

# Tony DeNicola

Fruitland Park, Florida



TDJ Travel

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## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Tony DeNicola:*

Originally from the Northeast, Tony DeNicola, Owner of TDJ Travel, spent six years with the United States Air Force as a Computer Systems Operator immediately after high school. Following active duty in 1998, he moved to the Tampa Bay area where he continued to work in technology. He also met his wife and eventually relocated an hour north to Fruitland Park to be closer to her family. DeNicola's entrepreneurial journey began in 2000, not long after moving to Lake County.

"That's when I started my website company on a part-time basis," he said. "I also worked for a movie theater company and eventually for Westgate Resorts as a Cold Fusion programmer for their internet marketing department. That was my initial exposure to the travel industry. I then spent time with a different internet marketing company

before being let go as part of a round of layoffs.”

DeNicola continued, “During this whole time, I was still working on my website development company on the side. My wife and I also tried a few different things, including a grocery delivery business and an online coupon business. Neither of them worked out. At some point, I got burnt out doing websites and really wanted to do something else. That’s when my experience with Westgate came to mind. I really enjoyed the travel industry and decided to become a travel agent.”

In 2010, DeNicola began his new career in the travel industry with Millstream Travel. It was a good learning experience; however, he quickly realized that neither the company nor his colleagues were as supportive as he originally thought they would be. After about a year, he quit doing travel and spent the next seven years focused on growing his website development business. In 2018, he got back into travel as an independent travel agent with KHM Travel Group – an organization he’s had a great relationship with ever since.

“That’s also when I formed TDJ Travel,” he said. “I have a full license and I’m registered as an independent travel agent. We’re focused on cruises and our primary markets include river and luxury cruising as well as family and group cruises. I’m a Certified Travel Associate, a Certified Autism Travel Professional and I hold a certification in Accessibility Travel. These certifications are important for our family travelers with special needs.”

DeNicola added, “On the business side, TDJ Travel works with companies to offer meetings and events at sea. We also work with companies to develop travel incentives for their employees as well as

their customers.”

TDJ Travel is a small company, which allows them to spend more time with each customer. Companies like Expedia, because of the sheer volume of trips they book, are able to offer discounted travel packages.

However, the customer service is usually non-existent.

“We don’t book thousands of cruises a year,” DeNicola said. “We don’t guarantee you the best possible rate for your cabin and then put you in a room at the bottom of the boat. We will get you the best bang for your money. We will make sure you have the best views on your cruise and our customer service is second to none. We get to know our customers and their likes and dislikes. If you want to go on a cruise to Alaska to see the Northern Lights, we’ll tell you the best time to go. If we know you like to have wine and fruit in your room when you get on your ship, we’ll have it there waiting for you.”

Despite facing many challenges, including marketing and having to deal with the ramifications of COVID-19 on the cruise industry, DeNicola is optimistic that his business will continue to prosper. By getting involved in groups like the chamber, Rotary Club and Knights of Columbus, he’s able to network and make valuable connections. He also remains front and center in the minds of his clients and prospect by sending out a weekly newsletter.

“Each week, I’ll typically focus on a specific destination,” he said. “I really enjoy researching new destinations and then sharing that information with my customers. I also love getting emails from my customers telling me that they read my newsletter and they want to learn more about a destination or they want me to put together a package for them to go to

a destination I wrote about. Knowing that I have that impact on people makes my day.”

DeNicola added, “I also love to talk to my customers when they come back from a trip and hear about their experience. Many times my customers tell me about how they enjoyed an excursion or activity that I recommended to them and that they would not have otherwise tried.”

Looking ahead, DeNicola would like to grow his business to have between three and five travel agents. He’d also like for each agent to specialize in something different such as all-inclusive resorts, adventure travel, day trips, etc.

What advice does DeNicola have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Over the past 25 years I have had several different companies from home food delivery, website development, online coupon website, at-home wine tastings, and more. Most of these I have worked on a few years before I moved on to something else. Some of these didn’t make it even a year before the business failed. An entrepreneur isn’t necessarily someone who starts one business in their lifetime and keeps it forever. Most entrepreneurs are people who over a lifetime will have many businesses.

Some businesses will succeed and some will go under. Whenever a business goes under, don’t look at it as a failure – look at it as a learning experience and use that when you start your next business.”

DeNicola added, “Lastly, this is my tip on how you can work the least amount of hours and make a decent guaranteed income. This tip is to not become an entrepreneur, go out and get a 9 to 5 job. If you want to be an entrepreneur, expect to work 14 hour days seven days a week. You may not work that much, but as an entrepreneur you will not be

successful if you only put 40 hours a week into it. Over time you may be able to hire people to take some of the work off your table but in the beginning expect to do as much as you can yourself and to be married to your business.”

DeNicola also recommends the following business-related books: *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Tim Ferriss, *One Word That Will Change Your Life* by Dan Britton, *Jimmy Page and Jon Gordon* and *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill.

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