Lauren: Hello and welcome to Wanderlust, a podcast about travel. I am your host, Lauren. In each episode we'll meet a traveler, learn more about them and something they're passionate about. I hope you enjoy this journey with me.

Lauren: So today I'm joined by Courtenay, a travel Consultant with Indy Travel leaders. Please welcome Courtenay.

Courtenay: Hello.

L: How long have you been traveling?

C: My entire life. [laughs]

L: How many countries have you been to?

C: Oh boy. Wow I should know this answer. I would say at least ten, or so?

L: [laughs] Gotta be more than 10.

C: You think?

L: I've been to 10, yeah. I've been to 14. So I know you’ve been to more.

C: Oh, wow okay. You’re probably right. Okay then I would say maybe it’d be closer to 20.

L: How many countries have you gone to school in?

C: I studied abroad in England. I lived in London for three months and had an absolute blast. I've done multiple trips with my father who was the director of International Programs at Ball State, so I did Ireland as well as Scotland, so a lot of the United Kingdom. Oh, and Italy.

[laugh]

L: If I remember correctly, didn't you also go to school in Jamaica for a little bit?

C: I did when I was little, yes. I sure did. I went to preschool there, I was young but yeah I thoroughly enjoyed it. I can still remember my outfit and the food we ate which was literally chicken and rice, daily, but it never got old. It was always delicious.
L: What’s your favorite part of travel?

C: The experiences that you get with it. The people you meet, the cultures you get to learn about, trying new foods. It’s a high honestly. It’s really unlike anything else in my opinion it’s something everyone should get to experience.

L: What’s your favorite place you’ve been to?

C: I would say — I get asked this a lot and it’s a tough one — [sighs] I love Southeast Asia, I love Thailand and Cambodia. Those are some of the best people I’ve ever met. So I would say that’s probably number one. But I mean there’s so many places that I loved. I loved New Zealand, I even loved just an easy Caribbean vacation, staying at a nice resort. Just relaxing. So I kind of am all over the place but I would say number one would be Southeast Asia.

L: What’s your biggest misadventure?

C: Huh.

L: I can give you one.

C: Okay

L: I thought my bus would come at 5 o’clock in the morning, it didn’t, so I stood in the middle of nowhere, waiting, when it was dark out, there’s nothing open, it was snowing, trying to get downtown to get to the airport.

C: ugh

L: It turned out okay, because other people were heading to the airport and they saw me, we didn’t speak the same language, but they took me with them. We knew enough to be like “where are you going?” and I was like “I know the name of where I’m going.”

C: ohh that’s, awful. Yeah, I mean the one thing I can think of at the moment, I’m sure — especially traveling with Jim Coffin, my father — I’ve had many experiences, it’s typical situation when you’re traveling, where you have delays but it was actually when we were heading to Thailand and we were with a group of students, of course there were delays and we got stuck in — I think we were in Hong Kong for like at least, I think it was like 18 hours we were in the airport and they finally were able to get all of the students except for myself and Dad.

L: [laughs]

C: So all the students arrive in Thailand to greet, you know, our host — we always have a host that, you know, helps my Dad with the tours and stuff— So they had to like handle all the
students and we literally go there two days later. [laughs] We had to stay in Hong Kong for like two days and then we finally got to our destination. It all worked out, students had a great time, everything was okay. But that was probably like the longest delay I've ever experienced, especially after you know how long those flights are, so you're miserable already and then to find out your stuck there for like three days, that’s no fun.

L: What did you do while you were stuck in Hong Kong for 3 days?

C: Honestly we couldn’t do a whole lot. I [sigh] I don’t know if at that point—I don’t think we needed a visa. We literally stayed at the airport. There was a hotel there that we stayed at. I think we might’ve ventured out like one day but the problem was we had to be at the airport because we weren’t sure if we were going to get on the next flight and they kept cancelling our flight. They’d schedule us on a flight then they’d cancel it. They’d schedule us, they’d cancel. It was like bad weather situation. It’s not like we could go at least explore. We were just kind of stuck. But it was worth it. It was— It still ended up being my best trip so that tells you how amazing Southeast Asia is.

L: So in the opposite, what’s your best adventure?

C: Oh I’ve had so many good adventures. I’d say most recently Alex and I did a self drive all over Ireland and we had a blast. It was— Alex is my husband and we’ve got two kids, at the time we just had one and it was just a lovely time. We got there, we rented our car, Alex had never driven [laughs] on the opposite side of the road, so that was a little stressful at first but once he got used to that we had a blast. ‘Cause it’s so nice, I’m use to doing tours with my dad or fam trips with my company, which I can explain what those are later but this was a more independent situation where we could just drive wherever we want we didn’t have a whole lot of plans, which is kind of how we are anyways. It was one of my favorite trips for sure.

L: So you did mention your job, what is the difference between a travel agent and a travel consultant?

C: There isn’t a difference, it’s whatever you prefer to be called, it’s really the same job. You’re helping clients plan trips, doing everything from flights to accommodations to rail, tours, we do cruises. We really do everything and some people just want a hotel booking some people just want flights only. It just depends but travel agent, travel consultant, we all do the same thing.

L: How does one become a travel agent or travel consultant?

C: I kinda took the [laughs] harder route, I went to college and got a bachelors degree in travel and tourism which is great. I learned a lot. I got a lot out of it. I’m glad I did it. But you absolutely do not have to do that. I mean there’s many programs online you can that you can do, there’s a lot of franchises out there. I’m part of Travel Leaders— which is one of the biggest travel agency franchises in the world— And they have all kinds of training that you can do, certifications that
you can get, so really anyone can do it I mean as long as you’ve got a love for travel, passion for it. It obviously helps if you have traveled to different places but even if you haven’t, if it’s something that you are hoping to gain from becoming a travel agent those are some perks for sure like I mentioned the fam trips are familiarization trips. As an agent you can go at discounted rates or like in my case my bosses will send me on them and you basically just they send you to a destination and you’re usually there with other agents. For example like if you do a Caribbean fam you’re typically touring multiple different all inclusive resorts in a day. It makes a difference. There are a lot of really cool fam like Southeast Asia, South Pacific, all over Europe and you just gain a lot of knowledge from those trips and it obviously makes you better able to sell.

L: You did touch on what a travel consultant does, but what would you say are the benefits of using a travel consultant versus like planning a trip on your own?

C: There are people out there that absolutely just love doing that and are fine with it but there are a lot of people out there that get flustered and there’s so much online. It’s funny you know, with the travel industry when the internet became big it really did hurt the travel industry because people were able to start booking their own stuff online and it was much easier but now with it being so much more immense and there’s so much more on the internet that people feel like overwhelmed. The internet is almost helping our business these days cause that’s the majority of people that come in are people that are just completely overwhelmed and don’t know what to believe. But the benefits: one is time, of course expertise, like I said we’ve been to many of the places that we’re helping you with, we’ve experienced these places we know the ends and outs, the good hotels versus the bad, the good transfer companies versus the bad so it’s really just about our expertise and time, you know, a lot of people just don’t have the time to plan their own trips and just want to have somebody else do it. And most of the time we do not charge a service fee. A lot of people don’t understand that. They wonder how we get paid, we get that question a lot.

L: How do you get paid?

C: [laughs] We get paid through the suppliers that we book through so they pay us a commission. So there is no need to charge clients extra so whatever they can find online we can find for either the exact same price if not better depending on promotions that we get through the franchise or through the suppliers that we book through. And when I say “suppliers” I’m talking about like tour operators. Some bigs one are like Globus, Trafalgar, these are all like escorted tour companies. Or the cruise lines, you know, Royal Caribbean, Celebrity, I mean obviously there’s a ton of them. That’s how we get paid and a lot of people think oh I don’t want to pay extra to use a travel agent if I can do it on my own. But I’m telling you it’s worth to even just reach out and say “hey you know I found this online can you help me either match it or try and beat it?” we do that a lot.
L: You plan trips that include your family. How is a family trip planning different than like a person going by themselves or a couple going on a trip? Cause you now travel with little children.

C: Yeah, I sure do. It’s more of just making sure you know where you are going is family friendly, that there’s plenty of amenities for kids or at least places that kids are going to enjoy. We took our son, he was four when we took him, we did Paris, London and then drove throughout Ireland. I think he enjoyed Ireland just because it’s not that bustling city where we’re constantly holding his hand and making sure he’s okay. Ireland he could kind of roam around and enjoy himself but it’s just all about making sure it’s family friendly. It’s the same with resorts. We do a lot of all inclusive resorts and there’s adults only resorts there’s family friendly resorts, there’s more couple oriented properties, so again it helps with seeing these properties, knowing, you know what’s going to be the right fit for which family.

L: What do you wish more people knew about being a travel consultant slash travel agent?

C: Everybody just thinks we’re a dying breed and we’re really not. I mean obviously right now with the pandemic we’ve been hit really hard but last year was our biggest year in sales and this year honestly, I mean starting out January February we were even higher in sales then we were previously. We’re definitely, the travel industry is growing and I think more and more people are realizing the benefits of using agents to help them with travel, which is great. It makes me happy.

L: What do you think will change because of Covid? So what like changes do you think will maybe stick around after Covid is defeated?

C: Yeah, I mean I’m honestly, I’m really hoping that we keep the sanitizing up and you know cleaning everything after everybody gets on and off airplanes. The resorts are way more— I mean they’re the cleanest they’ve ever been, the airports are the cleanest they’ve ever been and it’s how it should be. It’s kind of crazy to think that we haven’t been this proactive about this from the get go. I mean I think people are going to think twice about kind of where they’re going and when and what’s safe and what’s not and just doing the right thing and I just hope [laughs] things are going to be cleaner from now on. And I do wonder, I mean a lot of the countries right now are— I mean there are more than this, but the only thing that we’re selling a whole lot of right now is Mexico and the Caribbean. And Mexico, one of the few places that isn’t really requiring you to do anything once you get into Mexico. I mean they do like a thermal scan to make sure you don’t have a temperature when you get to the airport. But like Jamaica, a lot of the Caribbean islands you have to have a negative Covid test when you arrive. You have to fill out these health questionnaires. So I bet those will stick around. Maybe they’ll keep the thermal scans at the airport, which I mean wouldn’t hurt. So hopefully things like that will stick around.

L: There are some countries that like have always had thermal scans.
C: Yup.

L: Like when you get into Seoul, South Korea, pretty sure those are thermal scans. So I know that you do international trips like planning, you plan those and help other people plan for those but do people use travel agents within the United States?

C: They do. I mean we definitely the majority of our sales is in international travel but people have been reaching out more about domestic travel but we still haven’t seen that many [laughs] people actually booking it because obviously our domestic travel is still a concern at the moment in this country. Typically Florida place on the beach type of situation, we do quite a bit of Vegas, we do California, New York, kind of the most typical touristy places. I’ve done a couple National Park trips for people. Not a ton, but yes people do still reach out for domestic travel as well. We are getting a lot of questions for driving like “hey can you recommend anything within 4-7 hours I’m located in Indiana” which unfortunately there’s not a whole lot of [laughs] exciting stuff 4-7 hours from us. But some people are traveling to Michigan some people are traveling Kentucky, Tennessee. A lot of people are more interested in the driving slash camping, more outdoorsy trips right now which is good. I think it’s good for people to get out and experience that.

L: What happens at a travel leader slash travel consultant conference?

C: It’s a very inspirational type of situation. So we’ve got a lot of key note speakers. It all kind of boils down to trying to do more, giving us ideas, use an agency as an example that’s doing really well that year and kind of let us know what they’re doing that’s working and we learn so much from those I honestly I look forward to those every year. Unfortunately this years was cancelled. And they always do it in a cool place. We’ve had them in New Orleans, we’ve had them in Florida, New York. This year was Universal, we were actually going to stay on Universal we were going to a day that it was like for us and it got cancelled. But anyway that’s [laughs] not— that’s the fun stuff. You know all morning and afternoon we have like 30 minute classes and it’s a lot of our different suppliers that we sell that I mentioned to you like Globus, Trafalgar, the cruise lines, F.I.T- which I don’t know what that stands for but I know what it is. And it’s independent travel so you know tour operators have escorted trips already planned. So they daily itinerary is already planned; we just book our clients for whatever trip they are interested in. We don’t do a whole lot of work with those, which is fine and I’m fine with selling those. Those are easy and clients get a lot out of them but what I prefer to sell are F.I.T trips which is where I build the trip for the client. So I choose the hotels and then I kind of I help them basically piece it together and that’s my favorite thing to do. But those type of suppliers are there and you learn about new destinations that they are coming out with, new things that they’re doing. Those conferences are amazing, Travel Leaders does a great job.

L: You guys have actually been open during Covid-19, what have you guys been doing?

C: So when it first happened we had to go on lockdown so we started working from home. Thankfully we have a good phone system that connects to our cell phones so anytime
somebody (would) call in we would just get the call and we’d be able to answer it from home and we’d help people. Now most of what we were doing at the beginning was [laughs] cancelling trips and rescheduling trips. There were really no new bookings until June. So pretty much from March to June it was all about cancelling, trying to get people refunds, or rescheduling which many people rescheduled for either the end of this year but most people rescheduled for 2021. I will definitely say that the cruise lines, the airlines, the tour operators, everybody has been very good when it comes to this pandemic, you know everybody is offering refunds for people that either had cancelled flights or just couldn’t travel because of the pandemic. What the majority of our job has consisted of lately is cancelling and rescheduling, but people are traveling. I’ve had multiple people go to Mexico and come back in the last few weeks and they’ve had a good trip and they decided it was worth the risk. They’re healthy and really everybody that’s traveled and come back has so far been healthy, everybody wore masks.

L: How about we do a quiz?

C: Okay great, I’m terrible at these let’s do it.

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L: So this is from the Quiz.com it’s called Plan a vacation and we’ll reveal the ideal US destination to go to next.

L: Can’t get enough of those facts. I’m taking a vacation to relax, not learn stuff. Can’t wait to learn more about the world. There won’t be any museums where I’m going or we’ll walk through a museum if it’s convenient to our trip.

C: That one is easy. Can’t wait to learn more about the world. That should be everyone’s answer.

L: Let’s see it all on the bus tour. This most likely won’t be on our itinerary. This is a must if we want to see it all. We only hop on if it helps us get to our destination. There probably won’t be a lot of buses where we’re going.
C: We only hop on if it helps us get to our destination.

L: mm so not like when we went to London and you just fell asleep on it?

C: [laughs] Exactly! Although that one, that's what I'm thinking of are the hop on hop off buses

L: yup

C: I don't mind those because they do get you where you need to go I actually recommend those to clients all the time because it's such an easy way to just get around a city. If you do it on like the first couple of days it gives you a good idea of where things are, you can head back to certain areas that you didn't get enough information on. But yeah I was very jet lagged I would like to say and pregnant. I have my excuses.

[both laugh]

L: Relaxing by the campfire? Only if the hotel provides the fire pit. Of course! S'mores and conversations are ideal. This is not on our itinerary for this trip. A campfire on a cool night at the beach sounds relaxing.

C: ooh. Two- I like two of those answers. I like s'mores and conversation and a campfire on the beach [inhales]

L: Which one do you like more?

C: [exhales] That's tough. Let's do campfire and conversation. It doesn't have to be on a beach.

L: But you have to have s'mores. [laughs]

C: [laughs] yes.

L: So many natural wonders to see. Natural wonders are all over the place where we’re going. We probably won't see too many of these where we are going. This is the whole reason we are going on this trip. Not on the agenda but may stop if it looks cool enough.

C: I mean I love natural wonders so I'm going to say the first one, natural wonders will be everywhere we're going.

L: Let’s take a cruise? This sounds like the perfect way to vacation. Some of us might get seasick after awhile. Sounds nice but might be too noisy. Might be great if there are fun events to attend.
C: I’m just not a big cruise person.

L: But don’t you sell so many of those?

C: I do! [laughs] I do. It’s funny I have a free cruise that Alex and I are going to attempt to go on but it definitely would not be my first choice. Uh, let’s see.

L: I love cruises.

C: You like cruising?

L: Yeah, well I’ve only ever done—

C: I’m picturing like big ship cruising.

L: yeah. I’ve been on the Disney cruises.

C: Oh! Well no duh you like cruising. You’ve been on the best one.

L: [laughs]

C: I mean it’s hard to beat Disney Cruiseline.

L: Yeah, there’s so much to do.

C: How could I not know you went on a Disney cruise?

L: ’cause I did it when I was little.

C: Oh you did? Okay yeah, who did you go with?

L: My Dad’s family.

C: Oh well that’s nice.

L: So we did it two or three times I think? Between like elementary and high school. It was very fun. Actually one of the things I wanted to do when I came back was do another one. I just forgot how expensive they are.

C: They can be that’s for sure, especially Disney. [laughs]

L: The one that I want to do is they go to like Russia and through Europe and Asia and I want to do those so badly.
C: Yeah, now that I think I would try because I do think it'd be an easy way— It'd be a more relaxing way to see quite a bit. But I also have a hard time because it— you know if you only have a certain amount of time there that day— To me you get more out of spending the night in a place. But! If you don’t have a ton of time it is a great way to see a lot in a shorter amount of time. And you’re only unpacking once which is a big selling point for a lot of clients too so I mean cruising is big. A lot of people love it, it’s just I just have done so many land vacations it’s just what I enjoy. I’m going to say “Might be fun if there’s great events to attend”, I don’t know that one is a tough one.

L: Music City USA, that's Nashville.

C: mmmmm.

L: We would be too far away from the beach here. This is one of those cool cities we've always wanted to see. This destination has a good balance between quiet and fun. We've always wanted to see a country music show here.

C: I like it's a good balance of music and fun— or quiet and fun. I've done Nashville and I did really enjoy it. We did an Airbnb and it was a good combination of both. And Nashville is beautiful, it's a beautiful place.

L: It's all about the food. Cool refreshing drink is the most important thing. We can't wait to try something new. We'll probably pack our own food for this trip. This isn't the most important thing to us on this trip.

C: Can't wait to try something new. I mean that's a biggie, we are foodies through and through. We love to try new things. I think that’s one of the biggest ways to learn about a culture is by—through their food.

L: The more the merrier. Oh so this one's your crowd question.

C: oh gosh

L: [laughs] crowds are okay as long as we can do our own thing, we can't get enough of the crowds and the noise. There better not be any crowds or noise where we're going. There will be lots of crowd and noise where we're going.

C: I kind of like “Crowds are okay if we’re doing our own thing.” Cause I do feel that way. I— Like if I don’t feel like I’m stuck in a crowd the whole then I’m okay with there being crowds here and there. But I definitely always into doing my own thing for sure.
L: The serenity of Alaska. This would be an amazing vacation destination for us. There isn’t enough going on for us to visit there. There aren’t enough big cities for us to visit. We might have to look pretty hard for something fun to do. That’s a lot of negatives for Alaska.

C: For Alaska? No absolutely I would love to do Alaska.

L: Will we be checking out some Hawaiian beaches? The perfect place to get some sun and surf. There are so many unique things to see and do. The perfect place for us to get pampered for a few days. Sounds like a nice time but might be too quiet for us.

C: There would be unique— what am I saying?

L: things

C: Yes! [laughs]

L: There are so many unique things to see and do.

C: Yes, that is accurate.

L: They think you should go to a coastal destination. So “you’re a coastal traveler who enjoys the sun, surf and laid back vibes of a fun destination located along the coast.”

C: Yeah I mean I do agree with that but like I said at the beginning I go both ways with travel. I love adventure travel and going to unique places. But I also love just lounging on the beach too, so I’ll take it.

L: Where’s like your dream trip?

C: One of the only continents I haven’t gotten to be— haven’t gotten to see— so Africa absolutely. Would love to do a safari slash camping trip and see some of the city like I’d love to go to Cape Town. My parents did some like little islands like Mauritius, off of the coast. Hopefully some day I get to do that. That is a very expensive trip [laughs].

L: oh

C: So I don’t see it in my near future. But I definitely want to do like a safari slash city slash island trip in Africa trip for sure.

L: Do you have anything that you’d like to promote?

C: Just travel in general. I mean, obviously right now everybody’s pretty concerned about it but you will get to travel again and there’s nothing wrong with planning now and thinking about next
year and being positive and hoping for the best. Even if you do book a trip for next year and things aren’t better the suppliers are doing amazing at working with you, rescheduling things, offering refunds. Don’t give up on your travel dreams. I think planning trips is one of those euphoric things that makes you happy just thinking about it.

L: Well thank you for being here.

C: Yes, thank you for having me.

[music]

L: How do you travel? Do you do it yourself, book a tour or use an agent? Let me know on twitter at wanderlustpod. Until Next time dear travelers. Thank you for listening.

[music]