

A CAREER IN TRAVEL? YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING!

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No, I am serious. For those that want it there is a bright opportunity-filled future in the travel industry. Despite the media focus on internet booking engines, high gas prices, tsunamis, hurricanes, airline bankruptcies and troubles around the globe there continues to be a demand for new staff in every sector of the travel industry.

Almost every time something negative happens around the globe or in our own back yard, the survival of the neighbourhood travel agency --and even the occupation of 'travel counsellor'--is called into question. Yet, there are jobs in the travel industry--from coast to coast to coast--that are begging for qualified personnel, and there is space, wide-open, in business school and college courses, for training in the field of travel counselling.

The Coordinator of one Travel Program explained that "Employers have depended on our graduates to fill positions in travel agencies, as well as other travel related occupations. In spite of recent events around the globe, the demand is as high as ever for educated travel professionals". The head of another major Tourism and Travel College program concurred by saying that "Just this week we have had six calls, looking for grads for entry level positions in reservations, call centres, documentation and ticketing, and junior level counselling", She went on to say that "To get the best trained staff, you must start with 'the best material' and in many employers minds, the 'best' are the graduates of endorsed travel programs".

The definition of a perfect job is to find something you love to do and to actually have someone pay you for doing it. Travel careers frequently follow this path. People choose travel as a career because they love to travel. They love to learn about cultures and history and different places. They love to sample different cuisine, photograph colourful celebrations and festivals. They love to share their experiences with others; to share what is referred to as "contagious enthusiasm" for a destination.

While travel professionals love the intellectual challenge of the job, there are also professional skills at work. It is no wonder that at least one travel counsellor calls herself a "Jaqueline-of-All-Trades": Travel counsellors must be proficient in using a GDS (Global Distribution System) which contains all the airline schedules, hotel information, car rental information and booking rules. Travel counsellors must be adept at people skills, sales and marketing skills. They must be able to interpret a brochure and display it 'upside down' to them so it is right side up in front of the client. Travel Counsellors must be up-to date on destination information, know where the closest travel medicine clinics are located, be able to comfortably sell a variety of travel insurance products, know the passport and visa rules and keep a database of their client's travel preferences.

A career in travel ? Here are some things to consider. Consumer travel has increased dramatically, since December 2001. Despite the in-flux of Internet booking engines, consumers tend to research on the net and then book with a real, live travel professional. A popular western travel agency noted that "some people have tried booking on the Internet and have returned to us. They discover that the Internet takes time and if anything goes wrong, who're they gonna call?" According to the travel press from West to East, travel jobs are re-bounding. There is a need for travel professionals out there.

Potential travel & tourism students may balk at the cost of attending a travel and tourism program, yet the recommended course of action for professional training in a growing field is to enroll at an endorsed program, all of which are listed on the CITC website (www.citc.ca/en/schools). Creativity is welcome, respect and accuracy when treating clients is important and customer service is mandatory. Exercising good business skills is the norm and staying flexible and adaptable to industry changes is essential in this day and age.

The travel industry is anything but conservative and stagnant. Today, travel professionals are recognizing opportunities and customizing vacations to suit the Baby Boomers, the Gen X'ers and even the Gen Y'ers. They are getting involved in niche marketing (everything from birdwatching and wine-tasting tours to dabbling in adventure travel). They are responding to the need for ecologically responsible tours, spiritual adventures and cultural experiences. They are looking into the seniors market, the disabled traveller market, the gay and lesbian market and the family market. They are learning more about Canada, for those family travellers who prefer a domestic holiday with amazing sites to see and endless attraction-possibilities.

Now is the time to think about a career in travel. The nay-sayers are the ones who will be put out of business because of uncreative and negative thoughts. The proponents of travel are those who are happily carrying on in their chosen field and engaging in their clients' dream fulfillment. After all, they are working in a career they have chosen. For the most part, travel professionals love their work. Even better, they are getting paid for it. And in the process, their own dream fulfillment is being realized.

A full listing of Canada's Endorsed Travel Programs can be found at www.citc.ca/en/schools or by contacting CITC at info@citc.ca; 1-800-589-5776; 416-484-4450.

Incorporated in 1968, the vision of the **Canadian Institute of Travel Counsellors** is to lead the Canadian travel industry to be the most skilled and professional work force in the world, and to ensure that the CTC / CTM designations are recognized, accepted and valued by the travel industry and consumers as the ultimate achievement in professionalism. Information on membership, certification, educational programs, publications and consumer travel advice is available at www.citc.ca

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