

Lisa Beregi:

Good evening, everyone and welcome to the Federations Educational Call. If you would go ahead and mute yourselves, we would appreciate it for the time being until question and answer time. For those of you that don't know me, I'm Lisa Beregi, education chair for the National Ski Council Federation.

Welcome all of you. Glad to see such good turnout. I'm sure many of you know Sara Clemons, president of Sports America Tours. Sports America is also a Black Diamond sponsor for the Federation, and with that, they get to do presentations to our group. If any of you have ever been to Mountain Travel Symposium, Sara puts on a presentation on Saturday mornings there talking about trip issues, and we have been asked in the past if we could pull together notes and share them amongst the Federation. Instead of putting notes together, I threw the idea at Sara back in March prior to mountain travel of doing a mini presentation or a repeat of her mountain travel presentation this year for all the people that don't get to go to mountain travel or weren't able to go. This give us the opportunity to be able to record it so that we can share it on the website and not have to make personal notes and get the information out. So that is how this came to be.

And with that, I'm not going to take up any more time. I'm going to turn it over to Sara and let her delve into these topics.

Sara Clemons:

Perfect. Good evening, everybody. Thank you, guys all so much for tuning in. I see lots of familiar faces and some folks I don't know so well, so glad you're all here. I had the Federation sent out a list of topics to make sure what I have found to be the hot topics in the past year or so fit what you guys are interested in hearing about. The four big topics that we already had planned, the feedback was a resounding like, "yes, I'm definitely interested in that." So, I think you've all kind of gotten the agenda of those four hot topics. Just as a quick summary of where we're going with things tonight.

We're going to talk really quickly about comps. You know, what comps are available, how are comps included or not included, the different types of comps. And then, we'll jump over to the booking cycle of when should you be booking your trips, what kind of trip planning timeline should you be looking at. Then we'll dive into individual deviations. The deviations from group travel. What is possible? What's appropriate? What's unmanageable, kind of, how it impacts a group travel as a whole? And then we're going to wrap things up with kind of a silly topic we're just going to be blunt and be like what's happened, what has happened to group travel? Where are we at? What are some of the big changes and maybe why it's come to where we're at now?

Mostly the angle I'm taking about tonight is going to be applicable more to club travel, group travel and less so for council travel. In a couple situations we will still definitely speak to council level. There are some changes, you know, it's a little bit different for comps, for instance, and for the booking cycle for council. So, we'll touch on that, but generally speaking, it's mostly applicable to clubs, and then a lot of crossover. Obviously, when you're talking about deviations and things like that, you know, it applies regardless of whether you're a group of 20 or whether you're a group of 2000.

With that said, I'm just going to shoot to keep this right about an hour so I'm going to set my timer for 10-minute max on each one of these topics. We might be able to wrap some of those up early and leave more time at the end for more questions. I'm going to do each topic and then pause for a minute and just see if we've got any questions and statements we want to clarify.

Go ahead if you guys are familiar with using that raise your hand buttons, that's going to be the easiest way for like Lisa or I to be able to see you rather than just waving

and dancing. If we don't see you, you guys can get animated with it. But let's use that and with no further delay let's jump right in.

So, when it comes to comps, there's a lot of different ways comps are provided in your packages. There's a lot of different ways you guys can receive the pricing for your trips. The biggest thing is to, as a board, as a trip director soliciting these bids is to be super clear about what your expectations of comps are. When it comes down to it, there's natural comps which are earned provided directly from the vendors that you're working with. So, a natural lift ticket comp is when you go to Aspen Snowmass and you buy 25 lift tickets, they're going to give you a comp lift ticket, so that's a natural comp that is solely based upon the number of goods you purchased from that provider. It has nothing to do with working with a tour operator, it has no financial impact, it is literally you go to that ski resort and they're going to give you an extra ticket once you meet that threshold. So those are natural comps most commonly that's seen in lift tickets, so many, many places, you still earn a natural comp with your lift tickets. Not in all cases, but in many of the resorts, you will still earn that but pass products don't count towards comps. So, it's only actual lift tickets purchased, not necessarily members, guests skiing at that resort.

The other opportunity you have for natural comps are going to be within the lodging realm. That's seen less and less anymore. More commonly in hotel situations than condo situations, and not so much. It used to be a 1 for 20 or a 1 for 25 comp was awarded, now we're seeing those numbers increased to, you know, 1 for 40 comp. But sometimes they do still exist.

And then the third aspect where we see these natural comps are in airfare. Fewer and fewer airlines provide those natural comps. Southwest provides it once you ticket 29 people, they give you a comp seat. On most United records, domestically, once you purchase 35 tickets, the 36th is a comp. Beyond that you pretty much don't get airline comps. So, it's pretty few and far between. So that is one way you earn comps.

The other way is if you're going to your tour operator and you tell them straight up, "I want a trip leader comp in my package?" Like when you provide me with your pricing, I need a trip leader comp included. Whether that's 1 for 20, 1 for 25, or if you have a particular number that you want that to be, go ahead and say that because each different tour operator might have a different way of declaring that or even awarding that. So that's going to be my next caution or advice is, when you're asking for a trip leader comp to be included in the package, make sure you ask how that's going to be awarded also. Because if I'm going to a destination and we're not earning any natural comp, so we're not getting a lift ticket comp from the resort, we're not getting a lodging comp. We're not going to get a transfer comps.

If you ask me for a 1 for 20 comp, in order to give that to you, I'm adding 5% to the cost of that package. Basically, I'm taking that math, I'm splitting that amongst the 20 people and building it back in so every single person's trip is going to cost 5% more than if I wasn't building in that comp. Now to make it fair, because that's prorated and for every single person sold on the trip, you better be getting a prorated comp when all is said and done. So, if you're bringing 32 people on that trip, and it's a 1 and 20 comp, you should be earning a little bit more than just one trip leader comp on that trip.

So, making sure you guys know how your comps are going to be awarded from the very beginning, from the contract time is important because if they're just saying no, you just earn a trip leader comp, they're pocketing that extra money. They've added that 5% to every single trip and there's money being left on the table. So, you want to make sure that your comps are going to be awarded back on a prorated basis as well. Or you just say, "you know what, don't worry about the comps. If we're not

earning any natural comps, you told me if there's a natural comp on the table. If there's not, do not add a trip leader comp to my pricing, because you guys as an organization can figure out what that math is." You can figure out how much you need to add to the cost of your trip before you sell it to your members so that you take care of your trip leaders, whether that's a full comp or maybe a comp and half if you have an assistant. Like, if you guys can do that math and then you don't have to worry about how that tour operator is going to award your comps afterwards.

Sara Clemons:

Then there's no surprises down the road when suddenly, it's time for final accounting and you have to argue about the extra 5% on the table for those six extra people or whatever it happens to be. So, kind of the takeaway from all of this is really just knowing in any particular proposal you're receiving, how those comps are dictated, how they're awarded, and being aware of natural comps versus comps they've added in. On a quick note on the council level, obviously, you guys as council officers, you know that more and more like the resorts aren't awarding. They're not coming in and saying, "Okay, we're going to give you comp for your six staff or whatever it happens to be." So, all that math is going into your bids as well and potentially increasing the cost to everybody to be able to cover those. So, on a council level, making sure you're working with the resorts and working with your tour operators to really know which of these elements are the resorts and the partners truly comping and which of these elements they aren't comping. And you guys can then decide. What are we going to pay for? What are we going to put out to the membership and end up making them pay for?

I'm going to wrap up comps. Anybody want to jump in with questions, comments? No, I'm not seeing any hands. That's good. All right, looks like I covered that one. All right. Okay, so we're going to jump over then to the next topic we have. Which was your booking cycle? So, I think we can all agree that everybody is confused and everybody's going, when the heck are we supposed to be doing these proposals to be getting the deals that we need? What is the timeline here? The short story is there's no magic answer to that. It's very destination dependent and the biggest advice I can give you is to just have flexibility in your planning.

I know you guys all probably have timelines within your clubs and you go, "we take surveys during this time and then the board reviews the answers during this time and then we put together RFPs." The really tough part is that it's so destination dependent that you literally have like two giant extremes. If I take both ends of the spectrum today, I can say if you're looking to go to Big Sky or Snowmass, you better be planning your 2025 trips right now because we're already booking club trips for 2025 to Big Sky.

If you're looking to go to Steamboat, we only just started getting pricing from those lodging partners in the past week or so for 2024. So those are the two gigantic polar opposite ends of the spectrum. Most destinations are going to be somewhere in the middle. For the most part we have found that industry wide, everybody is saying plan earlier, right? Especially on the club level. Plan earlier. Well what does that mean? I would say comfortably if you guys start reaching out about proposals in the fall. For this fall come October, November of 2023, you guys will start planning your 2025 trips.

If you start asking for proposals then, most properties are going to be able to start entertaining rates and things like that. You're still going to be able to get into your Big Ski's and your Snowmass's if you're planning this fall and be prepared for some of those destinations and tour operators to come back around and say, "We're not going to be able to give you pricing for Taos until February". They're not going to have those rates established. You just have to know that there is going to be some flexibility because not all properties are going to be on the same timeline. Which makes it tricky because in a perfect world you guys would like to be able to say, "Okay, I'm going on

three trips. I want to plan all three of my trips at the same time." Unfortunately, that might not necessarily be the case.

If you're like, I'm going to go to Snowmass next year, you're going to have to lock that contract in right away and then maybe wait it out until the spring to be able to add Steamboat and Winter Park to your lineup or whatever the case is. So, flexibility is just super important. Communication with your preferred tour operators because all of us are able to tell you, I'm not going to go through every single resort and say, "all right, well, these ones are the ones you have to book first, followed by these ones, and followed by that would take all night." But all of your tour operators are able to kind of have that conversation with you and navigate which resorts are later in the game and which resorts have to be planned right away.

Within that booking cycle, within that timeline, I think the most important thing for you guys to know and to understand is that the property's flexibility for being able to provide rates and then hold space has diminished dramatically. So even as short as like four years ago, we would get rate sheets from the properties. They would send them out for the entire season, and they would say, "Here's our pricing for this season. All you got to do is check availability." We didn't have to go to the lodging partners every single time you guys ask for bids and say, "What's the rate going to be? What's the availability going to be?" We were able to at least look at the rates and then check availability, get you guys some options, maybe discuss options before we even discuss it with the property manager. That's just not the case anymore. And as soon as we request those rates from that property manager, those usually have a timeline on them as well. It's either these are valid for a two-week period, or these are valid until somebody else takes it. So, there's no guarantee that that pricing is going to last.

So the importance of being able to get the proposal turned in, you guys receive the proposal, you have that quote, and be able to have that conversation with your board and turn it back around and say, "Okay, within like a week of receiving that proposal, these are the ones we want contracts for." And then as soon as you guys get those contracts, again, be able to turn that around immediately and sign that contract and get a deposit in because these property managers aren't holding that space until they have a signed deposited contract. So that timeline has gotten a lot more crunched, being able to go to in person meetings and have your monthly board meeting to discuss the trips on the table and get them signed. In many, many cases, you guys have to be prepared to do that electronically, to have that virtual meeting, to have that conversation via email to expedite that process, to make sure you're getting what you want otherwise, it's going to get scooped up by somebody else superfast.

All right, that's my spiel for booking cycle timelines, questions there? Are you guys all shy?

Cecilia Brinson: This is Ceci.

Sara Clemons: Oh! Hi Ceci.

Cecilia Brinson: Hi sweetie. Okay, now what about the passes icon and I think we need to go over that even though I know the answer, but somebody might not know the answer is in reference to comps.

Sara Clemons: Okay. Like, what comps are earned?

Cecilia Brinson: Correct.

Sara Clemons: How it impacts lift ticket comps, or what you can earn for past comps?

Cecilia Brinson: There you go.

Sara Clemons: All of it?

Cecilia Brinson: Yes.

Sara Clemons: Okay, so just jumping back to that on the comp situation, we did touch on the fact that in either case whether it's Epic or Icon, that Pass products are not going to contribute towards lift ticket comps earned from a resort where all these resorts are still offering that if you get a group lift ticket rate, you get that group rate even if you're only buying three tickets as long as you have 20 plus skiers, 25 plus skiers. Most of them can be pass holders. You still get that rate but you're not going to earn any sort of a portion of a comp on the lift tickets. Both of the Icon and Epic partners have rolled out for this year Epic jump back on board with comps being available.

So, making sure you guys are working with your tour operators with those partners directly, be it Vail or Alterra, to consolidate your purchases into one portal. So whether that's encouraging all your people to buy their passes through one particular tour operator, some of you guys have individual, like, almost contracts set up with Icon and Epic directly but getting your people to purchase their passes all through the same portal gives you guys the opportunity to actually earn comp pass products as well. So that's important. We can circle back. We have time. We flew through those first two topics really quick. So, if there's more questions about passes, I'm happy to deviate that direction a little bit.

Did that cover what you were thinking, Ceci?

Cecilia Brinson: Yeah. I knew the answer, but I thought maybe somebody might be out there and we share.

Sara Clemons: Yup.

Cecilia Brinson: Okay. Thank you.

Sara Clemons: Yeah. All right. I know tonight is the deadline for the lowest rate for group icon passes. So, if you have any members out there that haven't bought their icon passes yet, they've got a couple more hours.

All right. So, I am going to jump over to deviations. I feel like this one could be a doozy. Let's dive right into this. What it boils down to is that we're all doing group travel, and I think that in our experience for the past year or so, suddenly things have changed a lot when it comes to, we call them deviants. Deviations from the group package, and you're individual travelers. Your people that are signing up for a group trip and then deciding that they actually want any number of things within that group package to be different than what was contracted to the group. So that can come from a logging perspective. Maybe somebody is looking at the property you're staying at and says, "Well, we're booked in all two-bedroom condos, but I'd really like a studio for just my husband and I." Or, "We're thinking about sticking around an extra couple of days because we're going to connect to some other trip later. So, can I add a couple of nights?" It can be as simple as a lodging deviation. It'll be the lodging, it'll be transfers, it'll be airfare, and each one of those little deviations, all of us need to look at the impacts of a deviation like that of individual deviations and how that's impacting your group package, how that's impacting your trip leader and their ability to effectively herd the cats, right? To keep track of everybody and to make sure that it's a positive experience for everybody that's involved in the trip.

It's important to look at the impacts on a particular tour operator, like how much is that opening up that tour operator to working directly with any number of your individual guests instead of just having communication between the trip leader and assistant trip leader, and effectively managing the group package, how much of their time is now being spent on some one-off situations and maybe how was your trip going to be impacted because their time is being spent on the individuals instead of on the group package.

So those are just a couple of different angles to look at what is available to be changed and shouldn't be changed. Because when it boils down to it, I'm not going to tell you all the different scenarios and I am going to throw out here is just some examples to talk through and think about. In every situation, it can be deviated. And any of the tour operators to tell you like, "Sure, I can divide person out of that group of record and I can make it an option for them to upgrade to first class, but should we?" And there are tour operators that'll tell you, "I'm not going to do it." It does not mean that it can't be done but it shouldn't be done. So, this is like, "No, I'm not going to get into like Sports America's policy versus somebody else's policy." I am just going to talk about the different types of deviations that we're seeing a lot of requests for and make sure that you guys all kind of think about that and maybe come up with, in your own terms, what is the reasonable expectations for your traveler? Make sure that your travelers know what the expectation is on a group package to make it a positive experience for everybody.

So, with all that in mind, we kind of talked about those lodging requests, those lodging deviations. Those are the two most common that we see. That you either -- you have somebody interested in a different type of unit that wasn't originally in the contract, or you have somebody interested in adding extra nights or maybe coming in late a couple extra days. Those are two very manageable deviations for anybody to work within. As long as the property is open to it, as long as that availability exists, it's very easy for us to manipulate a lodging package to offer that. And it's a reasonable request. When it comes to transfers, their a-lot-of-group pricing is going to be based on a whole charter bus and that pricing is going to be dictated on X number of people sharing that bus.

So, if you start having people deviating their flights, or stay an extra days, that's going to impact the pricing and you'd have to make sure that when you're allowing, or if you're allowing them to change their transportation, you're also making sure that you're not applying the original transfer funds that they've paid. They're paying an additional amount to be able to take care of those individual deviations. And then in the midst of that, I've seen more and more where the tour operators are saying, "I'm not going to handle these individual transfer request." Like, "We booked you a charter bus and this is the charter bus." And if you have people that are going to miss that charter bus because they are getting in too late, or they're coming an extra day, then those people are going to have to book their transfers on their own and here's the transfer companies we work with. And they need to go book that independently, and then we're seeing that more and more.

Mostly that's because it's the amount of time that it then takes that tour operator to keep track of the individual changes, the changes to that person's airfare. It's way more margin for error, right? The more situations you throw into it, the more potential for somebody to miss that and all of a sudden, "All that transfer didn't get updated because we did not get your updated flight schedule." And now somebody missed their individual transfer as well.

"We're not going to tell you; you can't do it. We're just going to tell you that you need to book that directly so that you're now in charge of that reservation and if your flights

changed, you're required to update that transportation." So that's one aspect where we've seen less and less willingness to handle those individual transfers. A few exceptions to that, there are certain destinations that you're not using a charter bus. You're booking all individual transfer so changing that flight schedule, it's not that difficult. It's relatively easy to update that flight schedule and it just gets updated into the transfer company. So, that's one that got to be a little tricky. I think everybody within your club should kind of decide maybe what that club policy is. Make sure you're communicating with your tour operators about what their policy on that is, and setting that expectations from the beginning so there's not any surprises when you get down the line.

The last one is the biggest one, hands down. And we see more and more of this because of travelers' flight statuses. So, when it comes to group airfare, just because I have Platinum Premier United status, and I'm booked on this group air, and I want to go in and upgrade my seats to comfort plus because I get to do that for free. But when I am on a group record, I can't do that to just my record, because I am part of a group of 32. Hopefully you guys aren't giving out the record locators because there's tons of risks to that. So hopefully your people don't have the record locators and therefore they're not able to go in and try to manipulate their records individually.

This goes to, it's not that it's not possible, it's absolutely possible that your travel agent, your tour operator can go in and they can divide that person out of the records, so now that record of 32 becomes a record of 31, and this new person gets their own record locator and they can go into United and they can upgrade their seats and they can get their Comfort Plus, and it's possible. But there's so much risk to it because every time you divide out that record, you create another record locator, it's kind of the transportation situation. If the day of travel -- I mean, we have records this year where, if it was a record that started at 36, we ended up with 15 different record locators before the trip actually happened because of these individual deviation request, because they want to upgrade their seats because they want to come in a day later because they -- whatever the reason is.

So, my plea to you guys is to make sure that individuals understand we're not doing that anymore. I said I wasn't going to get into our policy, but I am going to say, we're not doing that anymore because when flights go wrong the day of, if there's a misconnection somewhere, like managing and keeping track of 15 different record locators is so difficult to do. People get left behind. The entire group doesn't get protected together. It just opens up the window for a lot more trouble than it's worth. So, from our perspective, if somebody has that frequent flyer status or they want those upgraded, those first-class seats, they need to opt out of the group air. Group air really needs to be group air. You guys are on the group record.

Individuals that want that. They can purchase the same flight, the same schedule but they're going to be doing that individually instead of doing it with the group and then trying to slice off and then do their own thing. With that, just a quick touch on like the frequent flyer. We do know there's lots of questions I get often times about the bags and bag fees. And sometimes, you've got a Million Miler on your group record and you just get really lucky because you get to the airport and because of that person's status, suddenly the whole group gets free bags and there's no explanation to it. There's no rhyme or reason on why it happens sometimes and why it doesn't happen on other times.

But if you get complimentary bag fees, complimentary bag waived because of your frequent flyer status as long as your frequent flyer is applied to that group record, you'll still get the free bags. You won't get the free bags if it's tied to a credit card. So that's the other thing is if you've got a United credit card or a Delta credit card that you get complimentary bags, when you purchase air on that credit card. That doesn't

work for group travels. So, there's no way for United or Delta to know that you are credit card holder because that flight wasn't actually purchased with your credit card.

So, when you go to try to check in, they're going to charge you the bag fees because they don't have that credit card association. So, that's just really important too that there's people that are really adamant about getting their free bags. They're going to need to go buy that ticket directly with their credit cards so that they get their free bags.

All right. Deviation questions, I made it through all my hypothetical scenarios. No?

Terri Corbo: Hey, Sara. This is Terri Corbo. How are you doing?

Sara Clemons: Hi, how are you?

Terri Corbo: Good, I just have a general question. I've seen clubs offer trips without air fare. Say, this is our trip and you're on your own for getting your own air. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing something like that?

Sara Clemons: So, I've seen -- Maryjo, I saw your hand too if you want to comment on that too, I'll let you jump in as soon as I'm done here. More and more people are like, so with all of this said about all these deviations and all of these negatives of Group Air, why on earth would we even still use Group Air? What are the advantages to Group Air? One, really what it boils down to is that you're being guaranteed a certain price for a large number of seats for much closer in than if you just go individual ticketing.

So, disadvantages of individual ticketing is that once a person buys that ticket, they're locked into that schedule. Pretty much when they ticket it. Individual ticketing can lead to problems when it comes to transportation so depending on your destination if you're trying to get everybody to an airport, it doesn't matter how many times you tell them. You need to land by 1:00 p.m., book your flights to arrive before noon if you're going to use our transportation. Flights end up changing, you end up -- if you're trying to use a charter bus for all of your members and you don't have the Group Air tied to that exactly then there is problem for a misconnect between the actual flights and their transportation.

If you're going to a destination or if your package has individual transportation involved in it, everybody is just buying an individual shared ride shuttle seat, that's no big deal. You can totally offer it as land only and I've seen it happen a lot more because people have their planes, people have their status, people have vouchers leftover from COVID that just keep getting rolled forever. So, there's a lot more reasons why people are motivated not to use group travel and it's doable for sure. Maryjo, you want to jump in?

Maryjo: Yeah. The past three years, my trips have all been land packages only. Buying Group Air, well airlines finally figured out. We were reserving these big blocks and then not taking them and so now they just want the money upfront and then they're not too nice about giving it back. It's a fight. So, I've had no problems in the past three years. I just give everybody the flight. You have to confirm. Give me your confirmation. I keep track of that.

If they're coming early or later, it's all on them. If they book a different flight, they have to arrange their own ground transportations. It's worked out perfect and I highly suggest it just from my experience.

Sara Clemons: I think it boils down to expectation, right? So, now your travelers know like this is the way we roll. This is what to expect and setting that expectation might be a change as

you guys roll out a concept like that but as long as you're just really straightforward about what's included, what's not included, what the parameters are, it's doable for sure.

Maryjo: Yeah, it really is. Plus, it was because of all these people going, "Oh, I want to upgrade." Do this, do that. They charged for my luggage; they weren't supposed to. It just made life easier. So, that was my two cents. Thanks, Sara.

Sara Clemons: Thank you for sharing.

David Schoneker: This is Dave. I guess just extrapolating from what you said there in the discussion. I think the key is that word expectations, right? It's really setting the expectation and I know certainly in my groups, I usually set the expectation early on. There's not going to be deviations unless it's a real special case. If you're signing on for group, to go in a group trip, this is what the group trip is. If you don't like what it is, go run your own trip.

I wouldn't say that we don't have some deviations, but we really try to minimize them. At least within my club, we try to sell the idea that a group trip is going with the group and utilizing most of the stuff. We may have somebody coming in from a different town on a different air whatever but it's basically, "Here's our time. When our bus is going to leave, if you're not there, you're on your own. Make your own arrangements." But again, I think the keyword is setting those expectations. Nobody gets upset when they know that ahead of time. It's when they are surprised, that's the problem.

Sara Clemons: All right. So, now the doozy, right? I feel like this is where we're going "womp, womp, womp". What's happened? What has happened to the ski industry? What has happened to group travel? What has happened to our group bookings and the warm fuzzies and all that good stuff, right? Every time we turn around, it's just like, "Oh my goodness, what else can they take away from us?" These are things like the comps. We already talked about comps. There are fewer and fewer comps offered anywhere. What's going on there?

When it comes to welcome receptions. There used to be welcome receptions provided a lot of places. There used to be mountains tours, complimentary mountain tours, lots of places. All of these things are shifting. We're seeing an increase in the rates over and over and over. We're talking 30% to 50% on lodging and lifts over the past couple years and it's just mind boggling. You're charging me so much more and I'm getting so much less than I used to. I can't even get a trail map or a sticker to like get my people excited about these trips.

It's all true. I don't even know how to say like it's not that bad. It is all true and it's really hard for us to push through and I figured I'd touch on it. It's not the case everywhere, there's still destinations that will send trail maps, they'll send stickers, or they'll send you goodies to raffle off at your pre-trip parties. They're few and far between but they do exist so talk to your travel organizers about that's really, really important to you where are some of those places.

We are seeing more and more on the mountain tour side of things, is that it doesn't exist but maybe that's a product that there is a nominal fee for. That you have to register for. Maybe it's still complimentary but there's a limited number of spaces so you have to make sure you make the reservations for that. So, those things do exist. I think the best thing is to just make sure you're asking. The worst that's going to happen is you're going to be told no. That your tour operator is going to be like "Yeah, they don't do that." Or we'll go to the resort and the resort is like, "Yeah, we don't do that."

That's the worst that the answer could be. So, if at welcome reception you'd like somebody to come talk to your group when you get to town, if you want to do a Zoom, I've had a lot of different resort people lately be very willing to jump on a Zoom if you guys are having a pre-trip party, they're willing to get on there and kind of do a resort introduction and talk about great restaurants to check out and how to manage the bus system in all of those things online ahead of time.

Because maybe they don't have the manpower to be able to do that in-person once you're on site, so things like that. There are resorts that are kind of changing things a little bit and still trying to make sure you guys are taken care of, and your questions are answered. So ask. If there's something that's important to you guys, ask for it and we'll do our best or we'll be very honest with you about like, well, that's not going to happen.

A lot of this has become a thing, a lot because the resort staffing changes. In many, many cases you don't even necessarily have a person in Breckenridge and a person in Keystone and a person in Vail, and I'm picking on a particular direction here, but they have a call center where they're managing these bookings. Who even knows where from, Vermont? I don't even know. And they're not in Breckenridge, not in these towns, so they don't have the ability to actually show up at your welcome party.

Other cases it's simply a matter of what used to be a team of three or four is now just one person, is one national sales manager that is trying to do everything. So if he's got three groups that are coming to town, you all get in on Saturday, there's just no way that they can actually do a welcome reception or a meet and greet for all three groups. So, some places have started actually charging for that where if it's really important to you, you can pay \$100 and they'll make sure that they have somebody, a mountain ambassador come meet with your group or deliver those lift tickets and provide a quick question answer session. So there are ways that they're still working through it. There are limited budgets. A lot of places have just absolutely eliminated trail maps completely, so they just don't even exist to be able to send. It's tough. I mean, it's changed a lot, but I think at the end of the day, the group travel is still an incredible value. So, there's a lot of no's being thrown out there right now. The pricing is going up and up and up, that threshold is just being pushed to the limits because of that demand, that pent up demand for travel, the leisure traveler that is just dropping dollars on all of this stuff, and the revenue managers are going, "I'm not going to allocate all this space to groups when I can get three times as much for the individual family that's coming out."

So, hang in there. It can't be this ridiculous forever. It's going to break and at the end of the day, the group travel is always going to be there, right? We're still going to come, we're still going to be filling those condos, filling those hotels when that leisure market breaks, when all of a sudden okay, well, I had my fill, I'm going to go on my beach trip now. Whatever the case is. Hang in there. Don't be afraid to ask for things. Don't be afraid to hear no, because we're all really accustomed to hearing no anymore, but keep asking. We'll keep trying.

All right, I've made it through. I'm happy to answer other questions. Do you have a question, comment?

Jngahn: It's Jim. I just had a question regarding is there a trend in the airline industry to discourage bringing your personal ski equipment long on the plane?

Sara Clemons: Yes, actually that's a great topic, a great question. I'm glad you brought it up. There are several carriers that have started limiting the number of ski bags that they'll allow on a flight. I know particularly Air Canada and Alaska both require us to turn in an equipment list when we do ticketing so we have to declare how many. I know Alaska

will not allow more than 25 skis on any record, and they make us declare that ahead of time, and then Air Canada doesn't have a magic number, but they do make us turn in an equipment list. I have seen that the equipment list can sometimes dictate how they manipulate your schedule and suddenly a group that is like, on a particular schedule and that equipment list gets turned in. Those flights still exist, but suddenly that group is re-accommodated to a different flight schedule to account for weight and it's not pretty in most cases.

So there are some incredible deals out there in rentals and renting equipment. There's lots of providers out there that are offering group discounts to rent your gear.

There's another company, shipskis.com is great. I'm sure a lot of you guys already have partnerships with them. If you don't, it's definitely something to look into. They're a great company that offers group discounts. If you set up a program with them, you actually send your ski equipment through them and it's at the resort waiting for you, and then you get a return label and you just leave it there for UPS pickup and they send it back home. So, it's a little tricky if you're doing back-to-back trips or trips that are pretty close together, but it's definitely another option. If you love the gear you have and you want to ride your own equipment, that's a great alternative to dealing with the airlines and then not having to rent gear.

But renting gear is great. I mean, the pricing isn't that horrible, and it gives you the opportunity to try new equipment to change it out when the conditions change, all of a sudden you're in town and you get 2ft of new snow and you're like, shoot, I can go play on some different skis today. So, there's something to be said for just renting gear when you're in town instead. I've got John Olson. You want to go for it?

John Olson: Yes. In Minnesota here, we ran a trip to Zermatt, Switzerland on Air Canada, and they would not allow us to bring any skis because we were going Minneapolis-Montreal, Montreal-Milan.

Sara Clemons: Okay.

John Olson: And they wouldn't let us have any skis. Air Canada was kind of, it seemed like each leg was late.

Sara Clemons: They're kind of awful, but we don't need to go into that.

John Olson: No, that's fine. But the ski thing was other airlines, we haven't had any problems, but Air Canada, they off the bat, said "no skis."

Sara Clemons: Randy, you want to jump in?

Randy Lew: When do you see airfare starting to normalize again? They are all over the board.

Sara Clemons: Yes, they are. If I could have a crystal ball, I tell you what. Airfare is -- I don't have that answer. I wish I did and every year you go, oh, my God, it can't get worse, and then it gets worse. There's no rhyme or reason to one week versus another week, one destination versus another destination. In the past week or so, I've seen the queue taxes. So, the fuel surcharge taxes from basically comparing the same market, right? So, let's pretend we're going LaGuardia to Salt Lake City. I'm just going to throw that out there. For the same dates, you go February 3rd through the 10th and then February 10th through the 17th, right there. The 3rd through the 10th, the fuel surcharge was \$168. What? And then on February 10th through the 17th, on basically the same schedule, it was \$19. That's just one example of the massive inconsistency. I don't have that answer. I wish I did, because it's very difficult. I mean, it just goes

back to maybe group travel is not where it's at, like Group Air booking is not where it's at. It's not doing us any favors, that's for sure.

- Randy Lew: Thanks.
- Sara Clemons: Sorry. I don't have an answer. All right any other questions about anything? Happy to go in a totally new direction if there's any hot topics that people are worried about. Yeah, Pat?
- Pat: So, if you do land only you wouldn't charter a bus then, or how would you work? Everything would be shuttles?
- Sara Clemons: It depends. You can still do the bus if you're going into Denver, for example, and you say, this is the ideal flight schedule, you can look it up and say, when we're going from San Diego, Denver, this is the flight schedule we recommend. Our bus is going to leave that airport at 2 p.m. So as long as you land before 1:00, you get to ride our bus. If you don't land by 1:00, then you get to go book your own transfers.
- Pat: But my concern would be, if everybody's booking their own air, how do you make sure you have enough people for your bus? Since I'm a new person, I'm trying to figure out how that works.
- Sara Clemons: Yeah, you can still do that price. If you've got 32 people on your trip and you say this bus cost \$3,000, you're going to split that total cost by all 32 people. If they choose not to participate, or if they go get their own transfers, they're still paying that per person cost. There's no discount for not utilizing that bus. Every single person that goes on your trip is paying for that bus seat, whether they use it or not.
- Pat: So, you call it lodging, but you add the bus into the hotel?
- Sara Clemons: That could work.
- Pat: Okay.
- Sara Clemons: It's the base package, right? So, your base package is your lodging, your transfer, maybe a breakfast, whatever your club add-on is, the guest doesn't get to see that line item itemization in that. And the same thing if you're selling single supplement packages, making sure that you're including that transportation cost in that single supplement upgrade package as well, so that you don't end up short on your bus cost if you've got five people that decide they want their own room.
- Pat: Yeah, I already got caught on that one by mistake.
- David Schoneker: That's what I was saying, Sara, is like the group package is there. If somebody's not using something that's going to be affecting the group, they're paying for it anyway. That's the only way it works really.
- Sara Clemons: Yup.
- Pat: Thank you.
- Sara Clemons: Pamela?
- Pamela Lester: There are two items. One, to comment on what was just happening. We've gotten caught several times where people we've ended up with a double occupancy room where we've only had one person. So, we've actually built in one single supplement on every trip to make sure we're covered. The question that I have has to do with

European trips and half comp, half board. What has your experience been recently on half board? We're having trouble finding it.

Sara Clemons: So, I'm going to have to bow out of that question only because maybe some other club leaders can jump in if they have some experience they want to comment on that. We don't run international travel. We do North America only, so I don't have any experience to be able to comment on that. Dawn, do you have something to add to that?

Pamela Lester: I'm assuming that it has to do with the workforce that people have cutback, that they're only providing breakfast, not providing dinners, because everybody is short-handed.

Sara Clemons: Yeah.

Pamela Lester: And it's not just the ski industry. It's everywhere.

Sara Clemons: Everywhere, for sure, yeah.

Dawn: We just did a European trip to Andorra and Barcelona, and we had half board at both locations when we were there, and we're going to Dolomites next year. We have half board at the first hotel, but not at the extension. We only have breakfast.

Pamela Lester: On our extensions, we generally only do breakfast, but this year, Verbier, we couldn't get anything.

John Olson: When we were in Zermatt, we had half board at our hotel, and we actually filled the whole hotel, so that worked out pretty good.

Mary Anne Koltowich: Yeah, I was just going to say, this is Mary Ann from Crescent, our club is booking a trip to Zermatt this year, and we're getting half board. So, you have to work with your tour operators to get you the right lodging to be able to do that.

Sara Clemons: Matt, you want to jump in too?

Matt K: This is kind of off the subject, but it's on sleeper buses. But we've kind of noticed that the sleeper buses are starting to disappear, and apparently, it's maybe a liability issue that companies don't want to run them anymore. Anybody else seeing that?

Sara Clemons: We don't do a lot of work with that, but I have heard that comment made by some of the clubs that we work with that have used to utilize that out of Texas area up from Flatland Ski Association across. I definitely have heard that that's gotten harder and harder to find the providers that are willing to do that. My understanding is that there is a lot of liability issue. The buses, they're just not providing that anymore. Anybody else have any comments about that? Any other experience with that?

Dawn: This is Dawn from Milwaukee. We don't use sleeper buses because it's just too far, but we normally go up north for a weekend trip and we used to be able to get like a fancier bus that was more luxurious. It was really nice bus, and it took less people, but people were willing to pay for the difference, but the bus company said it was too costly to replace the bus once they had to take it out of service and they weren't going to buy another bus even though there was demand for it, so just wasn't cost-effective. Their insurance has skyrocketed for bus companies and it seems like large national bus companies seem to be buying each other out too. So I don't know if that has anything to do with it.

- Sara Clemons: I wish I knew the stat because I heard it a couple of years ago. One of our big national charter providers was giving me some stats about the number of bus companies, like charter bus companies that existed pre-COVID. And then how the percentage of them that went out of business that don't exist anymore since then. I don't remember what the exact number was, but it was mind blowing. I was like "holy moly," that has an impact for sure.
- Dawn: And some of those were bought out too, or acquired or whatever. I just know in our area they can't even get enough school bus drivers for the school.
- Armand, did you have a topic?
- Armand Gutierrez: Well, just to comment on the half board and the boarding when you're at the hotels. We just returned from Zermatt in February of this year and we had full board at the hotel, but not for every night. Sometimes it's only for four nights or three nights and then there's a couple of nights you're on your own. We did have an extension to Majorca and Spain. We did not have dinners. We were on our own for dinners. But on the majority of the trips I've taken with Far West to international trips, we've always had full board, especially on the ski trip. Maybe not on the extension, but at least on the ski trip itself for the week and for the week of skiing maybe out of six days, six nights maybe we had breakfast and dinners four or five of those nights, and so full board is available. I think it may be just dependent upon the hotels that you're going with.
- Kathy: Trying Club Meds?
- Armand Gutierrez: I've never tried Club Meds.
- Kathy: We run a lot of them. You get four meals a day and liquor.
- Pamela Lester: Our group is not a Club Med group. And what I think it is has to do with COVID and the lack of available workers because we had no trouble in getting it for next year. We did have trouble in Verbier.
- Sara Clemons: Great. Well, that brings us to just about an hour. If there's any other lingering questions, jump in quick. Otherwise, oh, Michelle, jump in in there.
- Michele Ormond: I have a quick question. It's Michele from the Craigmeur Ski Club. I'm new to booking travel with the Ski Club. My question is on travel protection and I know I was at the travel show this weekend, buy it. How does that work with the club, though? Am I putting that out there that go to this link and get your travel insurance or am I supposed to handle that? How does that work?
- Sara Clemons: So, travel insurance. We did a quick chat kind of very similar to this this weekend while we were in New Jersey. One of the topics was travel insurance. Basically, the takeaway was just buy it. There are so many reasons to just have that. The quick answer for you, Michele, is it kind of depends on who you're booking with.

The different tour operators have different opportunities on how to purchase. I know for our case if you're using a reservation system, it's included as an option in your registration. You get to opt into it. If you're not using a registration system, we have a link that we can share with all of our groups. So if you're coming on group travel with our company, you simply go to this website and you purchase policy direct. So depending on who you're working with like they might have a form you fill out, they might have a website where you just share that website. I know most of us have done a lot of steps to make it very easy for you guys to encourage your people to sign up. If it's more steps and more work for you to collect premiums and do all the stuff like

you know, it's a headache. I think everybody is doing our best to make it easy for you to sell it and for members to buy it.

Michele Ormond: Okay.

Pamela Lester: I would strongly suggest that you get trip insurance and we usually have the individuals get their trip insurance whether it is through the tour operator or they do it on their own. Invariably, I always get a phone calls saying "I'm having trouble, can you help me?" So, make sure that you get copies of what the insurance requires because there is a difference between cancel for any reason and just straight trip insurance.

Sara Clemons: Yup. Carole?

Carole Mustaleski: Many people don't want to purchase trip insurance as it will cover their whole trip cost because it's so expensive especially when you get to my age but you can purchase medical insurance and if you are leaving the U.S., you can purchase medical insurance, it cost me \$51 to purchase it to leave the country. If you can't get people to purchase the full insurance to cover the whole cost of the trip, maybe they don't care if they lose money. But they need to have medical insurance and it covers from the time they get on the plane until they return.

Sara Clemons: Yup.

Carole Mustaleski: We had people break ankles, have strokes, stayed couple of weeks, two of us spent an extra week in Scotland last year with COVID and it covered it.

Sara Clemons: Yup. So, the comment on the age, a lot of insurance companies, maybe if you guys have worked with them directly and group policies had been very limited. They don't exist but most of the tour operators out there still have group policies so that you get to buy into that group package and your age is irrelevant. It's a set premium price based on the total cost of your package. So those do still exist. You just have to find them through your tour operator partners and they're not as common if you're buying it directly from insurance companies anymore.

Carole Mustaleski: Not all tour operators are that way.

Sara Clemons: Yup.

Carole Mustaleski: I had to pay through a tour operator. I would have had to pay based on my age.

Sara Clemons: Yup. Cheryl?

Cheryl Mann: Hi Sara. There's a question in the chat. It says does a Million Mile Club person need to be at the airport with the group or does he have to be at the airport first?

Sara Clemons: I have no idea. The time that that happened, we we're like, "Whoa, who was responsible for this and how did this happen so we can make sure it happens again?" No idea.

Carole Mustaleski: The person needs to be there. The person needs to be there when everyone is checking in and they get x number of people.

Sara Clemons: I've seen it where like sometimes it'll just be like eight of the people on the record get the perks but we've also seen it when an entire record of like 27 passengers, everybody got the free bags. There was no rhyme or reason to it. It's a nice surprise if it happens, let's go with that. Julian? You're still muted, there we go.

- Julian Franklin: Going back to the insurance question, at least one company offers annual policies which are you go on like more than two or three tips, it is a much lower price.
- Sara Clemons: Yes. That is definitely something to explore as well if you guys are doing multiple trips those annual policies are great value. All right?
- Lisa Beregi: Last chance. Going once, going twice.
- David Schoneker: One more comment about the Million Mile business, Sara, because I'm a Million Miler and if you're 1k status, you get to bring quite a number of different friends with you and get the free bags, get the free upgrade to economy plus. If you happen to have that status you can work sometimes with your tour operator to get your record locators stand up so that the number on a particular record locator that you're going to be on allows for that and if it's a Million Mile flyer, the spouse gets the same status as the Million Mile flyer. So again, I've been on situations where me and my wife we're going, we both had 1k status because of my Million Mile flyer and then we set it up on two different record locators and we took up to 16 people that got all the advantages. My people were worshiping the ground I walked on when we made that happen. But again it's something that you can do when you have that kind of status especially with 1k.
- Lisa Beregi: Good. Thank you Dave, thank you everyone for joining and Sara, thank you so much for your time and your continued support of the federation.
- Sara Clemons: Yes. Thank you guys for all participating and shoot me questions. If you guys have questions, you don't have to work with my company. If you want further information about one of these topics or something, feel free to reach out. We're advocates of group travel and making this work for everybody so just happy to see you guys all tonight. Thank you.
- Cheryl Mann: Thanks Lisa, thanks Sara.