure how much to spend, an advisor can tell you what to expect of a five-star versus a three-star hotel. Per the ASTA, one in five millennial clients uses an advisor to work out a travel budget. And expect to pay something for travel services. Virtuoso advisors, for example, normally charge between \$50 and \$300, sometimes more depending on the complexity of the trip. "Leisure is your most valuable nonrenewable asset, and you don't want to leave it to chance," says Ewing Belles. "We're the travel equivalents of financial advisors."

Take advantage of combined fares

Due to their established contracts, travel advisors often can secure international airfare in conjunction with a hotel, cruise, or tour booking for better-than-published rates. "Sometimes you'll pay the cheapest fare and get an automatic upgrade to business class," says Fitzgerald.

Traveling to high elevation? Read these tips on dealing with altitude.

Claim extras when planning a cruise

Cruises are particularly good trips to book through an advisor. Virtuoso regularly gets benefits and amenities valued at \$800 to \$3,000 per sailing, such as airport transfers, a car and driver in port, or a private lunch in the home of a former ambassador.

Get itineraries tailored to tots

Advisors can plan a trip with pacing that works well for kids. "It's important not to over-program," says Fitzgerald. "I think of sightseeing in half-day increments and getting enrichment in early in the day. We really shine in helping people maximize their time on a trip so they're not spending hours at the concierge desk."

Receive help when misfortune strikes

Look to travel advisors for guidance planning trips around disease outbreaks or natural disasters. If things go awry while you're away, you can call on them to get your trip back on track. They will spring into action to provide services such as rebooking a canceled flight or expediting a meeting at a foreign consulate in cases of emergency.

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