

Agencies divert disaster

BY IEVA AUGSTUMS
Staff Reporter

For students who want to avoid spring break package companies, other options are available.

Shirley Rice, co-owner of Four Seasons Travel, said most students come to her agency for help with single travel accommodations such as hotel or air transportation.

"Most students like to plan their own spring break vacations," Rice said. "We do our best to accommodate each individual to the best of their needs. A lot of students are on a shoestring budget, and we can help them spend their money wisely."

If a student wants a complete spring break package, Rice said Four Seasons Travel will book a package through a spring break company. Rice said all the companies Four Seasons works with are approved by the Better Business Bureau.

"Students like coming to travel agencies because they are local and more reliable," she said.

Four Seasons Travel has been in Lincoln for 22 years under the same ownership. As a member of the Better Business Bureau, the agency is committed to their customers and are willing to work one on one to have an enjoyable vacation, Rice said.

Scams target naive students

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known company with regional corporate offices throughout the United States, is one of several companies that recruits students to help increase sales.

Dave Gustafson, Midwest regional director for College Tours, said the company benefits by selling spring break packages through students.

"The reason we have student representatives is because students know the campus and the students on their campus," Gustafson said.

Gustafson said student representatives receive additional bonuses, or "perks," to their personal spring break package. After selling 10 trips, representatives receive 25 percent off their total packages. After selling 15 trips, representatives get 50 percent off, and after 20, their trip is free. Additional bonuses include an ocean view room, priority hotel check-in and admission to various parties and activities not open to the public.

During February, March and April, more than 95 percent of all U.S. and Canadian colleges and universities have students leaving for spring break, said Brad W. Nelson, owner and president of Inter-Campus Programs. About half these students do not know everything they receive or don't receive with their trip packages.

Nelson said there have been cases with other spring break companies in which students have gotten "screwed over" and left with no trip at all. "A lot of spring break companies lie to hook their customers," Nelson said. "It's all part of the job."

But Gustafson said College Tours was an honest, legitimate company. "I'm not going to lie," Gustafson said. "Spring break companies lie to

increase sales. However, I am proud to be a part of College Tours, a company that is not affiliated with this stereotype."

Nelson also vouched for his own company.

"Inter-Campus Programs is a very straightforward company," Nelson said. "We are well staffed, and honestly, we have the best deal financially."

Campus Programs said their jobs are based on being a salesperson. The goal is to sell as many travel packages as possible.

"Companies do misrepresent information and some of the pricing for their trip packages," Nelson said. "Competition is strong. Companies, like ourselves, are trying to get the most students possible."

Spring break companies compete against each other through ads and package deals to see who can appeal to the most students, Mecham said.

Nelson said Inter-Campus Programs does have price competition with other companies for international spring break destinations, but not for domestic destinations.

It is in the students' best interest to research the company they plan to use, Mecham said. They should check out other options as well because they may find a more reliable company that offers a better deal, he said. Gustafson agreed.

"Students should check out everything," he said. "Call the local Better Business Bureau, contact the Department of Transportation and the FAA." Everybody gives a good sales pitch, but not everyone has a good track record and is creditable."

Ellis said College Tours has been serving students since 1967. She has been on two tours in high schools that were organized by the company, and has traveled internationally with them as well. College Tours does not have a bad reputation, she said, and she doesn't think it will be getting one.

"I like to call it the used-car syndrome," Mecham said. "Many companies are stereotyped as having bad reputations, just like most used-car salespeople. There are reliable spring break companies out there. The challenge is just finding them."



MATT HANEY/DN

Skeptics on duty

Mecham, of the Better Business Bureau, said smooth talking and quick walking may be the business ethics of some student travel companies.

Students are susceptible to many businesses and their products, Mecham said. In a college town, companies know they can make a quick penny off students because students need their services.

"Part of our job here at the Better Business Bureau is to look out for the interest of consumers, as well as companies," Mecham said. "If a customer feels they were misrepresented, treated unethically, or they think something phony is going on, we can help them out and look into it."

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Women know the importance of annual exams, but many are concerned that it may bring bad news about their health. Abnormal pap smears, fibroids, ovarian cysts, irregular uterine bleeding or pelvic pain can be frightening. But are they always life threatening? Early detection and treatment are crucial and can alter the course of endometriosis and cancer. Being informed can offer reassurance.

Dr. David McIntosh of the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, and Dr. Gene Stohs, Women's Health Care Center in Lincoln, offer candid discussion about endometriosis and cancerous conditions of the female reproductive system.

UNMC, in conjunction with Olson Center for Women's Health, invites you to attend "Women and Gynecologic Health", an "All About Women" forum November 18, 1997.



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Do the Homework

Business experts say the best strategy to avoid vacation scams is for consumers to do their homework. If a particular company or offer seems too good to be true, contact the Cornhusker Better Business Bureau at (402) 476-8822.

Consumers can research vacation companies by phone or on the Web:

College Tours (800) 395-4896,
<http://www.collegetours.com>

Inter-Campus Programs (800) 327-6013,
<http://www.icpt.com>

Sun Splash Tours (800) 426-7710,
<http://www.sunsplashes.com>

World Ventures Tours and Travel Inc. (800) 225-4386,
<http://www.wvtt.com/spbreak.htm>

Student Express, Inc. (800) 787-3787,
http://www.allcampus.com/travel/Links/Student_Express.htm

These Travel Agencies are Better Business Bureau members:

- Adventure Travel
- Four Seasons Travel
- Good Life Tour and Travel
- International Tours of Lincoln
- Omni Travel
- Travel Agents International
- Travel and Transport
- Van Duling Tour and Travel