

## TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS

# Jeannie Lippard

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# **Jeannie Lipphard, ACC, MCC, ECC, ECCS, LCS Travel Agent/Independent Contractor Cruise & Travel Planner (hosted by Nexion) Centreville, Maryland**

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

In the late 1990's I started cruising and loved it – not only the fun aspect of cruising/traveling but also the behind scenes operations and the industry including the history of the major cruise lines, the ships, and more. My travel agent at the time, Diane Mason (also an ECCS, CLIA Individual Agent Member), suggested I consider getting into the business so I went to work for her and her husband Jim Mason in 2001 as a home-based agent. After getting accredited (ACC, MCC, ECC, ECCS, and LCS), traveling to new destinations, attending conferences/seminars, as well as learning the business, I went on my own in 2005. It took those first few years working with mentors like Diane and Jim as well as building a client base to set myself up for success. Remember the business does not fall in your lap – it takes many hours of hard work and investment in yourself and your business (travel, certifications, education, etc) to be successful in any type of sales plus a huge passion for cruise travel – you have to love what you sell!

## **What is your approach to serving clients?**

Quick, efficient, and detailed customer service – sometimes it's not about what gifts you give to clients but more so getting back to clients quickly with information and providing details – in our culture clients expect quick service – emails during business hours should receive a response within 1 hour even if to just acknowledge the client email and advise when more detailed information will be provided.

## **What are some of your best practices in selling cruise travel?**

Again, quick and efficient customer service – always reply to that email or return that call as quickly as possible – even again just to acknowledge the client's email or call and to advise when information i.e. quotes, etc will be provided back. If a client contacts me I get back to them quickly – never leave a client without a response as that client may move on to another agent or a cruise line direct.

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

First time cruisers that are unsure if they will enjoy a cruise – overcoming those obstacles – ships are small and confined, fear of motion sickness, etc – if you explain and sell with passion, confidence, and experience (I've personally sailed worldwide on 68 cruises) you can overcome those obstacles.

## **What has been a career highlight, thus far?**

Actually, I have several highlights. Selling my first full Regent World Cruise, several groups (both affinity and promo) of over 100 cabins, Nexion Circle of Excellence top 5 producer out of over 3500 agents nationwide in 2015, 2016, and 2017, Nexion top Carnival producer for 2016/2017, earning my ECCS status, and more!

## **Are you CLIA Certified? If so, what at what level and how has that certification impacted your career?**

I worked through all certifications early in my career obtaining and maintaining the ECCS certification since 2005. Certainly, the ability to advise clients that as a travel agent I have the highest industry credentials gives a client the assurance that they are working with a professional experienced cruise travel agent.

## **How has your CLIA membership and/or professional development helped you in your career?**

Education and knowledge – just like any profession the more you learn about the product/industry you are selling and how to sell it, the more successful you will become. CLIA provides that education at a reasonable cost – remember you have to invest in yourself and your business.

## **What cruising trends are you seeing?**

River cruises are best way to visit Europe – unpack once and move town to town through several countries. Destinations like Iceland/Greenland, Galapagos, and Transatlantic crossings.

## **What is your fondest personal cruise memory?**

Well I've sailed many times on both ocean and river cruises with many memories but some of my best are the Christmas Markets along the Main River in Germany, sailing the Greek Isles, sailing out of Venice, sailing the Chesapeake Bay from Baltimore, and believe it or not my first cruise on the Carnival Ecstasy in 1998 – I remember seeing a cruise ship for the first time in Miami from our taxi – I was in awe – and still get goose bumps after all these years when I get that first glimpse of a ship!

## **Any last thoughts?**

Being a successful cruise travel agent means hard work and time – this is a 7 day a week 24 hour a day job – you must be available to clients – and you have to go out and get those clients – ask for referrals, stay in touch, and more – building and maintaining a good client base with referrals and repeat business!



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