

Travel agency garners top industry awards despite pandemic; *continues to grow and go*

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Launching first on a part-time basis in May 2017, Travel by Corie jumped full-time into the industry from its Troy home in June of 2018. Then, as we all know, the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

Most businesses and industries were faced with crippling struggles to just survive as the pandemic took its hold. Among the hardest hit was the travel industry, as everyone was told to isolate themselves and tourist hotspots closed their doors in response.

Corie Devall, owner of Travel by Corie, said that while sales slowed initially, there was initially a substantial increase in travel insurance sales. “Once travel was shut down, all sales stopped and trips were canceled for the upcoming several months. The biggest challenge at that point was the unknown policies for trip cancellations within the travel provider, and then, they were constantly changing. Depending on when the trip was booked and when it was canceled determined what type of refund or credit a client could receive.

“I spent entire days on the phone, on hold, waiting for a representative from the provider to assist with processing those cancellations. Some days, I would be on hold all day, and then the phone line would disconnect as they stopped taking calls. Although understandable, it was frustrating to know this is how my days would be spent for an unknown period of time,” Devall added.

“My next challenge was tracking and ensuring client’s refunds were processed, which was taking several months, and making sure those who were issued travel credit were re-booked before their credits expired. It took well over a year before the cycle of credits were used. From a financial perspective, every booking which had been canceled had no revenue associated with it,” she said.

Post-pandemic, Devall says her business, and the travel industry as a whole, is “absolutely” on the road to recovery. “As soon as travel re-opened, even though there were some restrictions, travel bookings boomed. The industry coined it as ‘revenge travel,’ and it continues to this day. Clients were ready to get out of their homes and feel a sense of freedom again through travel.”

Devall also noted that prices became favorable, which helped to increase sales as well, because resorts and airline seats were not reaching capacity. The cruise industry had taken a bit longer trail to reach the recovery road, mostly because of their more restrictive vaccination requirements. “I focus on all-inclusive resort destinations,” said Devall, “so my business recovered much faster than those

agencies who are more cruise heavy.”

The industry continues to have its share of issues, including staff shortages, ongoing Covid-19 travel restrictions in some areas, flight cancellations, etc. And because of these issues, travel pricing has increased, just like nearly everything else has. However, sales are on an upward trend for Travel by Corie after a quick dip in 2020. “Our sales increased 56 percent from 2018 to 2019, we were down 15 percent for 2020, up 297 percent in 2021, up 53 percent for 2022 and are on pace for over 10 percent growth in 2023,” Devall noted.



Corie Devall, owner of Travel by Corie, a local agency closing in on its sixth year in business and servicing travelers all over the world from her Troy, Ill.-based home office continues to grow, and go. (Courtesy Travel by Corie Facebook page)

Now, in part because of the pricing increases of nearly ‘everything,’ Devall said she is predicting a potential overall leveling out of travel spending, or perhaps in some cases, a decline. “With the cost of goods and services increasing, spending on travel could potentially decrease. Travel, for some, is a luxury item and can be skipped or held over into another year. This is one area I hope I’m wrong, but increased travel levels will have a hard time sustaining or competing with grocery prices, insurance premiums and utilities all going up substantially.”

Devall said she got the travel agent “spark” while working for Triad School District. “I had a desire to find a secondary career which could provide additional income for our household, operate at a low expense from our home, and in

a field I loved. My husband Doug and I love to travel, and we’ve found all-inclusive resorts to be our go-to. After a few conversations with others in the industry, I discovered that the travel industry checked all these boxes.”

Travel by Corie specializes in all-inclusive resorts throughout Mexico and the Caribbean. “I love planning honeymoons, destination weddings, group and family travel, and ladies’ getaways. We do a lot of these types of travel, so we’ve become experts in these areas,” Devall said.

The agency has grown sales to a million plus annually. Devall said her agency’s growth plan is built on three key areas: Referrals, social media, and Google Business placement.

“Having a solid number (and growing) of repeat clients and their referrals, followers on social media (mainly Facebook) and a well-maintained business listing on Google Business set the stage for the agency when the post-pandemic travel surged,” she explained. “We have had a solid business operation, even before the pandemic, which helped us be prepared for the increased business which followed.”

Travel by Corie’s efforts have been recognized many times over in the industry. “Our master agency recognizes top travel agents and top companies (as some companies have multiple travel agents within their

structure) on a monthly and annual basis via Top Sales (sales of travel bookings), Top Earnings (actual commission earned on travel bookings) and Top Company (the combination of both Bookings and Earnings for all agents within the specific travel agency company),” Devall noted.

“We began receiving monthly awards in 2020 and continue to do so today earning a total of 37 monthly awards through March 2023. In 2021, we earned the annual Top 100 Sales and Top 100 Earnings awards. For 2022, we earned Top 100 Sales, Top 100 Earnings and Top 50 Company awards. We also received recognition for being in the Top 50 for ALG Vacations Travel Advisors (Apple, Funjet, Southwest Vacations, etc.), as well.”

Devall offers these words of advice as people begin looking toward their summer vacation travels and beyond:

“Over the last year, flight cancellations have certainly taken center stage with issues. Apart from Southwest’s issues over the holidays, most air carriers are operating at a normal pace. Prices for checked bags, seat selections and bag weight limits have all increased, especially for the discount carriers. My advice would be to purchase those items at the time of booking or at least before you check in at the airport. The earlier you purchase those items, in most cases, the better the price.

“Secondly, I would allow extra time and patience. Lines are longer, due to the increased travel and some staff shortages, so getting to the airport earlier than you normally would is helpful. Airport and resort workers are overworked with the extra travel, so have extra patience with those helping you.

“If you are visiting the Caribbean, including the Cancun, Mexico area, be prepared for large amounts of sargassum. These areas have been invaded by an increasing seaweed plant traveling across the Atlantic and ending up on the shores of these beautiful beaches. Resorts place resources and efforts to remove the sargassum from the beach, but at times it can be overwhelming.

“Currently, there is a 5,000-mile-wide bloom of sargassum, named the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt, heading across the Caribbean and will reach shores over the summer. It is also expected to hit the shores of Florida this July, which is unusual for the state. Sargassum will smell foul as it rots in the sun.” Devall then added in these sage words: “Head to the resort pools this year.”

To reach Corie Devall and her Troy, Ill.-based agency, Travel by Corie, call or text (618) 304-5399 or visit online at travelbycorie.com. To reach Devall by email, send a message to corie@travelbycorie.com. Travel by Corie can also be found on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

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