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LIFESTYLE • CAREERS

Who Needs a Travel Agent in the Digital Age? Apparently, More People Than Ever

The business is thriving, especially for the priciest and most complicated journeys

By Heidi Mitchell [Follow](#)

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Sunset in Agia Triada, in the suburbs of Thessaloniki, Greece. CHIRAS/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

Quick Summary ∨

- The travel agent profession is growing, with industry revenue projected to reach \$134.4 billion this year, up 17% from 2023.

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The travel agent is alive and well.

The profession might have been written off as obsolete in an age of internet reviews, online travel agencies and artificial intelligence. But if anything, the appeal of travel agents is increasing. Not only are people hitting the road more, they are looking to get away from the usual touristy spots. For travelers of nearly every stripe, that means turning to agents—also called

advisers—who can dig up hidden nooks while snagging free upgrades, arranging local guides and ensuring seamless transfers.

“Travel advisers play a more critical role at the top end of the market, and should continue to grow even with the advent of AI tools for trip planning,” says Christopher K. Anderson, a professor of services management at Cornell University and director of its executive master of management in hospitality program.

The limits of DIY

For one measure of just how many people are turning to agents, total revenue for the industry is projected to hit \$134.4 billion this year, up 17% from \$115 billion in 2023, according to the American Society of Travel Advisors. LinkedIn, meanwhile, listed travel adviser as one of the 25 fastest-growing jobs of the past three years.

True, AI could still be gunning for the travel-agent business. After all, an AI agent is good at creating itineraries from scratch and incorporating your preferences and budget into whatever format somebody likes. People can also refine it infinitely, at no monetary cost, to match their desires. But at least for now, an AI agent typically doesn't know hotel or tour availability or live prices, and it often misses lots of activities, attractions and properties.

And AI doesn't have the same kind of insider info that agents often do. For Rachel Riggs, a mother of three in Springfield, Mo., the value of a travel agent became clear in 2019 when she set up a trip to the South of France for the following year—before the pandemic hit. The travel agent from Internova Travel Group, one of the world's largest travel-services companies, secured a full refund from a hotel with a famously strict no-refund policy.



Rachel Riggs and her husband, Zach, in Capri. RACHEL RIGGS

“I know if it had just been us booking on our own, I wouldn’t have known whom to contact,” Riggs says. The agent now handles all of her trips, which can tally up to seven a year, and even helps the family decide where to go. “She’ll say, you loved Mykonos, let’s try Portofino,” Riggs says.

The family always gets a free upgrade and a welcome gift, and on a more-recent trip to Greece, “people kept showing up with signs with our names on it,” Riggs says. “It was a very VIP experience, all the way around.”

Just like in the old days, travel agents work on commissions from hotels, cruises and tour companies. The client usually sees no additional cost when using an agent to book a trip. (Highly specialized agents can tag on high fees, however.)

A new generation

The lure of those big commissions—and the promise of booming business—is drawing more people into the travel business. The total number of travel agents soared to 310,000 in 2025—a 63% leap from 190,000 in 2024, according to the travel-adviser society.

A new generation of modern travel agencies is making it easy for wannabe advisers to set up shop. For one, there is Fora, a platform that hosts travel advisers and lets customers choose among them. The site gives newbie agents training resources and marketing tools. The agents also can use the company's International Air Transport Association number—an identification code that travel agents must have before they can collect a commission. In exchange, the site takes a 10% to 30% cut of agents' sales, and charges agents an annual fee of \$299.

Henley Vazquez, the company's co-founder, says Fora's 15,000 advisers have booked more than 750,000 trips since its launch in 2021, with 97% of its advisers new to the industry. But breaking into the business isn't as easy as it looks.

One new entrant is Erica Christie, 44, from Indianapolis. She completed a Ph.D. in education and spent years teaching and leading a nonprofit. "Then Covid hit," Christie says. "I was feeling stuck, burned out, ready for change." She stumbled upon Fora and her interest was piqued. "I didn't know that travel agents really existed anymore."

Christie started building her Fora business through Instagram and referrals in 2023, and in 2025, booked more than 400 trips—which took up more than 40 hours a week and often required working nights and weekends. She's on call for emergencies at all times. Still, she loves her new career and is proud to meaningfully contribute to her family's finances.

"In the U.S., people have limited time and budget, and we're all so busy," says Christie. "So you want that week with your family to be really perfect. You don't want to waste your time or money or to have stress."

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