

How to get a job in travel

By  Natalia Rosa

18 Jun 2018

The first step to getting into travel... is to travel. At least, that's the word from some of South Africa's leading travel professionals, who believe that first-hand experience travel is irreplaceable in the travel industry.



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"It's all well and good being passionate about travel, but to sell it, you need to have travelled first," says Fiona Morrison-Arnthal, account director: leisure and tourism, Progressive Travel Recruitment.

"Go overseas as soon as you can after leaving school. You need to understand what it's like going through an airport, getting on a plane, seeing new cultures and environments and experiencing the logistics involved in travel," says Morrison-Arnthal.

Hayley Walls, sales and marketing manager, Minor Hotels Africa agrees: "I would recommend to any young person to do some travel, as it allows one's mind to open and be stretched. The opportunity to experience a different country and culture is like being in the university of life." Walls suggests that eager candidates for the travel industry do some job shadowing when they're still at school. "Either approach a company through a personal contact or the HR department of a travel company. The smaller ones are often looking for assistance that students could help out during school holidays."

This would give students interested in the travel industry insights into the varied roles available so they can make an educated decision on what they'd like to study further or in which part of the travel industry they would like to pursue

employment.

"You need to determine what area of travel piques your interest. The travel industry is large and dynamic, so one needs to give due consideration to where you think the right fit would be, e.g. travel consultant, tour operator, hospitality, car rental, etc.," says Nivashnee Naidoo, professional project and programme manager for the Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA).

“ The travel industry is extensive, so candidates need to research who the movers and shakers are and approach them. ”

Naidoo says one way of doing this is learning through work experience, e.g. learnerships and internships. "This will allow you to work within a travel organisation, learn how it operates from an internal perspective and give you the opportunity to assess what your preference is, so you can thereafter focus on a career in that direction.

"Once you know what area of travel you want to pursue, you can get yourself qualified in a tertiary qualification – either a degree or diploma in Travel or Tourism."

The travel industry is extensive, so candidates need to research who the movers and shakers are and approach them, says Naidoo. It's important to understand that travel and tourism are in fact not one and the same thing and that facilitating the outbound travel of South Africans for business or holidays does not require the same interest, knowledge and skill-set as facilitating the travel of inbound overseas travellers visiting South Africa.

Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) accepts candidates who have any tertiary education or four years' work experience, either in sales or retail, says Sam van Gool, FCTG Peopleworks general manager. "We recommend reading up on the top travel destinations and the relevant attractions, or pop into a store to get an idea of 'a day in the life of a travel consultant' from our very own."

What skills and personality do you need to work in the travel industry

Flight Centre is looking for such skills as **sales and customer service**, persistence, drive, rapport building, time management, computer literacy and attention to detail when they hire candidates to become travel consultants. "We look for the following personality traits in our candidates: driven, outgoing, happy, well-travelled or passionate about travel, organised, service orientated, confident, a team player and professional," says van Gool.

Excellent communication skills are a further must, adds Morrison-Arnthal. "We don't just speak on the phone, we have to write emails that sell the service and ourselves. We also have to create travel documentation that generates excitement. If you can't spell-check and your communication isn't accurate, the customer won't trust you."

Walls says to work in the travel industry, being a people's person is very important. "You will deal with a cross-section of people, so having tenacity and patience is also an advantage. Being organised and able to plan well are good skills to have as you are literally planning people's lives to an extent."

What are the benefits of working in travel?

"We have incentives in place for the top achievers," explains van Gool. "Our consultants enjoy uncapped earning potential, medical aid contribution, provident fund, uniform allowance, 18 days leave to start off, longevity leave benefits, discounted travel, travel educational, national and global ball, clear career paths and loads of development, health-wise looking after your health and wellness."

Flight Centre, says van Gool, is a great company to learn how to run an individual business. "If you would like a career for life, this is the place you want to start."

Not as much as is the past, but still a perk if the ability to travel and experience different airlines, hotels and activities you may never have been able to, had you not become a travel consultant.

"Travel whilst working in travel can definitely happen, it all depends who you end up working for and how many opportunities are made available to you. I have been very fortunate in many of the positions I have held to get the opportunity to explore amazing countries that I would not necessarily have been able to if not working in travel," says Walls.

Other benefits, explains Naidoo, are the opportunity to work in a dynamic, multi-faced environment. "Any interested person can find a suitable role to follow and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you help people's travel dreams and requirements become a reality."

"Why do we who work in travel love it?", asks Morrison-Arnthal. "It's long hours (you won't get anywhere clock watching), it takes huge amounts of tenacity and resilience and hard work, and it's about the customer and their journey not yours.

"You will get the opportunity to travel but for at least 48 weeks of the year you will be seated behind a desk. If you work in a product role you will not be sitting on a beach and enjoying cocktails. Rather, you will be viewing masses of properties and negotiating deals. It's hard work. Being in travel is rewarding, as your hard works makes travel dreams come true."

On the whole, travel is an exciting industry to be involved in, says Walls. "Especially now as in an African context, as this is an emerging tourism destination for many incoming tourists and will only continue to grow. It is ever changing and will certainly keep you on your toes. I think in life, all situations are what you make of them. If you work hard and give it your all, you will reap the benefits for sure."

ABOUT NATALIA ROSA

Natalia Rosa is the MD of Big Ambitions, a specialist travel and tourism communications and marketing organisation which helps tourism and travel organisations connect with their members and customers.

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