

THOMAS M. KEESLING 1932-2021



Denver, CO – Thomas Marion Keesling, a worldwide leading travel consultant, has died. He was 88. His passing on February 21st was announced by his family.

Born in San Mateo, CA on September 14, 1932 to his father, Mr. Hector Victor Keesling and mother, Mrs. Margaret Downing Keesling, Tom was the youngest of four siblings; John Keesling, Jane Trevor and Ginger Ramage. Tom graduated from University of Colorado with a Bachelor's degree of Science. He joined the Air Force rising to the rank of First Lieutenant and was one of the founding members of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He developed the program for the Advance Training in Aviation for non-Academy Cadets.

Based out of Lowry, living in Cullen Hall, Tom eventually met and married Ruth Morris on June 30, 1956 and lived in Boulder, Colorado. Tom always had an interest in flying but that soon transferred to travel and tourism with the founding of Travel Associates, Inc in 1960 where he and Ruth then moved to Denver, CO.

Keesling was best known as a travel agency industry advocate and a proponent of environmentally sound tourism. He served as President of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) following earlier positions as officer in charge of air matters, industry relations, conventions, and special education; Chairman of the Finance Committee; and Secretary and President of the Rocky Mountain Chapter. He also chaired the ASTA Environmental Committee and the ASTA/Smithsonian Institution Awards Committee where he formulated ASTA's Ten Commandments on Eco-Tourism.

In addition, for a period of 10 years, he judged the British Airways "Tourism for Tomorrow Awards in London," the world's most prestigious award for environmentally sound tourism projects.

He founded Travel Associates in 1960 and operated the agency until its sale to a South African company in 2001. Keesling was also well-known for his escort skills in developing continents such as Africa and Asia, where travelers needed expert assistance.

He traveled all over the world, as evidenced by his membership in the Travelers Century Club, limited to those who have visited at least 100 countries. He more than doubled that having

visited more than 200 countries.

As one of the leading advocates for travel and tourism he was appointed by President Richard M. Nixon to the National Tourism Resources Review Commission. During that time, Keesling served on the Department of Commerce task force to assess the potential of foreign tourism in the U.S.

Some of his other accomplishments included General Chairman of the 37th World Travel Congress in Athens, Greece, serving as the representative of the U.S. and Canada to the Universal Federation of Travel Agent Associations and being appointed to the Development Authority Council of the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) where he worked on the tourism in Pacific Basin countries.

Keesling also was a consultant to China International Travel Service from 1973 to 1990, and opened Tibet and the western provinces of China to tourism. When Raffles Hotel in Singapore undertook a \$190 million renovation, he consulted on the project and they received the Travel Trade Gazette designation of “Best Worldwide Independent Hotel.” He continued to work with Raffles as its North American Marketing and Reservations Representative.

Thomas Keesling has been decorated by the governments of Lebanon with its Order of Cedars of Lebanon and the rank of Knighthood, and by France, which awarded him the La-Medaille de Reconnaissance. He also served as honorary consul to the Republic of Rwanda from 1987 until 1992.

As a long-time travel industry consultant, Keesling worked with a variety of companies. He was a consultant on worldwide travel programs for Abercrombie & Kent International, a member of the original President’s Advisory Board of Seabourn Cruise Line and a Board Member of the International Institute of Education. From 1996 to 2020 he developed and built the educational travel programs for the Office of International Education based at Eckerd College.

Following a few years of retirement, Keesling re-entered the travel business in 2004 to launch an independent travel agency, Tom Keesling Travel, based in Denver, CO. The agency catered to clients who enjoyed a wide range of styles and preferences for their vacations, business, group and independent travel. He liked to tell everyone: “Tom Keesling Travel’s work starts when the airplane stops.”

He also belonged to the Institute of Certified Travel Agents, Round-up Riders of the Rockies, Dillon Yacht Club, Denver Country Club and Naples (Florida) Yacht Club.

Services: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, services are to be determined at this time. Please email Frank Keesling at fmkeesling@aol.com for further updates when they are available. Mr. Keesling is survived by his three sons; Tom M. Jr., James H., Frank M. with wife Vivian and seven grandchildren, Brian, Jackie, Kevin, Fowler, Logan, Lauren and Audrey Keesling. The family requests that contributions in his memory be made to family’s longtime non-profit, Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund c/o Ruth Keesling Wildlife Health and Research Center, www.saveagorilla.org. Mail: MGCF 3220 Cherryridge Rd. Englewood, CO 80113