

TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS

Lucinda Belden

Travel Professional Interviews

Agency Membership

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Lucinda Belden, ECC

Owner – Agent, Dream Vacations – Stingray Travel Elite Cruise Counsellor

Congratulations on receiving the 2019 Elite Cruise Counsellor of the Year Award, Lucinda! What does the honor mean to you? How did you feel when you found out?

Being nominated by Dream Vacations was an honor in itself. Finding out I was receiving the award...I was completely overwhelmed. This honor was a confirmation that if you follow your dreams, even when you may not see the connection between some of your pursuits, they will come together in surprising and amazing ways. From writing a book for my clients – “60 Ways to Make Your Vacation Last All Year” on Amazon to getting the highest certification available through Cruise Line International Association – all of these drives culminated in this honor. If it wasn't for my clients, family, fellow agents and local business development managers I would not have been on stage to receive this title, “2019 Elite Cruise Counsellor of the Year”. Thank you all!

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

I have been in business for nine years. Prior to that I lived the life of a Web Company Owner, then Web Director for fortune 1000 companies and conducted web contract work around the U.S. I wanted to shift to a second career that would take me into retirement. I ‘accidentally’ came across an article in Fortune magazine listing the top franchises. Cruise franchises were in the top 100. Even though I had little travel experience outside of planning for friends and family, I knew my love of travel and my social media and web background would be a great marriage. This award certainly reinforces that decision!

What is your approach to serving clients?

I want my clients to be awed by the world in which they travel, no matter where they are going or how often they have been. The first time I ever traveled to the sea I was actually already an adult and the impression was lasting. The first creature I encountered was a stingray – which is

why I named my franchise Stingray Travel. To always remind me to include 'awe' in every client's travel plans. I also listen to my clients. When you hear about your client's past experiences, their dreams, their future plans you can paint a picture of the cruise that will deliver.

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

Considering that less than 25% of U.S. citizens have cruised the biggest challenge is still getting the idea out there that cruising is your best travel experience because there is a cruise ship for every personality and every generation. I overcome it by not trying to sell to everyone. I have picked my niche following my own passions (food, motorcycles) and I have narrowed my client profile. This helps me specialize and focus. And the final thing I do is always try and present the concept of cruising through outside-the-box method. (Presenting that way is one of the things that contributed to me receiving the CLIA Award!)

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

When I first started as an agent, I had no travel background except my own experiences. Aside from direct travel destination experience, education will be your foundation. Through CLIA I was able to take training classes focused specifically on cruising, connect with cruise lines for certifications and naturally pursue the highest certification in the industry – Elite Cruise Counselor. These trainings and certifications have provided me with the tools to present myself to my clients as an expert in the field. My listing in the CLIA travel agent database has resulted in direct cruise sales because clients have depended on that listing to find certified experts in their area.

What cruising trends are you seeing?

In just nine years I've seen trends swing from buying the biggest, best, largest to buying authentic experiences and memories. Now the trend appears to be on travel that gives back and is ethical in its footprint. We will find clients to be more brand loyal when we deliver versus price shopping – because they have already done their research online but also understand the benefits of using an expert. Terms like authentic and 'living like a local' have been great in introducing clients to cruising destinations but we will be looking for new terms that will relay clients interaction with cruising. Clients will no longer be shopping for travel, they will be reserving an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution through travel.

Now for a little fun... if you were working as a crewmember aboard a cruise ship and you could have any job you want, what would it be?

I certainly would be tempted to go with a third career as a Junior Cruise Director 😊 I like the direct connection and creative interaction they have with the cruisers onboard. Not too different than what I work for with my clients! Hosting the games, events and activities onboard as well as administering them would be great because of the immediate feedback. Always a great opportunity to grow, create new ideas and look for ways to improve service. I can't sing or dance though...but I could have fun with the cruisers who do and take a few lessons along the way.



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