

PAUL PLAWIN

CAREERS FOR

# TRAVEL BUFFS

& Other Restless Types

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SECOND EDITION



VGM Careers for You Series

CAREERS FOR

# TRAVEL BUFFS

& Other Restless Types

PAUL PLAWIN

SECOND EDITION

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CAREERS FOR

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# Foreword

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Since antiquity, people have traveled for exploration, commerce, learning, and pleasure. Tourism liberates the mind and gives us new impressions, new ideas. In the modern world, a global economy has lifted billions of people out of subsistence living and fostered the growth of a worldwide middle class with the discretionary income and desire to visit cultures beyond their own borders.

The travel and tourism industry in the United States employed eighteen million people in 2001. With 95 percent of all travel and tourism businesses qualifying as small businesses, the opportunities are great for new entrepreneurs looking to prove their skills by starting their own companies.

In 2001, the terrorism of September 11 brought great challenges to travelers and the tourism industry. But Americans cling tightly to their precious freedom to travel, and there is every indication that they will continue to do so in the future. History suggests there will be no decrease in our mobility as a nation. Travel has always rebounded quickly after wars and economic recession.

As you explore career possibilities, you will find that in almost every field of work there are jobs in which you can fulfill your quest for traveling. Much of it can be a pleasure. It will surely broaden your horizons.

William S. Norman, President and CEO  
Travel Industry Association of America  
[www.SeeAmerica.org](http://www.SeeAmerica.org)

# Acknowledgments

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**T**he work of writing books isn't limited to interviews and library research. It relies as well on experiences and information acquired over years through many people. For their savvy ideas, valuable criticism, and pats on the back, I am grateful to my wife, Joan, and children, Jenny and Paul, and colleagues Joyce Lain Kennedy, John and Judy Schulte, Bill Sellers, Hal Giesecking, Carolyn Bennett Patterson, and the late Ralph Danford.

# Introduction

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I like to travel—always have. I loved Boy Scout camping trips when I was a kid. For someone who grew up where there were sidewalks and apartment buildings, these excursions into the wilderness (now probably suburban residential developments) were exhilarating. Those junky-looking country stores we explored on our overnight hikes were exotic bazaars where we dug into our pockets for change to buy Bazooka bubble gum, cinnamon hot hardball candies, and wine-soaked crook cigars that we smoked surreptitiously when the scoutmasters were out of sight.

Every summer my family visited the relatives 350 miles distant. I always looked forward to these trips—despite memories of getting carsick when we drove too far in the '38 Chevy. During our vacations, we'd manage a side-trip or two. Because my dad and his brother, my Uncle Richard, were interested in Civil War history, we roamed the old battlefields at Petersburg and Antietam and Gettysburg. My memories of these rumpled fields and redoubts are still vivid.

My first trip to New York City was on one of these family excursions. I remember going to the observation deck in the Empire State Building and being on a tour bus where someone pointed out men sleeping on the sidewalk as typical scenery in the Bowery. I remember dining at the Automat, where you chose from hot meals, cold salads, rolls, and desserts in individual little windows. You put change in the coin slots to open the window and extract what you had selected. They had nothing like this back home.

When I went off to college, I made friends with people from other parts of the country; we shared stories and dreams, and my

horizons expanded. We used to hitchhike to other college towns or to the big city. To be stranded from time to time, alongside a highway, seemingly in the middle of nowhere—that was an experience to be relished.

In our own cars, we made road trips to all sorts of places. Once a friend and I toolled through the countryside for two or three days just to find things we had read about—like a particular beach or the world's largest chair in the square of a North Carolina furniture factory town. Those were great trips.

For a time I daydreamed about shipping out on a freighter to see the world. I'd leave the ship when I got someplace I really wanted to see and live there for a while. Who knows: someday I might return to America, wise beyond my years. I'd be an experienced world traveler. Ah, dreams.

I married a girl from out of town, so I had to travel to see her when we were courting. Fortunately, she liked the idea of traveling, too. When we got married, we went to Nassau, in the Bahamas, on our honeymoon. It was our first tropical island. Nassau was just as the travel brochures showed it—sparkling, clear water; white, powdery sand; blue sky and blazing sun. I got so sunburned by our third day there that I was walking like an old man. But what a time we had. We arrived home with just enough change in our pockets to call someone to come and pick us up at the airport.

## ..... **A Travel Career**

As much as I liked to travel, I didn't really connect it to my first job as a newspaper reporter. There were some brushes with wanderlust in those days—when I'd go aboard a foreign flagship to interview the captain for a feature story or encounter a story subject who had traveled extensively. Once I interviewed daredevil aviator Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan when he visited friends in my town. He was quite old. I barely knew of the air travel exploits in



1938 on which his renown was based, but Corrigan still told his story with a crackle to it.

After a couple years of newspapering, I got a job with a big-time magazine. We moved to a new and bigger city. I began traveling in my work. Finally I was able to combine my love of travel and my job. Often my wife went along as I gathered stories across the landscape. We loved it, and it was the start of my career as a travel writer and editor. Eventually I took a job as the travel editor for *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine in Des Moines, Iowa. That was in 1967. We've been traveling, and I've been writing about our travels, ever since. I also have written about jobs and careers over the years, primarily with *Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine* and with the Association for Career and Technical Education. So in this book, I have the opportunity to combine the two subjects.

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## Jobs for Travel Buffs

What you will find herein is information about more than a score of careers in which travel plays an important part. Although some of these career fields are small, with relatively few workers, all of them are open to anyone who will put in the time and effort to prepare for the field.

When we think travel careers, we tend to think first of jobs in transportation—with airlines, railroads, cruise lines, and shipping companies—and of travel agents. But as you will learn here, you don't have to be a pilot, railroad engineer, ship captain, or bus driver in order to travel in your work. There are several dozen kinds of jobs, for people with a variety of skills, in which travel is an important part of the work routine.

There are also some traveling jobs—such as those of high-powered politicians, diplomats, rock stars, and astronauts—that few people can hope to land. But who knows; if space exploration expands, thousands of travel buffs with every work skill known to society could be needed for great adventures in outer space.

In each chapter that follows, you will find a description of what a field is like and what kind of jobs it supports—including where travel fits into the routine. The outlook for job growth in a particular field is based on this U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics scale: average job growth is 10 to 20 percent; faster than average is 21 to 35 percent; much faster than average is 36 percent or more; more slowly than average is 3 to 9 percent; little or no change is zero to 2 percent; decline is down 1 percent or more. If you're interested, you can read on to discover exactly how to get into that field, what typical pay scales are, the training and background you must have, and where you can get more detailed information about the career field and preparing for it. Unless otherwise noted, this information is applicable to workers in the United States and Canada; however, earnings figures are in U.S. dollars. Many of the information sources are international organizations. Where available, both website addresses and street addresses are listed.

For general information about the travel and tourism industry in the United States and Canada consult these sources:

Travel Industry Association of America  
1100 New York Avenue NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20005  
[www.tia.org](http://www.tia.org)

Tourism Industry Association of Canada  
1608 – 130 Albert  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5G4  
Canada  
[www.tiac-aitc.ca](http://www.tiac-aitc.ca)

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# Travel Agents, Tour Guides, and Tourism Promoters

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## Travel Agents

Nearly everyone who travels may eventually turn to a travel agent for help in planning a trip. Travel agents sell travel. They make recommendations about destinations to visit and how to get there. They also make transportation, hotel, and tour package reservations for you. After paying the bill, all you have to do is get to the airport or pier on time.

Of course, buying travel is a bit more complicated than buying a new pair of shoes, and it's a lot more expensive. The tab for a couple planning a two-week tour in Europe can be in the \$5,000 to \$15,000 range. With that kind of purchase, good travel agents pride themselves on giving their clients lots of information and helpful advice. Especially for international travel, there is much to know about—customs regulations, passports, visa requirements, certificates of vaccination, currency exchange, and rules of the road for drivers.

Travel-planning sites on the Internet let you select the elements of a trip and book air, hotel, and other reservations. For the simplest of trips this may do fine. But you may still need the savvy advice of a travel agent. Is the price you got on the website really

the cheapest? Are there any hidden costs such as port charges or departure taxes? Your travel agent should know.

## Promotion

Travel agents can't just wait for customers to walk in with their checkbooks in hand. Agents must know how to attract business and how to keep their clients coming back for pleasurable trips.

One way agents do this is by promoting their expert knowledge of the tourist destinations of the world and of the logistic and mechanical intricacies of travel. They have access to all sorts of published and computer-based sources of data on all elements of a trip—airline, train, and cruise line schedules and fares; availability of discounts; the range of hotel rates; package tour ingredients and prices; rental car deals; critical ratings of individual hotels and restaurants.

Travel agents also attend meetings of special-interest groups where they can give slide shows or other presentations about their services, and they regularly call on major firms to solicit their business travel accounts.

## The Daily Routine

The way travel agents acquire much of their knowledge is by taking trips. Nothing beats firsthand experience and observations. Airlines, cruise lines, hotel chains, and tour operators regularly host travel agents on familiarization trips ("fam" tours) where agents can check out itineraries and facilities they'll sell to their clients.

Agents often go on fam tours in the off season at popular travel destinations. There is more space available then and more time for them to look around. Also, in the prime travel season, travel agents are usually chained to their desks and computer consoles working out travel plans for their customers.

Travel agents regularly visit hotels, resorts, and restaurants to rate firsthand their comfort and cleanliness and the quality of the

food and wine. They base their recommendations on their own travel experiences as well as those of colleagues and longtime clients. Traveling is also a way to learn about typical weather conditions, off-the-beaten-path restaurants, sightseeing attractions, and recreation opportunities at destinations around the globe.

But even for travel agents, there is never enough time to travel. Most of their time is spent at their computer terminals and on phones conferring with clients and completing the paperwork that holds together a well-planned trip. Travel agents spend hours on the phone and computer—consulting with tour operators and guides, E-mailing clients and suppliers, and punching in data to track reservations and build client records.

Travel agents work everywhere. More than eight out of ten salaried agents work for travel agencies; others work for membership organizations with travel departments. Many travel agents are self-employed. Few towns are too small to support a travel agent. They work from offices in suburban areas, in large cities, and in small towns and rural areas.

Many agencies specialize—in business travel, cruises, adventure trips, personalized itineraries, or other niches. There are a number of major travel agencies that have hundreds of branch offices around the country and the world—American Express, Uniglobe, Carlson Wagonlit, and others.

Agencies that specialize in planning vacation trips are referred to as boutique agencies; they tend to be small and offer highly personalized service. Some agencies promote themselves as “discounters,” giving back some of the commission to customers but offering little or no service other than ticket sales.

Independent agent Cindy Peters is a cruise specialist for Adventure Travels in Pompano Beach, Florida. “I started in this field by working for a large discount cruise agency,” she says, “and after working there for four years and establishing a client base, I moved to a work environment where I basically run my own business within this agency.

“Since my clients are national instead of local, I have no ‘walk-in’ business. I work by phone and E-mail. I typically work many hours a day, sometimes seven days a week, but don’t mind at all because it is my own business. My clients call to get price quotes on specific cruises or land tours, and I get discounted rates for them on each trip. My motto has always been that I would not be undersold.”

Peters says she loves working in the travel business and travels as often as she can get away. “Next month I will be sailing to Alaska with a large group of passengers in the almost one hundred cabins I booked. In the fall I will be trying out all the new cruise ships on a series of two-night sailings. Then over New Year’s, I will take my family on a Disney cruise.

“It sounds like a lot of traveling, but I feel like the more ships I experience, the better salesperson I can be.”

## **Getting into the Business**

Becoming a travel agent requires specialized training. Technology and computers are having a profound effect on the work of travel agents. Computer skills are a basic requirement. Some employers want their agents to have college degrees in areas such as travel and tourism, computer science, geography, communications, accounting and business, world history, or foreign languages.

Few agencies train people on the job. They normally refer you to one of the many vocational schools that offer six- to twelve-week courses for beginning travel agents. Then, with actual work experience, plus further study and examinations over eighteen months, an agent can earn the coveted Certified Travel Counselor (CTC) designation from the Institute of Certified Travel Agents. Another mark of achievement in the field is a certificate of proficiency from the American Society of Travel Agents, which is awarded to agents who pass a three-hour exam.

A travel agent’s job also requires the ability to work with computer databases and a head for basic business accounting and



planning practices. Previous experience in the travel field is an asset. For example, some agents were previously airline reservations agents or ticketing agents.

An agent also needs good selling skills. Characteristics that help in this department are a pleasant personality, patience, and the ability to gain the confidence of clients. Agent-client trust is a key here. For potential clients, choosing a travel agent is like choosing a doctor or lawyer—once the agent's competence has been established, the choice often comes down to personal chemistry and trust. This is where the personality and integrity of an agent are major assets. Personal travel experience is also an asset for an agent, since firsthand knowledge about destinations can help influence a client's travel plans, and the ability to continually steer clients to places and experiences they enjoy brings repeat business to an agent.

If you work for a travel agency, the agency often has earned formal approvals from travel suppliers such as air and rail lines and rental car companies. Those approvals enable travel agents to draw commissions when they sell the products of those companies. To earn those approvals, an agency must demonstrate that it is financially and operationally sound and has been in business for a period of time. In several states, travel agents must also be licensed. The toughest aspect of becoming a self-employed travel agent, or opening a new agency, is operating successfully for long enough to win the approvals from key suppliers that allow you to earn commissions.

## **Your Future as a Travel Agent**

Job opportunities for travel agents are expected to grow more slowly than average. The reasons are that many more travelers are making their trip arrangements on the Internet, airline commissions to travel agents are lower than ever, and the terrorist air attacks on America on September 11, 2001, depressed the travel market for some time.