

AS SEEN IN *Forbes, Fortune & Entrepreneur*

LEADING WOMEN IN BUSINESS | SOUTHEAST FLORIDA

Travel Advisors Extraordinaire

A travel company trains travel advisors to provide best-in-class service while supporting their success as home-based entrepreneurs.

Thanks to the internet, planning a vacation seems easy; everything is a click away. But is it that simple?

Michelle Fee, founder and CEO of Cruise Planners, an American Express Travel Representative, says it's not. Her company has transformed thousands of home-based entrepreneurs into bona fide travel advisors capable of designing once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

"Our agents have relationships with customers that you can't get when you book online or go directly to a travel supplier," Fee says. "We enable this by granting franchises to great people and giving them the tools they need to be the best in the industry."

SELLING TRAVEL FROM HOME

Around the time the internet began to emerge, and years into her career as a travel agent, Fee predicted the way people bought travel products and services would soon change. Determined to evolve the industry, she started a travel franchise for home-based travel advisors. The company would provide technology, systems, and ongoing support, allowing agents to focus on selling world-class travel experiences.

Today, Cruise Planners supports more than 2,500 franchise owners. Many are local to their clients and offer a level of personalized service that online retailers simply can't match. "Travel agents always add value," Fee says. "For the same price, or better, than you get from booking directly with a cruise line or online travel site, a travel agent might offer you an upgrade. Also, they save you time by taking care of the details of your trip." This includes

dealing with cancellations, refunds, and sending critical pre-trip information or reminders. Travel agents can make a bucket-list vacation a seamless reality.

Despite working from home, Cruise Planners agents are not flying solo. Their franchise experience begins with six days of in-person training at STAR (Sales Training to Accelerate Results) University, where the company's leaders and industry veterans share invaluable guidance. Once an agent launches their business, they get access to website support, proprietary technologies, and exclusive marketing data. Any time there's a question—say, about the best shoreside excursion in the Bahamas—agents can access internal Facebook groups and Cruise Planners' business development coaches for advice.

"We've created technology that does

everything for our agents, some of whom now sell more than agents who work for online travel companies," Fee says.

THE PENT-UP DEMAND FOR TRAVEL

Many travel companies had to furlough employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cruise Planners agents, however, remained extremely busy. Today, they're working hard to serve restless Americans eager to see the world after being sidelined by the pandemic.

"The next few years are off the charts in terms of travel sales because people want to make up for lost time," Fee says. "And we're signing up a record number of new franchise owners. It's a great time to be in the travel industry. The surge from the pent-up demand is here. Travel never goes out of style."

Michelle Fee, founder and CEO of Cruise Planners, an American Express Travel company, has been at the helm of the award-winning, nationwide, home-based franchise travel agency for over 25 years.



Cruise Planners hosts annual Elite Summit Trips with top producing travel advisors to different bucket-list destinations, like this trip in 2018 to Machu Picchu, Peru.



CRUISE PLANNERS®



TRAVEL