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Travel Health & Safety: Finding Travel Companions

By Robert Haru Fisher
August 28, 2008

How would you like a traveling companion who never argued with you, never talked back, and always deferred to every one of your whims? Maybe you'd find such a person on your honeymoon trip -- probably not, though -- but a sure way to find such a paragon might be to pay for him or her. This was the underlying message of "paid companions" back in the Victorian era when travel really began to be popular with the landed gentry and others with money. And it may still be possible today with an outfit such as Flying Companions, an Atlanta-based firm that is providing what seems to me a valuable service.

Doug Iannelli, president of the company, says he started it to help get families together. Busy couples often can't make time to fly to visit their senior relatives, so Flying Companions provides a way to get the seniors to their children, with a paid companion to ensure safe and stress-free travel. The companion can pick up your senior relative at home, take them to the airport, fly with them to your town and deliver them to your house, if necessary, taking care of baggage, any connection problems, and other all-too-familiar harassments along the way.

Iannelli gave me some sample costs, pointing out that every scenario is different, thanks to the logistics, timing, urgency, type of aircraft cabin used, etc. Taking a client and her daughter from Orlando to Westchester, NY recently, the bill for three airfares and expenses came to \$1,759. Escorting a senior from Atlanta to Stockholm for a three-night, four-day stay, including two airfares, hotel rooms, car rental, and food came to \$4,987.

I contacted three former clients of Flying Companions, all of whom recommended the company highly. One woman wrote as follows:

"My mother has late-stage Alzheimer's, and I was going to bring her from her home in Florida up to New York to live with me. The concept of managing travel arrangements and logistics while trying to care for my mom was daunting to me. She is completely helpless, hardly walking any more, and not able to feed herself, go to the bathroom, etc.

"That's when I was referred to Doug (Iannelli) by my mom's hospice social worker. For a very reasonable fee, he took care of all the arrangements, flew in to Orlando airport to meet us with a wheelchair, took care of all the carry-on-bags while I took Mom through security, accompanied us all the way to New York and arranged a wheelchair on the other side. Curb-to-curb service, and with a cheerful smile and a truly caring personality. I can't

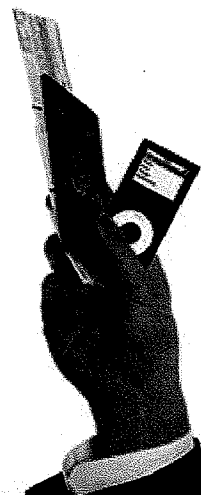
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recommend Doug highly enough!"

Flying Companions will make reservations, escort the client throughout, handle wheelchair assistance, coordinate airport check-in and carry onboard luggage, guide the client through security, provide client with access to an airline lounge while waiting to board, assist with bathroom trips, retrieve luggage, keep friends, and family informed by phone or email during trip. Ianeli stated that he and his employees are experienced air travelers and former airline professionals who are fully insured and each has passed an extensive background check, he says. The firm is willing to provide proof of insurance and references at a customer's request. They are willing to accompany you on a single flight or an entire vacation, they say. You can reach Flying Companions at tel. **888/350-8886**, website www.flyingcompanions.com.