

To: Shari Wallack & Caryn Rosenthal
Buy the Sea Cruises

From: Jill Roth CMP
Jill Roth Events

Date: August 2008

Subject: Testimonial

In 2007, I took on the most challenging meeting planning project in my career and need to thank Shari and Caryn from Buy the Sea for their dedication and determination to create a fabulous experience for my client and their guests.

My client wanted a "Trip of a lifetime" for their top Insurance agents and marketing organizations. As potential destinations were discussed, the client wanted an international program, visiting at least two countries with all or part of the group of 300 people. As I began thinking about the travel logistics and security issues present in our world today, I decided a single destination would be most ideal and safe for this size group. Only a third of the group were well traveled or experienced international travelers. I decided to search for a destination which would allow for a day trip to another country rather than relocating 300 people to a second location. As I created the RFP for this group, it came to me that a Mediterranean Cruise would be the perfect solution for the client.

Conveniently, I met Shari Wallack just after joining FICP and posting the RFP on my profile. Very quickly Shari and I began discussing the many different Cruise products that exist. I will admit my knowledge and experience in the cruise market was limited. Shari was so knowledgeable of the wide variety of products that are present in the cruise market. She helped educate me very quickly. I felt very confident we would find perfect options for this incentive program.

We looked at the profile of the agents, a mix of annuity, life and health insurance agents and realized that a small ship vs. a mass market ship would allow our guests to see each other and interact thru-out the week. Our first option, which I never thought we could afford was a huge hit and was a slam dunk with the client. The client selected a 7-night full ship charter of the Wind Surf, which embarked in Barcelona and disembarked in Rome. It allowed the guests to visit not only Spain and Italy, but also France and Monaco, without the hassle of all those airports and multiple hotels. Another bonus of this cruise was spending no days at sea and having an overnight in Monte Carlo.

My work was cut out for me to customize this program based on many components from our previous style land based programs. For example, we could not seat all guests in one area at one time for a meal period or for a meeting. What would I do for an awards dinner or for a business meeting. Shari was instrumental in helping me think out-of-the-box to come up with solutions. Because we had a full ship charter, we could customize many of the standard ship programs and schedules.

Solution number one, the Awards dinner for this group took place at The Hotel Hermitage in Monte Carlo. I hired a local DMC to assist with this event which went off flawlessly. People felt so special and rewarded to have a black tie awards dinner in Monte Carlo. The evening was over-the-top and just magnificent as people sipped cocktails overlooking the Mediterranean and the silhouette of lights on the sails of the Wind Surf.

Challenge number two was how to hold a business meeting during this trip. After brainstorming with Shari, the ship sales manager and my client, we had a business meeting for only the Health agents which took place in the lounge on board the ship. The other business lines opted not to bring together their agents for a formalized meeting. However, they had two designated evenings to host their agents

exclusively in the private dining room. This brought those business lines together for the necessary interaction.

The program planning became more complicated when the client decided to invite the top marketing organizations to Barcelona one night early for a dinner event. I hired an outstanding DMC which I had worked with years before in Barcelona to assist with this event. The pre-cruise hotel for this group was conveniently located at a port where the Wind Surf usually docks for embarkation. However, the place of embarkation would not be confirmed until 48 hours before the cruise.

Throughout the planning process Shari and Caryn stayed in constant communication even though I had been assigned an account manager from Holland America, the parent company. As the saying goes, everything happens for a reason. After the ship contract was signed, the cruise line announced that the Wind Surf would go into dry dock for renovations. Wow, this was great news for me considering the ship would be in mint condition for our cruise taking place less than four months later.

A couple months later, I received a call from Shari informing me of an ownership change that would take place with the Wind Surf. She assured me our contract would be upheld and that things would go on as scheduled and they did.

Program challenges always arise and as a planner, we deal with it. However, Shari and Caryn were instrumental in preventing some potential on-ship challenges. The week before our cruise Shari and Caryn were on-board the newly renovated Wind Surf. They had taken the program specs with them to anticipate the experience we would have. Several red flags came up and Shari called me. Recalling that an ownership change and ship renovation took place since my site visit, some things had slipped thru the cracks. For example, during ship renovations a coffee bar was added on board. It was my understanding that the coffee bar was included in the charter price. However, Shari and Caryn learned that it was not. Many thanks to them, those charges were not billed to my guests. There was also miscommunication on some other costs that were settled in advance thanks to Shari and Caryn.

The day before embarkation, I learned the Wind Surf would not dock at the port located adjacent to the hotel where almost half my group was located due to early arrivals. A brand new port would open for the first time for our cruise and I could not see it until the morning we would embark. As Shari and Caryn were disembarking from their cruise, they met me at the port, stayed with me at the pre-con and thru embarkation. They welcomed my guests as my staff of four people was split between the hotel and the port. Shari and Caryn were once again instrumental in getting this cruise off without a hitch.

The cruise was truly the "trip of lifetime" for my client and their guests. It was an amazing experience. The ship was outstanding and the staff very professional. Weather prevented us from going to Portofino, but not one person complained as the captain came up with plan B to go to Genoa, Italy. For me personally, I was successful with my most complicated incentive trip ever. With three DMCs and three hotels in three countries, pre-cruise events and post-cruise events and an event staff of four people including me, we rocked.

I have to thank Shari for educating me and insisting that there is a way to make this convention work at sea. Both Shari and Caryn are true professionals who care about their clients, the products they sell and the experience they are providing to many meeting planners and insurance agents. The knowledge these two ladies possess is amazing and the desire and motivation to deliver a superior experience is highly respected and so much appreciated.

Personally, I would welcome the opportunity to recreate this experience once again in the future for another incentive group. It was a trip of lifetime for many people and it was an experience of a lifetime for me professionally.