



INSIDER EXCLUSIVES

Attention, Tour Operators—Is the Weekend Your Weak Link?

By Shebby Lee

I'm in the travel business. One day of the week is the same as any other to me. I am always startled when a Friday email ends with a heartfelt wish from the sender to have a nice weekend. What's a weekend?

As true as having a relaxing weekend may be for a tour company's office workers, weekends are not the same for tour personnel. When I am on the road with a group, nine times out of 10 when something goes wrong it invariably occurs on a weekend when the hotel or attraction sales staff is not there. Apparently there is a weekend for these people because: a) they aren't there to help and b) the fact that something went wrong is often directly attributable to their absence.

There is too often a lamentable breakdown in communication between the sales office and the front desk. Whatever instructions you relayed to the front desk the night before evaporate somewhere between midnight and the time the morning crew comes on. The wake-up calls you requested are not delivered. The departure and bags-out schedule is not forwarded, and breakfast on the weekend starts an hour later than during the week (although the person who checked you in the night before was blissfully unaware of this detail). If you're really lucky someone will stuff a bill under the doors of each of your passenger's rooms!

I can just hear a wail going up from readers proclaiming that everybody needs some time off. I can't argue with that.

Burnout is another challenge in our line of work. But all professions have certain expectations and minimum requirements. Firefighters, health care professionals, and police officers work shifts around the clock to make sure the public's welfare is taken care of at all times. Is hospitality any different?

Yes, it is. Besides providing a seamless experience exactly as planned and promised, the travel business has a built-in imperative to make sure our guests/participants are not only comfortable but also happy. Our goal should be to exceed their expectations—not just meet them—and if all the planets align correctly, we should give them life-changing experiences.

Yes, it's a demanding profession, but it's also one of the most rewarding. Are you a service provider who could benefit from a review of such lapses? Are you absolutely providing the best experience for your groups—no matter what day of the week they visit? If you're not willing to go that extra mile for your guests, perhaps you need to rethink your career choice.

I'm in the travel business, also known as the hospitality industry. One day of the week is the same as any other, and by the way, you are in the same business!

Historian and writer Shebby Lee owns Shebby Lee Tours Inc. of Rapid City, S.D. Her tours focus on the history and cultural heritage of the West. Lee also makes presentations at history conferences and industry meetings and writes the travel blog Trail Talk. To contact Lee, visit www.shebbleetours.com.