

## **What Do You Need to Become a Travel Agent?**

Working as a professional travel agent is a rewarding career for many people. Travel is a billion-dollar industry that offers many opportunities for those interested in tourism. As a travel agent, you make travel arrangements for the corporate businessperson, individuals, families or groups. Being a travel agent allows you to learn about exotic locations and different cultures while helping people plan their trips. You also get to travel yourself in many cases, often for free. But there are certain skills and training you need to become a professional travel agent.

### **Travel and Tourism Training**

Many community colleges, universities and online schools offer programs that train you to become a travel agent. The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) is a trade association that has member travel schools in 14 states including New York, California, Maine, Ohio and North Carolina. Depending on the school, you can train via correspondence study, on-campus classes and/or online. Curriculum varies with each school but usually includes courses on computerized reservations systems, world geography, marketing, sales, group tourism, cruises and customer service.

While going to travel agency school is not a requirement to become a travel agent, completing such a program and getting a certificate or diploma can greatly improve your chances of getting a good job in the travel industry. The minimum requirement for becoming a travel agent is a high school diploma or GED.

### **Computer Skills**

Because most of the allied industries of air travel, hotels and car rentals use computerized systems, it is imperative that anyone who wants to be a travel agent become proficient in using a computer. Taking classes in word processing, spreadsheets and databases is very useful. There are inexpensive online courses and books that teach these skills. Many public libraries offer free computer classes to patrons.

### **Travel Experience**

It is a good idea to have some travel experience when seeking work as a travel agent. While this is not a mandatory requirement, it helps if you can put yourself in the shoes of your customers. Once you have traveled, you have a better understanding of the pleasures and problems of planning and going on a trip. This is invaluable experience for a travel agent.

### **Foreign Language Skills**

As international travel becomes more common and as people of all nationalities immigrate to other countries, as a travel agent you will meet and deal with a wide range of people. Being fluent in one or more foreign languages is helpful if you want to arrange national and international trips. The article "How to Become a Travel Agent" (see References below) suggests Chinese, Spanish or French as a second language to learn.

### **Other Useful Skills**

Being a people person definitely helps when interacting with people of all nationalities. Respect for other cultures is also necessary. Being a good listener and being detail-orientated are also important skills to have. A tiny mistake on a reservation could cause a disastrous trip. Interest in

learning about other countries and being willing to do research to find the best deals for your customers will result in repeat business.

### **References**

- [City Town Info: How to Become a Travel Agent](http://www.citytowninfo.com/education-articles/career-guides/how-to-become-a-travel-agent) [http://www.citytowninfo.com/education-articles/career-guides/how-to-become-a-travel-agent]
- [ASTA Member Travel Schools](http://www.asta.org/education/travelschool.cfm?navItemNumber=615) [http://www.asta.org/education/travelschool.cfm?navItemNumber=615]

### **Resources (Further Reading)**

- [ASTA: Becoming a Travel Agent](http://www.asta.org/education/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1681&navItemNumber=610) [http://www.asta.org/education/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1681&navItemNumber=610]

© Copyright Demand Media Studios 2010 All rights reserved