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SECTION ONE

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30 UNDER 30

SEE PAGE 22



INSIDE:

St. Maarten / St. Martin

New Carnival, Silversea Ships

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AUGUST 2018 | Volume 351, Number 8

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12

Cover Story

11TH ANNUAL 30UNDER30

22

The next generation of agents who will discover new places to go and new ways to connect with travelers

COVER DESIGN BY **Debbie Sheehan**

News

- 10** Walt Disney World To Get Makeover As 50th Anniversary Approaches
- 11** Young Travel Agents Tend to Flock to Leisure Selling

In Every Issue

- 2** From the Editor
- 6** Trend Watch
- 36** Travel Agent University
- 42** Edit Index



18

Features

12 CARIBBEAN, THE BAHAMAS AND BERMUDA

St. Maarten and St. Martin have encouraging hotel developments to report

16 CRUISES

Silversea Expeditions' new flagship delivers pampering coupled with adventure

18 CRUISES

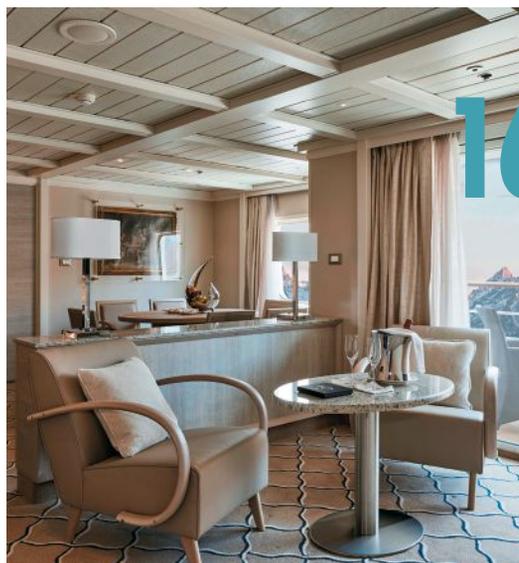
Exploring *Carnival Horizon*, the line's second *Vista*-class ship, which is full of fun

20 CONSORTIA

The latest conference news, products and initiatives from consortia and host agencies

37 RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS

Rising travel advisors share their best practices and other secrets to success



16

There's More to Be Done

WHAT A GREAT TIME this is to be growing into a career in the travel advisor industry. Consumers are seeking more diverse, authentic travel experiences and suppliers are doing a great job of providing them. There's a strong demand for travel across the board. In the United States alone, hotel occupancy rates are at a 30-year high and domestic resorts are seeing the largest revenue growth. New cruise ships are extremely chic and high tech, and expedition cruising has become more luxurious. Tour operators, whether they're serving the mass market or affluent travelers, are venturing into more exotic locales. It's all very exciting and new.

As a result, the role of the travel advisor has become more diverse. Clients don't know what they don't know and need to be schooled on what's available. They may not have a clue that boutique hotels have upped their game and that a non-branded, urban property in a city center may provide a more dynamic stay than the luxury chain resort that's virtually a household name. A couple may dream of trekking through the South of France not realizing they'll need to change hotels every night if they want to see every sight on their bucket list.

The savvy travel advisor, however, will know exactly which cruise itinerary will hit all of their ports and provide a much greater ease of travel.

This year's "class" of 30Under30 has really embraced the notion that they can help people travel better. In fact, they see that as the essence of their job. Frances Sarrett of McCabe World Travel said it best.

"I could listen to a client's request and fulfill it, but instead, I provide what they could have," this young advisor told us. "Clients don't know what's out there and what they could have with so many choices. I've realized that a new hotel, cruise line, or land/tour operator could be the missing link to make their itinerary echo for years to come."

Ryan Barks of Travel Haus of St Louis has the same view. "My day-to-day responsibilities are to meet with clients who want to travel but, for lack of better terms, don't know how," he says. "This enables me to be their guide in helping them find the right destination/resort/cruise that entices them to catch the same bug we all have."

When we launched our first 30Under30 issue in 2008, many suppliers were openly vocal that they didn't see much of a future for travel agents because it was an aging industry with few fresh faces coming into it. If a young agent went to an industry event, odds were no one else near their age would be in the room.

Fast forward to 2018: There's been an incredible youth wave, thanks to the extremely diligent efforts of the agency networks. They've created sophisticated, integrated programs to educate and develop very viable career paths for newbies to the industry. Individual agencies have done the same and these days when you go to industry events, there's typically a much more balanced range of age groups.

Our work is not done, however. Many of the more venerable travel advisors are finally getting ready to retire. The amount of experience and knowledge that will go with them cannot be measured, and we all need to find ways to bring still more new people into the travel advisor arena.

It's a challenge, but I say, we're up for it.

So, congratulations to all who have supported this youth movement, and congratulations to our Class of 2018. We're very glad you're here.



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TREND WATCH

Consumers Value Advisors' Knowledge Over Trip Price



Good news for travel agents: product and destination knowledge top price when it comes to what consumers value about working with a travel professional. That's from Ensemble Travel Group's first Ensemble Agents Make A

Difference Survey, which polled 2,000 of the organization's members in the U.S. and Canada.

AGENT SKILLS AND SERVICES THEIR CUSTOMERS APPRECIATE MOST

Product knowledge (i.e., differences between cruise lines, hotels)	65 percent
Destination knowledge	53 percent
Help in emergency situations	30 percent
Special deals/amenities (i.e., upgrades)	26 percent
Time savings	22 percent
Price	11 percent

Agent Use by Generation

As we salute young Millennial travel agents beginning on page 22, we note that Millennial travelers appear to be more inclined to use a travel advisor than older generations.

Percentage of Total Vacations:	Millennials	Xers	Boomers	Matures
Traditional Travel Agents				
Vacations aided by traditional travel agents	12%	7%	6%	7%
Past Use of Traditional Travel Agents	Millennials	Xers	Boomers	Matures
Used a traditional travel agent for at least one vacation during the past 12 months	20%	10%	10%	15%
Average number of vacations*	2.9	1.8	1.4	1.6

* Among travelers who used a traditional travel agent to plan at least one vacation during the past 12 months.

Source: MMGY Global's 2018-19 Portrait of American Travelers

St. Maarten/St. Martin Holds Its Own

According to MMGY's 2018-19 Portrait of American Travelers, St. Maarten / St. Martin has taken sole position of third place among "Caribbean Countries or Regions Interested in Visiting During the Next Two Years." In last year's survey it was tied for third with three other island destinations. Also, at 19 percent, it has closed the gap between itself and The Bahamas (24 percent) and U.S.V.I. (22 percent).

Read about the latest hotel reopenings on the island on page 12.

Portugal Dominates World Travel Awards

For the second year in a row, Portugal has been voted the best European tourist destination and Turismo de Portugal was once again recognized as the best official European tourism agency. In all, Portugal garnered 36 awards, including 24 for various resorts, hotels and other accom-

modations, as well as tour and transportation services, and also:

- Europe's Best Destination City: Lisbon
- Best European Cruise Port: Port of Lisbon
- Best Island Destination: Madeira



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SHORT TAKES

Gina Gabbard has been named senior VP of leisure and independent advisors for **Ovation Travel Group**. Most recently she served as VP of leisure sales and marketing at Tzell Travel Group. Although it's a newly created position, she will largely be filling the role formerly held by **Jack Ezon**, who will be transitioning roles to exclusively manage his own luxury leisure business within the Ovation family.

Hilton has appointed **Jorge Giannattasio** as senior VP and head of Caribbean and Latin America operations. He joins Hilton from SBE Entertainment Group, where he held the role of COO.

Carlson Wagonlit Travel has named **Niklas Andréen** as executive VP and chief traveler experience officer, effective September 2018. He most recently served as a senior VP at Travelport.

Lesli Reynolds, a 20-year veteran with Omni Hotels, is the new senior VP of operations for **Aqua-Aston Hospitality**.

Valerie Wilson Travel has hired former Protravel International President **Patrick Fragale** as its new senior VP. He'll work closely with co-president Jennifer Wilson-Buttigieg.

AmaWaterways has promoted **Alex Pinelo** to the new position of VP, national accounts.

Disney World to Get Makeover As 50th Anniversary Approaches

WALT DISNEY IMAGINEERING executives took the opportunity of this summer's opening of the highly anticipated 11-acre Toy Story Land to announce other new and updated development plans leading up to the 2021 celebration of Walt Disney World's 50th anniversary.

Tops on the list is the continuing 25-acre transformation of Disney's Hollywood Studios that began with Toy Story Land and will see its culmination with the 14-acre Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, scheduled to open in late fall 2019. The latter is an epic adventure putting guests in the middle of a battle between the First Order and the Resistance, and the opportunity to pilot the Millennium Falcon through space and fire its laser canons. A Disney Star Wars-themed hotel will also be opening near Disney's Hollywood Studios in tandem with the new attractions, offering an immersive Star Wars guest experience.

Other Disney developments in progress include Lightning McQueen's Racing Academy, a live show experience starring characters from the Pixar Animation Cars movie series. It is set to open in 2019 near the Hollywood Studios Rock 'n Roller Coaster. This fall, the new Disney Junior Dance Party will premiere at Disney's Hollywood Studios. The high energy music party will include character appearances from Disney Junior TV Shows, including "Doc McStuffins," "The Lion Guard" and "Mickey and the Road Racers."

Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway will open in 2019 as the first Walt Disney

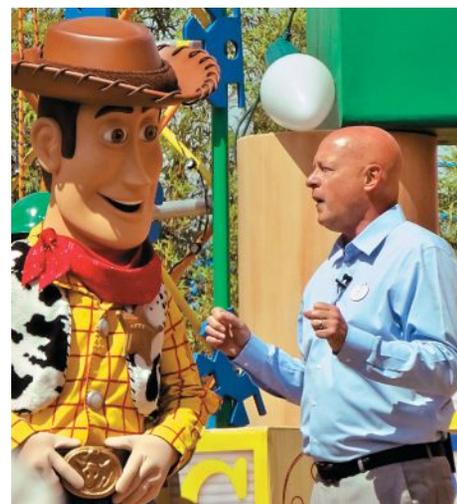


PHOTO BY MAUREN CODY STONE

Disney Parks Chairman Bob Chapek joins Woody at the dedication of Toy Story Land.

World ride dedicated to these two iconic characters. New technology on the ride will put guests in the middle of their own Disney Channel Mickey Mouse cartoon, where anything can happen.

The first play areas for the new Play Disney Parks mobile app, launched in Toy Story Land on June 30, include Peter Pan's Flight in Fantasyland and Space Mountain in Tomorrowland in the Magic Kingdom, in addition to Slinky Dog Dash in Toy Story Land.

More play areas in Walt Disney World will follow, and the app is free to download from the Apple Store and Google Play. The colorful new Minnie Van Service is available throughout Walt Disney World as an on-demand transportation service accessible through the Lyft app.

—JOHN STONE

Double Reward Points From Club Med

CLUB MED has launched a new double points reward program for travel agents.

Agents who book select Club Med resorts now through August 21 using promo code DBLPTS at check-out, can receive double their Great Member and

Great Agent Loyalty Points. The offer is good at Club Med's resorts in Cancun, Punta Cana, Ixtapa Pacific and Bucca-nee's Creek.

For travel dates and other details, visit www.clubmedta.com.

Young Travel Agents Flock to Leisure Selling

WITH TRAVEL AGENT retirement on the rise, younger advisors are increasingly entering the industry to sell leisure travel, according to the latest data from Hot Travel Jobs' travel agent survey. The organization just released a breakdown of the data from its latest survey, which covers 2017, regarding the ages of advisors.

According to the report, the percentage of travel agents in the 55+ age bracket increased between 2016 and 2017 by 7 percent, the largest increase recorded during that period. The 35–45 bracket, by contrast, declined the most, by 4 percent. The youngest age bracket measured by the report, 20–35, hovered around the lowest percentage, at 2–3 percent.

Breaking the data down by sector, however, Hot Travel Jobs found

that younger agents tend to flock to leisure travel. Leisure travel among young agents is 7 to 8 percent higher than corporate travel agents or travel managers.

That tracks with Hot Travel Jobs' previous data on the subject, which showed that travel agents' plans to retire increased in 2017 versus 2016. Overall plans increased 2 percent that year, with percentages of agents reporting that they plan to retire in two to five years or six to 10 years both on the rise.

Focus on Consolidation

The industry has been preparing for the coming retirement wave by focusing on consolidation, as many agency owners looking to retire or simply step down their roles will

most likely be looking to sell their agencies. At its most recent EDGE Conference, Travel Leaders Network announced the launch of a new, dedicated Agency Marketplace website for agency owners looking to sell their agency.

Aimed at matching up buyers and sellers, the new website will allow owners who are looking to sell to list their agency, and set restrictions on the type of buyer the owners are looking for.

Even as older travel agents retire, younger agents have stepped up to make waves in the travel industry. For the past 10 years **Travel Agent** has been profiling top agents in our annual 30Under30 feature. The 11th and latest edition begins on page 22 of this issue. —ADAM LEPOSA

Tours Specialists Inc. Launches Croatia FAMs

TOURS SPECIALISTS INC. of Florida, is offering four FAM trips, including a five-night "Croatia From Dubrovnik to Zagreb." This tour, which departs on Sundays through September 23, starts in Dubrovnik and takes guests to Split, Trogir, Zadar and Zagreb. Travelers can explore UNESCO World Heritage sites, see historic landmarks such as Diocletian's Palace and the Cathedral of St. Lawrence, go on guided sightseeing tours, and more. Prices start at \$900 for agents, \$1,000 for companions.

Other FAMs include a six-day "Croatia With Serbian Highlights" trip (from \$1,100, \$1,200) and eight-day "Croatia Adriatic Cruise From Dubrovnik" and "Croatia From Dubrovnik" itineraries (each priced from \$1,450, \$1,550).



Dubrovnik, Croatia



Fairmont Kea Lani, Maui

Journese Offers Bonus For Fairmont Bookings

JOURNESE, the luxury brand of Pleasant Holidays, is offering travel agents the chance to earn 500 Bonus TRIP (Travel Reward Incentive Program) Points for every confirmed Journese booking at Fairmont Hotels & Resorts worldwide. The offer is good on bookings made now through August 31, 2018, for travel through August 31, 2019, and is combinable with all other resort promotions such as complimentary nights, special room rates, spa and resort credits, golf packages, and complimentary daily breakfast for two.



Sonesta Ocean Point Resort will reopen on November 15. Shown here is the Sunset Butler Suite that has 180-degree views of the Caribbean Sea.

ST. MAARTEN / ST. MARTIN

Dutch and French sides both have encouraging hotel developments to report.

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY on the island of St. Maarten / St. Martin continues to recover at a steady pace from the ravages of last September's Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Several hotels and smaller properties have reopened, others have scheduled reopening dates and airlines have added new service.

St. Martin: Belmond and Beyond

According to tourism officials, most hotels in French St. Martin were destroyed, but about 200-plus hotel rooms are now available, including the **Mercure Saint Martin Marina and Spa Hotel**; 300 to 400 more are expected to be available by December with a total of 700 open by the end of the year.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments in St. Martin comes from **Belmond La Samanna**, which reports that it will begin welcoming guests once again as of December 10, follow-

ing a top-to-bottom property refresh. The property's 83 guestrooms, eight three- and four-bedroom villas and public spaces are getting a complete redesign by Muza Lab, London. The new look incorporates pastel blues, greens, pinks and peaches inspired by the natural tones of the Caribbean, with shells and corals, along with botanical prints on fabrics, artworks, lighting and mirrors, serving as accents.

The Baie Longue Bar, Trellis restaurant and main building were all included in the refresh. Dining is also available at the La Cave Wine Cellar, which resort officials say is the largest private wine cellar in the Caribbean, with a fine wine paring experience curated by the head chef. The Beach Bar was also refreshed, with swings, monochrome lounge seating and chandeliers. It serves champagne and cocktails with sunset views.

Belmond is also offering a two-property package with **Belmond Cap Juluca** on Anguilla, which is also reopening November 17. A five-night stay (three at La Samanna, two at Cap Juluca) for two people during low season, subject to availability, starts from \$3,500, including transfers and a \$200 credit per resort, excluding taxes and resort fees.

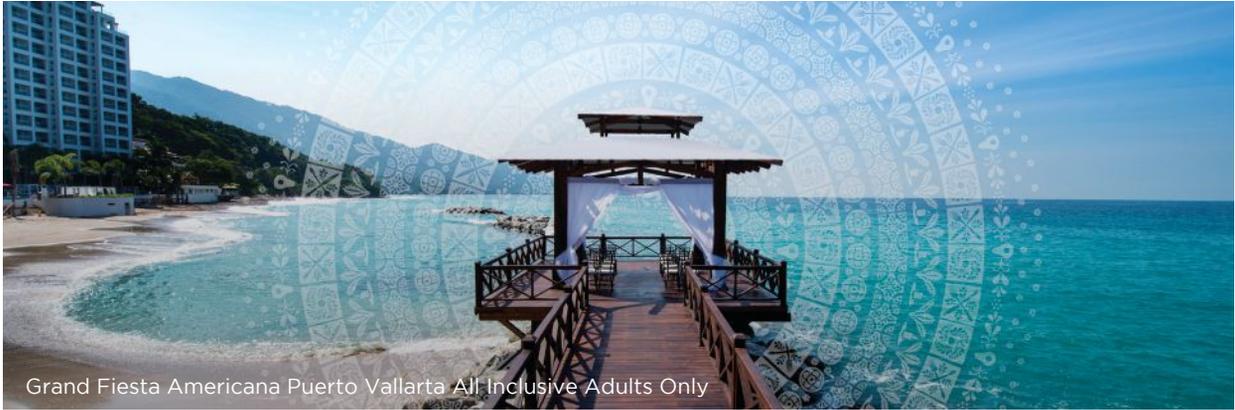
St. Maarten Resort Report

On the Dutch side of the island, there are currently several hundred bookable hotel rooms available, including such larger properties as **Divi Little Bay Beach Resort**, **Simpson Bay Resort & Marina** and **Oyster Bay Beach Resort**. Some portions of the latter are still under construction, with all renovations slated to be completed by December.

Sonesta St. Maarten Resorts will reopen its adults-only **Sonesta Ocean**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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DESTINATIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Point Resort on November 15, and its family-friendly **Sonesta Maho Beach Resort, Casino & Spa** on February 1. Both are in the middle of a complete renovation after being demolished by Hurricane Irma last September.

Sonesta Maho Beach's Sky Tower sustained the most damage and the renovation required that the building be stripped to its main structural frame, which was fortunately spared by the storm. The reconstruction project is completely overhauling the building, instating a comprehensive architectural and interior redesign. Most importantly, the project will install TCK and LVKE building technology with a storm resistant building envelope that can withstand sustained winds in excess of 200 mph and severe earthquakes. Hurricane Irma had sustained winds of 165 mph.

Sonesta Ocean Point Resort fortu-



Belmond La Samanna will begin welcoming guests as of December 10, following a top-to-bottom property refresh.

nately sustained somewhat less damage, with the structure, mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems remaining in good condition, as the property had undergone a gut renovation in 2015. Repairs are being made to damaged areas, with improvements implemented to increase the storm resistance of the building's exterior envelope. The Ocean Point lobby will be entirely redesigned and given an updated contemporary style, while the new Casa



Some portions of the Oyster Bay Beach Resort are still under construction, with all renovations scheduled to be completed by December.

Blue, a Spanish-style tapas restaurant, will debut on the rooftop terrace above Azul restaurant.

Maho Village, the shopping and nightlife promenade located outside the resorts, along with Casino Royale, are undergoing a massive transformation as well, and are set to re-open this summer with a modern new look. Casino Royale will continue to offer more than 21,000 square feet of gaming and entertainment with the biggest theater in the region, and will debut two new alfresco restaurants and a new outdoor bar and lounge overlooking the main street of Maho Village.

Through September 30, Sonesta Ocean Point Resort and Sonesta Maho Beach Resort, Casino & Spa are offering a pre-opening 45 percent discount promotion that will be available to book online at www.sonesta.com/stmaarten or by calling 800-SONESTA and using promo code "Preopening."

Travel agents are also invited to book and experience either property themselves with Sonesta St. Maarten Resorts' new "See for Yourself" Program. Agent travel dates and rates are:

Sonesta Ocean Point Resort: November 15 to December 21, 2018, and January 6 to December 20, 2019. Junior Suite is \$145 per person, per night; an upgraded room category is based on availability, subject to surcharge.

Sonesta Maho Beach Resort: February 1 to December 20, 2019. The Run of House (ROH) room rate is \$85 and an upgraded room category is \$105 per person, per night. Children up to the age of five are free and ages six to 12 are \$45 per child, per night.

Available Activities

The St. Maarten Tourist Board reports that nearly 90 percent of all on-island activities are already available for guests to enjoy. Popular offerings at Aqua Mania Adventures, Flavors of St. Maarten, Rainforest Adventures, Lee's Deep Sea Fishing, the Topper's Rhum Distillery and more are open. For those looking to get a taste of St. Maarten's cuisine, the vast majority of restaurants on the Dutch side are open, in particular along Front Street, the Boardwalk, Simpson Bay and Maho Stripes.

By Air and Sea

In terms of air travel, two-thirds of all carriers that provided flights to and from the island have resumed regular service, and American Airlines has increased capacity on its daily flight out of Miami, as well as added a new daily nonstop from Charlotte as of November 4. American will add a second daily nonstop from Miami effective December 19. JetBlue currently has daily service from New York's JFK, Delta flies three times a week from Atlanta, and United has weekly service from Newark.

On the cruise front, **Crystal Cruises'** *Crystal Esprit* will sail roundtrip from Marigot, St. Martin's capital, on a series of five seven-day yachting itineraries, beginning November 11, and an 11-day Christmas cruise departing on December 23. The public ferry service between Marigot Bay and Blowing Point in Anguilla operates every 45 minutes, with 14 round-trips a day.

—ADAM LEPOSA AND DAVID K. MOSEDER



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'SILVER CLOUD EXPEDITION'

Silversea Expeditions' new flagship delivers pampering coupled with adventure.

AS SILVERSEA EXPEDITIONS marked its 10th anniversary in June, **Travel Agent** was onboard the recently updated *Silver Cloud Expedition*, its newest flagship, for a London-to-Dublin celebratory sailing. Originally launched in 1993 for **Silversea Cruises'** classic fleet, today it's the line's largest expedition ship, carrying 254 guests (200 in polar regions).

During a \$40 million 2017 drydock, *Silver Cloud* received an ice-strengthened hull, so it can operate safely in polar regions. This past June, for example, it journeyed to 82 degrees north, less than 500 miles from the North Pole. Here are a few "take-aways" from our non-polar two-night cruise.

INTERIOR CHANGES: Guests who've sailed on *Silver Cloud* in the past will notice that the ship's interior has a lighter interior color scheme, similar to what's on *Silver Muse*. Public spaces and suites also have expedition-

ary-focused artwork — in many cases large, historic black-and-white photos of famous expeditions. Thanks to Silversea's partnership with the Royal Geographic Society in the UK, select voyages feature RGS speakers who lecture in the onboard Explorer Lounge. These small steps show how the ship's onboard personality has evolved; I felt *Silver Cloud* definitely "looked the part" for its new expeditionary role.

ULTRA-LUXURY SERVICE "LIVES":

Ultra-luxury is alive and well on this vessel, despite its conversion to expedition cruising. Service was professional but both friendly and nicely anticipatory. *Silver Cloud* has 223 crew members, including butlers for every suite. Butlers will help guests pack or unpack, make spa or dining reservations, set up al fresco dining on the balcony, or arrange an in-suite cocktail party with friends who are traveling onboard.

On embarkation day, my butler promptly introduced himself. He offered to help me unpack, stocked my minibar with favorite beverages and asked how he could assist; his service was consistently good throughout the cruise. I noticed that waiters, bartenders and restaurant managers were also professional, friendly and eager to please — offering to get refills without being asked or going to La Terrazza's buffet for "this" and "that," upon request. Dining service in The Restaurant was well-orchestrated.

While I didn't have time to experience the Zagara Spa, I was greeted pleasantly when I visited to look around and a spa staffer promptly showed me a treatment room when I asked — and without any "hard sell" for bookings. Even at debarkation, the security crew member at the gangway was proactive in his desire to assist guests.

Silver Cloud's Owner's Suite is available as a one-bedroom configuration or as two bedroom by adjoining with a Vista Suite.



PAMPERING ACCOMMODA-

TIONS: *Silver Cloud* has opulent, large Owner's and Grand Suites, but also many other sizes — from 240 to 1,314 square feet. Since 80 percent have private verandas, it's easy for many guests to just step outside their suite to watch whales, penguins or other wildlife. My 295-square-foot Verandah Suite, #624, was a pampering enclave of luxury, and it was just a short walk to guest services and the expedition desk. *Silver Cloud's* suites all feature such creature comforts as luxurious queen-sized beds (convertible to two twins) with high-thread count sheets, down duvets and pillow choices.

My adjacent sitting area had a couch, two chairs, a coffee table, plus a long credenza with a writing desk, mini-fridge, shelves and a large flat-screen HDTV with high-tech entertainment system. The walk-in closet housed fluffy robes, slippers, drawers and a personal safe. The marble bathroom had one sink on a marble vanity, a toilet and shower, and guests can choose either Bulgari or Ferragamo toiletries. All suites have free Wi-Fi.

A SUPERB THEATER: This ship's large, multi-tiered Explorer Lounge is the hot spot for lectures, presentations and movie / video showings. I attended two "live" programs here and observed that the theater had a good sound system, large video screens and very good sight lines. Guests who wish to sleep in and still catch a lecture can do so via the in-suite video system.

On select voyages, speakers from the UK's Royal Geographical Society will share insights, research and archive materials with guests in the theater. During our presentation, the Society brought a sextant used by Charles Darwin and guests could come down front to closely look at it.

CUISINE AND WINE: On embarkation day, I dined at the Pool Bar & Grill for lunch; it offered tasty salads, burgers and other light fare. In the evening, this venue becomes The Grill with lava stone cooking (meat, fish or vegetables) directly at the guest's table. La Terrazza proved a lovely casual venue with an



Silver Cloud has introduced My Photo Academy, using the ship's new Photo Studio as a hub for photography-based workshops.

upscale buffet approach for breakfast and lunch. Guests can choose from fresh berries, exotic fruits, multiple fresh salads, hot entrees, carved meats, sushi, fresh pasta, freshly baked breads, soups, yummy desserts and more. During dinner, La Terrazza transforms into an intimate Italian eatery with table service.

The Restaurant serves up contemporary, international cuisine, plus regional specialties (based on the itinerary). We felt both the cuisine and wine selections were very good. Given our limited time onboard, we couldn't experience La Dame by Relais & Chateaux, offering a six-course tasting menu with fine wines (\$60 per person). I did order room service — complimentary and available 24-7 — for breakfast. It was timely, tasty and elegantly presented by my butler.

OTHER PERKS: Photography of wildlife / marine life and stunning scenery is a top pursuit of expedition guests, so *Silver Cloud* has introduced My Photo Academy, using the ship's new Photo Studio as a hub for photography-based workshops. In private or group lessons, beginners can learn how to take and edit photos and pros can improve their techniques.

At the fitness center, guests can work out with elliptical trainers, free weights, treadmills and exercise bikes. Circuit training and Pilates, yoga and aerobics classes are available onboard as well. There's also a pool and two whirlpools. *Silver Cloud's* modern boutiques have been re-designed recently and offer such brands as Le Vian, Buccellati, Damiani, Tag Heuer,

Bulgari, Gucci, Paul & Shark, Sisley and Swarovski.

This ship never felt crowded, and there were always little nooks or lounges for reading throughout the ship. The Panorama Lounge or Dolce Vita are good spots for cocktails with friends or a hot cup of Earl Grey. Cigar lovers can head for Connoisseur's Corner. We particularly liked relaxing in Tor's Observation Library / Lounge; the venue's name is a tip of the hat from Manfredi Lefebvre d'Ovidio to Torstein Hagen, the chairman of Viking Cruises, who opened Manfredi's as an alternative dining venue on Viking's ocean ships.

GOOD TO KNOW: *Silver Cloud* carries an expedition team of 20-22 experts. Depending on the itinerary, these could include biologists, geologists, ornithologists and wildlife / marine experts; they lecture, run workshops, lead Zodiac and kayak trips and guide nature walks, all complimentary. Shore excursions are conducted in groups of 14 or fewer guests. The ship carries 16 Zodiacs and 10 kayaks, and all guests on polar expeditions receive a complimentary parka.

Among its sailings are special "Explorer's Collection" voyages, a partnership between Silversea Expeditions and the Royal Geographical Society. These retrace (in part at least) the routes taken by early explorers. For example, *Silver Cloud* departs August 26, 2019, on a 16-day roundtrip Explorer's Collection voyage from Kangerlussuaq to Canadian Arctic and Greenland destinations and locales. It's just one of the line's voyages taking ultra-luxury into the adventure zone. —SUSAN J. YOUNG

'CARNIVAL HORIZON'

Line's second 'Vista'-class ship is stunning, fanciful – and full of fun.

AS GUESTS EMBARK the new 3,960-passenger *Carnival Horizon*, eyes fixate on the funnel-shaped “Dreamscape” atrium sculpture descending 24 feet from the ceiling. Comprised of 2,000-plus flexible LED tiles, it displays colorful artwork created by patients of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital plus other rotating imagery. It’s a stunning “Fun Ship” welcome by this 133,500-grt ship, the second in Carnival Cruise Line’s Vista-class.

Travel Agent sailed during a recent four-night New York-to-Bermuda cruise. During “Sail Away,” guests gravitated to the main pool deck and higher decks too, for a celebratory party of dancing, rocking, jamming and moving to the music. Orchestrating the energetic fun was Christopher Williams, a cruise director of Scottish heritage in kilt attire, joined by red-shirted crew members and the Dr. Seuss characters “The Cat in the Hat,” “Thing 1” and “Thing 2.” Above the action, a 270-square-foot outdoor movie screen provided “live” video coverage.

ACTIVITIES GALORE: *Carnival Horizon* introduced the first Dr. Seuss-themed WaterWorks aqua park. A bucket shaped like The Cat in the Hat’s tall hat fills up and dumps water on kids, toddlers play in a splash area and three-deck-high water slides draw older kids and adults; riders must be 42” tall for “Fun Things,” 48” for “Cat’s Hat.” SkyRide, a bike-ride-in-the-sky attraction, which debuted on *Carnival Vista*, was closed for maintenance during our cruise, but is now back in service.

In addition to a robust range of spa treatments, the Cloud 9 Spa and fitness center also offers wellness and fitness seminars. I attended “Detox for Health and Weight Loss,” an excellent presentation by the gym manager,



Carnival Horizon introduces the first Dr. Seuss-themed WaterWorks aqua park.

who offered helpful biological, exercise and wellness information. Guests also packed multiple showings at the IMAX Theatre and Thrill Theater. One man who attended the IMAX 3D version of “Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom” told us that he was “duly frightened” but loved it. Thrill Theater had horror flicks and family showings.

Guests can also head for trivia contests, Carnival Quest (adult scavenger hunt), a blackjack tournament, military appreciation gathering, bingo, pool activities and “Groove for St. Jude,” a charitable dance event. Dr. Seuss fans will discover a “Seuss-A-Palooza Parade and Story Time,” plus “Photo Time with Dr. Seuss.”

Carnival Horizon also has a robust supervised kids/teens club program, including Camp Ocean (2-11), Circle “C” (12-14) and Club O2 (15-17). One nice perk for teens 12-17 is a “Teen Pamper Party” in Cloud 9 Spa. Parents we talked with appreci-

ated Night Owls (10 p.m. to 1 a.m.), allowing them to leave their kids (6 months to 11 years) in Camp Ocean so they could head out to the Limelight Lounge, an adult comedy show or the ‘80s “Rock ‘n Glow” Party.

SPACIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS: *Carnival Horizon* has 1,980 guest state-rooms and suites, including 25 accessible staterooms. Cloud 9 Spa Suites offer spa bathrobes and slippers, Elemis toiletries and such perks as priority spa reservations, unlimited thermal suites access and free fitness classes. Also popular are 16 Family Harbor Suites with a large cove balcony and four Havana Cabana Suites with a patio cabana and lanai.

I stayed in #6327, a standard balcony stateroom, starting at \$799 per person double for my cruise. I’m always impressed walking into Carnival’s accommodations because of the space they provide. Our pleasantly decorated stateroom had a king bed (convertible to two twins), pull-out couch, desk /

credenza with a hair dryer, non-stocked mini-fridge and large, interactive, flat-screen TV. One closet accommodates long clothes, another two rows of shorter clothing and a third has drawers, shelves and a safe. Our bathroom was small but perfectly adequate with a small shower, toilet, sink and vanity with small glass shelves extending upward. The balcony had two blue chairs and a small table.

A nice touch? Abraham, my friendly cabin steward, introduced himself and provided his personal business card, displaying his photo, name and phone for stateroom service. We observed that all stewards in all corridors proactively greeted guests who passed by.

DINING DELIGHTS: As part of a group, I dined in three specialty restaurants. Cucina del Capitano served family-style Italian favorites (\$15 per person, \$10 for kids under 12). I liked the Arancini Fried Risotto Balls with baby arugula, shaved Parmesan cheese and tomato sauce and the calamari. Popular entrees are Spaghetti Carbonara and Bistecca alla Griglia, an Italian version of a New York sirloin steak.

For upscale specialty dining, Fahrenheit 555 Steakhouse (\$35 per person) serves succulent USDA prime steaks and cooked-to-perfection lobster and seafood. A server displays a sea salt box tableside, and guests choose one for the chef in preparing their meal. For dessert, if the entire table agrees, order “Art at Your Table.” In wizard-like fashion, the chef will brush, concoct and flick ingredients to create a colorful, yummy masterpiece surrounded by a white chocolate shell.

I also dined solo at the specialty Jiji Asian Kitchen (\$15 per person, \$10 for children under 12) and savored the Singapore Chili Shrimp. I instantly bonded with several servers from northern Thailand. All Jiji crew members were friendly, almost as though they were family. One night as I was entering Cucina del Capitano (next door), several Jiji waiters saw me through the glass, waved and called out, “Susan, what are you doing? Why are you deserting us? Come back tomorrow!”



The “Dreamscape” atrium sculpture on the new *Carnival Horizon* features custom-designed, continuously changing artwork created by patients of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and other imagery.

At 1 p.m. on a sea day, I was immediately seated in Bonsai Sushi’s main dining room without a reservation. Melt-in-your-mouth good is Wagyu Kukuni (\$4), three beef bites enhanced by caramelized onion and teriyaki sauce. I also enjoyed the light shrimp tempura (\$7). Sushi and sashimi fans can choose from Ebi (shrimp); Sake (salmon); Maguro (yellow fin tuna); and Hamachi (amberjack), all at \$1.50 per piece. “Rolls” are \$5 –\$7 each.

Bonsai Sushi also has a separate teppanyaki room (the line’s first) with two eight-seat tables. Due to very limited capacity, pre-sailing reservations are imperative and, even then, may be unavailable. Still, we’re happy to see Carnival wade into the teppanyaki arena and hoping for more tables on future ships.

Carnival Horizon also has a new Guy’s Pig & Anchor Smokehouse/Brewhouse with barbecue favorites created by celebrity chef Guy Fieri; it’s in the space formerly occupied by Red Frog Pub. Yes, the Red Frog Rum Bar is still on the pool deck, along with BlueIguana Tequila Bar, BlueIguana Cantina and Guy’s Burger Joint. I met a teen ashore who pronounced: “I’m going to try every single one of Guy’s burgers before I get off the ship.”

Given our schedule, we didn’t dine in the Reflections dining room, but guests told us it was a good experience. The Lido marketplace served up the usual cornucopia of tasty buffet / station offerings. Complimentary breakfast room

service was a no-show one day, okay on two others. Daytime / evening room service offers both complimentary and a la carte dishes.

PROS AND CONS: *Carnival Horizon* offers the lovely, adults-only Serenity, a great spot for relaxing on cushioned loungers with a cool drink and a good book. Also a “pro” are the Playlist Productions shows, including Celestial Strings, Vintage Pop and Soulbound (singers and dancers interact with LED video screens). I personally liked Carnival’s two-level, mall-style shopping approach, showcasing such brands as LeVian, Victoria’s Secret and, for the first time, Michael Kors, Kate Spade, Breitling and Hublot.

Sometimes this ship did feel crowded, other times not. My biggest personal “con” and that of many other guests on this cruise was the high-tech elevator system, which didn’t work that well on a ship of thousands. It created “impatient” people weary of waiting in elevator lobbies. Yes, it was faster once guests boarded a car, but they couldn’t change their mind and pick a different deck en route.

Overall, *Carnival Horizon* provides very good value for money, given the high quality and diversity of dining experiences, onboard entertainment, activities. Plus, the crew is friendly. The ship sails to Bermuda and the Caribbean from New York this summer, and will reposition to Miami in September.

–SUSAN J. YOUNG

PHOTOS: SUSAN J. YOUNG

CONSORTIA/HOST AGENCY REPORT



To celebrate its 50th anniversary, Ensemble Travel Group will be holding its annual conference at Grand Hyatt Baha Mar in Nassau, the Bahamas, from October 24-28, 2018.

IT'S BEEN A BUSY last few months for the travel industry's consortia and host agencies, and they're pushing ahead into fall and beyond with a number of conferences and new initiatives. Here's an overview.

NEW BOOKING ENGINE: Signature Travel Network has launched its new consumer-facing hotel booking engine. The platform, an initiative created in partnership with Freedom Travel Technologies, includes all of Signature's 1,000-plus preferred hotel and resort partners. This will allow an agency's clients to book their own travel through consultants' websites while still guaranteeing the amenities and commission.

Consumers booking their hotel stay at one of Signature's partner hotels and resorts around the world will receive benefits such as breakfast for two daily, a dining or resort credit, spa credits, complimentary round of golf, airport transfers and welcome amenities.

The need for Signature's hotel booking engine derived from the trend of consumers booking travel online them-

selves through third-party affiliates. With this new tool, consumers have access to all the information while still working with the consultants to receive the additional benefits and be aware of any restrictions outright.

ENSEMBLE ASSEMBLES IN BAHAMAS: To celebrate its 50th anniversary, Ensemble Travel Group will be holding its annual conference at Grand Hyatt Baha Mar in Nassau, the Bahamas, from October 24-28, 2018. This is the organization's first such event to take place outside North America in more than 10 years. Ensemble agents will gather there with the knowledge that their efforts on behalf of their clients have not gone unnoticed. According to the consortium's own Ensemble Agents Make A Difference Survey, travel agents' expertise and know-how far outweigh price when it comes to what their customers appreciate most. (See Trend Watch, page 6.)

Speaking of appreciation, in June, Ensemble recognized its newest class of "Ensemble Elite" members with a spe-

cial celebration at the Club Med Marakech La Palmeraie in Morocco. This annual event recognizes the organization's top-producing members in the U.S. and Canada based on Ensemble preferred supplier sales in the previous year. Included in this year's fete were a number of customized sightseeing, culinary, and shopping excursions exclusively created by Club Med for the Ensemble agents in concert with the consortium's newest partners — Sahara Experience and Morocco National Tourist Office.

A SYMPOSIUM DOWN UNDER: Virtuoso is heading to Australia for its 2019 Symposium. The luxury travel event will be held in Melbourne, May 7-11, and will mark the second time Australia has hosted the annual event, the first being in Sydney in 2009. Only Hong Kong and Spain have also hosted it on two different occasions.

The Virtuoso Symposium will bring approximately 500 luxury travel advisors and executives to Australia for a week-long conference that includes business meetings, networking events and experiences that highlight the destination. Approximately 50 percent of the Symposium attendees will be travel agency owners or managers. Tourism Australia, along with Visit Victoria, are sponsoring the event.

Virtuoso Chairman and CEO Matthew D. Upchurch said in a written statement that, since the organization began operating in Australia in 2004, it has grown to 89 travel agency locations in the country, and that Virtuoso is expecting further growth. Tourism Australia has worked with Virtuoso in North America since 2015 with the aim of building a greater connection between the international luxury market and Australia's luxury offering.

FROM THE "EDGE" TO THE "APEX": Travel Leaders Group and American Express are launching a new travel benefit program to select Gold

Card members in the U.S. and expanding opportunities for all card members to redeem loyalty points. The news was revealed to media at the Travel Leaders Group EDGE Conference that was held in Las Vegas in June. Under the program, dubbed APEX, Travel Leaders Group is introducing “The Travel Collection by Travel Leaders Group,” a special benefit for Gold Card Members.

It works like this, according to officials: U.S. Consumer Gold and Business Gold Card members can gain access to The Travel Collection by calling a Travel Leaders Group agent. The Travel Collection will provide discount offers on flights, value-added benefits at select lodging establishments, shipboard credits on cruises and discounts on escorted and vacation packages.

An important component of the program is that Travel Leaders Group agents will be able to book select

American Express travel services, and also redeem Membership Rewards points on behalf of their clients, and earn a commission doing so. A select number of travel agents are beta-testing the program right now; it is expected to be launched to additional Travel Leaders Group agents later this year.

WORKSHOPS AT SEA: Agents who are attending the CoNexion 2018 conference onboard Royal Caribbean’s *Harmony of the Seas*, Sept. 22-29, will have nearly four dozen workshops to choose to attend. Among these are “Best Practices that Close More Sales & Increase Your Bottom Line,” “Learn the Fundamentals of Social Media for Travel Professionals,” “LGBTQ Travel and Tourism - The What, Why, Where and How,” and “Family Travel onboard Royal Caribbean with Vicki Freed,” among others. There will also be a variety of guest speakers, roundtables, panel

discussions, networking opportunities and a supplier partner trade show.

BIG PLANS FOR AMEX REP: As it launches “Avoya 2025,” a new seven-year innovation plan, Avoya Travel, an American Express Travel Representative, plans to navigate into the future in a bigger, bolder way. That includes everything from securing a new technology patent, tackling the negative impact of rebating on agencies, and streamlining communications so its independent member agencies can sell more efficiently and also interact with suppliers in new ways.

Travel Agent learned about the ambitious plans from executives speaking to 500 attendees, including independent agencies in the Avoya Network, industry leaders, supplier partners and support staff, during the group’s recent conference in Long Beach, CA.

—COMPILED BY DAVID K. MOSEDER



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 VIRTUOSO MEMBER.

Travel Agent's 11th Annual 30 UNDER 30

BY MICHELLE KROL, ADAM LEPOSA, DAVID K. MOSEDER, RUTHANNE TERRERO AND MATT TURNER

MEET THE FUTURE LEADERS OF THE AGENCY INDUSTRY: We present — as we have done every year since 2008 — the next generation of travel agents who will discover new places to go and new ways to connect with travelers. They exist in a 24/7 world of nonstop information, and communicate with each other, with other industry professionals and with clients through multiple platforms. They tweet. They share. They snap pictures and chat about their experiences. And they sell travel in ways that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

Over the past several years, this feature has created a buzz in the industry and also helped fuel a community of young professionals who enjoy being a part of a special, growing niche in the travel business. This year's list of young agents, all of whom were under 30 when the year began, is a testament to our combined success.

Candidates for 30Under30 nominate themselves for the program. Nominees must be currently employed at any level as a travel consultant, should have completed a significant project for his or her travel agency, and be recognized by heads of his or her own organization as an emerging leader.

Here they are — **Travel Agent's** top 30Under30 for 2018.

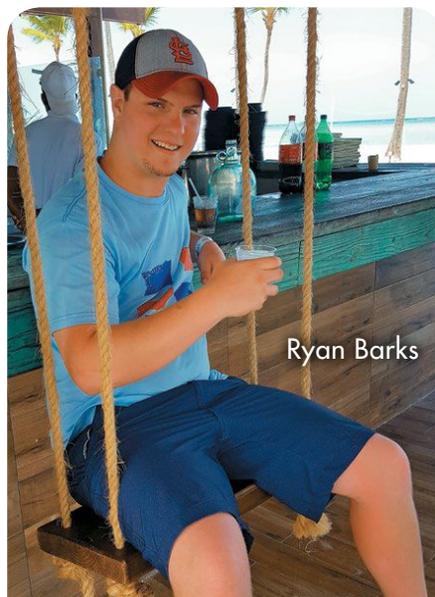
Ryan Barks, 27

Travel Haus of St. Louis

St. Louis

Approaching the act of being a travel agent as a craft has helped Ryan Barks of Travel Haus of St. Louis, an Ensemble member agency, excel. After beginning his career working in the flight-only industry and assisting clients with their air travel plans, he sought out a position at Travel Haus looking for a new challenge.

"I do my best to give my clients that feeling just as they would have hiring a wedding coordinator, a realtor, or any



Ryan Barks

other specialist designed to do the 'leg work' for them," Barks says. "My belief is that if I've done my job right, my clients will exclusively use me for every type of travel, as well as recommend me to everyone they know."

While referrals are key, having a great elevator pitch helps, too. Recently Barks says he has been working at as many bridal shows and events as he can to meet new clients and to keep top of mind for clients he has already spoken with.

One top tip? When picking a hotel, placement is one of the most important things.

“This can make or break an experience,” Barks says, “especially when [the client] has never been to the destination.” Some of his favorites include a hotel in Rome near the Piazza del Popolo that has a spiral staircase leading to a platform for the bed, and a hotel in Florence that overlooks the Arno River near the Ponte Vecchio.

“Rather than simply ask someone where they want to go, I much prefer to ask clients what they want to experience,” Barks says.

Leah Bilquist, 30
TravelSmiths
 Point Pleasant, NJ

Leah Bilquist, a certified Signature Travel Agent, is a member of TravelSmiths’ groups department, where she works with groups of 50 to 200 people. So far this year, she has 20 groups, three to five of which can be traveling simultaneously at any given time.

She says planning group travel, such as for a destination wedding, can be challenging, especially when not everyone in the group is an avid traveler. “It is important to me to make these clients feel comfortable about [traveling and] excited about going,” she tells us. With all of the global uncertainty, Bilquist makes it a priority to gain her clients’ trust and to make them feel as comfortable as possible throughout the entire process.

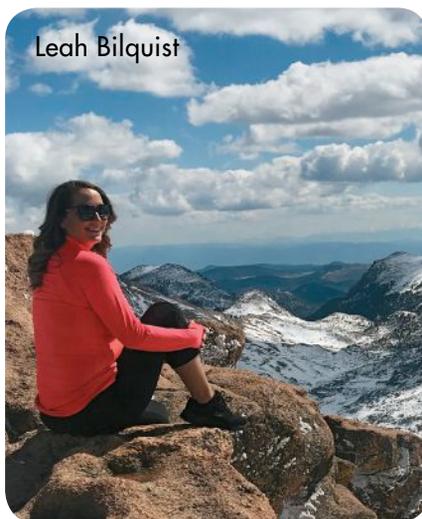
Joy Rons, TravelSmiths’ director of group operations, says, “Leah has been nothing but professional and passionate about her job. She handles clients with class and confidence, which [results in] an important level of respect from the client to the agent.”

Her tip for increasing her bottom line? Upselling. “If someone wants the most beautiful view, I am honest and tell them what room category they need to reserve for that,” Bilquist says. “At the end of the day, people will go over their budget if it means getting what their vacation goals are.”

Brand and destination certifications held by Bilquist include Adventures by Disney, Disney Cruise Line, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, Jumeirah Resorts,



Deanna Bonanni



Leah Bilquist

Club Med, St. Lucia, the Dominican Republic, Bahamas, Fiji and Taiwan.

While Bilquist tells us she loves her job, she says it isn’t for everyone. Being a travel agent “is the hardest job I have ever had, and I put all of my pride into it every day — 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.”

Deanna Bonanni, 28
E. Clarke Travel
 Closter, NJ

As something of a prelude to making our 30Under30 list, Deanna Bonanni of E. Clarke Travel earned a 2018 Pacesetter Award from American Express earlier this year. The award is presented to the sellers in the top five percent in the American Express Consumer Travel Network.

Bonanni got her start in the industry with Island Destinations, where she fell in love with the Caribbean and Mexico. For her honeymoon — her specialty — Bonanni will be traveling to Anguilla; she tells us she wants “to give back to these magical islands,” after the destruction caused by 2017’s hurricanes. She says many of her clients were wary of the region; however, she has been able to book weddings, honeymoons, family trips, bachelor / bachelorette parties and more in the islands. “I am determined to bring life back to the Caribbean,” Bonanni says.

Karen Essafi, owner of E. Clarke Travel, backs her up. “Deanna is a fabulous agent,” she says. “She really cares about her clients and getting them the best experience possible. She is a Caribbean ‘guru’ and has significantly increased our sales to the Caribbean — particularly to Turks and Caicos.”

Essafi adds: “Deanna is always eager to take on new destinations and learn the ins and outs to best advise her clients. Her positive attitude and willingness to go the extra mile are her best attributes and is the reason her repeat clientele business is so strong.”

Bonanni tells us that many of her clients are also under 30. “I am always encouraging people to go out and see what this world has to offer,” she says, adding that she also sees a need for the industry to get younger.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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Kristiana Choquet, 29
Artisanal Experiences by
Ovation Vacations
 New York City

Kristiana Choquet has been nominated for the shortlist of Virtuoso's Rising Star this year. Now in her third year in the industry, Choquet, a member of Artisanal Experiences by Ovation Vacations, plans trips for solo travelers, couples, multigenerational families and even royal families with the assistance of a full-time concierge that she employs.

One of the more challenging trips that Choquet planned was for a royal family in Europe. They visited two ski

Kristiana Choquet



destinations in different countries with their own staff and security. Due to the size of the traveling party, multiple hotels had to be booked. "It was an exhausting and tasking trip to plan but, in the end, the logistics went perfectly, and the client was extremely pleased with the result," she says. To note: The family rebooked the same destination after the successful coordination of the first trip.

"In such a short time, [Choquet] has accelerated through the ranks and single-handedly manages some of our top clients, which include royal families, A-list celebrities and some of the world's

top CEOs," says Jack Ezon, president of Ovation Vacations. "Her extensive knowledge of the world, critical thinking skills and endless dedication to her clients make her a standout in the luxury travel industry."

To help bring in more money, Choquet tells us that her agency has forged closer relationships with hoteliers to increase commission percentages due to their volume of business. It has also begun promoting its Ambassador Program, in which current clients can reach "Ambassador" status by referring the agency to other clients.

Recently, Choquet visited Iceland, which she called "an absolutely magical experience." She stayed at The Retreat at Blue Lagoon Iceland, "the epitome of luxury."

Samantha Collum, 26
West University Travel
 Houston

In just her third year in the industry, West University Travel's Samantha Collum totaled \$1.5 million in sales. She's a Virtuoso Certified Travel Advisor, a member of the network's Adventure and Wellness Community and has several impressive itineraries to her name.

In March, clients came to her asking to plan a trip to India's "Golden Triangle" — New Delhi, Jaipur and Agra. The hook? The couple was leaving in just two days and already had their airfare booked. Collum says she spent the next two nights staying up, communicating with her partners in India. She was able to navigate the couple through six cities over two weeks, visiting an elephant sanctuary, Ranthambore National Park and other "must-sees," several of which with private guides.

"While I enjoyed the challenge, I did recommend they give me a little more warning for their next trip," says Collum, who adds that she charges travel planning fees. "This service makes sure I'm compensated for my time, even if my clients decide not to book or need to cancel their travels." She likens an agent's job to that of an interior designer or business consultant — both of whom charge for their services.



Samantha Collum

To keep her clients — and potential clients — in the loop, Collum is sure to post photos daily to social media during her travels; she also writes blog posts upon return, highlighting her experiences.

Collum tells us she's confident in the future of the industry: "The old-school brand of travel agents has evolved — where once we were viewed as just a selling commodity, we now help cut through information overload and create custom travels," she says. "As long as there is a desire to travel, there will be a need for travel advisors."

Taryn Deschaine, 28
Camelback Odyssey Travel
 Phoenix

Taryn Deschaine wears many different hats at Camelback Odyssey Travel,

Taryn Deschaine



a member of Virtuoso. In addition to working directly with her own clients, she also supports the agency's employee team and manages its VIP desk. She has also attended a leadership conference and is making sure to learn from the knowledgeable advisors around her.

"Taryn understands how to take a great travel itinerary and make it outstanding, with no detail too small for an opportunity to wow a client," says Shelby Donley, Cambelback's owner.

That attention to detail came in handy when planning a recent multi-generational trip to the Bahamas over New Years. With 18 family members traveling from different cities and arriving on different days, keeping track of everything was a challenge. In addition to trip calendars and floor plans, Deschaine even built herself a family tree to keep the details straight.

Deschaine also values the personal side of the business. "I enjoy creating those 'wow' moments, even if it's something as simple as surprising an avid jogger with a running map in their room when they check in," she says. "Making those connections and getting to know your client's preferences can truly elevate their experience."

Those experiences and connections help show an agent's true value, which Deschaine says is the best way to grow a business. "Referrals are the lifeblood of our business and keep us growing every day through our client's social networks," she says.

"Having her on our team is not only invaluable to our discerning clients, but she is also an incredible asset to Camelback Travel, with an attitude that brings sunshine to our workplace and inspires us all to do our best," Donley says.

Candace Dupps, 25
Platinum Travel
 Louisville, KY

Having graduated college with two bachelor's degrees at 19 years of age, Candace Dupps, a Travel Institute Certified Travel Advisor, has always been ahead of the curve. In her third year as an agent, she has already been recognized by Classic Vacations for having the top Mexico sales for Platinum Travel as a new advisor, among other accolades.

Dupps tells us that her top accom-



Candace Dupps

plishment, however, is the feedback she receives from her clients after their trips. "My favorite was a family who walked in the day after returning from their trip to book their next," she says.

The positive responses are certainly earned. Dupps says that one of her more challenging trips was sending two couples to Europe, where they visited Ireland, Munich (for Oktoberfest), Florence, Rome, Santorini, Athens and more. "Although this trip had a lot of moving parts and we made a lot of revisions, I think it turned out perfectly for these two couples," she says.

"Candace continuously excels in our Service Excellence program, with integrity and highly professional service," Platinum Travel Vice President Emily Baldwin says. "She has managed several travel supplier engagement projects and continued her professional development by obtaining her CTA through The Travel Institute and becoming an Adventure Travel Specialist. Candace's creative itinerary planning has significantly raised her success rate of client retention and referrals over time."

Dupps also sailed on the inaugural *Norwegian Bliss* cruise. She says it's perfect for families (opt for the secluded Haven section) and singles (who can stay in studio staterooms). Onboard amenities, including the shows, kids' clubs, racetracks, laser tag and overwater slide, guarantee a "wow." The food and views were also "incredible," she says.

Andrea Espinosa, 28
Harmon Travel
 Boise, ID

Andrea Espinosa's former roommate suggested she'd be a perfect travel agent

because of her passion for traveling and other cultures. She was right.

After being hired on the spot at Harmon Travel (Bob and Barbara Harmon found her to be a quick learner, passionate and able to exude an enthusiasm that is "incredibly contagious"), Espinosa was enrolled into the agency's mentorship program and within months was a full-fledged Private Travel Designer. She'd already booked a family of 20 in to a private villa with a house chef and round-the-clock private security. More complex trips to Bora Bora, South America and Europe followed and three years later, Espinosa accepts new business by referral only.

Her sales are up 120 percent since last year and she's deeply involved with Signature Travel Network's offerings, attending their annual Sales Meeting



Andrea Espinosa

and taking part in many of their immersion programs. Espinosa calls what she does "tailor-made travel experiences where luxury meets authentic."

Thailand was her most recent personal trip, during which she posted on social media to drive sales.

"I get e-mails from clients saying, 'I saw your pictures on Instagram and I want to do exactly that!' It creates a

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sense of trust for my clients without my having to sound like I'm trying to sell them the destination," she says.

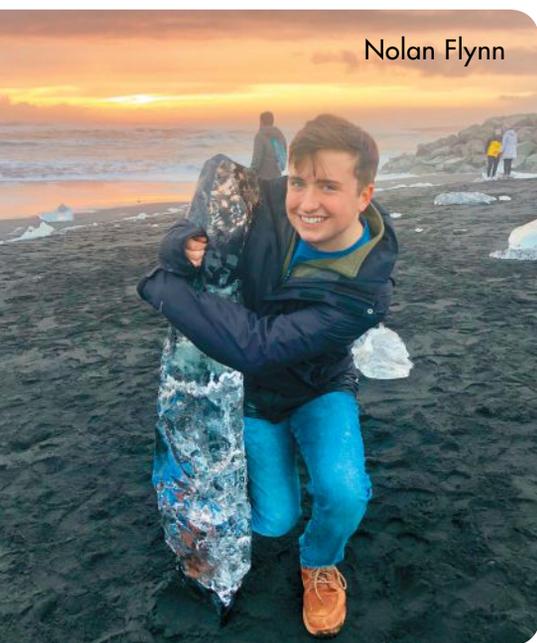
Before each journey, Espinosa makes a list of potentially interested clients based on their "travel blueprints" and sends each one a postcard along the way. "I often get calls saying, 'Thank you for thinking of us, Thailand has been on our bucket list; what do you recommend?'"

A believer in certified credentials, she's finishing her CTA with the Travel Institute. Courses thus far have helped her implement a Custom Planning Fee Agreement for new bookings and a referral program for valued clients.

Nolan Flynn, 21
LaMacchia Travel
Kenosha, WI

Nolan Flynn believes in reaching clients the way they want to be reached; that philosophy helped him develop an engagement tactic for the agency to close sales.

"It's not your typical 'pitch, quote, sell' routine," he says. "At LaMacchia Travel, we embrace a very personalized service environment. We make every step as convenient as possible for our clients, whether that's texting or direct-messaging them or meeting them for



Nolan Flynn

coffee or a cocktail." That engagement continues after the client has completed their trip, he says.

Flynn started at the agency when he was 15, answering the phone, managing social media pages, labeling brochures and fixing technical issues in the office. He kept his hand in during high school and college and was hooked. In 2014, the agency owners, Tom and Monica Karnes, started a romance travel agency brand for destination weddings and honeymoons called "LovinAway," and Flynn was tasked with maintaining relationships with hotel suppliers and clients. Today, LovinAway is a self-sustaining romance travel agency that serves couples across the country.

"We opened LovinAway a year ago and Nolan has been the driving force behind the marketing; website, blogs and social media," says Tom Karnes, the agency's owner. "Nolan works the leads and closes the sales. He has the ability to be extremely successful in the travel industry."

Flynn recently traveled to Iceland with a group of 45; putting the trip together was especially challenging as he hadn't been there before.

"I would recommend Iceland to anyone who wants to immerse themselves with nature, but in Iceland, that nature appears like magic. Exploring ice caves, diamond beaches and countless waterfalls is only the tip of the iceberg (pun intended), when traveling there," he says.

Jonathan Garcia, 30
First in Service Travel
New York City

One of the most challenging trips that Jonathan Garcia planned was his first leisure booking — a two-week honeymoon for his friends. He booked them into suites at both the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea and Four Seasons Resort Hualalai, where the couple was greeted with a bottle of wine and a personal note from him. He also booked their flights, transportation and all activities during the two-week trip.

Garcia was able to book seats on a flight that was completely sold out



Jonathan Garcia

when fashion clients of his needed to catch a flight for a photo shoot the following morning. He also found three rooms for other clients during Milan Fashion Week despite the website showing the entire hotel as full.

Before getting into the family business, Garcia planned to become a psychologist ("I was fascinated by moods, feelings and reactions," he tells us). In college, he studied business management with plans to open his own business — "a clothing store or a restaurant," he tells us. During his time at St. John's, he began working at First in Service as a part-time accounting assistant. After five years in accounting, he became a house agent, where he worked with entertainment bands and tours for two years. Finally, he opted to become an independent contractor, and has been primarily working with fashion / corporate / entertainment accounts.

To build his business this year, Garcia has made an effort to meet many of his clients face-to-face, after "e-mailing all day for many years." He's taken them to brunch, for after-work drinks and has even sent catered breakfasts. He tells us it has helped their personal relationships and has also led to more personal leisure requests.

Jordan Glanda, 29
Touraid Travel Inc.
Plattsburgh, NY

"Jordan joined us in 2012 and has been a top-producing agent right out of the gate," says Andrew Bonichi, vice presi-



Jordan Glanda

dent of Touraid Travel, Inc., which is a member of Signature. “Jordan is fun, energetic and very knowledgeable. And of course her clients love her!”

Since joining Touraid, Glanda has been promoted to supervising and assisting a team of travel agents, in addition to managing her own workload. As a call center-based agency, Touraid poses unique challenges, she says, but she’s been able to leverage her previous experience as a training supervisor for a direct marketing facility to excel. Glanda says she found that role enjoyable, and that it solidified that customer service was a calling for her. However, there had always been a part of her that needed to travel and share that experience with others, which led her to become a travel agent.

“[Clients] don’t get to see us face to face, yet they continuously book with us because of our ability to build a personal rapport by simply using our voice,” she says. “We work hard to keep up communications via e-mail and handwritten notes to keep the personal touch alive.”

That personal touch has helped Glanda grow her business this year when she has been focusing on her existing clientele with referrals by reaching out with handwritten notes.

“Keeping in touch when you are call center based is imperative to continuing a loyalty with [clients],” Glanda says. “This added level of personal touch has made an exponential difference with my level of service and return clients.”



Samantha Hartman

Samantha Hartman, 26
Someplace New, LLC /
Protravel International
Roseland, NJ

At only two and a half years into her career, Samantha Hartman has already been selected for top-level programs and events. An independent contractor with Protravel, she has been picked for that organization’s highly selective NEXT intensive training program — one of only eight out of hundreds of applicants to be so honored. She has also attended ILTM in Cannes, France, one of a handful of Protravel agents to do so.

Hartman jumped into the travel industry early, shortly after graduating college. During post-graduation she spent a year abroad teaching English in Spain and taking the opportunity to travel the continent. While on a trip through Tuscany, she decided she wanted to work in travel, and wound up with a head start on a position with Protravel before she even returned.

“As travel advisors, we can work with all parts of the world and we are not confined to the way one property or hotel operates,” Hartman says of what drew her to the life of an agent. “Basically, we can get as creative as we want to offer our clients incredible experiences, worldwide.”

In addition to her training, Hartman has been taking the opportunity to grow by connecting with other agents. This year she established a partnership with Curtis Parris, a well established agent in Protravel’s New Jersey office

who specializes in high-end corporate and entertainment travel, as he had been getting frequent requests for leisure trips, which he now refers to Hartman.

“Together we have marketed my leisure-focused experience to his already established book of business,” Hartman says. “This has helped grow my clientele and has added a new component to his business.”

Stacey Hoehne, 28
Brentwood Travel

St. Louis

Stacey Hoehne of Brentwood Travel (an Ensemble member) knows how to save a dream vacation. When Hurricane Matthew shut down Fort Lauderdale’s airport, it threatened to derail a massive, multigenerational Caribbean cruise she had booked for a family. After trying everything — flying into any airport in Florida, or even driving to Missouri — it became clear the family wasn’t going to make their cruise. Rather than admit defeat, however, Hoehne convinced the family to try something different and work out the cruise cancellation and insurance details later. With some quick thinking she was able to book a charter from STL to Jamaica and got them into a family resort, and worked with

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Stacey Hoehne

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the cruise line to secure a future cruise credit as a refund. The family loved their trip, and she's just arranged a new Alaska cruise for them this summer.

At Brentwood, Hoehne has been responsible for training new staff and helping the current staff grow in her new role as leisure travel supervisor. She has also incorporated supplier training, technical training and office procedures into the agency's training program, and she's continuing to work to train current staff.

Hoehne's next big thing? This year, she's been growing her mini-group business, focusing on groups of friends traveling together or multigenerational trips.

"Creating a 'mini-group' with one of our suppliers allows me to save them additional money on the trip," Hoehne explains. "The benefit of a smaller group over a corporate group is that I was able to make personal connections with each of the travelers, which has led to a quick new client base."

Elizabeth Hoover, 27 Travelink Incorporated Nashville, TN

After graduating from the hospitality and tourism program at Purdue University, Elizabeth Hoover went to work at Travelink Incorporated, part of American Express, as a research assistant at its luxury leisure travel division. She earned her CTA right away from the Travel Institute, which has also desig-

nated her as a luxury and adventure travel specialist.

Hoover has gone straight up the ladder over the past four years; she's now a full-fledged advisor with Travelink, which awarded her the "Best of the Best" designation. Last year, her agency's owners nominated her as a "Rep Excellence" advisor for American Express Travel; Amex has also given her the title of "Travel Insider" for Alaska.

"Elizabeth Hoover is curious, highly organized, goal oriented and technically very savvy," says Linda Raymer, president of the vacation division of Travelink. "She has been proactive in her own education with suppliers and our technology tools. Elizabeth exceeded her sales and revenue goals in her first year as a travel advisor and is comfortable selling all types of cruises, as well as complex land vacations and managing the details of incentive groups."

Hoover makes it a point to experience every type of travel: escorted tours, FIT, cruising, river cruising, safari and all-inclusive resorts. Adding to her bottom line is also a priority.

"I've taken it upon myself to register with every hotel group that I do business with to make an incentive off my commissions and to receive bonuses and perks from the hotels and the management companies directly," she says. "This provides a value-add for my clients, because those suppliers will typically provide an extra amenity or something special when my clients arrive on site."



Kate Johnson, 27 TravelStore Los Angeles

Kate Johnson has fully immersed herself in the travel industry; she's completed TravelStore's mentorship program and belongs to several agent groups, such as Millennials in Travel, Young Travel Advisors and Signature Embark, part of the Signature Travel Network. Most recently she won SoCal ASTA's Millennial of the Year at this year's Diamond Awards.

Not bad for someone who's been in the business for just three years, but Johnson has been keen on travel ever since trekking through Europe and the Caribbean as a teenager. She studied hospitality and tourism management, and after graduating from the University of New Hampshire, she moved to Los Angeles and studied under a top-producing agent for a year. She also did extensive sales and geography training and learned the GDS systems.

Thinking out of the box led to a recent success; Johnson sent personal video footage of her time at Laucala Resort in Fiji to a colleague at Business Insider; her social media information was posted in the article and she got a flood of leads from potential clients.

"I also treat every person I meet as a potential future client — my hairdresser, the nurse at the doctor's office, the couple sitting next to me on the plane, a group of girlfriends at a restaurant," says Johnson. "I treat every interaction as an opportunity to grow my business and build awareness among friends,



Elizabeth Hoover

Kate Johnson



Marielle Kabin



family and acquaintances.”

Katie Cadar, director of leisure sales for TravelStore, says that after completing TravelStore’s mentorship program, the agency entrusted Johnson with challenging projects and clients, which she handled with skill and dedication. “Kate’s customer service is impressive, along with her ability to handle clients, always with a warm smile and caring attitude,” says Cadar.

Marielle Kabin, 28
Travelwise International
Fort Washington, MD

Shortly after Marielle Kabin graduated from the University of Maryland, her mother, founder of Travelwise International (a Travel Leaders member), expressed a desire to give up the company and retire. Kabin knew she had a decision to make.

“I could be like my colleagues at glamorous Fortune 500 companies at an entry-level job, or I could be part of an enterprise that I could call my own,” she tells us. “I knew this path wasn’t for everyone and would demand a lot of endurance, self-motivation and accountability, but if there was anyone who would continue my mom’s legacy while keeping my own travel benefits, then the decision became very clear.”

Kabin is now in charge of the second-generation, family-owned agency which specializes in international trips outside of North America. She was the recipient of the GTT Million Dollar Sales Award (airfare consolidator) for



Allison Kobasky

both 2016 and 2017, and has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both clients and other professionals within the industry.

The most challenging itinerary Kabin recently organized was an 11-night Japanese explorer cruise for 40 passengers headed to Japan and Busan, South Korea — destinations which she had not previously visited.

“The demographic of the group was dynamic and composed of mixed races, multiple generations, 12 first-time cruisers, 28 seasoned travelers, 20 VIP passengers and the biggest obstacle of all, traveling with the founder of Travelwise, my mother,” she says. In the end, Kabin was not only able to make the trip a success, but she also gained her mother’s trust in guiding the family business in a new and positive direction.

Allison Kobasky, 29
Over the Moon Vacations
Miami

Allison Kobasky worked 14-hour days at the inception of her business to ensure that Over The Moon Vacations’ clients had perfect itineraries, filled with as much detail as possible.

“My husband called me ‘obsessed,’ but admittedly, I was,” she recalls. It paid off; by the end of 2017, Kobasky had booked more than 300 trips for the year, solo, and generated \$1 million-plus in revenue.

She’s also proud to have earned 75 five-star reviews on her Facebook page. “Our business runs on word-of-mouth marketing and organic referrals,” says Kobasky, whose husband has since joined the business.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

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These efforts earned her the “2017 Top Agent Travel Expert” award from her host agency, Cruises and Tours Unlimited (part of Travel Leaders), as well as media placement in *Martha Stewart Weddings*, *Brides* magazine, *Travel + Leisure* and PopSugar.

Prior to getting into the agency business, Kobasky was a tour leader for various teen tour companies; those gigs led her from Western Europe to living in small villages in Western Africa. “I learned firsthand that traveling makes you a better person. It forces you out of your comfort zone, thrusts you into new cultures and allows you to become a more understanding, appreciative and compassionate person. After having these experiences, I knew I wanted to influence others to do the same and started travel planning as an independent travel agent,” she says.

Kobasky hasn’t slowed down; proud accomplishments include planning a “mega-honeymoon” for a couple who wanted to do five countries in 35 days and, more recently, she returned from a research trip to South Africa, Dubai and the Maldives.

Kobasky recommends the career of travel advisor, but has this caveat: “You have to be incredibly self-motivated and driven, because this business gives you only as much as you put in.”

Amber Koll, 28 The Travel Advantage Sioux Center, IA

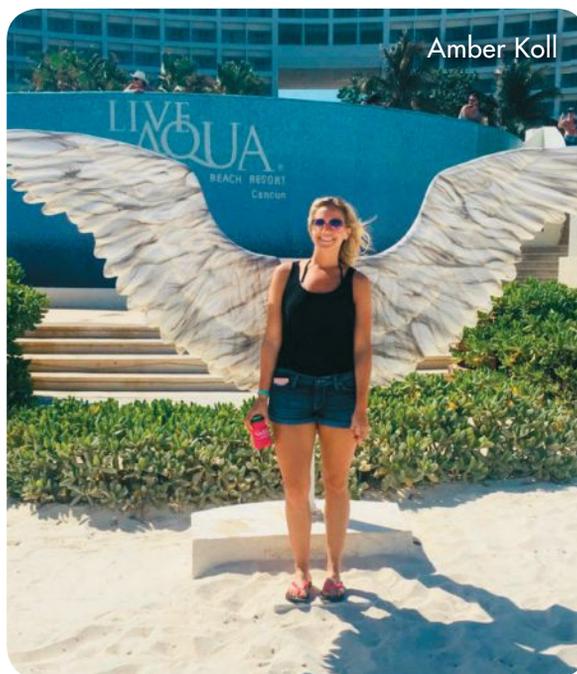
“Amber [Koll] has been a blessing since the day she was hired,” says Amy Eben, manager and leisure specialist at The Travel Advantage. “She serves our largest corporate accounts with passion and seamlessly changes her mind set to serve her leisure clientele.”

Since joining the Travel Leaders affiliate as a consultant in 2011, Koll’s ability to transition from working on corporate accounts to selling leisure travel has proven valuable for both the agency and herself.

“We have a lot of clients that want to take a long vacation to Europe and visit several countries. Quite often, rather than doing a guided tour they like to be able to do things on their own,” she tells us. “In situations like this, qualifying our clients and really learning about their likes and personalities becomes so important.” Putting these types of trips together, she adds, also “helps you build relationships with vendors in the countries your clients are visiting.”

In the past few years, Koll has visited Cancun, Puerto Vallarta, Cabo San Lucas, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, just to name a few of the destinations she’s been pitching. She says the smartest thing she’s done this year to make more money is to constantly keep in touch with her clientele.

“Last year, I had a couple that wanted to take a multigenerational family trip over Christmas — but we were a little late in the game, so the prices were incredibly high,” she says. “I reached out to them again this year when I saw some decent rates over Christmas 2018, and within a couple weeks we had their family confirmed for a fun getaway. We always keep an eye out on travel deals and make sure to get in touch with clients when we see something they might be interested in.”



Amber Koll



Kaitlyn Kubitskey

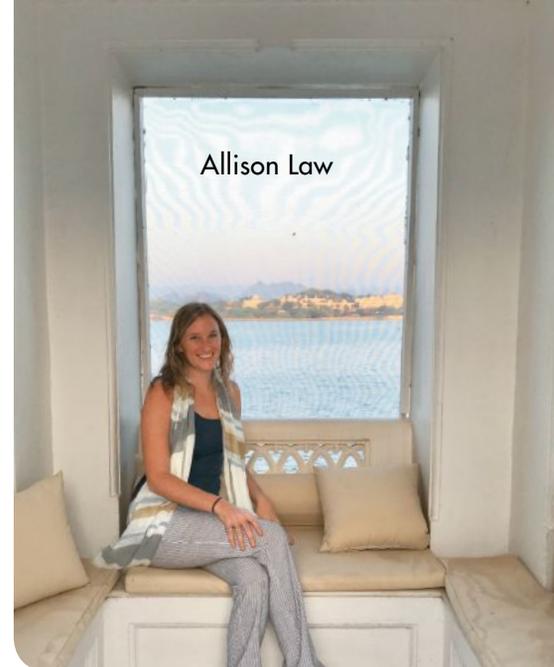
Kaitlyn Kubitskey, 29 My World Travel LLC Louisville, KY

As the owner and operator of My World Travel, Kaitlyn Kubitskey gauges her personal success through reviews from clients and says she’s proud of the overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Kubitskey has a Master’s Degree in Religion & Politics with an emphasis on conflict resolution. “To me, travel is the perfect form of conflict resolution and my company is my personal outlet for helping this mission,” she says. Her knack for solving problems in creative ways proved very helpful in 2016, when she found herself in the unique position of designing a 16-person trip to Turkey that was interrupted by an act of terrorism.

“I was assisting in organizing a wedding group’s travel from the U.S. to a small village in Turkey. Sixteen people were scheduled to arrive on July 1, 2016, when, two days before, a bomb went off at the Istanbul Airport,” she recalls. “I am very much of the ‘keep traveling but be very alert’ breed, but with this giant group of travelers leaving in two days and using that same airport, the proximity of it all even shook me.”

She spent the next 12 hours calling each individual to gauge their feelings about the trip and to ensure the receptive group in Turkey was caught up with all the details as well. “Flights were rearranged, trip insurance was



called, A / B / C plans were developed,” she says. Because of her efforts, 14 of the 16 travelers kept their plans and arrived home safely.

Kubitskey is IATA certified and says the smartest step she’s taken this year to make money is taking time to log in and register for all of the commission opportunities with each travel supply company.

Jordan Lapetz, 27
AAA Travel Michigan
 Birmingham, MI

Although Jordan Lapetz has only been working as a travel agent with AAA Travel Michigan for four years, she isn’t shy about offering advice to anyone her age who might be interested in entering the industry. “Besides an obvious interest in travel, global cultures and understanding the world of sales, a young travel agent needs to be hungry for knowledge ... hard working [and] people oriented,” she says.

You can also add eagerness to take on a challenge to that list. For example, Lapetz was in charge of putting together a three-week self-drive tour through Great Britain and Republic of Ireland.

“The clients wanted to trace their family ancestry and combine it with several locations from the ever popular TV series ‘The Outlander,’” she recalls. “This took several weeks of researching and organizing from family records to scenic landscapes tucked inside national parks, but the finished trip was truly a personalized dream come true.”

Ryan Johnson, AAA Travel agency

manager, says Lapetz continues to grow and is a tremendous asset to both the agency and clients. “Taking the time to research destinations, itineraries, properties, and excursions that best match her client’s needs is what separates her from many others,” he adds. “That attention to detail is what allows her clients to simply enjoy their dream vacation.”

In her own travels, Lapetz recently sailed in Europe on the Rhine River with AmaWaterways, her first-ever river cruise experience, and says the trip exceeded her expectations. Since returning, she reports receiving an overwhelming increase in river cruise bookings, especially with AmaWaterways. “My next familiarization trip will hopefully be to Kenya where I can experience firsthand the wonders of an African safari.”

Allison Law, 28
SmartFlyer
 New York City

“Allison Law’s laser-cut focus and thirst for adventure are the things that make her an extraordinary travel consultant,” says Erina Pindar Chamberlain, managing director at SmartFlyer. “Not only is she a self-taught Sabre agent who has a deep understanding of the ‘ins and outs’ of airline configurations and routings, she’s also constantly in search of the greatest adventure destination the world has to offer.”

Before joining SmartFlyer three years ago, she was bitten by the travel bug during a six-month internship at the London Olympic Games, later becoming

an event manager at a non-profit sports organization. After researching the travel industry, she made the decision to learn Sabre in order to gain an advantage on industry competition. Law became the fastest agent to finish the initial training program, completing the six-month course in only three.

Law now injects her adventurous attitude into the itineraries she designs for clients. In January, she spent two weeks in Africa, traveling through Uganda and Kenya. “This trip gave me an opportunity to vet different and exciting add-ons that I can suggest to clients, such as gorilla trekking in the Bwindi National Forest or a helicopter ride over Victoria Falls,” she says. “I’m also planning a new trip to visit the Azores, which we’re seeing more requests for due to the new direct Delta flights from New York.”

Last year, Law was chosen as one of three in-house agents to attend and represent Smartflyer at Virtuoso Travel Week and will be one of only two agents this year. Law was also selected by upper management to represent SmartFlyer at the Rising Stars luncheon hosted by Taj Hotels this past March.

Stephanie LeGrow, 29
Lovely Lotus Travel
 Las Vegas

“I am a solopreneur,” says Stephanie LeGrow, owner of Lovely Lotus Travel. “I own, operate, and book all of my clients’ travel. I get to enjoy the client-facing consulting portion of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Stephanie LeGrow

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the business, as well as all the creative back-end work.”

The balance of logistics and creativity has always been a strong point for LeGrow, who notes that her previous careers and education give her a unique perspective as a newcomer to the travel industry. “I had a vision to refresh the booking process, bringing together New Age access with time tested personalized customer service excellence,” she tells us.

The most intricate trip LeGrow ever planned was a destination wedding for 60 guests traveling to Mexico. While she describes putting together the itinerary as a fun experience, the logistics and documentation for so many people traveling in a 24-hour period proved challenging.

“My entire office floor, desks, and couch were covered in paperwork to keep everyone organized and separated,” she says. However, LeGrow notes that it was also the most rewarding trip she’s ever planned. “Every single guest went out of their way when they got home to tell me about how flawless their travel days were and how beautiful the wedding was. The mothers of the bride and groom were especially

happy that they didn’t have to worry about any of the family members getting lost or stuck somewhere.”

Among her numerous accolades, LeGrow was named a “Best of Weddings” winner by The Knot this year — the only such recipient in Las Vegas and all of Nevada. This recognition has extra meaning to LeGrow as it is the first kudos she’s earned during her first full year operating without a host agency.

Trevarus Martin, 28
Book and Bag Travel, LLC
Katy, TX

“Every day there is a new challenge and opportunity to share travel experiences,” says Trevarus Martin, owner of Book and Bag Travel. “I often ask myself why I didn’t start this career much sooner.”

When Martin started his business, he was met with plenty of challenges, including some negative feedback from family and friends who felt leaving his full-time job in the insurance industry wasn’t a good idea. Martin decided to join under a host agency, Jus Adventures Travel Services, and since then has been met with success.

Samantha Hammond, owner of Jus Adventures, calls him her top agent. “Trevarus has worked diligently to attain many difficult certifications and has consistently exceeded sales goals each month,” she says. “He’s extremely hardworking, personable and provides excellent service to his clients.”

Interestingly, Martin says the most challenging trip he’s ever worked on was designing his own destination wedding, at El Dorado Royale and Casitas in Riviera Maya, Mexico. He had originally hired someone to handle the travel planning, but ended up having to consult family and friends himself. “That also taught me a valuable lesson about this business — relationships matter,” he says.

So, which destinations is he currently pitching to his own clients?

“Most recently I went to Antigua. It’s definitely the most amazing place I’ve visited in the Caribbean. The people



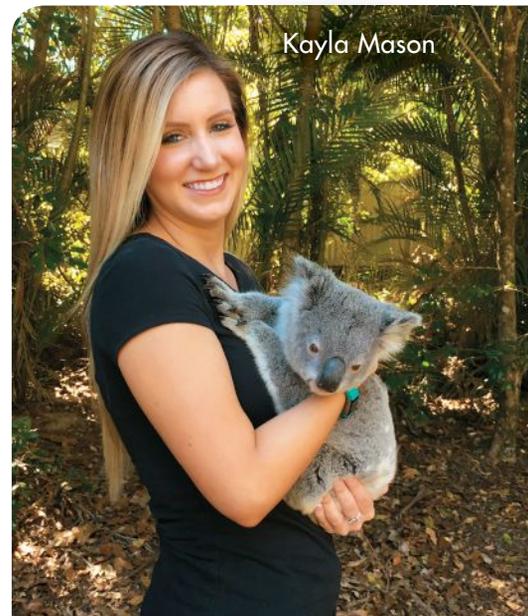
Trevarus Martin

were so friendly, the food was amazing, and the beaches were beautiful,” he says. “When I talk to my clients about it, they say they’ve never heard of Antigua, and then they start looking for it on the map. I get excited when talking to people about it, so they have to see it for themselves.”

Kayla Mason, 28
Frosch Travel
Houston

As a full service leisure agent specializing in luxury cruises, family vacations and honeymoons, Kayla Mason has not only been able to make her clients’ dreams come true, but has also realized her own.

“My passion for travel started at a young age when I took my first trip to



Kayla Mason

Walt Disney World,” she says. “I knew that I wanted to be a part of the ‘Magic’ and be in the hospitality industry.”

When a position at Frosch opened two years ago, she jumped on it. Mason recently completed the company’s eight week program designed to recruit young professionals into the industry and is now well-versed in selling travel for Sliversea Cruises, Disney Destinations, Europe and the Caribbean.

“Because of the great training that I received in the academy, I have become a trainer in the Houston office,” Mason says. “Additionally, I was nominated for ‘Delivering the Unexpected,’ a program Frosch has that encourages us to be better employees and a better agent for our clients.”

This year, Mason was also asked to attend a Disney Travel Agent Training, which she considers an honor as only 30 agents specializing in Disney Destinations are selected. Mason’s other accomplishments include an invitation to take a part in the FT2 Advisory Board, which recently met in Costa Rica.

A recent challenge for Mason was planning a honeymoon to Africa, a destination she was unfamiliar with. It required great attention to detail. “I had to find the perfect lodges, game drives and also inter-country flights,” she explains.

Mason is also currently pitching Queensland, Australia, to clients after experiencing the destination firsthand. “It has city life, beaches, reefs and jungles,” she says. “Holding a koala and feeding kangaroos in their own natural habitat can only happen in Australia.”

Kristen Munch, 27

Frosch Travel Chicago

Karen Schueller, director of Private Client Services at Frosch, a Signature agency, lauds how Kristen Munch “not only [works] from an exceptional knowledge base, but continually travels and researches to ensure growth,” adding that Munch is “not afraid to take on any task, no matter the size, scope, or potential for recognition.”

An example of one such task? “I was selected by Frosch to participate in creating a training program for agents new to the industry,” Munch tells us.



Kristen Munch

She recently had two weeks to put together a trip to the South of France and Italy for a client whose son is a huge car enthusiast. “On the first day they will have a Ferrari delivered to their hotel where they spend the next few days fully immersed in cars. They will visit the Ferrari Museum & Factory, Lamborghini Museum and even experience driving on a Formula 1 Race Track in Milan.” For the France portion she arranged for a helicopter to take them to St. Tropez and also from there to Le Castellet, “for a truly VIP experience.”

“The most challenging part of planning this trip was all the logistics involved,” Munch says. “Figuring out the best driving route, delivery of rental cars ... and how to create the ultimate VIP Grand Prix experience.”

Such dedication is reason enough why, Munch says, “I recommend all agents charge fees and not be afraid to do so. The amount of research, time and knowledge agents put into the planning, execution and follow up of these trips warrants fees. We are not only applying our expertise to the trip we are planning, we are investing in learning about the client to successfully craft the perfect trip, while taking note for future travel.”

Christabela Pierre, 28

Atlas Cruises & Tours Palm Beach Gardens, FL

“In her short tenure as a travel consultant, [Christabela Pierre] not only fills her position in sustaining the ardu-



ous demands of our growing group department, but exceeds it by providing the best service for groups of up to 1,200 guests,” says Burt Brage, general manager at Atlas Cruises and Tours. He adds that Pierre’s personality, creativity, attention to detail and critical thinking have allowed her to make her mark in the travel industry.

As Atlas’s group department and event manager, Pierre is responsible for planning travel for multiple guests, securing venues and acting as a liaison while onboard cruises. Pierre is a Free-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

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style Certified Agent with Norwegian Cruise Line, an Expert-Plus level agent with Royal Caribbean Cruise Line and is a Celebrity Cruises Five Star Agent. Additionally, Pierre has been the top group seller at Atlas for Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Line for the past two years.

The most formidable trip Pierre has ever had to organize was a cruise for approximately 600 guests alongside a smaller group of 20 passengers attending a wedding at sea, both aboard the *Norwegian Sky*.

"It was challenging, because the wedding packages available on the *Sky* were limited and [the bride] waited quite close to the sailing date to decide if she wanted to do it," recalls Pierre. "I helped her order all of the decorations, rose petals, cake topper and aisle runner, then had it delivered to the office so I could bring everything to the ship for her. Directing one group and coordinating a wedding all in one trip was exhilarating."

Callie Mae Ritsema, 28 Ritz World Travel

Grand Rapids, MI

Callie Mae Ritsema is off to a strong start as a travel agent, nabbing the highest honor from her host agency, KHM Travel Group, in her first full year as a travel agent.

"As a member of KHM Travel

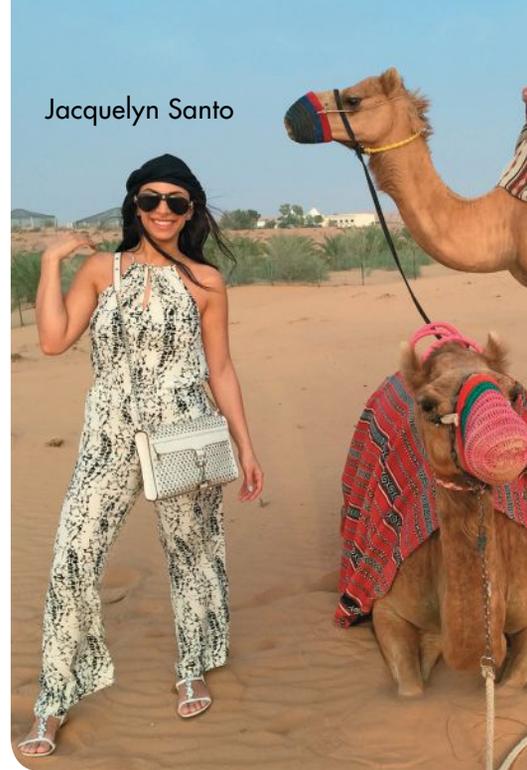
Group's Pinnacle Elite Agent Program, Callie is among our host agency's top-producing agents," says Geoff Cox, KHM's vice president of sales. "Since she joined KHM Travel Group in 2016, we have witnessed her sales increase as she works hard to grow her business. Her dedication to serving her clients is evident in not only her impressive sales figures, but also in the great reputation of her business."

Ritsema became a travel agent after five years working in human resources, and she says that she was drawn to the career path because it allowed her to combine her love of travel with her longtime dream of being a small business owner. She is the owner of Ritz World Travel, a member of Travel Leaders, and since becoming a travel agent she's continued to encourage others to follow in her footsteps.

"I often get calls from aspiring travel advisors who find me on Instagram or Google to ask me questions about my career choice," Ritsema tells us. "I always take the time to answer their questions, and encourage them to continue down that path if they're passionate about travel and are looking for a rewarding career."

Most recently Ritsema has been focusing on expanding her group sales. "I have proven to myself that groups take much less of my time, and I receive a greater return investment," she says.

Jacquelyn Santo



Jacquelyn Santo, 28 Cruise Planners, an American Express Travel Representative Chicago

After working for five years as a real estate broker, Jacquelyn Santo "took a leap of faith to follow my love for travel" and invested in a Cruise Planners franchise in 2016. "It has been the best decision I have ever made," she says. She was met with success quickly, becoming one of the top producing franchisees in her training class for Cruise Planners in 2017, which led to her being named a "rising star" last year.

"Networking has been a big part of my success, so I am continuing to put in the time and effort to make connections and win new business," Santo says. She has also invested in local ads and attends "high-profile events where I can promote my business."

A few months ago, she traveled to Japan, where she fell in love with the Japanese culture and food. "There is so much to see and something for everyone," Santo says. "I tell my clients to include both Tokyo and Kyoto in their travel plans to Japan. Tokyo for a more fast paced, city experience and Kyoto for a more 'zen' vibe, visiting all of the beautiful temples, shrines and gardens." Santo is based in Chicago, from which there are nonstop flights to Tokyo, "which is a huge sell for my clients," she adds.

"As a Millennial, it's no surprise that technology and social media are



Callie Mae Ritsema

key aspects as to how Jacquelyn grows her travel business,” Cruise Planners’ CEO and Founder Michelle Fee tells us, adding that, “More importantly, she understands the power of the human connection and has built a solid business foundation on being responsive to leads and engaging with clients.”

Frances Sarrett, 26
McCabe World Travel
McLean, VA

Frances Sarrett began her travel career working in Italy for IC Bellagio, arranging touring and transportation services. “I have a degree in Italian Studies from the University of Virginia and speak the language fluently. When I decided to move back to the U.S., I felt that becoming a travel advisor was my next step to advance from selling a destination to offering the world.”

So three years ago she joined Virtuoso member McCabe World Travel, where, says President Anne Scully, “Frances has been a real asset to our team. Her enthusiasm for her work, attention to detail, and innate southern kindness, as well as her listening skills with her clients, make her an outstanding travel advisor.”

Sarrett returned to Italy a few months ago to attend the DUCO Travel Summit in Florence, after which she traveled to Rome. “I returned home with a better understanding of the best hotels in Florence and Rome and the right clients for each,” she says, adding that, “I want my clients to feel like locals when visiting a destination. Even with clients with other upcoming vacations, I’ve mentioned my trip to plant the seed for a future Italian getaway.”

Earlier this year, she visited South Africa for a stay in Cape Town followed by two safari experiences. “Africa is a destination that is important to experience in order to understand it and be able to promote it to clients. This was my first trip to Africa [and] I have been selling it more and more since I returned.”

She finds that “it’s important to think outside the box, such as suggesting a cruise when a client wants to visit a destination like the Greek Isles. They’d lose a day each time they moved destinations, whereas a ship moves at night and allows clients to wake up and be



Frances Sarrett

in their next stop. This raises my yield ... but more importantly, improves the client’s experience.”

Sarah Ann Van Elsen, 29
Adelman Discoveries
Springfield, MO

After two years of handling mostly administrative duties for Adelman Discoveries (the groups division of Signature member Adelman Vacations), Sarah Ann Van Elsen was promoted to group travel advisor in July 2017. Her outstanding work over the past year has not gone unrewarded.

“I was [recently] recognized by my company as a Service Hero and received a trophy that currently sits on my desk,” she

says. “Out of the entire company of over 300 employees, I am one of a very select few that have been chosen. It is awarded to individuals that have demonstrated exemplary customer service both within the company and with all of our clients.”

Cam Thieme, Adelman’s director of groups, lauds Van Elsen’s industry savvy and social media skills. “Sarah played a significant role in securing a large cruise group for 2019 through her contacts with the Branson entertainers that host the cruise,” Thieme says. “She is also tasked with building and maintaining our social media and private group pages, which she handles with efficiency, humor and professionalism.”

One of her biggest challenges has been educating clients who are afraid of traveling to Europe or Mexico because they fear for their safety. “When they hear from someone that has recently been there and understand that the media has exaggerated things, they begin to realize that it isn’t as bad as it seems,” she says. (In the past nine months alone, Van Elsen has visited Amsterdam, Bruges and Prague on one trip; and Iceland and Zurich on another.)

That said, she also offers alternative options closer to home, “We have trips going to the Southwest Canyonlands, Alaska, and the Canadian Rockies this year and next,” she says. “We’ve found that these destinations have become increasingly popular, so we’ve learned to highlight those a bit more with people that are concerned about safety.” ■



Sarah Ann Van Elsen

Did You Know?

- Most Americans use less than half of their vacation time to actually travel, according to **Project: Time Off**. Further, 52 percent of Americans don't use all of their vacation time. Help break this cycle of out-of-the-office apprehension by letting your clients know that "bleisure" (business + leisure) trips can save them time and money.

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas

Las Vegas is probably the easiest bleisure trip you can plan (maybe even sell). With the city holding nearly 20,000 conventions yearly, several (if not most) of your clients are making annual trips to the Strip. Figure out who and then suggest that they take that much-deserved girlfriend getaway, romantic weekend or family vacation at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. But first, learn about the property's recent overhaul of its gaming and dining facilities, and redesign of its hotel rooms. cosmopolitanlasvegasagents.com



Dominican Republic

Your client doesn't need you to tell them to add a day or two to their business trip to the Dominican Republic, but they might need you to show them how this destination is a magnet for family travel bliss. With an array of family-friendly, all-inclusive resorts and non-stop flights from major U.S. hubs, planning a multigenerational trip around your client's company's annual sales meeting is easier than they think. Show them the way after you become a Dominican Republic Specialist. dominicanrepublicspecialist.com



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We are living in the era of globalization. That said, you'll need a strong network of trusted hotel suppliers to pull off bleisure trips in China as successfully as you would in Paris. You'll want to rely on a hotel leader with over 550 four- and five-star properties across 76 countries, including brands as unique and diverse as Kempinski and Omni. Become a GHA Specialist to gain the support you need and the training to sell 34 top hotel brands with ease. ghaspecialist.com

Grenada

Few places in the world epitomize pure leisure like the Caribbean, which is probably why a lot of work trips aren't planned there. However, Florida is home to endless conventions and also Miami International Airport, which offers daily direct flights to Grenada. Bleisure trips are about convenience and when you're already so close to "The Spice of the Caribbean," what's another quick flight to find paradise? And what's five short lessons to grow your Caribbean sales. puregrenadaspecialist.com



RISING TRAVEL ADVISORS SHARE THEIR SECRETS TO SUCCESS

WE ASKED OUR 2018 CLASS of 30Under30 how they're generating revenue to their bottom line. Responses harkened back to using the best practices of Sales 101, to putting social media to good use. What did they all have in common? Consistent engagement with their clients, whether the customer is new or tried and true.

RYAN BARKS, of Travel Haus of St. Louis, says that his business model revolves around customer service and attention to detail. A specialist in honeymoons, destination weddings, cruises and Europe, he has focused heavily on working as many bridal shows and events as possible to be sure he's meeting new clients and keeping current on offerings for those clients he's already working with. "This gives me a great opportunity to continually hone the proper 'elevator pitch' for reasons to work with a travel agent as well as to broaden my client base," he tells us.

CALLIE MAE RITSEMA of Ritz World Travel in Grand Rapids, MI also focuses on destination weddings, as well as other types of group travel and this year she's focusing her sales and marketing efforts on that category. "I quickly learned that I can make a greater amount of money if I focus my



Callie Mae Ritsema

“I often get calls from aspiring travel advisors who find me on Instagram or Google to ask me questions about my career choice ... I always take the time to answer their questions and encourage them to continue down that path if they're passionate about travel and are looking for a rewarding career.”

—CALLIE MAE RITSEMA OF RITZ WORLD TRAVEL, GRAND RAPIDS, MI

time and energy on group sales. I have proven to myself that groups take much less of my time, and I receive a greater return on investment.”

You get what you pay for is **LEAH BILQUIST**'s credo. This travel advisor with TravelSmiths in Point Pleasant, NJ doesn't hesitate to tell her clients which room category they need to reserve to get the most beautiful views. The same goes for experiences.

“If you want to zip line through the rainforest, you got it, but I will only book you on the luxury tour, which may be a \$100 more, but you will get

more of an experience out of it,” she says, noting that her honeys is what keeps her clients coming back to her.

“At the end of the day, people will go over their budget if it means getting what their vacation goals are,” says Bilquist. “You need to be honest with them and present multiple options. In the end, they will respect you and most likely take the highest one.”

“Keep in Touch” are the three little words that **AMBER KOLL** of The Travel Advantage in Sioux City, IA lives by.

“We have leisure travelers that will

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

SARAH ANN VAN ELSÉN of Adelman Discoveries in Springfield, MO, has been offering trips closer to home for those clients concerned about safety. “We have trips going to the Southwest Canyonlands, Alaska, and the Canadian Rockies this year and next year,” she says.

COVER STORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

enquire about vacations periodically throughout the year and sometimes it's just not within their budget to go right away, so we make sure to keep checking in with them," she says. She learned that lesson last year in particular when a couple that wanted to take a multi-

confirmed for a fun Christmas getaway.

"We always keep an eye out on travel deals and make sure to get in touch with clients when we see something they might be interested in," she notes.

Certified credentials go a long way with **ANDREA ESPINOSA** of **Harmon Travel** in Boise, ID. That's why she's

messages to commemorate successes, birthdays, milestones and anniversaries. She fully recommends the career of travel advisor to people her age. "It's such a fulfilling and rewarding career with possibilities of growth, constant change and never ending learning," says Espinosa. "I feel proud to say I'm a private travel designer when people ask me what I do for a living."

JORDAN GLANDA of **Touraid Travel Inc.** in Plattsburgh, NY says her agency sends out weekly handwritten notes to their clients. She participates to grow her own client base and to build up existing client relationships, she says. "This added level of personal touch has made an exponential difference with my level of service and return clients." Glanda says she is also working on focusing on existing clients to bring her referrals.

JACQUELYN SANTO of **Cruise Planners**, an American Express Travel Representative in Chicago, has also gone back to the basics by investing

TARYN DESCHAIINE of **Camelback Odyssey Travel** in Phoenix consistently communicates the value she is providing to her clients' trips, which encourages them to recommend her to friends. "Referrals are the lifeblood of our business and keep us growing every day through our client's social networks. It is also extremely gratifying and validating for us, knowing we are doing right by our clients."

generational family trip over Christmas. The vacation didn't pan out because it was a little late in the booking season and pricing was quite high.

Koll made it a point early on this year to circle back to them when she saw some decent rates for Festive Season. Within a couple weeks she had the family

currently wrapping up her CTA studies with the Travel Institute. She's also "old school" in the best possible manner.

"I handwrite personal invitations to my top clients to attend our monthly Luxury Travel Series events at our country club," says Espinosa. She also handwrites welcome-home notes and

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See www.msccruisesagent.com for marketing materials.



Jacquelyn Santo

marketing dollars in local ads, as well as getting involved in high profile events where she can promote her business. “Networking has been a big part of my success, so I am continuing to put in the time and effort to make connections and win new business,” she says.

People have busy lives and can’t always conduct business from 9 to 5, which is why **CHRISTABELA PIERRE** of **Atlas Cruises & Tours** in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, makes herself available at all times. This includes by cell phone and by Facebook Messenger; in fact,

ALLISON LAW of **Smartflyer** in New York would absolutely recommend the career of travel advisor to those her age. “I believe that the travel industry is going through a revitalization. There’s a new generation of travel influencers — from agents to hoteliers, and now even bloggers — using new techniques and technology to inspire and assist clients. Additionally, a younger generation of travel industry employees brings a younger clientele.”

Pierre has become much more active on Facebook and on Snapchat this year. She shares images of cruise ship inspections and hotel visits that portray a variety of room types. “This has encouraged clients to reach out to me and book the places I have shared on social media,” she says. Pierre is also all about the personal touch. When clients were headed to Paris earlier this year, she sent them French-themed gifts before they left, including a backpack, a travel guide and a bottle of wine.

All in all, she finds that these touches pay off. “Flowers in a cabin, a hotel upgrade or dinner for two goes a long way in earning clients’ loyalty and referrals,” says Pierre. “In such a competitive industry such as online travel, I

TREVARUS MARTIN of **Book and Bag Travel, LLC** in Katy, TX, plans group trips for his friends and the size of those groups keeps growing as anticipation about them spreads. “People love to travel, but they don’t want to travel alone. By picking different destinations to travel as a group, it allows for people to travel more, learn and visit new places while meeting new friends.”

continually strive to find ways to make clients happy.”

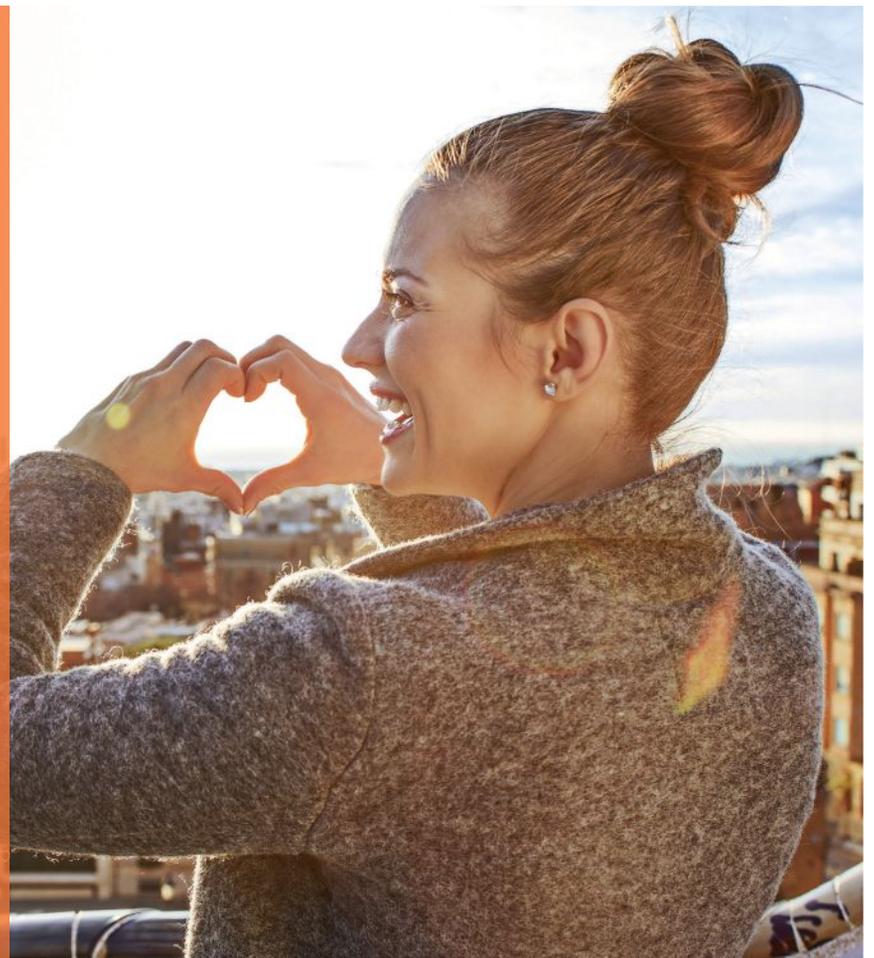
ELIZABETH HOOVER of **Travelink**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40

TravelBound

Europe is always a good idea.

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SAMANTHA HARTMAN of **Protravel International** in Roseland, NJ, cautions that it takes hard work to build your business as an independent advisor. “Yes we’re enjoying all these beautiful trips, but we’re answering e-mails and getting on calls at 4 a.m. with the time difference. It’s an amazing career with wonderful perks, provided you are able to be flexible and above all else, service oriented.”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

Incorporated in Nashville, TN, has found it makes a lot of business sense to pay attention to those companies she does business with. “To make more money this year, I’ve taken it upon myself to register with each and every hotel group that I do business with, to not only make an incentive off my commissions with my company but also to receive bonuses and perks from the hotels and the management companies directly,” she says. Her clients are often rewarded as well when they arrive at a hotel by being gifted with an extra amenity, she adds.

Hoover has also implemented a one-to-one marketing strategy with her clients by reaching out to past customers to discuss their next trip or experience. “This allows me to get to know my clients personally and also to generate sales that will continue to grow as our relationship grows,” she says.

KAITLYN KUBITSKEY of **My World Travel LLC** in Louisville, KY, also makes it a point to log in and register for all of the commission opportunities with each travel supplying company. “It is time-consuming and hard to navigate, but it really does pay off in the end,” she says. Kubitskey has also learned more about how to “work the system” with points and rewards programs, especially with credit cards. “I share this knowledge with my clients constantly. Your money should always be working for you!” she notes. Lastly, Kubitskey

“Brentwood Travel has taken notice of the Millennial generation and hired quite a few agents. Millennials in the work force are typically very resourceful and quick to learn,” says **STACEY HOEHNE** of **Brentwood Travel** in St. Louis.

says she has clenched her teeth and raised her prices a bit. “I’m trusting myself that I have value and my services are worth it.”

Charging travel planning fees has been a keen focus for **SAMANTHA COLLUM** of **West University Travel** in Houston, TX; in fact, she says that’s the smartest thing she’s done this year. “With my focus on custom travel, I really do spend a lot of time creating each and every itinerary,” she says. “I look for the best flight schedules, quote multiple hotel options, and try to design tours that match my clients’ budget and personal travel style.”

Being compensated for her time makes sense, she says, even if clients



Kristiana Choquet

decide not to book or need to cancel their travels.

“Think of it this way — interior designers or business consultants charge for their time, so why should a professional travel advisor be any different?” says Collum.

KRISTIANA CHOQUET of **Artisanal Experiences by Ovation Vacations** in New York says her team has forged

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

Knowing When to Grow

Marielle Kabin of **Travelwise International** in Fort Washington, MD, owns her agency, and recently realized she had to stop booking travel so she could focus on growing the company’s revenue. The decision was a tough one as she was a senior travel consultant contributing a high level of sales to the bottom line. She knew, however, that that wasn’t enough.

“As an owner it can be very hard to let go and trust that someone can take better care of your business without your involvement,” she tells us. “I stopped booking and taking requests from clients so that I could help and encourage others in the agency to break out of their shells and sell new destinations and travel experiences.”

Kabin focused on training to provide her advisors with intel on the different experiences each cruise line provides. She educated them on travel insurance and how to improve sales calls. She also sat with each staff member quarterly to perform evaluations and to set goals.

“By focusing on the company’s biggest assets, the employees, accountability went up, our agents gained confidence, which boosted morale within the office and gave our agents greater job satisfaction. Happy agents equal happy sales,” says Kabin.

Her time has also been freed up to create a vision for her agency. She joined associations and worked on public relations strategies to expand her agency’s network.

“This switch in gears has helped position our business with people who have opened new doors that were beyond our agency,” says Kabin.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

closer relationships with hoteliers to increase their commission percentages based on volume of production. “Programs such as Rosewood Elite and Oetker Pearl have increased our commission percentages,” she tells us. Her team has also developed an ambassador program that rewards current clients who refer the agency to other top clients. “The success of this program has significantly increased our client base,” says Choquet, who says an increased exposure in the press has delivered “a plethora of new referrals.”

JONATHAN GARCIA of First in Service Travel in New York City is also very customer focused this year and is making it a point to meet in person with his most senior clients, most of whom tend to be corporate. “It was finally time to put a face to their names after emailing them all these years,” he said. The strategy has strengthened his relationships with them and he’s even spurred some friendships, which has led to more requests for leisure trips. Garcia doesn’t take these relationships for granted.

“It’s the little details and how far and beyond you are willing to go in order to ‘wow’ them and make sure I make that lasting impression,” he says.

STEPHANIE LEGROW of Lovely Lotus Travel in Las Vegas has also forged friendships by trying to grow her relationships with suppliers within her community. “I’ve met with many business and wedding vendors in Las Vegas in hopes of becoming a preferred honey-

“My younger clients ... need someone who understands where they are in life and how to meet them where they are. Having more agents our age would benefit our clients and our industry,” says **STEPHANIE LEGROW** of Lovely Lotus Travel in Las Vegas.

moon provider for them. These meetings have begun to pay off, as I have a steady stream of leads coming from within the community now,” she says.

FRANCES SARRETT of McCabe World Travel in McLean, VA, designs luxury leisure vacations with a focus on cruises and European travel. She says that her best reward is when she hears back from clients after they return from a trip about the positive impact she’s made on their vacation.

“It is truly gratifying,” says Sarrett. Her success comes from listening to a client’s requests and then filling in the blanks with suppliers she’s savvy about. “Clients don’t know what’s out there and what they could have with so many choices. I’ve realized that a new hotel, cruise line, or a land/tour operator could be the missing link to make their itinerary echo for years to come.” Thinking outside of the box is another strategy; for example, if a client wants to go to the Greek Isles, Sarrett is apt to suggest a cruise to help them save travel time.

“This raises my yield, sometimes by as much as 70 percent, but more importantly, improves the client’s experience. We can then focus on pre- and post-hotels to round off the trip,” she says.

JORDAN MICHELLE LAPETZ of AAA Travel Michigan has made a keen effort to focus on her clients’ experiences, rather than on revenue and profits coming in. “Chasing sales will never provide you with a full book of business and desperation does not look good on travel agents!” she says. She complements this relaxed mindset with a drive to put her all into trip research and planning for her clients, who in turn don’t hesitate to send her referral business when she asks for it.

—RUTHANNE TERRERO



Jordan Lapetz

Company/Website	Page
American Express www.americanexpress.com	21
Belmond La Sammana www.belmond.com/hotels/caribbean/ st-martin/belmond-la-samanna/	12
Carnival Cruise Line www.goccl.com	18
Crystal Cruises www.crystalcruises.com	14
Divi Little Bay Beach Resort www.divisorts.com/divi-little-bay-beach-resort-st-maarten.htm	12
Ensemble Travel Group www.ensembletravel.com	20
Mercure Saint Martin Marina and Spa Hotel www.accorhotels.com	12
Nexion www.nexion.com	21
Oyster Bay Beach Resort www.oysterbaybeachresort.com	12
Signature Travel Network www.signaturetravelnetwork.com	20
Silversea Cruises www.silversea.com	16
Simpson Bay Resort & Marina www.simpsonbayresort.com	12
Sonesta St. Maarten Resorts www.sonesta.com/stmaarten	12
Travel Leaders Group www.travelleadersgroup.com	21
Virtuoso www.virtuoso.com	20

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