

At Balboa Travel – And In San Diego As A Whole – Leisure Agents Are In ‘Full Growth Mode’

by Cheryl Rosen (/tmrsearchresults?st=1&sr=Cheryl Rosen) / April 13, 2017



In another sign of the resurgence of leisure travel agents, San Diego-based Balboa Travel has promoted Mark Simões to the newly established position of vice president of leisure services, and charged him with adding a leisure travel element to its new office in San Francisco.

The San Diego-based agency, long owned by the da Rosa family (though more recently also by shareholders) is known for its specialty in corporate travel, where it ranks among the top 1%. It also has a large meetings and incentives division; leisure travel, its smallest division, started out servicing the vacation needs of its corporate clients.

But its new office, soon to open in San Francisco, will include a larger leisure presence—and indeed, leisure is “in full growth mode,” Simões said. On his plate are bridal shows, target mailings and even acquisitions designed to reach out to new leisure customers. “It’s an all-encompassing approach to growth. We are using every resource we have available to grow our footprint,” he said.

The hard part, of course, is finding great staff—so Balboa will be looking to expand its independent contractor program as well as hire in-house agents. Simões has put the word out through the local chamber of commerce and is using “word-of-mouth networking, which works best” in finding trained as well as not-so-trained staff.

“I’m looking for people who have a passion to get into the travel business and have sales experience, and we will mentor and train them,” Simões said. That approach worked quite well with one current employee, whom Balboa hired as an intern from a local community college.

“I made it a priority to learn the business; I learned Sabre on my own in my down time, kept practicing and learning, and eventually had enough skills to get into an agent support role doing administrative things.”

“It’s definitely time-consuming” to grow staff that way, he acknowledged, but in the current job market, “it’s something we have to do.”

(Interested in the job? Email jobs5414@balboa.com

(<mailto:jobs5414@balboa.com>.)

And of course Simões has a soft spot for travel agents who come up through the ranks slowly. He himself started in the business as a courier, carrying paper tickets to customers long before the word “eticket” entered the travel lexicon. “I made it a priority to learn the business; I learned Sabre on my own in my down time, kept practicing and learning, and eventually had enough skills to get into an agent support role doing administrative things.” He went into the leisure side of the business about 15 years ago – “and that’s when I really fell in love with this business and things began to take off.”

Last month Simões was voted Best Travel Advisor in San Diego by the readers of San Diego Magazine – the first time the magazine has included the category in its Reader’s Choice awards.

His advice to the readers of TMR? “It’s too easy to get complacent. Take the time to travel as much as possible, to experience things and to understand the nuances, so you never start losing that passion. For me, with so much on my plate, it’s important to recharge and stay fresh and keep that passion for what I am doing alive, to know the nuances of travel today, to stay up to date.”