Job description
Travel agents help their clients make travel plans. In addition to booking reservations, they assist customers in choosing their destination, transportation, and lodging and inform travellers of passport and visa requirements, rates of currency exchange, and import duties.

Wholesale travel agents specialise in organizing tours and then selling them to retail travel agencies who in turn, sell on to travellers. Many tours also include optional side trips and activities that have to be planned carefully. Wholesale travel agents must have good marketing skills to interest retail travel agents in the tours they have developed.

Retail travel agents offer advice to the general public. They provide travellers with timetables and travel literature, compute fare costs and make reservations, and sell tours developed by the wholesale travel organisations. In large travel agencies, agents may specialise in specific geographic areas; in smaller agencies, travel agents have a broader range of responsibilities.

Work activities
- Designing and developing a tour.
- Determining an itinerary, arranging for tour escorts.
- Assisting the overseas tour operating partner company in developing brochure content and marketing programmes.
- Making travel and accommodation reservations.
- Offering face to face and telephone advice to customers.
- Quoting holidays and converting these to bookings.
- Maximising sales and customer holiday experience by suggesting upgrades.
- Offering excellent customer service, dealing with complaints in a calm and diplomatic manner.
- Keeping product and brand knowledge up to date whilst having in-depth knowledge of the company’s brochures and destinations.
- Working to sales targets.

Work conditions
Travel: during the working day is not common though staff at times travel to overseas destinations to familiarise themselves hotels and locations.

Working hours: involves regular unsocial hours including weekends, evening and public holidays. Some of the larger operators require 24/7/365 cover so shift work is possible.

Location: mainly in larger towns or cities throughout the country.

Opportunities for self employment: it is possible to open your own agency.

Typical employers
- Travel agencies
- Airlines
- Cruise ships
- Oil companies.

Career development
Much of the recruitment to senior positions is made in-house so the opportunity for promotion is normally good. In addition agents might specialise in particular areas such as tailor made, safaris, or business travel.

Salaries
Salaries vary depending on employer.

Entry requirements and training
Specific degree subjects required
Although a degree is not essential, those interested in a career as a travel agent, particularly with larger organisations, should ideally be educated to degree level.
Travel agent (continued)

Other relevant degree subjects
- Geography
- Languages
- Leisure studies
- Tourism
- Travel studies.

Postgraduate study
A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is not a requirement.

Specific entry requirements
A competent level of typing and general IT skills may be required.

Training
Mainly in-house training.

Tips for applications
Employers normally look for well-travelled, confident people who are keen to develop a career in sales whilst maintaining a strong focus on client relationships.

Skills and qualities
- Passionate interest in geography, strong domestic and international travel knowledge.
- Excellent command of both written and spoken English.
- Strong numeric skills.
- Ability to multitask and quickly interpret complex information.
- Ability to build strong relationships with clients, both over the phone and face to face.
- Skills to persuade customers and influence their decisions, both for their own benefit and that of the agency.
- Exceptionally high levels of motivation, working both independently and as part of a team.
- Smart appearance.
- Proficient internet research skills for customer information.
- Ability to work in a target-based environment and to achieve sales goals and objectives.
- Ability to assimilate information and to pay close attention to accuracy and detail.

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