

Traveling Companions

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRIAN BRIGGS

TEXT BY MARY KELLY

Editor's Note: Over the last couple of years, our readers have found great pleasure in the travel articles we have published, many of which have been written by enthusiastic counselors in the office of Lake Forest Travel Bureau. Now we are giving you the opportunity to meet them for yourselves. You might just discover that you won't want to travel without them...

Downtown Lake Forest certainly has much to offer, but have you ever considered it your gateway to the world? You might just see things a whole lot differently following a visit to Lake Forest Travel Bureau, a company specializing in upscale individual travel, family getaways and luxurious small-group tours that has been serving the local community for over 50 years.

Since 1986, the company has been owned and operated by Helen Varri, a longtime Lake Forest resident. Born and raised in Switzerland, her life before Lake Forest was one of worldwide travel for over 20 years with residences in seven foreign countries – principally Europe, South America and South Africa. “After relocating to the United States, a career in travel seemed appropriate, based on my first-hand experience, passion for travel, knowledge of geography and understanding of foreign languages,” said Helen who, six years ago, invited her daughter, Monica, to join her in the business. Today the dynamic mother and daughter duo jointly own the company with 12 employees, most of whom are experienced travel consultants.

Since arriving in the United States, Helen has traveled many times to Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. “I just recently returned from a wonderful trip to Tanzania and Kenya with a group of almost 40 clients,” said Helen. “We were privileged to witness the exciting migration of thousands of wildebeests and zebras from the Maasai Mara to the Serengeti Plains. But the best part of travel for me is the opportunity to get to know and experience the lives of those who live where we visit. There are truly many wonderful people around the world.” Monica, a former corporate America international sales professional, has her share of experience, as well. Having lived in Milan,



she is a specialist on traveling in Italy – a destination of hers at least once a year. According to Helen, her entire team of counselors has the “travel bug,” and every few months someone from the office is on the road to explore new travel destinations, and to inspect hotels and cruise ships. This gives us a first-hand taste and we can counsel our clients depending on their requests and budgets.”

Helen is justifiably proud that her agency is a long-time member of Virtuoso, a deluxe marketing consortium that allows Lake Forest Travel Bureau to extend special privileges to its clients – from value-added amenities and upgrades at many world-class hotels and resorts, to complementary shore excursions on cruise lines. With personal contacts all around the world, Lake Forest Travel can arrange one-of-a-kind experiences such as access to private art collections and tickets to world class events including the Ryder Cup, the British Open, Wimbledon, and more. Recognized for their attention to detail and outstanding client service, Lake Forest Travel was featured in September 2004 by Chicago Tribune Magazine as one of seven leading Chicago-area luxury travel specialists.

“This is a service business,” says Monica. “Sometimes people come in knowing exactly what they want. Other times they want advice and assistance to establish a customized itinerary. Because our team members have had so many different travel experiences and have their unique areas of expertise, we are constantly working together so that we can give our clients the experience they are looking for.”

So what’s considered a “hot spot” these days? “What is hot is where you want to be and can enjoy yourself,” said Helen. “There are so many choices out there. A unique trip is long-remembered.”

The next time you are thinking about a travel destination, consult the great folks at Lake Forest Travel Bureau. They will be pleased to accompany you on the journey of a lifetime.

Lake Forest Travel Bureau is located at 267 East Westminster Road. Hours of operation are 8:30 am to 5:30 pm, Monday through Friday, and Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm. [F&B](#)