

Travel, Book and Tweet – All at the Same Time

STACY SMALL OF ELITE TRAVEL IS THE COMPLETE 21ST CENTURY TRAVEL AGENT

Stacy Small books a client's honeymoon flight from her laptop while she sunbathes on a Caribbean beach.

She shares restaurant ideas and photos by Twitter and Path during a trip to Paris.

Stacy assists another client by amending his adventure vacation itinerary from her at-home office in Los Angeles.

These are typical moments in the life of Stacy Small, upscale travel expert and founder of Elite Travel International. You might also know Stacy as @elitetravelgal on Twitter, where she has a growing following of more than 24,000 people discussing travel tips and experiences.

Stacy represents a new breed of travel agent. She works from home, yet travels 3-10 days every month, inspecting properties.

"Personally, I love to travel," she says. "And, professionally, I feel an obligation to travel, so I can keep current with changes in the field."

Stacy is savvy about using technology in a way that personalizes the customer experience. She carries her laptop and smartphone just about everywhere.

"It's funny, going without a laptop is scary for me – it gives me peace of mind to know that I can connect to Sabre and help clients wherever I am," Stacy says.

FROM TRAVEL WRITER TO TRAVEL PLANNER

As the founding editorial director of Elite Traveler Magazine, Stacy had the opportunity as a journalist to travel to exotic destinations around the world for 15 years.



"After a couple years of this, friends began asking me to help plan their trips," she says. "Where's a good beach resort in Thailand? Which new restaurants should we try in Venice? They didn't know where to turn for honest answers."

The defining moment in Stacy's transition from travel journalist to travel agent was an African safari.

"I had spent a ton of time planning all the details for a friend's luxury safari, and they absolutely loved it," Stacy says. "They came back to the U.S. gushing about the wonderful experience and the specific recommendations I'd made. That was the point that I realized that I was already doing much of what a travel agent does for clients. I just had to figure out the booking part."

Decision made, Elite Travel International was soon operating in early 2005.

"I was living in Palm Beach, and I wanted to find a way to be an agent from home, while continuing to travel as I had," she says. "Sabre was all I had heard about for years from my travel contacts. I knew that Sabre was *the* one to use and I wanted to learn it as soon as I could."



Stacy Small

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Stacy Small
Elite Travel International

“I’m also the go-to person when things go badly. Just yesterday, I helped a client get helicoptered out of a safari lodge when a nearby river flooded. Those things can be hard to do on your own.”

Stacy Small
Elite Travel International

OUT OF THE OFFICE, BUT NEVER OUT OF REACH

Sabre’s Web-based services fit Stacy’s busy lifestyle.

“I love Sabre Red,” Stacy says. “I can book clients on my laptop while I’m in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, myself; basically, anywhere I can get an Internet connection.” She laughs.

“Sometimes I’ll be in the airport lounge, and I’m busy making airline bookings for clients in the final moments before I board my own flight.”

Stacy reflects on the pace of change in travel.

“These days, clients want more details, personalized information, and transparent pricing,” she says “Yesterday’s client planned a trip, then told me all about it after they got back. Today’s client stays in touch with me during the trip. With Facebook posts, emails, and Tweets, I can see how the trip is going and make adjustments on the fly. Are they having fun? Are they content simply relaxing, or do they need to go on an exciting excursion? I can help with those decisions. Eighteen months ago, we started using Sabre ClientBase. I love the way it links into the Web-based system. I can have all my details needed to serve the client, without manila folders lying all around!”

Today’s clients realize a travel agent can plan things faster, with better upgrades and more value than if they spend hours booking travel themselves. Sometimes, Stacy even gets to be a bit of an Indiana Jones.

“And, as an agent, I’m also the go-to person when things go badly,” Stacy points out. “Just yesterday, I helped a client get helicoptered out of a safari lodge when a nearby river flooded. Those things can be hard to do on your own.”

Elite Travel International has grown steadily in the seven years since its founding, and now does more corporate travel, too.

“I’ve booked the honeymoons for Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, and also for executives in finance and entertainment. And then, because things went so well, we won the corporate travel account at their firms, too,” Stacy says.

She now has 10 independent agents in her network.

“I start by selecting people with intuitive sales and marketing experience,” Stacy says. “And I mentor them on what I’ve learned about how travel works. I love it!”

Indeed, Stacy has a lot to teach.

STACY’S STOP 10 LIST OF HOTELS VISITED & LOVED IN 2011

1. Four Seasons Lanai at Manele Bay, Hawaii
2. Mandarin-Oriental, Barcelona
3. Montage Deer Valley, Deer Valley, Utah
4. Hotel Le Bristol, Paris
5. Beach Village at Hotel Del Coronado, San Diego
6. The Ritz-Carlton Kapalua Resort, Hawaii
7. The Marbella Club, Marbella, Spain
8. Acqualina Resort, Sunny Isles, Fla.
9. Le Royal Monceau, Paris
10. Four Seasons Los Angeles and Four Seasons Westlake Village, Calif.

STAYING AHEAD

1. TRAVEL WRITER TURNED TRAVEL BOOKING PRO – 15 YEARS OF TRAVEL WRITING. STARTED ELITE TRAVEL IN 2005.
2. DELIVERS PREMIUM SERVICE, WHILE ENJOYING FLEXIBILITY AND FREEDOM WITH SABRE RED.
3. “BEEN THERE, DONE THAT” TRAVEL EXPERIENCES SHARED FAR AND WIDE THROUGH SMART USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, WITH OVER 24,000 TWITTER FOLLOWERS!

