



*We'll take you there.*

## ASTA PRESS KIT



American Society of  
**Travel Advisors**

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# Our Mission

ASTA, short for the American Society of Travel Advisors, is the world's leading association of travel professionals. Our members include travel advisors and the companies whose products they sell such as tours, cruises, hotels, car rentals, etc. We are the leading advocate for travel advisors, the travel industry and the traveling public. The mission of ASTA and its affiliated organizations is to facilitate the business of selling travel through effective representation, shared knowledge and the enhancement of professionalism.

Founded in 1931 as the American Steamship and Tourist Agents' Association, ASTA and its affiliates now comprise the world's foremost travel trade association with members in 120 countries. Our work encompasses every aspect of the travel experience. Here is just a sample of the activities in which ASTA is involved:

**GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS:** We promote and defend the travel agency community and the traveling public at all levels of government and within every segment of the travel industry.

**INDUSTRY AFFAIRS:** We fight to ensure a level playing field and fair competition throughout our industry which, of course, benefits industry professionals as well as consumers.

**EDUCATION:** We provide our members with the finest education and information resources available, so that they are able to provide the utmost in professional service to their clients. ASTA's educational research allows ASTA member agencies and future travel professionals the opportunity to expand their business through specialization, giving advisors the tools to sell unique travel experiences, comply with government regulations and adhere to a code of ethics.

**CONSUMER AFFAIRS:** We constantly monitor the travel industry to identify "scam" operators and others whose practices cheat consumers and negatively impact our industry. Only ASTA members subscribe to a 12-point code of ethics which stands for "Integrity in Travel." This is the pledge our members stake their reputations on. And we provide traveling consumers with a complete range of informational resources.

**CONSUMER AWARENESS:** Through its advertising and public relations efforts, ASTA strives to make the traveling public aware of the many benefits of using a travel professional to arrange and purchase travel.





# ASTA - A Living History

Since its founding on April 20, 1931, as the American Steamship and Tourist Agents Association, ASTA has remained true to its mission: to enhance the professionalism and profitability of members worldwide through education and training, effective representation in industry and government affairs and identifying and meeting the needs of the traveling public.

**IN THE 1930s**, when agents were booking 80 percent to 90 percent of all steamship travel, the association was urging ship lines to adopt agent- friendly policies and trying to persuade hotels and railroads to pay agent commissions.



When World War II curtailed all but essential travel **IN THE 1940s**, members fought for their association's survival. In 1946, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) cut agent commissions from 7.5 percent to 5 percent, a mere year after its formation. ASTA's parent group once again fought for its members. Around the same time, the

association changed its name to the American Society of Travel Agents.

**IN THE 1950s**, ASTA won a 27-year battle for rail commissions and broke new ground by introducing a home-study course, the industry's first basic training tool.

**IN THE 1960s**, the Society made numerous strides in education, holding its first School at Sea and opening seven travel-agent schools. In 1968, when President Lyndon B. Johnson restricted residents' travel outside the United States, ASTA waged the largest grassroots campaign of its history.

**IN THE 1970s**, ASTA formed several groups that continue to benefit members today. ASTA Marketing Services, Inc. (AMSI) a subsidiary of ASTA, helps member agents obtain high quality products and services at discounted prices. The ASTA Political Action Committee (ASTAPAC) leads the fight for agents' interests in the political arena. ASTA's Chapter Presidents' Council made its debut, and the decade also saw the first rise in air commissions in 25 years, from 5 percent to 7 percent, before the '70s ended with the deregulation of airlines.

**IN THE 1980s**, the Society continued its emphasis on education, holding Trainingfest, School on Rails, School at Sea and School on the Road.

**IN THE 1990s**, ASTA published the Travel Agent Manual. In 1995, when seven major airlines capped agency commissions on domestic tickets at \$50, ASTA filed an antitrust lawsuit that was settled out of court for \$86 million. Before the end of the decade, commissions were cut or capped five more times.



American Society of Travel Advisors

In 1999, ASTA prompted a U.S. Justice Department investigation of five carriers' plan to launch a joint Web site. ASTA published the Air Travelers Bill of Rights and secured Congressional endorsement of the Bill's key principles, as well as spurring passage and funding of the Consumer Access to Travel Information Act.

**IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM**, ASTA continues to support travel advisors and fight for the traveling public in the legal and legislative arenas. Several ASTA-endorsed bills to protect passenger rights and end airline preemption have gone to Congress. ASTA has also pursued legislation to address the consequences of airlines' anticompetitive, predatory behavior by giving travel agencies the right to bargain collectively.

In 2016, ASTA fought new disclosures in the FAA Reauthorization bill before Congress - saving travel advisors \$56 million. We've held over 100 U.S. House and Senate meetings in 2016 alone. ASTA petitioned the Department of Labor (DOL) to remove travel agencies from regulatory "blacklist", helped get more than half of the U.S. Senate to support Cuba travel freedom and successfully opposed legislation against the use of independent contractors.

In 2018, it was time for the association to go through a rebrand to change with the role from agent to advisors. The new branding revealed at ASTA Global Convention to be American Society of Travel Advisors. Advisors are trusted counsel from inspiration to complex itineraries, and no longer seen to the traveling public as a booking intermediary. The rebrand comes to life in this [video](#).



ASTA empowers members to reach out to consumers; it provides tools for members to launch or improve their own advertising and public relations campaigns. To this end, the Society launched TravelSense.org, a consumer-driven website that gives the traveling public direct access to member advisors.

From 1931 through the present, the industry has continually faced rapid changes in technology and shifting alliances among the travel community. Yet through all those advances and realignments,

**ASTA has remained the one true voice of travel advisors.**



# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is the role of the travel advisor and how has it changed?

Travel advisors create personalized value for their customers. This includes providing professional advice and arranging transportation, accommodations, cruises, tours and/or other travel products and services that represent the best value for each unique customer. The job of a travel advisor has grown and adapted to reflect the changes within the travel industry, and to reflect the difference in the way people think about travel. ASTA travel advisors recognize that consumers today have done their homework and are more knowledgeable about what they want. Clients who turn to an ASTA travel advisor desire an in-depth, personal approach and want the advice and expertise of a professional.

## TRAVEL ADVISORS: More important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic

The future of travel will be more complex and more personal than ever before. ASTA remains optimistic that the new landscape of travel, with all the complexities and changing rules, will thrust travel advisors into the spotlight as solution providers for the next wave of travel demand.

**THEY'RE  
THERE FOR  
YOU IF  
SOMETHING  
GOES  
WRONG,**

providing a safety net beyond travel insurance. The pandemic made it very clear that having a travel advisor in your corner makes a big difference.

Travel Advisors are the experts for the international destinations that you've never heard of

### **They can make recommendations when you're not sure where to go**

A travel advisor understands what you truly want to get out of each trip, even when you don't

### **The world is more connected, and travel agents specialize in complex itineraries**

They ensure you truly experience the destination - not just tick landmarks off a list of things to see

### **Travel Advisors understand the true value of some experiences**

They have access to benefits you can't get otherwise - our industry is built on relationships

### **The travel agency community specializes in those things you simply cannot find online**



In the peak of the pandemic in 2020, travel advisors worked around the clock to get their clients home safely as borders were closing. How did they do this? By leveraging the power of relationships. Most travel advisors work in large networks of host agencies and consortia – and these affiliations represent buying power in the travel marketplace. Travel advisors have relationships that would take the average traveler a lifetime to build. When a crisis happens, like COVID-19, savvy travel advisors were quick to negotiate refunds, re-book holidays, and quickly maneuver logistics to bring travelers safely home. Often, travelers didn't have to lift a finger.

When travelers feel confident in getting back on the road, using a travel advisor will be more important than ever. The list of document requirements, quarantine and testing procedures, as well as the general logistics is already proving to be more complex as they guidelines evolve. That's why working with a professional travel advisor who has all the up-to-date information is important. They'll read all the fine print for you, and help you understand and interpret your options.

## Is it safe to travel to...?

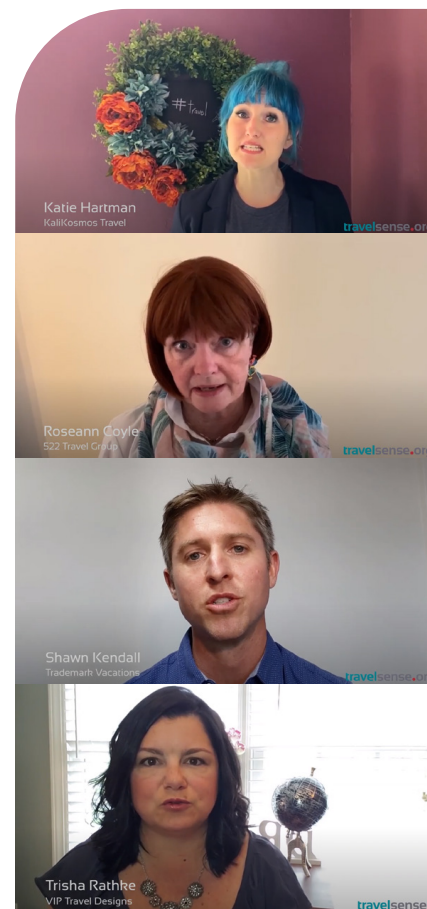
Every traveler will have to assess their level of risk tolerance before deciding when, or if, to travel. It's not the role of a travel advisor to give a 'yes' or 'no' answer when it comes to travel safety. A travel advisor can provide objective third-party information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) or the State Department that is material to the traveler's decision or destination choices. However, it's ultimately up to the traveler to take all this information into account, in addition to the advice from their healthcare provider, before deciding to travel. Bottom line: everyone has a different level of risk tolerance and it's up to the traveler to make those choices, along with the guidance of their trusted travel advisor.

How have travel advisors helped clients during the COVID-19 Pandemic? See for yourself in our collection of stories on [TravelSense.org](https://www.travelsense.org).

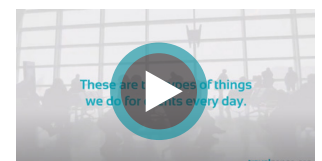
## Ethics & Travel Advisors:

ASTA members must adhere to a strict code of ethics. Any traveler who works with an ASTA member and has a problem has the option to file an official complaint with the association – and our consumer affairs team will investigate the matter and work with the consumer and the member to achieve an amicable resolution. If the member company does not cooperate or it is discovered that it has engaged in dishonest or fraudulent conduct, ASTA will remove that member from the association.

Travelers who wish to file a complaint against an ASTA member can email our Consumer Affairs Department at [consumeraffairs@asta.org](mailto:consumeraffairs@asta.org).

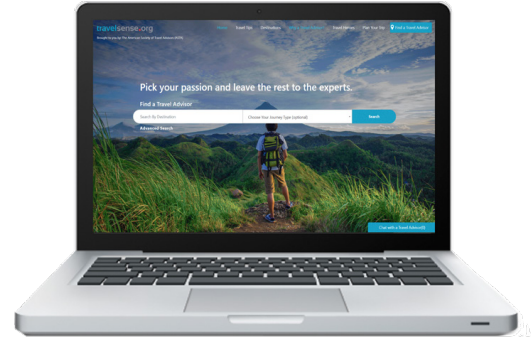


**CONSUMERS  
TURNED TO  
ADVISORS IN  
THEIR TIME OF  
NEED**, watch video



## Where can I find a travel advisor?

Go to [TravelSense.org](http://TravelSense.org) and use the "Find an Advisor" tool. Search for advisors with expertise in destinations or specific subjects that interest you. Rest assured that every travel advisor you find on [TravelSense.org](http://TravelSense.org) is a vetted ASTA member in good standing. How? Because it's tied to our membership database!



## How many travel agencies are there in the United States?

The Census Bureau's [number for U.S. travel agency employment](https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/press/releases/2017-09-14-foreign-trade-services.html) is at 105,085 (2015, latest available). This is the number we use most frequently, and it represents an 8 percent increase over five years.

Further, the research firm IBISWorld uses the number of [232,848 in the U.S.](https://www.ibisworld.com/industry-statistics/reports/travel-agencies-in-the-us/), which probably captures everyone in the ecosystem (self-employed independent contractors, part-timers, hobbyists, etc.).

Our members have been reporting improved business conditions post-recession and that outbound travel from the U.S. has remained strong, with the [National Travel and Tourism Office](https://www.nationaltravelandtourismoffice.com/) reporting a 7.8% increase in U.S. outbound travel spending January-October 2017 versus the same period in 2016."

# 9,000+ MEMBERS

in 50 States and 120 Countries

ASTA represents approximately 2,600 domestic travel agency and supplier travel companies employing nearly 30,000 people and varying in size from the one-person home-based advisor to storefront agencies. ASTA members are in every state and Congressional district and range from the large business-focused travel management companies such as Carlson Wagonlit and BCD Travel to the household-name online agencies like Expedia.

In total we represent over 9,000+ members in over 120 countries.

## How big is the travel agency industry in my state?

ASTA has created a state-by-state guide to outline the impact of our industry in each state. This includes data on retail locations, jobs and economic impact, as well as ASTA members broken down by congressional district. [Click here to learn more or visit ASTA.org/Advocacy](http://ASTA.org/Advocacy).



[ASTA.org/Advocacy](http://ASTA.org/Advocacy)



## Has the Internet Replaced the Travel Advisor?

There are some things technology cannot replicate, and personal touch is one of them. The Internet is a valuable resource, but it cannot replace the expertise, guidance and personal service of a travel advisor. At a time when travelers are stressed out with hectic schedules, travel advisors have all of the information at their fingertips, saving valuable hours of Internet research. Advisors also can offer insider tips based on personal experience.

It's fun to imagine a world where daily activities like cleaning and driving are made more simple. But travel is a highly personal and emotionally complex experience. In a complicated world of automation and information overload, travel advisors are more important than ever because of their experience based insight.

Advanced technology plays an important role in the travel industry. But as access to purchasing travel broadens, those truly unique experiences will become less and less available. If you really want to get the inside track, try working with a travel specialist who has been there, done that, and has your best interests in mind.

Today's successful travel advisor leverages new technologies to help them better serve their clients. They're connected on social media, using advanced booking platforms and even integrating AI to streamline the customer experience on their websites.

## Do Travel Advisors Charge Fees?

There is no simple way to answer the fee question, except to say that yes - many travel advisors charge a fee. This could range from \$50 to several hundred dollars depending on the complexity of the trip. Don't be scared off by fees.

Remember, you're paying an expert like you would your accountant or a lawyer. That fee will come back to you through the added value your advisor provides such as upgrades, complimentary breakfast, perks and other exclusive access their connections unlock for you.



We're living in a world where human connections are more important than ever. **It's how we build trust.** When we travel, we're connecting to the world through the people we meet and the experiences that make us feel alive.

## What Percentage of Airline Tickets, Rental Cars, Cruises and Hotel Rooms Are Sold by Travel Advisors?

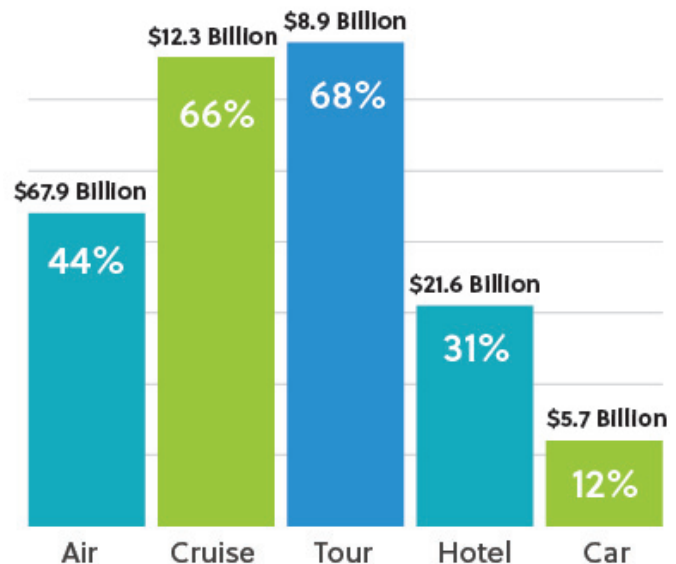
Travel agencies – online, brick-and-mortar and many hybrid business models in between – play a critical role in our country’s travel and tourism industry.

While the physical elements of travel include planes, trains, cars, hotels, cruises and tours, it is the travel advisor that makes it all happen.

### Travel advisors of all sizes and shapes, including online travel advisors, sold \$116.8 Billion\*

in Annual Travel Sales in 2019. This is broken out in the chart to the right.

Percentage of Travel Sales by Travel Agencies 2019



#### Fast Facts:

Were Used by 22% of U.S. Travelers (Leisure & Business)

**Arranged over 295 Million Air Trips\***

Employed 108,984 People

**Engaged 40,000 Independent Contractors to Sell Travel (Est.)**

Generated Payroll Output of \$7.3 Billion

**Earned Annual Revenues of \$15.1 Billion**

Operated 9,400 Airline-Accredited Firms with 14,797 Retail Locations Are Primarily Small Businesses (98%) Owned and/or Operated by Women (68%)

Sources: ARC, Census Bureau, PhoCusWright Travel Agency Landscape, Travel Weekly Power List, Company financial reports, MMGY's Portrait of U.S. Travelers, TNS Global's TravelsAmerica, Statista.com

Notes: Updates are provided to any past outdated or erroneous data.

\* Large online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia and Priceline may not be included in the data.

\*\* Includes online or intranet tools that agencies provide. Multiple booking methods applicable for different portions of each trip planning

# The U.S. Travel Agency Industry

**TRAVEL AGENCIES** – online, brick-and-mortar and many hybrid business models in between – play a critical role in our country’s travel and tourism industry. While the physical elements of travel include planes, trains, cars, hotels, cruises and tours, it is the travel advisor that makes it all happen.

Arranged over  
**295 MILLION  
AIR TRIPS\***

## In 2019, Travel Agencies:

Processed **\$116.8 Billion** in Annual Travel Sales - Estimated Volume and Market Share:

\$67.9 Billion Air (44%)	\$8.9 Billion Tour (68%)
\$21.8 Billion Hotel (12%)	\$5.7 Billion Car (31%)
\$12.3 Billion Cruise (66%)	

Are Primarily **SMALL  
BUSINESSES (98%)**

Owned and/or  
**OPERATED BY  
WOMEN (68%)**



Were **Used by 22%** of U.S. Travelers (Leisure & Business)

**Employed 108,984** People

Engaged **40,000 Independent Contractors** to Sell Travel (Est.)

Generated Payroll Output of **\$7.3 Billion**

Earned **Annual Revenues of \$15.1 Billion**

Operated **9,400** Airline-Accredited Firms with **14,797** Retail Locations

ASTA Member Agencies Represent over **80%** of Agency Sales

Travel Agency Retail Locations and Travel Advisor W-2 Employment by State (Census Bureau)

State	Agencies	Empl.
Alabama	66	478
Alaska	34	232
Arizona	351	7,500
Arkansas	44	249
California	1,234	11,353
Colorado	350	1,274
Connecticut	236	1,750
Delaware	59	7,500
D.C.	89	490
Florida	1,573	10,009
Georgia	412	2,159
Hawaii	176	1,245
Idaho	51	288
Illinois	862	5,104
Indiana	155	1,341
Iowa	106	391
Kansas	76	332

State	Agencies	Empl.
Kentucky	60	175
Louisiana	106	553
Maine	51	375
Maryland	276	1,139
Massachusetts	474	2,094
Michigan	432	3,750
Minnesota	319	2,165
Mississippi	41	60
Missouri	227	3,575
Montana	45	158
Nebraska	102	920
Nevada	162	1,750
New Hampshire	84	341
New Jersey	776	2,442
New Mexico	41	151
New York	1,425	10,693
North Carolina	433	1,950

State	Agencies	Empl.
North Dakota	30	184
Ohio	355	2,035
Oklahoma	83	375
Oregon	181	812
Pennsylvania	626	3,155
Rhode Island	61	232
South Carolina	122	375
South Dakota	38	175
Tennessee	208	911
Texas	1,003	7,279
Utah	152	1,695
Vermont	33	121
Virginia	355	1,750
Washington	343	4,139
West Virginia	26	124
Wisconsin	237	1,570
Wyoming	21	66

Sources: ARC, U.S. Census Bureau, PhocusWright Travel Agency Landscape, Travel Weekly Power List, Company Financial Reports, Kantar TNS, Statista.com

\* Large online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia and Booking.com are included in this data.

# ASTA Membership

## Who are ASTA members?

ASTA remains the world's leading association of travel professionals. ASTA's membership numbers reflect the shift and consolidation taking place within the travel industry, specifically among travel agencies. In response to the changes, ASTA has adapted its membership criteria to provide opportunities for all travel professionals and travel businesses to join from homebased individual advisors to larger travel agencies and affiliated travel suppliers.

We represent approximately 2,600 domestic travel agency and supplier travel companies varying in size from the one-person, home-based advisor, to storefront agencies and the large travel management companies such as Carlson Wagonlit and BCD Travel to the household-name online agencies like Expedia.

Our membership encompasses more than 14,000+ members in over 120 countries. Looking for a member? [Visit or member directory @ www.ASTA.org](http://www.ASTA.org)

**ASTA  
MEMBER  
AGENCIES  
PRODUCE  
83% OF  
AGENCY  
SALES\***

**78% of travelers** who last used a travel advisor within 5 years agree that their travel advisor looks out for them



**56% of all Millennials agree their advisors look out for them**

Almost 2/3 of those using a travel advisor feel that the advisor(s) made the experience better

**TOP 3 reasons for using a travel advisor = saving time, avoiding mistakes and improving the travel experience**

Travel advisors save 3.5 hours in planning time and over \$300 per trip on average



Sources: ASTA 2016 Financial Benchmarking report, ASTA 2017 Consumer Research.

## How Do I Choose A Travel Advisor?

Every travel agency is different and accordingly, some are better suited to a given consumer than others. Here are some tips on choosing a travel advisor who is right for you.

**LOOK FOR THE ASTA LOGO:** Through its continuing education and training programs, ASTA prepares its members to operate high-caliber, competitive businesses. ASTA members are required to adhere to an enforceable code-of-ethics.

**SEARCH ONLINE:** Go to TravelSense ([www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org)) and use the “Find an Advisor” tool. Search for advisors with expertise in destinations or specific subjects that interest you.



**SEE IF THEY ARE ASTA VERIFIED:** Go to TravelSense ([www.TravelSense.org](http://www.TravelSense.org)) and look for the ASTA Travel Verified Travel Advisor designation (VTA) and logo.

**ASK AROUND:** Tap friends, neighbors and relatives who use an advisor they trust. You may want to visit or call several agencies to find the one that best suits your needs.

**INTERVIEW THE ADVISOR:** Consider everything from the appearance of the office to the advisor’s willingness to listen and answer questions. The best advisors want to establish a long-term relationship with a client, not just make one sale.

**ASK ABOUT FEES:** Good advisors will notify their clients of any additional fees, including service fees, up front. Doing otherwise is pointless, as the fee will appear as a separate charge on the client’s credit card bill.

**CHECK INDIVIDUAL CREDENTIALS:** Many advisors have been trained in business management, travel and tourism or geography. Others have supplemented their agency experience with extensive education and training courses. Some travel advisors are Certified Travel Counselors (CTC), having completed an educational program with the Travel Institute, or Master Cruise Counselors (MCC), having completed a program with the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).



American Society of  
**Travel Advisors**



# Useful Sources

[U.S. Travel Association: General Industry Data and Trends Airlines Reporting Corporation \(ARC\)](#)

[National Travel & Tourism Office, U.S. Department of Commerce: information on travel to and from the United States](#)

[U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs: Travel Agents](#)

[International Airlines Transport Association \(IATA\)](#)

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

[State Department's China Page](#)

[Travel.State.gov](#)

[World Health Organization](#)



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