

CRUISE VACATIONER

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

MY CLIA



Avis Gardner Owner, It's Your Day Vacation Richmond, VA

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

In 2008, I was introduced to the travel business by a high school classmate who heard that I was doing group cruises with my friends and family. She contacted me to see if I would be interested in joining a travel company she was with. I immediately declined. I didn't care about making money. She convinced me to take a look at the business.

After a couple of weeks of hesitation, I watch the presentation and joined. After being in the business for 2 months, she quit. I had to figure a lot of the business on my own. I was up for the challenge.

What is your approach to serving clients?

My approach to serving clients is to be a listening ear to what their needs and wants are when it comes to cruising. With my 10+ years of travel experience, I would like to think I have the expertise to know what my clients would enjoy the most.

What is your biggest challenge when selling cruises and how do you overcome it?

My biggest challenge when selling cruises is getting a client to commit to the cruise. Clients will eagerly contact you for a quote. Once you present it to them it becomes a hurry up and wait game. After a few follow up emails and calls, they decline to commit. Bummer. The way I overcome this challenge is to continue to press on and find new clients. No only means yes. Yes, I will continue to move forward. Yes, I will continue to network. Yes, I will continue to advertise. I don't let "nos" stop me from continuing to be successful.

What has been a career highlight, thus far?

My career highlight, thus far, has been putting together a group cruise with 547 people. It was a 5-day cruise on the Carnival Sensation from Miami, Florida. We started the vacation 2 days prior to sailing with hotel accommodations. It was a true challenge with some obstacles, however, I was able to manage it and make it an enjoyable and unforgettable experience. We set sail next year with over 450 people already reserved.

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

My CLIA membership has helped me as a cruise travel professional by allowing me to book with an array of different cruise lines to service my clients. Clients have different needs and wants, therefore, it good to have different options to offer them.

What cruising trends are you seeing?

The cruising trends I am seeing is groups with themes. Everyone seems to gravitate to theme cruises. Whether it's line dancing, aerobics, Hawaiian, or the 70s cruise, people get excited. We have to remember it's all about the clients and

what they want. Groups and themes go hand in hand.

What is your fondest personal cruise memory?

My fondest personal cruise memory was just recently when I was on the Carnival Horizon. Never did I expect to see any famous people. When I first arrived on the ship, I notice a small crowd in the corner. Being inquisitive, I walked over to that area. There was Shaq (Shaquille O'Neal) doing an interview. I waited until the interview was complete. When he got up to leave, I asked him would he mind taking a picture with me. "Sure," he said. When we took the picture, I forgot that my cell phone timer was on for 5 seconds. He patiently waited for the countdown. Once it snapped he ask if it was good. I'm still smiling from that memory.
