

CRUISE VACATIONER

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

MY CLIA



Cheryl Mitchell, ECC Owner, Vacations By Cheryl (Independent Contractor of the KHM Travel Group) Plantation, FL

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

I was first inspired to enter this profession because of a lifetime love of travel instilled in me, by my parents, at a very early age, taking their seven children cross-country every summer in their '64 Chevy. As we grew older my parents liked the idea of taking family vacations, and my father always wanted me to be in charge of organizing these trips. This led me to the idea of leaving my career in the hospitality industry and moving into the travel field. I have now been in the business almost 11 years.

What is your approach to serving clients?

Most of my clients are repeat and referral clients. I treat them like they are long-time friends that I would be traveling with. We develop a trust, and that brings repeat business. Clients want to feel confident when they are using a travel agent. My hope is that they feel this way when they use me as their travel agent. I like to get to know them so that every trip I organize is better than their last one. As we grow together, I better understand their style. Responding in a timely manner also builds their confidence and trust and helps ensure their repeat business.

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

Trying to explain to people my value as a travel agent as opposed to an online travel agency. You need to convince the client that the service they receive from an independent agent is more appealing than booking online and has more value to it because we have their best interest at heart. I sell myself with knowledge and personal experience.

What has been a career highlight, thus far?

Some of my career highlights include reaching Pinnacle Status with my host agency KHM, being one of the first members to serve on the KHM Travel Agent Advisory Board, and being selected for the Travel Agent Advisory Board of Carnival Cruise Line. Most recently, during our company conference on Royal Caribbean's Independence of the Seas, I was awarded Agent of the Year for Royal Caribbean for my host agency and that just happens to be one of my favorite cruise lines. The most fulfilling moments are when clients return and share with me their wonderful vacation memories.

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

Knowledge is power. Cruise travel is a constantly changing industry. You must keep up with new ships and their features, changing itineraries, changing policies, as well as continue learning fresh ways to market yourself and keeping up with social media. CLIA teaches all of this and allows me to be at the top of my profession.

What cruising trends are you seeing?

Families are looking for larger ships that have interests that satisfy a multi-generational clientele. Many clients are asking for longer cruises and a greater variety of experiences, such as river cruises, adding cruise tours to ocean cruising, and specialty cruises that highlight their interests.

What is your fondest personal cruise memory?

That is difficult, because there are just so many! Seeing my children's eyes light up the first time they walked on a Disney ship, visiting Italy with my dad and feeling his emotion from experiencing the place of his family's roots, and watching my parents enjoy the memories that are made when traveling with the entire family. We've come a long way since the '64 Chevy!

Any last thoughts?

I truly believe that I was meant to be in this profession. When I first started I never thought it was going to be such demanding work, but the rewards far surpass the hours spent making travel dreams come true.
