

# TRAVELSAVERS Canada:

## With Every Challenge Comes Opportunity



*"We're best known for two key priorities: our proprietary technology and commitment to service," observes Jane Clementino, SVP & General Manager for TRAVELSAVERS Canada, before continuing: "And it's a model that works -- it works to adapt to the demands and nuances of the travel industry, which is continually evolving."*

***I hadn't realized that TRAVELSAVERS had been around for 52 years ... nice to learn something new ... and it has been in Canada for 23 years. So, maybe you could start by giving Canadian Travel Press' readers a bit of a history lesson -- how it started; what was the vision when it launched; and how it has grown, particularly here in Canada.***

Absolutely. TRAVELSAVERS is a 53-year-old international travel marketing organization and family-owned business that has been serving travel agencies in Canada for 23 years. It all started with Rick Mazza, a successful Brooklyn travel agency owner -- he joined a national franchise and realized that the products and services offered were limited to a one-size-fits-all approach. To better serve the industry, he created an alternative approach, and TRAVELSAVERS was born.

We're best known for two key priorities: our proprietary technology and commitment to service. And it's a model that works -- it works to adapt to the demands and nuances of the travel industry, which is continually evolving. As a silent partner and best-kept secret to independent agencies across the country, we're focused on investing in our members. Everything we do is agency-focused -- we're able to provide a

personalized experience for our agencies, backed by the power and strategy of our assets and partnerships.

In Canada, we've done over \$250 million in new sales over the past year while spearheading new engagement initiatives and growing our team. TRAVELSAVERS Canada has doubled the size of its team in only one year. Adding to an existing strong team, this growth will enhance capabilities across the organization and help us continue to provide the best-in-class experience TRAVELSAVERS is known for.

And as we continue to scale, top of mind for us is our core values. Ultimately, TRAVELSAVERS focuses on people, prides itself on high levels of service, builds valuable partnerships with suppliers, and sparks growth and success for our agencies.

***It's probably a bit of an understatement to say that the retail travel agency business has had more than its share of challenges over the decades. I'm hoping you can talk about the longevity of TRAVELSAVERS and TRAVELSAVERS Canada -- how has the group been able to weather both the good times and the bad times the industry has experienced over the decades?***

The travel industry has seen drastic fluctuation over the decades, particularly over the last few years. But with every challenge comes opportunity.

What I believe differentiates TRAVELSAVERS from the rest is our model, which is why the company has experienced the longevity it has. We're very family-driven -- some agencies have been with us for upwards of 40 years. This ethos applies to our team; during the pandemic, we didn't let anyone go. We were one of the few consortias that retained its entire staff, which allowed us to continue to support agencies during that time. Under American Marketing Group, Inc. (AMG), TRAVELSAVERS is among 19 brands that can provide an array of travel adjacent services that can be leveraged during times of economic

fluctuation.

Furthermore, we have in-house creative, marketing, and IT teams, which leaves us poised to pivot efficiently without relying on a third party. This gives us more flexibility, control and security during moments of economic instability.

***That said, I've always understood that the TRAVELSAVERS' model was different from the models of other consortia. Is that the case? And, if it is, how is it different and what does it offer its members that other agency groups don't offer? I guess what I'm asking is what's TRAVELSAVERS' unique selling point (USP)?***

TRAVELSAVERS leads with a commitment to service and consultation in providing the best-in-class experience from a service and technology-driven perspective as demand increases. Our family-driven model facilitates our commitment to service. From its conception, the company was never a commissions club. The goal was for everyone to walk away from the table feeling like they got something out of the whole program. From the start, we were here for the agency community but directed preferred vendors' products to consumers. We went out and we actually went after the consumer on behalf of the agency community. This really differentiated us in the industry.

***Changing gears a bit here, I'm hoping that you can talk about some of the trends that you're seeing in the marketplace today. Has the pandemic changed what travellers are looking for today -- in terms of both the destinations that interest them and, perhaps more importantly, the style of travel that appeals to them? When it comes to trends and travel styles, what are your members hearing from their clients? Can you break it down for CTP's readers?***

The pandemic has absolutely changed the game. We're seeing a re-imagined approach to travel, particularly with remote work driving the length of stay on properties. Blended travel is very common





these days, with travellers mixing business and pleasure. Travellers can even take a full vacation with minimal time off work since work offers so much more flexibility.

And post-pandemic, everyone was definitely excited to travel again. It's less about fulfilling a bucket list than it is about fulfilling a to-do list; people are more action-oriented than ever when it comes to travel. Travellers are spending on average 25% more on travel, with Millennials spending on average 40% more. Canadians are yearning for full sensory experiences, adventures and getaways. Solo travel is as popular as ever, as are destination weddings, cruises, and expedition getaways.

In terms of destinations, a few regions are experiencing more traffic than others: Since 2019, Europe has seen 89% more traffic, Africa has seen 86% more traffic, and Asia-Pacific has seen 57% more traffic. Additionally, premium and luxury

travel continues to top growth charts.

***So, the obvious follow-up to this is how TRAVELSAVERS is responding to these changes in the marketplace. What is it doing to help its members meet the needs of the changed traveller and keep up with the changing trends?***

Our commitment to service means that we are ready to adapt to the changing times and therefore changing needs of our affiliates. We have a long history of innovation, anticipating where the industry is heading and producing proprietary tools and initiatives to support the success of our agencies and suppliers.

TRAVELSAVERS affiliates have access to the best-in-class resources. We provide a robust portfolio of exclusive sales and marketing programs for agencies to capture, retain and grow their leisure and luxury travellers. A new IC model will be available through OnlineXpress, a

proprietary platform for consumer websites and lead generation. We've also added enhancements to Softvoyage, an online booking engine, providing consumers with a platform to access thousands of travel options and competitive marketplace pricing.

In line with the desire for more in-person communications, TRAVELSAVERS Canada is focused on intentional engagement, hosting a series of intimate events this season to facilitate meaningful one-on-one connections among owners, advisors and preferred partners.

***What's the phrase ... 'There's always something' ... I think that's it ... the travel industry always has something to deal with ... and I'm wondering what that 'something' is these days. What's raising concerns with your members right now?***

Staffing is a constant concern. Approximately 81% of luxury travellers believe that working with advisors is the only way to get a true luxury travel experience. Further, 36% of agencies lost seasoned staff during the pandemic and 56% of those haven't replaced them. Travel agencies are struggling to enlist and train advisors to keep up with industry demand.

In response to this very important need, TRAVELSAVERS Canada is gearing up to launch KORE, a new education program to attract and train new talent to the industry. KORE is a fully digital college-level platform with a self-paced curriculum designed to attract the next generation of travel advisors and equip them with the training and skills they need to succeed in the industry as it continues to evolve. This is the first program of its kind in Canada.

If the staffing situation doesn't improve, the industry likely won't return to pre-pandemic levels until 2035, which is why we've taken it upon ourselves to contribute to the solution with KORE.

And with staffing being such a prevalent issue, burnout is another pain point. There's too much business and advisors simply can't keep up. It takes them longer to put trips together than before





because so many people want to use the services of an advisor but they can't recruit the right kind of talent.

**Let's talk about technology. There's no doubt that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is going to have a place in the travel industry going forward. Can you offer some insights on how you see GenAI benefiting retail travel and, also, how TRAVELSAVERS is preparing its members for GenAI to become part of their businesses?**

Research shows that the fastest-growing demographic of luxury travellers, Millennials, prefer tech-enabled planning and booking. To meet this demand for digitalization, TRAVELSAVERS has started to integrate artificial intelligence into programs. It will be used to create content, manage workflow and save time.

Our applications will incorporate AI into proprietary social media platforms, itinerary builders, new payment methods with crypto and new direct application programming interfaces. By incorporating AI into our tools, we are giving our advisors more time to sell and work on their businesses. Within minutes, AI can produce customized content that will drive more business. This will free advisors to focus on their strength: delivering excellent client service.

Training has officially commenced for all levels within our memberships, which is very exciting.

**Following up ... what's the downside of GenAI for the retail industry? When the Internet arrived in the mid-1990s, many predicted it would be the end of retail travel agents, which didn't happen – so how do travel advisors adapt to meet any of the downside challenges of AI going forward?**

Travel is a very people-centric industry -- it relies on heavy networking and word-of-mouth. Using AI can certainly help to increase efficiency and automate processes, but not at the expense of sacrificing the personable nature that defines the travel industry.

That being said, AI is an exciting opportunity for the travel industry -- when used to its full potential, it can help travel agencies gain a unique competitive advantage. In fact, AI will allow advisors to focus on their strengths and give them more time to sell and deliver exceptional customer service.

**Sustainability ... Can talk a bit about TRAVELSAVERS' policies on sustainability, but also how it is educating its advisors to help them talk to their clients about travelling sustainably?** We're very passionate about the power of travel to create a more sustainable future. We know that 83% of global travellers think sustainable travel is now vital, with 69% committed to reducing the carbon footprint of their trip or paying to offset this whenever possible.

To combat emissions, TRAVELSAVERS Canada has recently partnered with award-winning environmental organization Trees4Travel. We've partnered with the organization to offset the environmental impact of travel to company events. Tree planting is a climate-positive action, and we're excited to make this part of our corporate responsibility and mission.

We estimate that we will save 341 tons of carbon emissions and fund the planting of over 2,000 trees to rebalance the effect of 13 company events by the end of 2024, which is huge.



The trees will be planted in developing countries such as Kenya and Nepal, improving a community's economic situation, restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, and creating forests for future generations. We're grateful to be given the chance to do our part and show up consciously.

I've said this before and I'll say it again: sustainable travel is not a trend. It's a necessary move to protect our planet and to satisfy the needs of our environmentally conscious customers.

**One of the questions that I've been asking people is whether the industry can find a balance between needing to grow its business (following a global shutdown) and operating in a sustainable manner that achieves NetZero targets by 2050. Is it possible? What's your view on how the industry gets there?**

The solution is multi-faceted. The first step is awareness, which means developing a good understanding of where there may be high sensitivity to over-tourism and the impact of that traffic, as well as restrictions present in certain markets.

The second step is education. It's about doing your research in your respective field and understanding new developments in sustainability practices and regulations, which could encompass new carbon offset taxes or new initiatives spearheaded by suppliers.

What's great about TRAVELSAVERS is that we're able to identify suppliers who are paving

the way in sustainability. Through our extranet, those suppliers and their activities are completely visible, which acts as the gateway to education and transparency. A few suppliers doing amazing things in terms of sustainability are G Adventures, Intrepid Travel, and Quark Expeditions, to name a few.

Thirdly, as I mentioned before, TRAVELSAVERS is dedicated to offsetting the environmental impact of company travel through our partnership with Trees4Travel.

**Last question ... is there a question that I haven't asked you that I should have asked you ... if there is, what's the question and, naturally, what's the answer?**

I think a great question would be asking what is needed to advocate for the health of our industry.

To me, the key is ensuring that agencies and advisors have access to professional and meaningful travel counsel through effective leadership, which is provided through ACTA. ACTA is the Canadian trade association for the entire travel industry (particularly for travel advisors), providing agencies with the support, advocacy, and service to help them grow and thrive. Their benefits support the health of the travel industry, compensation, insurance, service standards and more.

At TRAVELSAVERS, helping our members and the industry thrive is a priority, which is why we provide financial support for our agencies to join.