



## John Coles @ Travel-PA

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A hectic, exciting two months since launching my new business! I've advised clients on travel to destinations as diverse as Costa Rica, Macau and Myanmar, the Rhine and the Amazon. Meanwhile, I continue to study the travel industry, researching the incredible range of travel choices available to my customers and establishing contact with award winning suppliers.

I qualified as a CLIA Accredited Agent, so I can help you select and book the best cruise holidays. I participated in the ATAS conference in Birmingham, discussing innovation and product development in the touring sector. Next week I'll be at the world's biggest travel exhibition, the World Travel Market at London's Excel. Then it's off to Paris for the CLIA River Cruise conference. Towards the end of the year I'll focus on creating my marketing plan, to ensure my business takes off in 2019.



**ATAS Conference, Birmingham, 22 October 2018.** Some touring suppliers started by running coach tours around the capitals of Europe. Others trace their roots back to overland hippy bus trips to Goa and Kathmandu.

As this sector of the travel trade has evolved into a highly professional business, it has not lost its passion for innovation. And the diversity is still evident in the mind-boggling range of travel experiences: road and rail trips; trekking and cycling expeditions; history and wildlife tours; to more than 150 countries across the globe!

The ATAS conference brought together 28 of the leading tour operators to assess industry trends and present their latest products to travel agents.

A group tour is a convenient and stress-free way to travel. The tour manager is on hand to lead the way and resolve any problems that might arise. It's a sociable way to travel, meet like-minded people, and make new friends. Some operators report 25% of their customers are solo travellers, so they recognise the need to address the issue of single supplements and better serve this important market segment.

A theme of the conference was the trend towards an "immersive" travel experience. Customers want more than a photo-stop in front of a famous building. They want interaction with the local community and knowledgeable local guides who can provide a personal insight into their country. Itineraries are being adjusted, often slowed, to include time for active participation and authentic "off the beaten track" experiences.

The "in" destination is **Japan**. Japan has a reputation for being very costly, but economic trends have made it more affordable to visit this fascinating country, which combines the latest gadgetry and mega infrastructure projects with a respect for ancient traditions. Operators are always looking to expand the range of tours available, and new destinations on the scene include Rwanda, Georgia, Papua New Guinea and North Korea.

**Shirley Bell, General Manager of Travel-PA** writes about the relevance of the Travel Agent:



"Having been in travel for nearly forty years, I have seen a great many changes. In this age of low-cost airlines and Airbnb it is a good question, why would you use a travel agent?"

There is no denying for some, booking the cheapest flight with no luggage, hoping on a local bus and heading for someone's spare room makes for an affordable experience. But for many there are other considerations.

In an age where we all have so little spare time researching a holiday can be a challenge. Having a personal travel advisor ensures you have someone who will do all the hard work for you, who gets to know you and what makes a vacation work for your family, saving on both time and stress!

Talking about money, the often-asked question is will it cost more to book through a travel professional? Often the answer is no. The travel professional is not paid by you, they are paid by the supplier of the holiday or the hotel, car hire company, or cruise line. Often a better price can be secured driven by volume, or there could be added value such a room upgrade or free breakfast.

Comparing like with like is not always easy. You may be comparing sea-view with sea-view, but it might not be a full sea-view, or a room awaiting refurbishment, or one close to the lift or over the bar that is known to be noisy. *continued >*

**Quiz: Quito is the capital city closest to the equator. Which capitals are closest to the equator in Africa and Asia?**

Combining all the elements often starts with booking your airfare. For example, should you want to visit Orlando next summer and decided to start by booking your flights on the airline's website you would need to pay in full at booking stage. Special airfares often exist in the trade, allowing you to pay a deposit at time of booking, the balance at a later date. When booking the elements separately over a period of weeks there is very little financial protection. People are often unaware that their money is at risk, as we have seen with the recent Primera Air bankruptcy.

Booking online can be simple but should there be a problem prior to travel or in resort, it quickly becomes evident that there is not a 'real person' available to assist with resolving the issues. We often think just about saving money but for most people there are only four short weeks of annual leave a year so getting it right is of paramount importance. Knowing who to call is worth a great deal in many situations.

When investigating areas of the world the vast choice can be a challenge in itself. The travel professional is dealing with people visiting these places on a daily basis. Not only does this ensure they have recent, relevant information but they can guide you to a much shorter list of the right kind of holiday to meet your requirements.

Travel professionals are kept apprised of situations around the world through daily updates which they pass on to their clients. When it comes to that bucket list trip to have someone with access to the most up-to-date information, the best prices, and local contacts in the most out of the way places can be a real bonus.

Why spend days researching your next trip when a single phone call with ensure all the work is done for you? Every field has its experts and travel is no different. Experts always know more than the rest of us! So, head for the golf course, go shopping or sit in the garden with a glass of wine, and let your travel professional remove all the stress and do the hard work for you!

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### **Ecuador— Spectacular Nature and a Vibrant Historic City.**

Ecuador might not spring to mind as a holiday destination and it's often overshadowed by larger and better know South American neighbours. But this country (which is similar in size to the UK) includes the archipelago which challenged our understanding of the natural world; the headwaters of the most diverse ecosystem on the planet; and UNESCO's first World Heritage Site. Ecuador certainly deserves a closer look:



The **Galapagos Islands** lie 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador and can be reached by air from Quito. The archipelago consists of 13 main islands and 6 smaller islands, each one slightly different with endemic flora and fauna. Charles Darwin travelled to the islands in 1835 on HMS Beagle, intrigued by this diversity led him towards his theory of evolution.

The best way to experience the Galapagos is on a cruise so you can visit different islands. More than 80 vessels operate around the islands, including two 100 berth luxury liners. Most ships accommodate 16 to 20 passengers for a more intimate exploration.



The capital city **Quito** sits at an elevation of 9,350 ft. in the Andes mountains, just 16 miles south of the equator.

The city was founded by the Spanish conquistadors in 1534 and was for two centuries a prominent administrative centre of the Spanish empire. This "old town" of narrow streets and elegant buildings has been well preserved and is considered to be Latin America's finest colonial centre.

But the city is more than a museum. There's a vibrant arts and music scene, and new restaurants keen to embrace traditional Andean cuisine.



The **Amazon region**, located to the east of Quito, is a tropical rainforest with crystal clear rivers, home to 550 species of tropical birds, 13 species of monkeys and 1000 species of butterflies. And piranhas and caiman!

Expeditions into the Amazon start with a bumpy road trip or short flight to a frontier town, then a two or three hour journey downriver by motorised canoe to a lodge deep in the jungle. Native guides lead night hikes against the sounds of howler monkeys, and run exciting river safaris in search of caiman. Lodges often work closely with the local indigenous community.

A two week tour of Ecuador comprising 7 night Galapagos cruise, 4 day Amazon adventure and 4 nights hotel accommodation in Quito costs around £4,800 (USD 6,250) per person on a twin share basis. The price includes domestic flights between Quito and Santa Cruz and between Quito and Coto, and all meals and activities during the cruise and expedition. Flights from London to Quito are around £900 per person.