



Year-round excitement at St. Mark's Square in Venice, RailPass.com

## Families That Vacation Together, Stay Together

**P**earl Bloom, 85, and her family of 28 get together every year at the holidays, but there's not a Christmas tree or menorah in sight.

Instead, family members meet at an all-inclusive resort, usually in Mexico, for a week filled with sunshine, laughter, relaxation and adventure.

Like many American families, Bloom's clan is spread out across the country — Connecticut, North Carolina, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and California — and an annual gathering is one way to ensure that family members have a chance to truly know each other.

"This is an opportunity for

my children and grandchildren to spend time with each other, and it's nice for me too, because I can see everyone all at once," said Bloom.

And for Bloom, the rewards are many: hearing two granddaughters, ages 18 and 30, giggle together like school-girls; sneaking a peek when grandsons dance like no one else is watching; and enjoying when her four children, all grown now with children and grandchildren of their own, sit down to share the details of their lives.

Bloom started the tradition three years ago, and has no plans of stopping. "It's worked beautifully. I'd like to continue doing this for as long as I can," she said.

### A Renewal In the Family Spirit

Bloom is not the only one who's hooked on family reunions. According to the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), family reunion travel has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. A survey co-conducted by ASTA and Vacation.com reveals that nearly two-thirds of travel agencies report an increase in family reunion travel in the last five years. Most reunions booked are for families of 10-25 people, but some travel agents report working with groups as large as 500. (Yes, that's a five followed by two zeroes.)

"There's definitely been a renewal in the family spirit and the spirit of adventure," said Kathryn W. Sudeikis, president and CEO of ASTA. "Families are going to lots of great destinations, not just to someone's back yard, but to places where everyone can relax and have fun."

Sudeikis, who specializes in intergenerational family travel, cites the September 11 tragedy as a possible catalyst for the increased popularity of family travel. "People are realizing the importance of making time to spend with loved ones. Traveling is a wonder-

ful way to enjoy that time together," Sudeikis said.

Top picks for family reunions, according to the *ASTA/vacation.com* study, are cruise ships (52.8 percent) and all-inclusive resorts (19.8 percent), and the Caribbean, Florida and Mexico are popular destinations.

### Travel Agent as Referee

How difficult can it be to plan a family reunion? To round up the relatives, pick a date, keep everyone's interests and budget in mind, choose a destination, book the flights, hotel and rental car, and make sure you've not overlooked any crucial details? Easy, right?

Wrong!

"It's one thing to plan a little trip for yourself and a significant other, because there's just the two of you to please," said Sudeikis. "But once you open the event to the family at large, look out! Now you have to make sure the destination is one that everyone will enjoy, and that the date is convenient for as many people as possible. And you have to make sure that there's something for everyone to do, from great-grandma Louise right down to the toddlers. That is where your travel agent can show off his or her skills as a referee."

Once you're on your way — figuratively, at least — it's time to get the family excited about preparing for the trip. ASTA's consumer website, [www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org), offers many tips.

### Big Drum Dance, Grenada & Carriacou



## A Travel Agent Can Make All The Difference In The World

**E**very time Jennifer Deeny, 32, plans a trip, she turns to her sounding board/travel agent, Kari Thomas of Will Travel in Langhorne, PA, before finalizing her plans.

"Kari has been to most of the places I'm interested in, so we can talk about what's worth it, and what isn't. And when I need help from the road, I have someone to call," Deeny said. "You can't plan for every contingency, so it's nice to be able to say to someone, 'Please, help me!'"

And help is exactly what Thomas did when Deeny called her from London. While checking into a bed and breakfast, Deeny learned that her room was in the basement, next to the laundry room.

"There was no way I was taking that isolated room, not as a single woman traveling alone. You would think that would be an easy thing to fix, but the manager wouldn't budge until I got Kari on the phone. She fixed it in an instant."

For thousands of travelers like Deeny, travel agents serve as ambassadors of good will, stepping in at a moment's notice to

assist with travel arrangements, medical emergencies,

weather calamities, language barriers and a host of other potentially nightmarish situations.

"The last thing you should have to deal with when you're

*Continued on page 2*

### Exactly What Travel Agents Do

**N**aturally, travel agents are there to assist with bookings, and that's an enormous part of the job. Recent statistics show that travel agents book 80 percent of all airline tickets, 95 percent of all cruises, 90 percent of all tours and packages, 40 percent of all car rentals, and 25 percent of all hotels, according to the American Society of Travel Agents consumer website, [www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org).

But any good travel agent will tell you that bookings are not what it's all about.

"Anyone can make a booking, but matching a customer with the best possible vacation possibility is a skill that's developed over time," said Kathryn W. Sudeikis, president and CEO of the

American Society of Travel Agents. Among the many ways a travel agent can help are these:

- ✓ **Expert guidance:** Travel agents are trained to understand and decipher complicated travel information and codes, and they do it every day.
- ✓ **Personalized service:** Good travel agents develop a relationship with you over time, and come to anticipate what you want and what you value in your travel experience.
- ✓ **Professional advice:** Travel agents are there to make sure you get from Point A to Point B in a timely manner and without breaking the bank.
- ✓ **Time:** Let your travel agent

do the legwork and research for you. A travel agent has all the information at their fingertips, which can save you precious hours in front of a computer screen.

- ✓ **Unbiased information:** Travel agents work for their clients, not for travel suppliers. That means that a customer who feels that an agent has truly helped them may become a repeat client, and even better, may tell family and friends.
- ✓ **Customer advocacy:** If you experience a problem while traveling, your agent is there to act on your behalf to see that restitution is made.

To find a travel agent who meets your requirements, visit [www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org), and click on 'Find A Travel Agent.'

## What's New

**Back by popular demand!** In July and August 2006, **American Cruise Line** offers five Lobsterfest cruises along the New England coast. Expect lobster entrées at every meal, shore excursions to charming fishing ports, and exciting tales from real-life lobstermen. Learn more at [www.americancruiselines.com](http://www.americancruiselines.com).

**Ready to get away?** **American Express Vacations** offers a wide array of special vacation packages with the exceptional service and added value you expect from American Express. Also available are last-minute weekend getaways to Canada, the Caribbean, Europe, Mexico and Central America, South America and the U.S., offered from 14 days to three hours before departure. Learn more at [www.AmericanExpressVacations.com](http://www.AmericanExpressVacations.com).

**Optional new** GPS navigation systems installed on **Beach's Motorcycle Adventures** tour bikes enable motorcyclists touring Tuscany and the European Alps to more fully enjoy the freedom of discovery along Europe's magical back roads. Learn more at [www.bmca.com](http://www.bmca.com).

**Visitors to Branson, Missouri**, in 2006 will find plenty new to explore, including Branson Landing, a waterfront development featuring shopping, dining and luxury accommodations; the new Grand Exposition at the Silver Dollar City theme park; and Dick Clark's American Bandstand Theater Complex. To learn more, turn to the experts with 25 years of experience: **Branson Vacation Company**, [www.BransonVacationCompany.com](http://www.BransonVacationCompany.com), or 1-800-627-4596.

**Choice Hotels International** announces the late 2006 opening of the first Cambria Suites in Boise, Idaho, designed for active and affluent business and leisure travelers who consider environment and functionality equally important. The hotel will pamper guests with comfort foods and healthy fare, and free wireless, high-speed Internet access and flat-panel TVs in the rooms. Take a virtual tour at [www.CambriaSuites.com](http://www.CambriaSuites.com), and learn about other **Choice Hotel** properties at [www.ChoiceHotels.com](http://www.ChoiceHotels.com).

**Customers who purchase** a Eurail Selectpass on **RailPass.com** by March 31 will get an extra day of travel for free. This offer applies to six-, eight- and 10-day adult, youth and "Saver" Eurail Selectpasses, and can be used for unlimited train travel on non-consecutive days within a two-month period, as long as the first day of travel begins within six months of purchase. Learn more at [www.RailPass.com](http://www.RailPass.com).



**French Country Waterways** offers savings of \$800 per person and \$1,600 per couple on all April luxury barge cruises in Alsace-Lorraine, Burgundy and the Upper Loire Valley, as well as charter sailings. To learn more, call 1-800-222-1236, or visit [www.fcwl.com](http://www.fcwl.com).

**Try Grenada to 'spice up your life'** and escape the chilly Northeast. Then check out [www.GrenadaGrenadines.com](http://www.GrenadaGrenadines.com), official website for Grenada, 'Spice of the Caribbean,' and its sister islands, **Carriacou** and **Petite Martinique**. Awaiting visitors are balmy year-round temperatures (75-85 degrees), pristine beaches, upscale resorts, rainforests, birdwatching, music festivals, regattas, and water sports galore. New for 2006: guided river tube excursions along Grenada's Balthazar River.

**Traveling to Italy** for business, pleasure or the Winter 2006 Olympics? Then check out [ItaliaRail.com](http://www.ItaliaRail.com)'s new three-day rail pass, starting at \$117. Also available is the Trenitalia Winter Promo, which offers reduced pricing on the Trenitalia train passes purchased by Feb. 28 for travel starting by March 31. A free Italy guidebook is given with each purchase. To learn more, visit [www.ItaliaRail.com](http://www.ItaliaRail.com).

**On Jan. 10, Liberty Travel** became the only non-American Express travel agency nationwide to offer clients American Express Travelers Cheque Cards. With the built-in safety features of Travelers Cheques, these pre-loaded credit cards come in denominations of \$10, \$500, \$700, \$1,000 and \$2,000, and may be used anywhere American Express is accepted. To find a Liberty Travel agency near you, visit [www.libertytravel.com](http://www.libertytravel.com).

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## TIPS FOR PLANNING:

### The Perfect Reunion

When planning a family reunion, you can take steps to ensure that the event is enjoyable for everyone involved.

Edith Wagner, editor-in-chief of Reunions Magazine ([www.reunionsmag.com](http://www.reunionsmag.com)) recommends:

- 1. Start planning early.** Unless the reunion coincides with a milestone event, choosing a time and location to accommodate a large group can be tricky. Pick two or three dates, and *then* query family members.
- 2. Once you pick a date, stick to it!** Resist the temptation to change the date, even if it's inconvenient for a few people. You'll never find one date to please all.
- 3. Before you pick a destination, consider everyone's interests.** Cruises are popular because they allow family members to pursue different interests

during the day and easily dine together at night. Other popular family spots are the Caribbean, Florida, Disney and Mexico.

**4. If young children are attending,** make sure the location offers an assortment of age-appropriate activities to keep little ones occupied. Babysitting services are an added plus.

**5. Distribute a reunion newsletter.** This is an excellent way to keep the family up-to-date on planning, who's attending and what activities are planned.

**6. And most importantly, USE A TRAVEL AGENT!** Don't try making the reservations by yourself or online, because the hotel you book might not have the proper accommodations for kids, grandkids and seniors. "I always tell people, 'Just call the experts.' That's what they're there for!" said Wagner.

### The Perfect Vacation

**1. Update immunizations** for the entire family. If traveling abroad, check with public health authorities, your doctor or your travel agent for advisable additional vaccines, among them Hepatitis A and B, yellow fever, meningococcal, typhoid, immune globulin, Japanese B Encephalitis and rabies.

**2. If you're traveling with children** and planning to leave the country, be sure to have the proper documentation. The last thing you want is for authorities to delay your departure because you don't have a document saying it's OK for your daughter's friend, or your niece or nephew, to travel with you. Your travel agent will know what documents are needed.

**3. If you rely on prescription drugs and/or eyewear,** be sure to



bring back-up prescriptions in case your medications or glasses are lost while you're traveling.

**4. Passports, Visas and Tourist Cards.** Visit the U.S. Department of State's website, [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) to determine what documents you need. Begin the application process several months in advance to avoid peak-season delays.

**5. To Insure or Not to Insure?** There are many types of travelers' insurance offered, covering everything from trip cancellation and trip delay, to accidents, sickness, medical evacuations and emergency transportation, to supplier defaults and loss or delay of baggage or personal effects. Your travel agent will be able to help you make the decision right for you.

### A Trusted Travel Agent

*Continued from page 1*

on vacation is a problem," said Kathryn W. Sudeikis, president and CEO of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). "But things do go wrong, and when they do, it can make all the difference in the

world to have a travel agent you trust in your back pocket, much like you might have a caterer or a tax accountant you can turn to in a pinch. Without a travel agent, you're on your own, and that can be very scary."

Sudeikis, herself a working agent, explains that travel agents are there for people "before, during and after the trip. We're there to help you sort

through the information overload and pinpoint the offers best for your needs, we're there to assist in any way possible if something goes wrong during the trip, and we're there as sounding boards after the trip, to hear how it all went, and to help rectify any problems you might have had. Travel agents are customer advocates, from beginning to end."

  
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## Knowing When to Work with a Travel Agent, and When to Book Online

**W**hen planning a business or leisure trip, how do you know when to book online, and when to work directly with a travel agent?

It's a very simple decision. If all you're booking is one or two round-trip flights from Point A to Point B, and a hotel, chances are you can handle the transaction online, without missing any valuable opportunities. If the trip is more complicated than that, or a truly special event, you should consider working with an agent who will help ensure that no detail is overlooked.

When it comes to booking air travel, travel agents edge out Internet sites, according to a Survey of International Air Travelers study released by the U.S. Department of Commerce. The study shows that 43 percent of leisure travelers book with travel agents, 23 percent book online, and 21 percent book directly with the airline. Among business travelers, 14 percent book air online,



Smooth sailing off the coast of Grenada

41 percent book with a travel agent, and 15 percent book with the airline.

The study also shows that travel agents are a trusted resource for information, with 40 percent of respondents asking travel agents for information, and 33 percent using the Internet. Respondents also reported turning to airlines, friends and relatives, company travel departments, trade guides, tour companies, newspapers/magazines and state/city travel offices for travel information.

The Internet is a valuable resource when planning a trip, but it can-

not replace the expertise and guidance of a travel agent, who are trained to help clients sift through the information overload, and to make the decisions best for their particular situation.

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#### Agents Gear Up to 'Show Consumers The World'

Attention all travel enthusiasts! The American Society of Travel Agents is opening its annual trade show doors to the public for one day only, during which time consumers can learn about destinations, the value of using a travel agent, travel products and how to avoid travel scams.

THE TRADESHOW will be held Sept. 13-16, 2006, in Orlando, FL, and one day (date to be determined) will be open to the general public. To learn more, visit [www.astanet.com](http://www.astanet.com).

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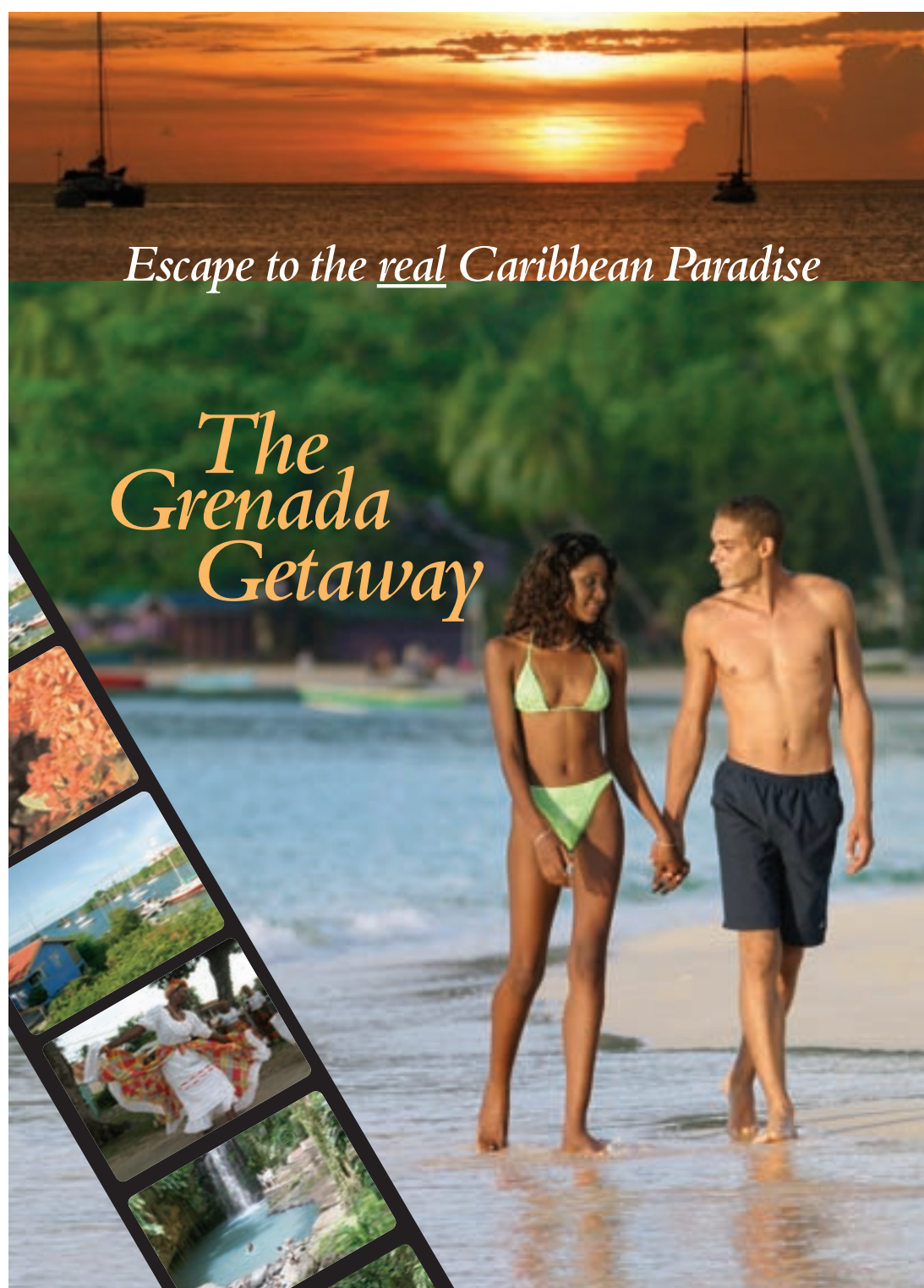
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## TRAVELING ALONE?

### Travelsense.Org Helps You Take The Proper Precautions

Whether you're a student getting ready to explore the world, or a solo female travel hoping to satisfy a travel longing, traveling alone can be one of the more exhilarating things you do. But it can also be a little scary – particularly if you're not prepared for what lies ahead.

So, after you've packed your passport, be sure to check out [www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org), where you'll find all the latest news and tips for safe and healthy travel.

Among the tips found on [www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org) are these:

- Do not answer your hotel room door without first verifying who it is – even if it means asking someone claiming to be a hotel employee to wait in the hall while you call the front desk to verify.
- Do not enter any vehicle that does not have a proper



Scenic Sorrento, ItaliaRail

license or does not pick you up from the designated area.

- If you don't know the local language, carry a card or matchbook with the hotel's name and address, and show it to a cab driver or police officer if you get lost.

- When it comes to lodging, smaller hotels on busy, well-lit streets are the best bets. The safest rooms are those on higher floors, near the elevator but away from emergency exits, stairwells, and any renovation work.

- Never accept a room if the clerk loudly calls out your name and room number.

- Explore transportation options available at the destination ahead of time. Travel agents can help determine the safest choice and make the necessary arrangements.

- Before you go,

learn the laws and customs of the countries you're visiting.

- Do not carry all your cash at once, and keep your wallet in a zippered pocket, preferably inside your jacket. If you need to exchange money in a foreign country, only use authorized vendors like banks.

- Don't be flashy. Wear an old, inexpensive watch and leave the bling at home.

For more helpful travel tips, visit [www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org).



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