

The Ins and Outs of Celebrity Travel



“In a sense, you have their lives in your hands.”
—Gary Mansour on booking travel for celebrities.

Securing a high-profile client may seem like a luxury travel advisor's dream come true. A-list celebrities usually travel with entourages via private jet (or at least in first class on a commercial airline) and require highly customized experiences. The sheer opportunity of charging a healthy fee for such services is sure to dazzle even the most successful agent.

However, booking such travel requires a tremendous amount of work and being on call 24/7 to ensure that one's carefully woven plans do not come unraveled. It can take hours—no, days—to arrange the moment-to-moment itineraries that are required for high-maintenance (and highly in-demand) individuals, which can all go to waste if their tour/road-trip/romantic getaway is suddenly cancelled for any number of reasons.

To get the inside scoop on what it takes to be a true expert at booking celebrity travel, I turned to two superstars in their own right, Bill Fischer of Fischer Travel in New York and Gary Mansour of Mansour Travel in Los Angeles.

Fischer's first tip for doing right by your A-lister? “Never give the name of the client to the hotel until the day of or the day before check-in,” he advises. “Until then, just let them know someone notable is arriving.” Should the celebrity be taking over a hotel or resort, the travel agent should ensure that all personnel at the property sign a confidentiality agreement. This will ward off the paparazzi for the booking that is at hand, and for future visits the superstar may want to make to the hotel, he adds.

As always, Fischer insists that this type of booking requires an intense attention to detail and that someone on staff must be on call around the clock to make sure everything comes off right.

Gary Mansour, whose name is synonymous with booking celebrity travel, agrees that booking such clientele is “very demanding.”

“They don't want to hear the word ‘no.’ The world

revolves around them,” he laughs.

Mansour told me there are several types of celebrity clients. First there is the ‘A-level’ celebrity client who has security issues, along with an ego that demands they want to be treated right.

“Then there is the megastar who has the power and the money to demand whatever they want. At that level, you can't slack at all,” he says. Mansour laughs when he notes what it sometimes takes to secretly get such celebrities into a hotel. “They often have to enter through the garage or the kitchen. On the surface, their lives seem so wonderful, but it's hell for them when they are out in public. Our job is to make it look seamless and easy for them.”

Mansour says that booking mega-level celebrities often requires securing—and cordoning off—an entire floor of a hotel, not only for security reasons but because said star may need an entire guest room simply for clothing. “We are not talking about people who are performing on stage, we are talking about people who travel with trunks and trunks of clothing, who wear a different outfit every time they go out,” says Mansour. “Or you may need a hotel room that is to be used as a classroom for their children.”

Booking travel at this very high level is “really stressful,” says Mansour. “It's also very personal. These people are always very much in control of their lives; even if they are a CEO, when they are behind that desk, they are running the world. But once they step into an airport, they are fair game and everything is out of control. They look to me to control every aspect of that. In a sense you have their lives in your hands.”

In the end, Fischer points out that the attention that goes into celebrity bookings is no different from what agents should be delivering to all of their clients all of the time. “It's our job to make sure they are happy and satisfied,” he says.

And now, if we haven't talked you out of booking this very complex, high-end type of business, turn the page for the best rooms and insider secrets in a number of very fascinating destinations.

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