



Vacation matchmakers: Travel advisors are key to cruise industry success

By Erica Silverstein

Travel advisors are both the cruise industry's biggest supporters and vacationers' most trusted allies when it comes to the ultimate success of a cruise vacation.

Whether travelers are looking to cruise for the first time or already fans, they turn to travel advisors for their knowledge and experience. In fact, 79% of cruise travelers say travel agents have a "meaningful impact on their decision to cruise," according to Cruise Lines International Association's [2025 State of the Cruise Industry Report](#). Only friends and family have more sway.

"Travel advisors are the principal distribution channel for cruise lines, producing a majority of cruise bookings worldwide, and they offer unique value that ensures that their clients (the cruise lines' guests) keep coming back," says Charles Sylvia, ECC, CLIA's VP, Industry & Trade Relations.

Cruise passengers report being happiest with their experience when they book their holiday with a professional travel advisor.

Travel advisors are matchmakers for cruise lines and vacationers

Advisors start by creating consumer awareness about the benefits of cruising, guiding travelers to consider a vacation at sea.

A knowledgeable advisor can then direct clients to the best cruise line and itinerary for their vacation preferences. "Most consumers haven't a clue what options will best serve them, but a travel advisor will ask the right questions and learn about their clients' needs, wants, and expectations to align them with just the right cruise line, itinerary, ship, category, etc.," says Sylvia.

Pair the right ship with the right guest, and that traveler will have a better vacation experience. Cruise travelers who booked with a travel advisor rated their vacation and cruise line higher than those who booked independently, according to CLIA.

High satisfaction rates lead to future bookings, and 82% of past cruisers intend to book another sailing – in many cases thanks to smart guidance from their travel advisor.

Advisors offer value

Cruise travelers often seek out travel advisors because they want the best cruise deal. Advisors deliver by leveraging promotional group rates and supplier relationships and pointing clients toward high-value sail dates, cabin options, and booking promotions.

But that's not all they offer. Advisors make sure their clients get the specialty restaurant reservations they desire, that their shore excursions get booked, and that they understand how to make onboard

bookings for shows and activities. They can also arrange pre- and post-cruise travel and support their clients while they're in transit between their home and the ship.

"My travel advisor cares about my total cruise experience from when I leave my house to when I return home," says Sylvia. "That level of client care and painstaking attention to detail is what keeps clients coming back to the same trusted travel advisor and to cruise travel."

How CLIA supports its travel advisor and agency members

CLIA's North America Travel Trade Membership team supports more than 74,000 travel advisor members with [professional development opportunities](#). There are also regional memberships in Australasia, Brazil, the UK and Ireland. When travel advisors can maximize their cruise sales and grow their portfolio of loyal clients, everyone benefits.

Professional development options for agents include a robust catalog of online courses and various specialized certificate programs (with both virtual and in-person training). The top offering is CLIA Certification, the cruise industry's only official professional designation, focused on how to sell and market cruises to grow a travel business. Multiple levels of accreditation accommodate travel advisors at different stages of their careers.

CLIA's professional development content is so well regarded that it's used in university hospitality programs throughout North America, Sylvia notes.

Live events such as [CLIA Cruise360](#) conferences and more intimate gatherings bring travel advisors and cruise line representatives together for networking and discussion of new ships and cruise industry trends.

A thriving, well-educated travel advisor community benefits both the cruise lines, and the nearly 38 million travelers expected to cruise globally this year.

"I believe travel advisors are the leading contributor to the growth and success of our industry," says Sylvia. "They are the face of cruise travel and our most valuable champions."

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