

Why You Need A Travel Advisor In 2023

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I'm a consumer advocate. I write about customer service.



In 2023, people are seeking the advice and wisdom of travel advisors .ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT/MJ

Marisa Thalberg doesn't know where she's traveling in 2023, but she knows how she'll get there: with the help of a travel advisor. A travel professional gives her "peace of mind," in an increasingly unpredictable world, says Thalberg, a marketing executive from Charlotte, N.C. When she works with an agent, she adds, "I know she'll maximize my hard-earned leisure travel."

This year, we can all use a little peace of mind.

Just when we think we'd seen the last of the holiday meltdowns, the FAA's computers go on the blink, freezing air travel nationwide for hours. And just when we believe the war in Ukraine is nearing an end, another horrific missile attack sends shock waves that are felt by anyone planning a trip to Europe.

"Travel continues to be complex," says Jackie Friedman, president of [Nexion Travel Group](#). "A travel advisor will be as valuable in 2023 by providing the traveler expert advice before, during and after their trip."

Travel advisors are not for everyone, though. If you need a quick domestic airline ticket or a roadside motel, you might be safe skipping an advisor and saving the booking fees, which can be considerable. But if you're planning a more complicated trip — a safari in Kenya, an Antarctic cruise, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land — you need a pro. Now more than ever.

But what's the latest on travel pros in 2023?

- They're virtually indestructible. Travel advisors working today have been through the mill, as my grandmother would say. That includes 9/11, brutal agency commission cuts, the online travel revolution, and the pandemic.
- They've learned new tricks and developed new specialties.
- Travel advisors personalize everything these days — your transportation, accommodations and activities. They're doing it better with technology.
- They've taken their travel expertise to the next level, learning about countries, cities and even neighborhoods. Google can't compete with that.
- Also, travel advisors are constantly improving, and their educational journey is continuing in 2023.

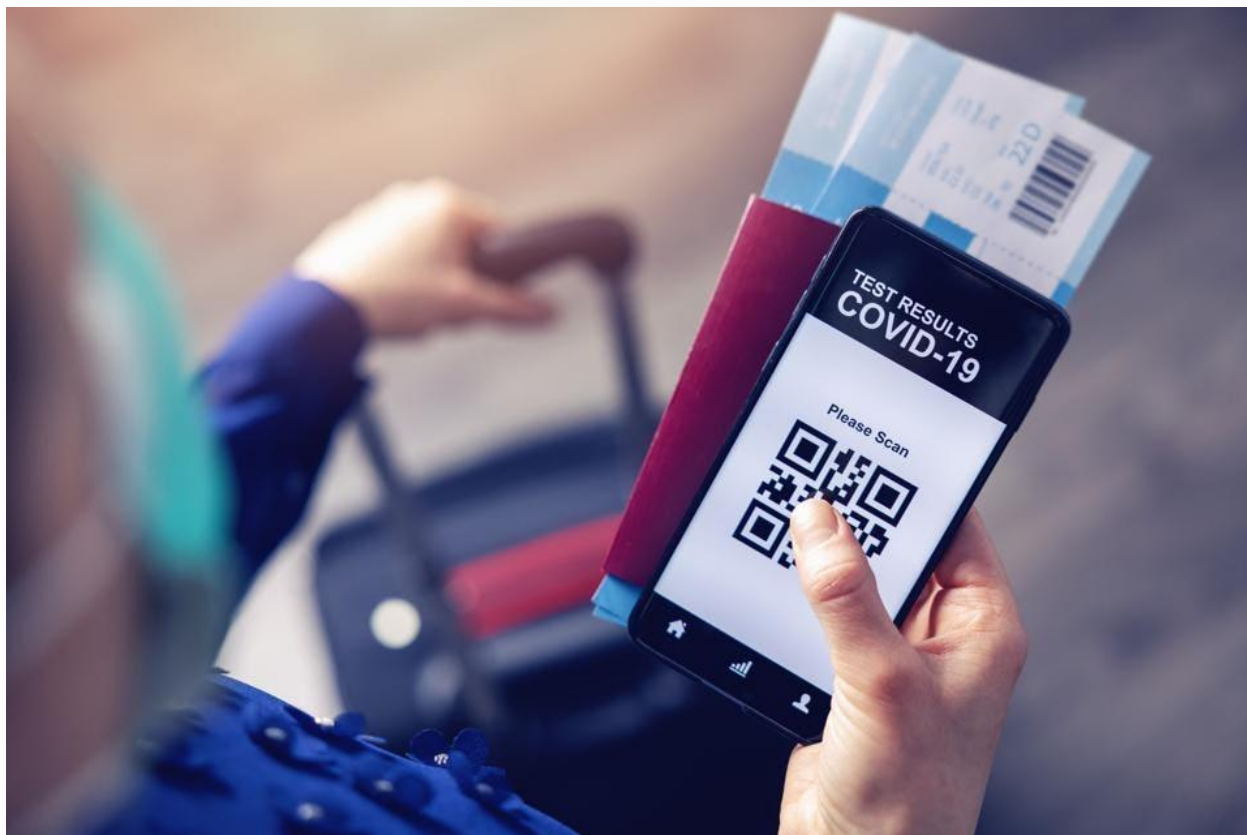
So what does that mean for your next trip? Let's take a closer look.

A travel "vacation consigliere" who goes the extra mile

Thalberg hired Kim-Marie Galloway, a "vacation consigliere" with Luxury Travel Mom, an affiliate of Embark Beyond. Galloway says Thalberg was looking for an advisor who could offer more than just booking an airline ticket or hotel room.

"She wanted someone who knows what she and her family need and goes the extra mile to make sure they have everything — the right insurance, a proper packing list, access to last-minute reservations," she says.

Thalberg also needed someone who could collaborate on future travel plans. "I wanted to combine my own desire and ability to do the research with the expertise of an experienced travel advisor," she says.



Travel advisors can help their clients get through anything, including another pandemic. GETTY

Travel advisors are ready for any crisis

If you haven't [planned a trip](#) in a while, you'll love the skill set of the top travel advisors.

"One of the biggest improvements across the board is that we're entering the fourth calendar year of planning travel with COVID-19 still in the picture," explains Claire Riley, owner of [Duende Travels](#) in La Jolla, Calif. "Tackling last-minute trip changes, working with travel insurance companies, and handling traveler anxiety about upcoming trips in the age of COVID has been

a major part of the job for the last few years. And with that experience comes a lot of new knowledge that I think is making the industry better as a whole."



Travel advisors are more educated and specialized than perhaps ever.GETTY

Travel advisors are more skilled in 2023

Remember, travel advisors have survived the lockdowns and travel bans. What did they do during their time off? Well, after helping their clients get refunds, some of them went back to school to become even better at their craft.

"They concentrated on learning through training certifications," says Andrew Garnett, CEO of Special Needs Group, a medical equipment supply company.

"So their experience and newly acquired knowledge makes them better equipped to help travelers achieve their dream trip with the extra safety net of knowing what to do if things go awry during their trip."



Travel pros are experts at customizing itineraries for their clients. GETTY

They can offer next-level personalization

"Travel advisors will be providing more curated and personalized trips to their clients than ever before in 2023," Shane Mahoney, CEO of Lugos Travel. He says there are new programs that allow advisors to know more about their clients and interests and goals when it comes to travel.

"For example, we have highly sophisticated software that can generate trip itineraries in less than five minutes," he says. "These itineraries are not just generic documents listing typical tourist attractions, but rather, they take into account the interests and goals of each client and generate a highly personalized and curated itinerary."

That kind of deep personalization is something a website can't do — at least, not yet.



The village of Macon in Burgundy, France. Travel advisors specialize in countries, cities and even ... [+]GETTY

Travel pros are “hyperlocalized”

Travel advisors have always specialized. But in 2023, they're taking it to a whole new level, experts say.

Manny Salorio, who runs a travel platform called Go Ask a Local, offers an example of "hyperlocalization."

"When you want to plan a trip to Greece, you'll connect with Athens-based travel advisor Luca Dolfino who has been planning island-hopping vacations for a decade," says Salorio. "If you're heading to Peru, tap into Nicholas Cino's 12 years of experience planning and designing adventures all over Peru. In Iceland, your trip planner will be Andrés Helguson, a travel advisor based in the Reykjavik countryside who has spent almost two decades as both an agent and driver-guide."

This trend is unfolding across the entire industry. Some travel advisors and agents specialize in not just a country but a single city, and sometimes even a small neighborhood in a city. If you're headed to that place, you'll benefit from their help.



Travel pros are constantly improving. That will continue in 2023. GETTY

Travel advisors will continue to evolve in 2023

That's the assessment of Kenroy Herbert, founder of Leviticus Lifestyle & Travel, a concierge brand specializing in renting luxury villas, jets, yachts and private islands. He says the journey from travel agents, who were focused on transactions, to professional advisors who offer advice on your next vacation, is accelerating this year.

"They get to know clients on a deeper level, and the relationship stems beyond that of an agent, but also a trusted friend," he says.

How to find a travel advisor in 2023

So how do you find a travel advisor who is building skills, highly specialized and super-responsive to your travel needs?

- Ask for a referral from a friend, family member or co-worker who already works with a travel advisor. Check the advisor's online reviews and testimonials and ask for references.
- Make sure that your travel advisor has a strong knowledge of the destinations and types of travel you are interested in. It's reasonable to expect an itinerary with detailed information and recommendations based on the agent's own experiences and research.
- Look for a membership in a professional association, such as the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) or The Travel Institute. Both these organizations have high standards for their members and can provide additional resources for the advisor.

Will travel advisors finally arrive in 2023?

I remember having a heated discussion with travel agents two decades ago (that's what they called themselves back then) about going beyond transactions and becoming true experts in their field. The agents said the system worked just fine, but 20 years later, I think the pros have won the argument.

But these pros can be expensive. Advisor fees typically range from \$25 to book a simple airline ticket to more than \$500 for planning an elaborate international trip. The fees may be a flat rate or a percentage of the total cost of the trip, and they're usually assessed for services such as booking flights, hotels, and rental cars, as well as creating custom itineraries and providing general travel planning advice.

Travel advisors may also charge additional fees for services such as passport and visa assistance, travel insurance, and emergency travel assistance.

Many travel pros also take a commission, which can offset the cost of a fee. Always ask about the finances of a travel transaction *before* you start booking.

Travel agents — sorry, advisors — have become the professionals they were always meant to be, and maybe 2023 is the year they arrive. Travelers like us will be the beneficiaries.