



Travel Agent Careers, Jobs, and Training Information

Travel Agent Career and Job Highlights

- Travel benefits, such as reduced rates for transportation and lodging, attract many people to this occupation.
- Training at a postsecondary vocational school, college, or university is increasingly important.
- Industry consolidation and increasing use of the Internet to book travel will result in a decline in the employment of travel agents. Keen competition for jobs is expected.

Travel Agent Career Overview

Advanced schooling, such as an associate's or bachelor's degree, is becoming more and more important to securing positions in this industry. There is extremely stiff competition, which is due in large part to the ease of travel booking on the Internet, and advanced degrees will give job applicants an edge. The travel and hospitality industry is a popular industry because it offers great benefits like discounts on plane tickets, hotels, or rental cars.

Traveling is extremely complicated and requires a lot of knowledge of the industry and logistical skills. Many people don't have the time or inclination to deal with changing airline schedules, different fares, finding packages, etc, and so they hire travel agents to make preparations for them. Travel agents work for both individual tourists and big businesses, and they assess their client's travel needs, look at the possibilities, and make agendas for them. Travel agents might work for other types of clients as well, including cruise lines, resorts, hotels, or travel groups.

The day-to-day work of travel agents consists of consulting clients on different travel destinations, planning for rental cars, planes, places to eat, and events like tours or places to see. They also help clients plan for weather conditions, recreational activities, or travel insurance. For clients who are leaving the country they may also help arrange visas and passports, and advise on customs guidelines, vaccinations, and money exchange.

Travel agents get their information from a variety of sources in books, travel journals, and on the internet. Many visit destinations themselves to evaluate activities and the quality of hotels and resorts so they can provide accurate, personal recommendations.

A lot of time is spent in promoting and advertising. Travel agencies use telephones, the postal service, and the internet to advertise their services. Agents may also make presentations to travel groups, make displays at trade shows, or work with businesses, where they might suggest company vacations. Many agencies specialize in one area of travel, such as business or tourism, or in a geographic area, like Europe or Asia.

Travel agents generally work in fun, casual offices. They spend most of their time at their desk consulting clients, contacting airlines, making reservations at hotels, keeping up with travel restrictions, and working at the computer. Many times workload increases seasonally, as holidays and vacation times require long hours. As more information is available on the internet and as telecommunications advance, more travel agents work at home.

Travel Agent Training and Job Qualifications

Being a travel agent requires at the very least a high school diploma or equivalent. However, as more work is done through computers formal education has increasing importance. There are many courses designed specifically for travel agents. Vocational schools, colleges, community colleges, and programs that specialize in adult education often have full-time programs that can last up to a year, part-time, and evening courses. Some colleges and universities offer bachelor's degrees in travel hospitality. Other bachelor's degrees can lead to career in the travel industry as well, like foreign language, geography, communications, computer science, or history. Some related business skills like knowledge of finance or management can be helpful as well, particularly for those looking for administrative positions or starting their own business.

A grasp of the fundamentals of travel hospitality can be gained through a distance-learning course offered by the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). Also, many travel agents get practical experience through [travel agent training](#) programs and special computer courses offered by their employer agency. Computer skills are a must for most travel agents.

Other courses are available for travel agents who want more advanced study. The Travel Institute offers individual- or group-study courses to qualify students as Certified Travel Counselors (CTC). They also offer courses in marketing, sales, and programs that specialize in geographic areas.

Agents who have traveled themselves, either for recreation or for professional reasons like being airline personnel, will have an edge because clients will be influenced by personal knowledge of an area. Other personal attributes are necessary to be a travel agent. Firstly, they must be well-organized and detail-oriented to plan out every aspect of a client's agenda. Secondly, they must be patient and have good research skills to find the best ticket, activity, or itinerary for their client. Also, good computer skills are important, especially as many travel agencies are transferring a lot of their business to the Web. Lastly, travel agents spend a lot of their time dealing with clients and so good communication skills are paramount. They need to be clear and concise both verbally and in writing, have good sales skills, and be able to gain the trust of their client.

New travel agents may begin at entry-level positions, maybe as reservation clerks or

receptionists. As they gain experience and know-how, they might assume the role of a travel agent. In large agencies, they might then advance to management positions.

Many travel agents work on their own. Most who start their own business have worked in other agencies before. In order to have their own business, these travel agents have to be formally approved by the appropriate agencies for airlines, shipping lines, hotel networks, etc, such as the Airlines Reporting Corporation and the International Airlines Travel Agency Network. Approval requires an agency that is solvent and has an experienced travel agent or manager in the staff.

More information on licensure for travel agents is available from the state Office of the Attorney General or Department of Commerce. There is no federal license, and only nine states have formal license requirements. These states are Washington, Rhode Island, Oregon, Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, Hawaii, Florida, and California.

Travel Agent Job and Employment Opportunities

Most people entering the industry will find job openings that are created by retirements and career changes by travel agents; few new jobs are being created. Competition for positions will be extremely fierce as demand for travel agents is reduced and as many people are drawn to the industry by the travel benefits.

The industry is expected to decline in coming years as more people make their own travel plans using the internet and as the industry consolidates. The Internet provides much of the information that people used to get from travel agents – rate comparison, special deals, etc. It also allows people to do much of the work that used to be done by travel agents – booking flights, making hotel reservation, etc. Furthermore, airlines previously paid commissions to travel agents who booked clients on their flights, but they have recently stopped doing that. However many clients still prefer the low-hassle and reliability of travel agents.

On the positive side, the decline projected for the industry is tempered by the fact that travel in general is expected to increase. As more families have higher incomes and fewer children more people will travel more frequently. More traveling is also expected from the increasing elderly population. Also, as the global economy expands and as more businesses look to expand internationally, higher levels of business travel are expected.

Another important factor in the growth of the travel industry is the decreasing cost of air travel. Competition within the airline industry and the rise of low-cost airlines have made travel more affordable for more people. This allows travel agents to offer discounted packages to customers. An increasing number of those customers are international clients who use American travel agents.

Projecting job growth for travel agents presents a problem because the industry is affected by politics and economics. Unstable political climates make people disinclined to travel, and traveling is often a leisure activity and so requires economic growth. These forces cause employment rates to vary quite a bit. Travel agents can maximize their opportunities by exploiting the internet to provide the best information to their clients.

Historical Earnings Information

The range of income for travel agents in 2002 was \$17,000-42,000. The majority of travel agents made between \$21,000-34,000, with a median of \$27,000.

There is a lot of variation in the salaries of travel agents. Salaries will differ based on the agency's size and location, and agents with a lot of experience and good sales skills will have higher wages. Also, those who have their own agencies will also have higher incomes. However, self-employed travel agents have to provide their own benefits while those who work at agencies receive benefits like health and dental insurance, and company perks.

Incomes also vary based on the type of agency. Agencies that specialize in business travel usually pay more and have better benefits than those that focus on tourism. Most agencies also offer benefits like "familiarization trips" where the agency pays for the agent to travel to various locations to learn about them, and discounted rates for hotels and airlines. Salaries at agencies can also be affected by economic recessions.

Income for self-employed agents depends on a number of different things. Most importantly, it depends on the number of clients and the rate of commission they charge. It can take a long time to build up a clientele, and so income may be low for the first few years.