

CAREER KIT

Travel Agent Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become a Travel Agent

2026-10 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

howtobecome — independent career guides

At a glance

You can become a travel agent with a high school diploma and no state license in most states; you either get hired by an agency or join a host agency as an independent advisor. Most people start booking trips within 1 to 6 months. Startup costs run from almost nothing to about \$2,000, depending on host fees, training, and state seller-of-travel registration.

Timeline	1–6 months
Typical cost	\$0–\$2,000
Education	High school diploma or GED
License	None in most states; seller-of-travel registration in CA, FL, HI, WA
Median pay	\$50,160 per year
Job outlook	0% (2025–35), little or no change

Step-by-step path

1. Choose your path: employee or independent

Time: 1 week

Decide whether you want a salaried job at a travel agency or corporate travel company, or to work independently. Employees get on-the-job training and steadier pay. Independent advisors usually join a host agency and earn commission, often from home.

2. Pick a niche

Choose one or two specialties, such as cruises, Disney and theme parks, destination weddings, luxury, or group travel. A niche makes marketing easier and helps you learn suppliers faster. Pick something you already know or have traveled for.

3. Join a host agency or apply for agency jobs

Time: 2–4 weeks · Cost: \$0–\$1,200 per year in host fees

If you go independent, compare host agencies on commission split, monthly or annual fees, training, and booking tools. Read the contract closely, especially who owns client data if you leave. If you want a job, apply to agencies, cruise lines, and corporate travel management companies.

4. Check seller-of-travel rules

Cost: \$0–\$300+ per year

California, Florida, Hawaii, and Washington require seller-of-travel registration, and their rules can apply to agents outside the state who sell to residents. Many host agencies let you sell under their registration if you meet the state's conditions. Check with your host and your state's official site before you advertise.

5. Complete training

Time: 4–12 weeks · Cost: \$0–\$600

Use your host agency's training, plus free supplier courses from cruise lines, tour operators, and resorts. Supplier courses teach products and booking rules, and some unlock agent perks. Learn a booking platform and the basics of travel insurance and payments.

6. Set up your business basics

Cost: \$100–\$800

Register a business name or LLC if you work independently, open a separate bank account, and get errors and omissions insurance if your host does not cover you. Create a simple website or social profile that names your niche. Set up a CRM to track client trips and payments.

7. Book your first trips and get certified

Start with friends, family, and their referrals, and ask every happy client for a review. After about a year of selling travel, consider a credential such as The Travel Institute's CTA or CLIA's cruise certifications. Certifications are optional, but they show clients and suppliers you know the work.

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Host agency fees	\$0	\$1,200	Per year. Some hosts charge no fee but take a larger commission share.
Training and certification	\$0	\$700	Supplier courses are often free; The Travel Institute's CTA starts around \$599.
Seller-of-travel registration	\$0	\$300	Only in states that require it; Florida also requires a bond unless exempt.
Business registration or LLC	\$50	\$500	Depends on your state.
Errors and omissions insurance	\$0	\$600	Per year, if not covered by your host.
Website, branding, and marketing	\$0	\$500	
Total	\$50	\$3,800	

Requirements

Education	High school diploma or equivalent is typical. Employers may prefer a college degree or travel coursework.
License	No federal license. A few states (California, Florida, Hawaii, Washington) require seller-of-travel registration, which is a registration, not a training-based license.
Business registration	Independent agents usually need a local business license or LLC, depending on city and state rules.
Host agency or employer	Most new independent advisors work under a host agency to get supplier access and commissions.
Skills	Customer service, sales, attention to detail, and comfort with booking software.
Insurance	Errors and omissions insurance is common; some hosts include it.

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Set up

Days 1–30

Goal: Choose your path and niche, and sign with a host agency or land an agency job.

- ☐ Write down your niche and three reasons you can serve it well.
- ☐ Compare at least five host agencies on fees, commission split, training, and contract terms.
- ☐ Ask each host about seller-of-travel coverage for CA, FL, HI, and WA clients.
- ☐ Sign with a host agency or apply to 10 agency jobs.
- ☐ Register a business name or LLC and open a separate bank account.
- ☐ List 50 people who travel at least once a year.

Phase 2: Learn and launch

Days 31–60

Goal: Learn your booking tools and suppliers, and go public with your business.

- ☐ Finish your host agency's core training.
- ☐ Complete at least three supplier specialist courses in your niche.
- ☐ Practice-quote five sample trips, including insurance options.
- ☐ Set up a CRM to track leads, trips, deposits, and final payment dates.
- ☐ Launch a simple website or social profile that names your niche.
- ☐ Announce your business to your contact list with a clear offer.

Phase 3: First bookings

Days 61–90

Goal: Book your first paying trips and build a referral habit.

- ☐ Hold discovery calls with every interested contact.
- ☐ Book at least three trips, even small ones.
- ☐ Send pre-trip checklists and follow up after each trip.
- ☐ Ask every client for a review and a referral.
- ☐ Post useful niche content once or twice a week.
- ☐ Track commission due dates and confirm each one gets paid.
- ☐ Set a goal for months 4 to 12 and pick a certification to work toward.

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- ☐ Government-issued photo ID and passport
- ☐ High school diploma or transcripts
- ☐ Host agency agreement
- ☐ Business registration or LLC documents
- ☐ EIN letter from the IRS (if applicable)
- ☐ W-9 for your host agency
- ☐ Seller-of-travel registration or host exemption paperwork (if applicable)
- ☐ Errors and omissions insurance certificate
- ☐ Supplier training certificates
- ☐ Client intake form and terms and conditions template

Exams & how to prepare

Certified Travel Associate (CTA), The Travel Institute

What it is: A self-paced online program covering selling, ethics, itinerary planning, cruises, and travel insurance, ending in a proctored exam with a 70% passing score. You need at least one year of experience selling travel, or a qualifying score on the Travel Agent Proficiency (TAP) test.

How to prepare: Work through the course modules and knowledge checks; most students finish in 3 to 6 months.

CLIA cruise certifications (ACC, MCC, ECC)

What it is: Cruise Lines International Association offers tiered cruise counselor certifications that combine training, ship inspections, and sales experience.

How to prepare: Join CLIA as an agent member and follow the requirements for each level on its website.

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to be a travel agent?

Tip: Talk about solving problems for travelers, not just loving travel.

2. What destinations or travel types do you know best?

Tip: Name your niche and back it with real trips or research.

3. How would you handle a client whose flight was cancelled?

Tip: Walk through calm steps: rebook, inform, document, follow up.

4. How do you find new clients?

Tip: Mention referrals, social content, and community groups with a weekly routine.

5. Have you used any booking systems?

Tip: Name any you know; if none, say how fast you learn new software.

6. How do you explain travel insurance to a client?

Tip: Keep it neutral: what it covers, what it costs, and that it is their choice.

7. Tell me about a time you handled an upset customer.

Tip: Use a short situation, action, and result story.

8. How do you stay organized with many bookings?

Tip: Describe a CRM or checklist system with payment deadlines.

9. What would you do if a client asked for a trip outside your niche?

Tip: Show you would research it or refer it, not guess.

10. How comfortable are you with sales targets?

Tip: Give an example of hitting a goal in any job.

11. What do you know about our agency?

Tip: Mention their niche, suppliers, or reviews you read.

12. Are you willing to work evenings or weekends?

Tip: Be honest; clients often call outside office hours.

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Completed supplier specialist training for three major cruise lines and two all-inclusive resort brands.
- Planned and booked 12 trips for friends and family, including flights, hotels, and insurance.
- Handled 50+ customer inquiries a day in a hotel front desk role with high guest satisfaction scores.
- Built a contact list of 150 frequent travelers and launched a monthly travel deals newsletter.
- Coordinated a 25-person group trip, managing deposits, rooming lists, and payment deadlines.
- Resolved booking errors and service complaints quickly in a previous customer service job.
- Created destination guides and social posts that grew a local travel page to 1,000 followers.

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Joining a host agency without reading the contract terms on client ownership and fees.
2. Trying to sell every kind of trip instead of picking a niche.
3. Ignoring seller-of-travel rules for clients in CA, FL, HI, or WA.
4. Paying for an expensive course before booking a single trip.
5. Not offering travel insurance and documenting the client's choice.
6. Missing final payment dates and losing a booking.
7. Not tracking commissions, so unpaid ones slip through.

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **BLS: Travel Agents**

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/sales/travel-agents.htm>

- **The Travel Institute: CTA Certification**

<https://www.thetravelinstitute.com/certified-travel-associate-cta/>

- **CLIA: Cruise Lines International Association**

<https://cruising.org/>

- **ASTA: American Society of Travel Advisors**

<https://www.asta.org/>

- **Host Agency Reviews: Seller of Travel Guide**

<https://hostagencyreviews.com/blog/travel-agent-license-seller-of-travel-license>

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
Less than \$34,610	\$50,160 per year	More than \$76,660

Outlook: Employment of travel agents is projected to show little or no change from 2025 to 2035, with about 5,900 openings each year, mostly to replace workers who leave.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 data — <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/sales/travel-agents.htm>

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.