



departure lounge

TRAVEL PLANNING SPECIALISTS



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Mission Statement

Departure Lounge is an innovative U.S.-based host agency for luxury leisure travel sales, supporting home-based and storefront independent travel advisors and advisor teams in North America and Europe to provide industry-best travel advising and traveler benefits, VIP perks and insider access.

The primary focus of the company is achieving outstanding traveler client satisfaction, followed closely by the compensation and satisfaction of the affiliated travel advisors, using the most progressive tools and resources, upholding utmost ethics and values, and fostering rewarding industry connections and relationships.

Departure Lounge's long-term goal is to be the very best, well-respected hosted group of luxury travel advisors globally, based on reputation and luxury sales volume.

Community

With more than 150 travel advisors across North America and Europe, the Departure Lounge team is highly supportive, driven by an incredibly engaged private Facebook group, and fortified with more than 20 Departure Lounge exclusive FAMs. Each year we gather at the much-anticipated annual meeting, Departure Lounge Exchange, to celebrate and inspire the best in one another -- and the travel industry.



The culture at Departure Lounge is the top reason I chose the host agency. Here, we as ICs feel valued and respected by leadership and industry partners. Leadership encourages comradery with a culture of collaboration and provides opportunities and resources for all of us to successfully grow our businesses.

Lisa Baserga, AVA Wine Adventures, Cayucos, CA

I knew the company would be great, but I am overwhelmed by the honesty, integrity and fun-loving nature of the advisors at Departure Lounge. The willingness to share knowledge and promote one another is extraordinary and such a privilege to be a part of. I love that Departure Lounge has an emphasis on young advisors, new advisors and seasoned advisors.

Its a great mix of super well-connected and intelligent people.

Anthea Gilchrist, Seamless Travel, Dallas, TX



Community over competition - every advisor at Departure Lounge wants every other advisor to succeed.

Melissa Downham, Roaming Travel Co., Denver, CO

Reputation

Departure Lounge has a Code of Conduct in all advisor contracts in order to protect and support the shared reputation of the whole team for being professional, responsible, kind and enjoyable to work with.



Every Departure Lounge travel advisor exudes the same thing: kindness. It is a joy working with this team as everyone is extremely professional and polite. Truly I believe this agency is paving the way for the future by bringing new blood into the industry.

Julie Skrei, Abercrombie & Kent

Whenever I meet a Departure Lounge Travel Advisor, I know I can count on a warm and friendly attitude, but most importantly a great level of professionalism! Working with Departure Lounge's management team has been a dream. Along with the consistent values of kindness, the agency is creative, innovative and forward thinking. We love collaborating and strategizing with the owner and senior management.

Ashley Thomson, Gleneagles, Scotland



The reputation of Departure Lounge as an agency is passionate, professional, insightful, creative, considerate, welcoming, and knowledgeable. The agency has a reputation of really nurturing their relationships with their partners in a sincere and genuine way.

Kelly Mark, Hotel Esencia, Mexico

Departure Lounge Is A Leader In The Industry

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2017 • VOL. CCLXIX NO. 35
WJSJ.com

LIFE & ARTS

THE MIDDLE SEAT | Scott McCartney

No, Really, This Is a Travel Agency

Austin's Departure Lounge, one of a new breed of vacation planners, books your trips while doubling as a wine and coffee bar

Austin, Texas
Would you book a two-week trip to Italy on the same couch where you brought with friends over a glass of Pinot Noir?

Departure Lounge, a leather-couch lounge in the heart of downtown Austin, is part of a new breed of travel agencies. It's not the traditional kind with a booth of agents or desks and travel brochures on the wall. Instead, it's an upscale meeting place that hosts corporate happy hours, South by Southwest events, wedding receptions and occasional gatherings. Families pop in with children on weekends or couples meet after work. It has a wall of wine bottles, its own coffee blend, sandwiches and TV screens on three sides.

Three years after opening, this level-and-entirely-making-it-profitable—and 80% of its revenue comes from selling trips. Travel agencies need to be visible to consumers to be relevant, says founder Keith Waldon. "We've got to get travel back on the street," he says.

An industry now written off as a victim of the Internet and direct booking is finding new ways to prosper. Luxury travel advisors have formed leading clubs, elite groups and including special perks for clients. Some travelers are checking travel, the accounting or investing, but business complex enough to benefit from expert advice, especially as their ventures further off the beaten path to exotic destinations.

The number of travel agencies has declined steadily since 2007 and fell by more than half by 2012, so online bookings, discount and electronic tickets became the norm. That eroded the need for an agent to issue a paper ticket, according to CruiseCritic.com, compiled by the American Society of Travel Agents. An industry rebound started in 2013.

New models of travel agencies have sprung up. Liberty Travel, a major leisure agency, opened a lounge in a Texas Corner, Inc., and as a way to reach new customers. Beach Travel, a travel agency launched by three 30-somethings eight years ago, focuses on upscale adventures and has expanded from London to the U.S. and what is now its biggest market.

"There's a role here to be that trusted person that is never going to be replaced by a machine or a computer," says Beach Travel founder and chief executive Tom Montebano.

Mr. Waldon saw the steady-growing trend as a possible. There to drive interaction helps agents take trips and their advice. He wanted a retail space that

could be social and relaxed without pretensions to being a lounge. He wanted a place where 70 clients recently drink wine with representatives from their cruise lines. Another night earlier this year, 65 people feasted and he hosts about 200 people.

"Mostly five percent of our clients have never worked with a travel advisor before," he says.

Mr. Waldon's 38 advisors use the space for client meetings during evenings or weekends. First-time clients go through a consultant-based questionnaire asking them about needs they like and previous travel experiences to gauge both spending levels and ideal trips.

When he can get clients into the space to meet with advisors, with beer or a trip, Mr. Waldon says. "It's only email and phone communications, only 60% top and repeat business falls off. Mr. Waldon plans to open two more Departure Lounges in Austin soon. His agency's average booking is more than \$10,000.

While some leisure agencies, Departure Lounge is more traditional in one way: It doesn't charge a fee. Revenue comes from commissions paid by tour brokers, hotels, cruise lines and other travel providers. Since it's part of the Virtuoso network of luxury travel agencies, hotels agree to provide clients with a travel upgrade and free daily breakfast.

Austin's Julie Barrett, 2016 Entrepreneur, When the new wine bar opened on the corner, she prepared to see the need for the space for

Beetle and sofas at the Departure Lounge are for travel advisors to meet with clients, as well as for founder Keith Waldon, left, whose travel agencies need to have visible retail presence in downtown or

NOVEMBER 18 - 20, 2016

USA TODAY WEEKEND

BRUNO MARS IS GOLDEN WITH '24K MAGIC' First album in four years gets funky

TRAVEL AGENTS RIDE A NEW WAVE

747s flying into the sunset

A flood of data has traveled, especially Millennials, working in the field. People are looking for ways to find their way.

The off for an unseasoned traveler is a travel agent. The industry is seeing a resurgence, with travel agents now being seen as a valuable resource for many travelers. The industry is seeing a resurgence, with travel agents now being seen as a valuable resource for many travelers.

"What stresses people today is not knowing if they are asking the right questions."

AUGUST 2016

LUXURY TRAVEL ADVISOR

DEPARTURE LOUNGE

Keith Waldon's Austin Agency Takes Flight With Plans to Expand

Austin | New York | London | Paris & Beyond

PROFILES: Chic Caribbean, New California Inns

CRUISE: Best of the Pacific

SPECIAL: Ultra Luxury Trends

COVER STORY

Departure Lounge

Keith Waldon's innovative travel agency concept is ready to take off with franchise plans at other locations.

BY RICHARD TERRY

"I had been a senior executive for 15 years at a major corporation. I was looking for a new challenge. I wanted to start my own business. I wanted to create a business that was focused on providing a high-quality travel experience. I wanted to create a business that was focused on providing a high-quality travel experience."

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Compensation

Top compensation for advisors is a priority at Departure Lounge. The agency offers both commission-split contracts that pay advisors 70-90% of commissions and fees, as well as a flat-fee contract for \$1 million+ annual producers, allowing those advisors to keep 100% of commissions and fees for a monthly payment of \$650.



The travel industry may have future-minded wanderlust, but behind the scenes it's often stuck in traditional methods. Departure Lounge's innovative approach to technology-focused platforms, unique commission structures instead of a "one size fits all" approach, and a strong community of agents, really sets it apart from other agencies.

Erica Levine & Sarah Steinmetz, EST Worldwide, Florida

I am constantly reminded how much the back office team cares about getting commissions to the advisors. They go to great lengths to get things right and their enthusiasm for the job shows.

John Paul Brownlow, JP Brownlow Travel, Southlake, TX



There is total freedom for running your business as you wish. I am in awe of the way there are so many successful advisors who specialize in different areas and operate completely different business models. Departure Lounge understands that one size does not fit all, and this emphasis on inclusivity extends to allowing for creative and innovative entrepreneurs doing their thing and doing it really well.

Maria Diego, Diego Travel, San Diego, CA

Client Perks

Departure Lounge is a member of the Virtuoso luxury travel network, and the agency also has status with more than 30 of the preferred agency programs of the top brands in luxury travel. All of this is supplemented by the agency's own preferred partner program, called Departure Lounge VIP. These programs result in complimentary upgrades and perks for clients, and often times enhanced commission.



Virtuoso member agencies and travel advisors provide special upgrades and perks to clients at more than 1,400 five-star hotels worldwide. The network also provides privileged access to hundreds of top cruise lines, tour operators, destination management companies, travel insurance companies and special experience providers. Clients may also enjoy Virtuoso publications and marketing materials.

Departure Lounge has status in more than 30 preferred agency programs that provide industry-best client perks and often times enhanced commission opportunities: Abercrombie & Kent, Accor, B Signature, Belmond, Cuveé, Dorchester, Doyle Collection, Four Seasons, Hilton, Hyatt, IHG, Jumeirah, Kempinski, Langham, Mandarin Oriental, Marriott, Oetker, Peninsula, Preferred Hotels, Relais & Chateaux, Rental Escapes, Rocco Forte, Rosewood, Shangri-La, SLH, Tablet, TCS World Travel, and Viceroy

**Preferred
Agency
Programs**

**Departure Lounge
VIP Preferred
Partner Program**

Our VIP Preferred Partner Program has more than 80 hotel and cruise line partners, and the program is growing quickly. Each partner pays a minimum of 15% commission for a direct booking, along with providing our clients with the top perks and amenities available.

Technology

Departure Lounge is committed to using best-in-class modern technology. Each advisor receives a tech suite consisting of

- 1) Travefy, for client proposals, travel documents, mobile applications and more,
- 2) SION, our impressive backoffice commission and fee tracking system,
- and 3) the Departure Lounge custom booking platform by Booking Vault for hotel and air reservations.



Travefy builds itinerary management, communication and project management software and mobile applications for travel professionals, and all Departure Lounge travel advisors are provided with an annual subscription. Travefy is synced to Departure Lounge's booking platform to provide outstanding efficiencies to the advisor.

SION is the modern and easy-to-use sales and commission tracking platform that Departure Lounge advisors use to record their bookings and fees, which enables the agency's talented back office team to produce the monthly direct-deposit payroll.



Departure Lounge was the first luxury travel agency to engage **Booking Vault** to create a customized booking platform that offers industry-best commissionable air fares, Virtuoso preferred hotel rates and direct-booking into more than 30 preferred agency hotel programs. Any hotel bookings made in Departure Lounge's platform auto-post in SION, requiring no additional data entry for the advisor to get paid commission.

Departure Lounge Travel Planning Process

Our Proven Travel Advising Process — Orchestrating Great Vacations



1. DISCOVER

We get to know your travel style and preferences, using some fun visual tools and old-fashioned conversation (sometimes with wine).



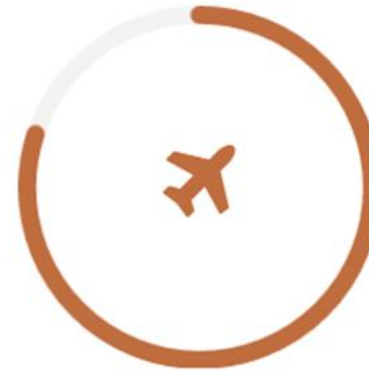
2. DESIGN

Based on your input and preferences, we design trip options and present them to you with pricing for your desired travel dates.



3. RESERVE

Once you select the travel options you want, we reserve all the elements and provide you with confirmations and documents.



4. EXPERIENCE

This is the fun part. You travel and have a great time. We check in on you and the selected travel providers to make sure all is going well.



5. SHARE/RECAP

When you return, we talk with you about what was great and what could have been better, so we make each future trip awesome.

Preferred Partner Marketing

Departure Lounge produces social media and marketing content from the agency's preferred partners for all advisors, and this content often includes exclusive offers and clients perks that give Departure Lounge advisors a strong selling advantage in the marketplace. The content is easy to customize, as needed, with the advisor's brand.



I joined Departure Lounge to further build my luxury travel business. The agency's connections and partnerships with the best in luxury travel have been very helpful, and the best-in-class client perks and upgrades that I can offer and promote are hugely important to my business.

Morgan Graybill, MorningStar Luxury Travel, Greenville, SC

The expansive list of vetted partners from Virtuoso, our Departure Lounge preferred agency programs and the agency's VIP preferred partner program is truly my superpower. When you have insider connections to the very best, along with the top perks and values from those travel providers, you can't be beat.

Evelyn Christensen, Ciao World Travels, Austin, TX



Our Virtuoso membership and preferred partner programs are extremely valuable to my clients and me. A client just told me she would never book a hotel directly herself again because she loves the amenities I can provide, and she tells her friends they're crazy if they book on their own! Also, the support from our contacts is much enhanced when I can say I'm part of Departure Lounge and Virtuoso and/or their specific brand's program.

Becky Robinson, Departure Lounge, Austin, TX



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Annual Meeting



The 2022 Departure Lounge Exchange in Nashville, Tennessee.

Departure Lounge Exchange 2023 will be held at Conrad Punta de Mita Oct 1-5 and will celebrate the agency's 10th anniversary.



I look forward to our agency's annual meeting every year. It is the key time Departure Lounge advisors are all physically together. It is informative and fun, and it is great to reconnect with our advisors and preferred partners.

Alexis Landrum, Departure Lounge, San Antonio, TX



Conrad Punta de Mita, Mexico

Advisor Teams

Departure Lounge provides multiple options for independent contractors to work together as a team and/or to have sub-agents as part of their businesses. This includes multiple compensation program options, as well as technology that makes the calculation of payments to sub-agents easy.



Departure Lounge provides the support our team needs but the freedom to create our own business. We rely heavily on the knowledge of Keith and our colleagues, as well as our established partnerships throughout the world. We have the most innovative and valuable tools available to share with our clients and give them the very best travel experience.

Jennifer Gouk, Tisha Patt & Mimi Sternberg, Departure Lounge, Seattle, WA

We've been with Departure Lounge since its beginning in 2013. Over that time we went from one of us being a part-time advisor, to both of us being full-time and growing a team and a multi-million-dollar business. Departure Lounge has given us the compensation options and support to grow our business and brand successfully.



Maureen & Hans Paap, The Art of Hospitality, Chicago, IL



Departure Lounge's team options provide a lot of flexibility. As our business has grown, the agency allows for the best for everyone involved and makes sense. That's what I love best about Departure Lounge -- never feeling like we'll continue to do things a certain way just because that's how it's always been done.

We continue to grow, evolve and learn, and that's what keeps us on top!

Heather Keller & Rita Fuja, Perfect Landing Travel, Houston, TX

Leadership & Support

Departure Lounge is stewarded by 37-year industry veteran Keith Waldon, joined by an impressive team of executives who manage the agency's preferred partnerships, marketing, back office and administration.



Keith started his career in travel as an intern at Rosewood Hotels during college, and he worked for the luxury hotel company several years after his graduation as a marketing manager. Next, he worked for Virtuoso for 16 years, during which time he created the Virtuoso brand and directed the network's public relations and business development as a vice president. Keith launched Departure Lounge in 2013, was named Virtuoso's Most Innovative Advisor in 2019, and currently serves on advisory boards for several top luxury travel brands.

Keith Waldon, Founder/Owner, Texas & Tuscany

Lauren joined Departure Lounge as a travel advisor in 2015 after a successful career with JP Morgan Chase and an impressive personal travel history, including living on multiple continents.

As Departure Lounge's Director of Supplier Relations, Lauren manages the agency's preferred agency program, the VIP preferred partner program, exclusive FAM trips and client newsletter content.

Lauren LaCour, Director of Supplier Relations, Naples, FL



Following a remarkable career at top global marketing agencies and her own thriving business as a graphic artist/storyteller, Stacy joined Departure Lounge to manage the agency's social media strategy and content, promoting its preferred partners and telling its story as one of the world's most progressive luxury travel agencies.

Stacy Weitzner, Director Of Preferred Partner Marketing, Anchorage, AK



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Ready to explore joining our team?

Contact:

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