



ToursByLocals:

Transformative experiences that are travel agent-friendly

Paul Melhus makes it clear that ToursByLocals has been working with travel agents from the start and recognizes them as an integral part of its business. In fact, says ToursByLocals founder and CEO, agents bring top quality clients in search of truly unique travel products.

I've always found that the beginning is the best place to start. So, maybe you can tell CTP's readers what ToursByLocals is all about. How did it start? What kind of product/programs/services does it provide?

ToursByLocals was created by travellers for travellers. The idea was born on the Great Wall of China in 2006. My partner Dave and I met two local women who offered to help us explore the history of the wall. After a great tour followed by confusion around payment, we wanted to be able to replicate the fantastic guiding experience, but take away the "luck" of meeting the right person, and the complexities of arriving at a fee.

We also wanted to give these local guides the ability to meet travellers on a more professional level and earn a fair wage as full participants in the tourism industry. Starting on the flight home, Dave and I began to imagine ToursByLocals – a platform that empowers tour guides all over the world to reach an audience of travellers who value their service, and provides travelers with a reliable way to book a reputable local guide, anywhere they travel.

And here we are now in 2022, and we've helped over 1.5 million people find and book fantastic local guides in 191 different countries around the world.

As a follow up, is ToursByLocals travel agent-friendly? How can agents work with it? What kind of support does it offer them?

Yes, we've been working with travel agents from the start, and recognize them as an integral part of our business; they bring top quality clients in search of truly unique travel products.

Agents just need to spend 5 minutes creating an account with us and can then purchase fully customizable private tours for their clients online, earning a commission on every booking. Agents receive 24/7 customer support by phone, email or LiveChat.

I suppose the next obvious question is how did ToursByLocals fare during the pandemic? How did COVID-19 impact its business operations? How did it impact the guides that you used for your programs? Did you offer them help?

Like pretty much every other travel company out there, we were walloped by COVID-19.

Our largest market is North Americans travelling to Europe (followed by Asia, North America, South America, Africa and Australia). With everything international shut down, we spent the spring and summer of

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