



American Society of  
Travel Advisors

# TALKING POINTS

## Background:

During the COVID-19 crisis, your talking points will need to be refined as the situation continues to unfold. In the coronavirus crisis, we are facing the biggest challenge our industry has ever faced.

Like you, our staff at ASTA headquarters has been deeply involved in the coronavirus conversation that continues to evolve by the day. We at ASTA are doing everything we can to push back on alarmism and misinformation, and to shape the narrative in a way that will protect your businesses long-term.

A few weeks ago, we plugged the importance of travel advocacy in the Washington Post story, [“How to think about travel as the coronavirus threat evolves.”](#) In the story, we landed our most important message to the traveling public when we said, “In times like these, you need a travel advocate.”

Our message summarized – every traveler has their individualized risk tolerance – that is tested in times such as this. Your role is to provide expert advice, point consumers to unbiased resources to weigh in their decision, and to provide maximum support to individuals and businesses regardless of what travel decision is made. In your role as a trusted travel advisor, it's important that your clients hear your voice directly as they sort through the deluge of information.

## TALKING POINTS

### How to talk about cancellations:

When talking about cancellations with the media, you must make a personal decision about how much you want to share. We recommend that you close each interview on a note of optimism by saying something like, *“As your trusted travel advocate, we’re able to re-accommodate our clients for future travel dates. When the dust settles, travelers will be ready to explore the world and reconnect.”*

As you can imagine, the situation is rapidly changing day to day, and even hour by hour. However, based on the survey feedback from members of the American Society of Travel Advisors, the impact has been significant. The current situation represents a reversal of the continuous upward trend of travel spending that we’ve been experiencing since 2013. Considering that, we have reason to be hopeful that the downturn will prove to be short-lived.

### Would you advise cruisers to rebook or take the refund if their voyage is canceled?

- I advise travelers to contact a travel advisor and discuss their options. Travelers can find a travel advisor through our membership database at [TravelSense.org](https://www.TravelSense.org).
- Ultimately, the decision to travel or not to travel comes down to the individual and their personal circumstances. We have found that many cruisers/travelers have decided to postpone, not cancel.
- One thing that we can say with complete confidence with respect to cancellations is that travelers who elected to work with a travel advisor when originally booking their trips are in a far better position to adjust their travel plans than those who decided to go it alone.
- The significant advantages of working with travel advisors is that they are able to leverage their industry experience and long-standing relationships with suppliers to secure more favorable resolutions for their clients – in terms of rebooking, refunds, and the like – than they could ever achieve on their own, and with far less aggravation as well.

## **If pre-paid sailing is not happening in the next few months, would you suggest that the cruiser take a wait and see approach before canceling?**

- Again, this comes down to the personal decision of the cruiser and their personal circumstances.
- I would recommend that the cruiser look at the cruise line's policy on their future voyage. Those updates are happening almost daily, so they must check in with the cruise line and their advisor to see what information is available on the upcoming itinerary. There are so many unknowns right now as this situation progresses.
- For travelers who are committed to sticking with their future voyage, staying informed is the most important step to take. Make sure you find a travel advisor to help you navigate.
- Just as you would consult a financial advisor to discuss your portfolio and long-term investment options, this too applies to your travel plans.
- Consult with an advisor who will be there with you every step of the way - helping you make informed decisions and navigate the best choices that are right for you.
- Even if you didn't book with an advisor, call one. They can offer you a consultation, sometimes for free. Don't go at it alone. Work with a professional.

## **Are you seeing any cruise lines with especially generous refund/rebooking policies?**

- Cruise lines have varying refund and rebooking policies - and these are being updated regularly. Many have "peace of mind" policies. {You can talk about specifics here if you want}
- Note: ASTA created a document [here](#) where we started tracking policies for travelers, it is not comprehensive, however and as you know, updates are happening regularly.

## **Is it safe to travel?**

- We recommend travelers follow guidance from the CDC, DHS, and other objective third-party resources. Right now, travel is on pause for many.

- Travel advisors are not in a position to make a “yes” or “no” recommendation about travel safety. Each client has individual circumstances and levels of risk tolerance. However, it is our duty to point travelers to objective third-party resources and help guide them in their future travel plans for when the time is right, and experts say it’s okay.
- We don’t have a crystal ball, but we do know that some clients are electing to book now and experience later. There are many travel deals on the market with flexible cancelation rates. Some travelers are choosing to take advantage of some of the premiere pricing for future travel, because they remain optimistic for their travel future.
- Travel insurance is also important, and some travelers decide to purchase Cancel For Any Reason or (CFAR) travel insurance to further protect their future travel plans.
- When the time is right, we’re here for you and all your travel needs.

### **The value of using a travel advisor during these times:**

- Travelers who elected to work with a travel advisor when originally booking their trips are in a far better position to adjust their travel plans than those who decided to go it alone.
- In many cases, we can leverage our industry experience and long-standing relationships with suppliers to secure more favorable resolutions for their clients – in terms of rebooking, refunds, and the like – more than an average traveler can achieve on their own, and with far less aggravation as well
- Travel advisors have your back before, during and after travel. Advisors are no stranger to turbulent times and handling crises. While this situation is certainly unprecedented, their role has, and always will be, providing solutions for clients.

### **The value of using a travel advisor for future travel & hope:**

- Support small businesses. The vast majority of ASTA members (98 percent) are small businesses, and over 2/3 of whom are owned and operated by women.
- When travel returns, travel advisors will be there for you. Postpone, don’t cancel.
- Buy now, experience later.

## General: Why use a travel advisor?

- Perks: Do you like free upgrades, spa credits, and late checkouts? Travel advisors have access to exclusive perks for their clients. After all, you can't VIP yourself.
- Save time and money: When time is money, today's travel advisors are your new asset managers. They'll do the searching for you and make sure you get the best value.
- Expert advice: Travel advisors have relationships that would take you a lifetime to build. Tap their knowledge and go beyond your bucket list.
- Personal attention: You want a personalized experience, not canned tourism. Our experts stake their reputations on tailor made journeys that fit your personality and preferences.
- Travel advisors are the experts for the international destinations that you've never heard of. They can make recommendations when you're not sure where to go.
- The world is more connected, and travel advisors specialize in complex itineraries. Travel advisors ensure you truly experience the destination - not just tick landmarks off a list of things to see.
- Travel advisors understand the true value of experiences. They have access to benefits you can't get otherwise - our industry is built on relationships.
- The travel agency community specializes in those things you simply cannot find online.
- As your advocate, we are here for you and your family. Our priority is YOU.

**More talking points and stats can be found on ASTA's Press Kit [here](#).**

Note: ASTA created a document [here](#) where we started tracking policies for travelers, it is not comprehensive, however and as you know, updates are happening regularly.