

TRAVEL ADVISOR CAREER GUIDE

An overview with a glossary of helpful terminology.

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JOB DESCRIPTION

Travel Advisors plan trips and make travel arrangements for their clients. By working with the various promotions and offerings provided by airlines, hotels, tour operators, destination management companies, cruise lines, ground transportation services and other industry suppliers, Travel Advisors create itineraries tailored to their clients' needs, expectations and budget while offering their experience and insight on cultures and traditions, applicable laws and regulations, and the logistics of navigating the trip itself. Here is an overview of the skills required for the job:

Social Skills



Being able to engage with people is at the heart of planning a great trip as well as building a faithful clientele. Travel Advisors work directly with the public and on a daily basis. They...

- Interview their clients to understand their travel preferences, budget, wants and needs.
- Listen to their clients carefully and actively.
- Handle complaints and resolve grievances and conflicts.
- Negotiate and interact with travel industry suppliers.
- Build solid, long-term working relationships with their clients and industry colleagues.

Analytical Skills



In order to create the best travel experience possible for their clients, Travel Advisors research trip options, choosing from a wide selection of sources and promotions. This involves not only reading through the various promotions and product descriptions but also...

- Verifying the accuracy of information.
- Judging the quality and value of different product offerings.
- Analyzing, compiling and comparing options.
- Paying close attention to detail.

Communication Skills



To ensure a successful trip and build trusting relationships, Travel Advisors explain trip options and promotion details, making sure the client understands pricing, and advising them of time-sensitive matters about pricing, legal travel documents and promotion deadlines. It is important to be able to...

- Explain services and pricing.
- Comprehend and interpret detailed written information.
- Speak clearly and express ideas and information in a way that others can understand.
- Present information to others.
- Write effectively with correct grammar and punctuation.



Sales Skills

Being able to sell is vital to the career of a Travel Advisor and often the success of the trip, so it is very useful to have some expertise with...

- Negotiation
- Persuasion
- Promotions and marketing
- Customer Service



Creativity & Problem Solving Skills

Travel Advisors daily rely on their problem solving skills in all stages of the trip, from the first stages of Plan A, to Plan B or C, and even to helping the traveler during the trip itself. This kind of logistical savvy involves the ability to...

- Anticipate problems.
- Think critically.
- Think creatively.
- Network and use resources effectively.
- Make decisions.
- Use reason and empathy.



Technical & Clerical Skills

Travel Advisors need to keep track of their daily operations and bookings as well as manage their clients, and doing so requires clerical and computer skills. These include:

- Booking travel using specialized computer systems (GDS).
- Managing clients using a CRM and/or database.
- Writing letters and other correspondence.
- Creating presentations.
- Processing and filing paperwork.
- Using various business software applications including email and calendar/ scheduling, accounting/ spreadsheets, word processing, business intelligence/ data analysis, enterprise resource planning.

EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS & SALARY INFORMATION

Travel Advisors can be employed directly by travel agencies as salaried or hourly employees. They can also freelance as independent contractors. Compensation models vary from agency to agency, however typical models include:

- Salary or hourly employment
- Salary/hourly employment plus commission*
- Commission only

For an overview of salaries for travel advisors across the United States, please visit: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/sales/travel-agents.htm>. You can also find salary information on the American Society for Travel Agents (ASTA) website <http://www.asta.org/> or use the salary search engines on job search sites such as Indeed.com or SimplyHired.com. **Hint:** search using the term "Travel Agent," since this is the more common term.

**Commissions are typically 10 – 15% of the total sale. Advisors can also work with suppliers on "net" pricing (non-commissionable) and they are able to "mark up" the price to make their revenue. Travel advisors can also charge fees for their time and services.*

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES

Because it is in the best interest of the agency to have knowledgeable salespeople, Travel Advisors are given opportunities to travel. These **familiarization (FAM) trips** are offered by industry suppliers (tour companies, cruise lines, hotels, etc.) at a discount because they want travel advisors to know their products and destinations. In some cases, the travel agency itself may even cover the cost of the trip.

In addition to providing experience with the culture and people of the destination, these trips involve taking a sampling of guided tours, networking with supplier personnel, touring hotels, and visiting destination restaurants so that the advisors experience first-hand what they offer their clients. Advisors take the opportunity to photograph the various room styles and think about the different kinds of amenities offered at the hotels they visit during the stay and get a feel for the types of experiences and quality of service offered by the different tour operators and other suppliers.

These are great opportunities to not only see the world, but also to build your career!

SPECIALIZATION

Another exciting facet of this job is that you can build a career around your individual interests and strengths. And this is not limited to specializing in a particular region of the world. Here is a sampling of the types of specialties that many advisors have built into their careers. Specializing can often increase an advisor's value and earning power.

In addition to focusing on a particular region of the world, you could also specialize in...

Art & Architecture

Beach & Sun

Destination Weddings

Family Vacations

Cruising

Air Travel

Safari

Adventure Travel

Meetings & Incentive

History & Culture

Food & Wine

Honeymoons

LGBT Travel

Health & Wellness

Nightlife

Volunteerism

Sustainability

TRAINING

Good news! Many agencies are willing to train new advisors. Training provided by an agency ranges from formal programs given at off-site training facilities to informal on-site training and/or mentoring. Some agencies allow training to be off-site or virtual. Another option is to start an employee off in an administrative role while they learn the business and later move them into the advisor role.

Training for advisors is also offered through the various companies that support the industry such as software companies that create booking software or travel networks like Virtuoso, which has its own dedicated training program (see below for details on **Virtuoso Travel Academy**). This kind of training is offered to the agencies that are part of the network or have purchased a company's product. Topics typically include:

- Products
- Destinations
- Technology/Software
- Soft Skills (such as sales and management)
- Business management

Additionally, you can look into travel and hospitality programs at colleges and universities or explore online training and certification programs such as:

- **The Travel Institute** – <http://www.thetravelinstitute.com/>
- **ASTA** (American Society of Travel Agents) <http://www.asta.org/>

THE VIRTUOSO NETWORK ADVANTAGE

Virtuoso is the travel industry's leading luxury travel network. Our membership is comprised of the finest luxury travel agencies and travel suppliers in the world. Advisors who work for our member agencies form the most powerful group in the luxury travel segment, consisting of more than 17,000 leading luxury advisors in more than 45 countries who collectively sell US\$23.7 billion annually!

Virtuoso's greatest asset is our talented pool of knowledgeable, well-traveled, specialized advisors. We strive to attract – and retain – the best in the business. And we do everything in our power to see that our advisors have the resources, training and ongoing support they need to succeed.

Network benefits include:

PREFERRED PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

Virtuoso has connections with a full range of travel suppliers that allow our advisors to offer their clients VIP treatment and recognition, Virtuoso-only amenities, exclusive access, custom-tailored experiences and itineraries, and preferred rates. Our supplier relationships include:

- Personal contacts at over 1,700 exceptional Virtuoso-preferred properties in over 100 countries.
- Partnerships with 36 of the world's leading luxury cruise lines.
- Connections with destinations, on-sites and tourism boards around the globe.
- Partnerships with over 75 of the world's top commercial and private air carriers, car rental programs, and travel insurance providers.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

- Virtuoso Travel Academy, our comprehensive online training program, is available 24/7 and offers a full range of development programs for both seasoned veterans and those new to the industry. Advisors can choose from over 1700 courses, and our advisors completed nearly 90,000 trainings last year.
- Professional Development Days are routinely offered as part of Virtuoso Travel Week and the Travel Week Tours. These sessions offer several tracks of training allowing advisors to take up to 5 classes throughout the day.
- Virtuoso offers study tours (FAMs) sponsored by our Preferred Partners.

CONSUMER MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Virtuoso provides a comprehensive mix of turnkey consumer marketing solutions to Member agencies and advisors both in print and digital formats. All Virtuoso marketing reinforces your agency brand and directs clients and prospects to you.
- Virtuoso's PR initiatives strike a balance among creating brand preference, enhancing the network's reputation, promoting the benefits of using a travel advisor, and inspiring great travel. In 2017 Virtuoso promoted 262 member agencies by referring them for press opportunities or promoting them in press releases and welcomed media attention from 76 journalists from 8 countries at Virtuoso Travel Week.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

- Virtuoso Travel Week Global is our weeklong event that showcases the best of the best in luxury travel, and brings together well over 5,000 industry professionals from over 100 countries.
- Virtuoso also hosts several Virtuoso Travel Week On Tour events throughout the year allowing advisors to network with preferred partners at various city stops within their region.

HELPFUL TERMINOLOGY

ARC	ARC (Airlines Reporting Corporation) is an accreditation organization for travel agencies. Accredited agencies are given a numeric identifier (ARC number) that allows them to sell airline tickets and receive data information services and analysis.
CLIA	CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association) is an accreditation organization for travel agencies. Accredited agencies or agents are given a numeric identifier (CLIA number) that allows them to book cruises.
Client List	A client list is an advisor's book of business. It contains all of the advisor's customers. Client Lists are typically managed in a CRM, which tracks list ownership. A client list may also be marked as "unassigned," which means that the clients are owned by the agency and are not yet assigned to an advisor. Whoever owns the list owns the clients. A client list owner can assign view or edit rights to other agency personnel as needed. See CRM.
Corporate Travel	Corporate Travel is a common type of travel booked by travel agents. It is typically travel intended for an organization's employees who are traveling to conduct business or attend conferences.
CRM	A CRM (Client Relationship Management) is a software tool that allows agencies to manage their clients and market to them, typically holding information such as contact information, sales activity, product preferences, and marketing materials.
FIT Travel	FIT (Foreign Independent Travel) - refers to travelling without a group or as part of a traditional, packaged tour.
GDS	A GDS (Global Distribution System) or CRS (Computerized Reservation System) is networked reservation system provided by a company which supplies automated booking services to travel vendors such as hotels, airlines, and car rental companies. A GDS hotel's inventory and rates can be accessed and booked by any travel advisor that subscribes to that GDS. (Examples of GDS companies: Galileo, Amadeus, Sabre, Apollo, Worldspan.)
Host Agency	An agency with a bonded, accredited industry number—e.g., ARC, IATA, CLIA—through which home-based travel advisors, Independent Contractors, and unaccredited or smaller agencies make bookings. Working through a host agency enables these agents to receive commissions since suppliers use accreditation numbers to allocate commission payments.
IATA/IATAN	IATA (International Air Transport Association) is a global trade association for airlines. It provides accreditation for travel agencies, granting accredited agencies a numeric identifier that allows them to book air travel internationally. IATAN (International Airlines Travel Agent Network) is a department of IATA that provides accreditation and identifiers for US travel agencies.
Independent Contractor	A self-employed Travel Advisor who works for an agency through a contractual agreement rather than as a regular employee. Independent Contractors are sometimes called "Affiliates."
Leisure Travel	Travel undertaken for pleasure as opposed to business.
MICE	MICE refers to Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions. It is a type of tourism in which large groups are brought together for a particular purpose.
Supplier	A supplier is an entity that provides services to travelers. For example: hotels, airlines, auto rentals, cruise lines, tour operators, and destination management companies.