

Travel Trade Weekly – Tour Operator Profile

QUESTIONS:

When and how did you get involved in the tourism industry? I was born in Canada and moved back to Rome (reverse immigrating with my parents) as a young teenager. So right away I was a curious tourist in my new surroundings! When I finished my schooling, I embarked on a two-year apprenticeship to learn the ins and outs of inbound travel, discovering how to create a pleasing tourist experience for the North American visitor. I was field-trained as a tour assistant, escort and guide, and driver/guide. This bottom-up training taught me many things – how to be efficient, the importance of top-notch staff and equipment, how to think on my feet when a change became necessary, and especially, how to enjoy and be in the moment with people who were strangers only moments before. That's why I love tourism! The natural progression was to form my own company, Driver In Italy, in 1994.

What are the most important attributes of a good travel agent/tour operator? Right off the bat, you have to be a good listener, and not just to the words but to the pauses, to the changes in tone, and if you can see the person, to their body language. Some people don't know or can't articulate what they want and need you to tell them what it is! That said, once you are confident that you have discovered the client's passion, go for it with suggestions that show you are really a master of your destination. And follow up, even when the client is still on tour, to make sure that there aren't ways to make it better.

On the other side, sometimes I have to scale down on the client's wish list if I know that it can't be done well in the time that they have available. I'd rather show them part of their list really memorably than do a drive-by you-just-saw-the-coliseum tour.

Lastly, networking and partnerships are crucial to my business. On-going communication with colleagues and clients keeps me up to date and shows me innovative ways to please the client.

What is the most frequently asked question that your company receives from customers? Probably 'do you work with travel agents and do you pay commission?' Yes, and we do, 10%.

What are the must-visits and must-dos in Italy that no one should miss? (destinations, attractions or activities)

For those who have never been to Italy, I suggest Italy 101, the gorgeous trio of Rome, Florence and Venice. The highlights of these cities are well known, but I also offer insider recommendations of places to sample some of the best regional cuisine, wine and gelato. Italy is all about sybaritic pleasures. Take time to enjoy them!

Which destination is on your bucket list? I can never get enough of the gorgeous Amalfi Coast! Outside of Italy, Nepal is calling my name...