

# TRAVEL AGENTS

## ONBOARDING GUIDE

for new entrants



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Published March 2017

# Message from STB

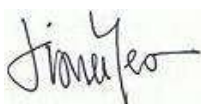
*Welcome to the exciting world of tourism. Every year, millions of people travel in and out of Singapore, as part of billions around the world who undertake international travel. A multitude of companies and services make this happen on a daily basis, from airlines to hotels to travel agents, and it is the people working in this industry that make experiences magical.*

*In August 2016, NATAS and STB jointly launched the Travel Agent Roadmap. This is a call to travel agents to be designers of travel experience; a call made ever more important by how consumer behaviour in seeking and experiencing holidays is changing rapidly. Consumers today crave unique experiences which are customised based on their preferences. Yet, they have little time to research and plan their holidays. In these times of heightened uncertainty, they also need assurance that someone will be present to assist them should their travel plans be derailed by mishaps or crises.*

*For travel agents to serve customers better, its people need to be creative, professional, and always up-to-date. To that end, the Roadmap supports travel agents by offering help in various ways, covering Business Transformation, Technology, and Manpower.*

*The Onboarding Guide is one such effort arising from the Travel Agent Roadmap. It is designed especially for new entrants in mind, to help you navigate the world of travel agents and embark on the journey to become designers of travel experiences.*

*You will bring fresh eyes and fresh ideas to the sector and be an invaluable resource and support to the millions of travellers that we serve. I hope you will find this guide useful as you embark on your career in the travel agent industry, and I wish you all the best for this exciting journey ahead.*



**Lionel Yeo**

Chief Executive

Singapore Tourism Board

# Message from NATAS

*A traveller once told me that “Using a travel consultant is like a great bottle of wine. You may never know all the passion and attention that went into planning the trip, but you’ll definitely taste the difference”.*

*These words sum up the life of a travel consultant, who lives to create that perfect trip for his/her customers so they can see the world in the best and most efficient way possible. Travel is our business, and we take pride in being able to advise our customers, many of whom have become our followers.*

*Ours is a professional trade where travel and leisure is the focus for our customers, and precision and attention to detail is the focus of our Travel Consultants.*

*To support the industry in this endeavour, the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) was founded in 1979. Today, it works closely with the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to deliver initiatives under the Travel Agent Roadmap to help our industry stay relevant to consumers. Our Business Transformation, Information and Technology, and Manpower and Training Committees collaborate with STB to act as key drivers to achieve improved business processes, technology adoption and better talent management.*

*Like any trade, ours has its own unique jargon or what we call travel speak – a sort of cryptic code that only travel consultants understand when we communicate with one another! When I first joined the trade, I told myself that surely there was no such thing as a “Half-Twin” and remember asking a more senior colleague why it was that my customer had to pay a “Single Room Supplement” on top of the per person price we had advertised for a tour, and I could not quite compute the amount? She answered me immediately and without hesitation, “his room never share but breakfast he only eat for one pax, right? You count lah!” It took me a few months to gather enough courage to ask my next question which was whether an “Open-Jaw” for my customer’s airline ticket had anything to do with sharks!*

# Message from NATAS

*I am pleased that today we have an Onboarding Guide for you, and I hope it will help you ease into your role as a travel consultant. As you move forward in your career, remember to keep learning and discovering, and be the consultant your customers need you to be.*

*On behalf of the NATAS, welcome to the wonderful world of travel. Welcome to our fraternity of travel professionals who are highly respected the world over for the passionate work that we do.*



**Devinder Ohri**

President

National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS)

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The only way to do great work...  
...is to **LOVE** what you **DO**.

*Steve Jobs*



# WELCOME TO THE TRAVEL AGENT INDUSTRY

Imagine yourself at the airport, waiting to board the flight to your first holiday. Your heart is thumping with anticipation, and your mind is filled with images of all the exhilarating possibilities that await you.

This is where you are right now, right at this starting point – your first day at work.

Your journey ahead in the travel agent industry will be filled with adventure. You will be exposed to a universe of amazing destinations, and your career can be as fulfilling as you want it to be.

To help you along this journey, here is a “traveller’s kit” packed with the necessities you need for the exciting adventures ahead. It is a guide to the industry, brimming with basic knowledge to help you navigate and tools to make your journey more fulfilling. Along the way, we will also feature nuggets of wisdom from travel agent professionals who have been in this field for many years!

Dive into your traveller’s kit now, then sit tight as your flight takes off. You are in for an amazing adventure ahead.

**Bon Voyage!**





# Module 1

## Industry Overview



In this first module, you will learn the basic facts about the travel agent industry. It shares on the beginnings of travel in Singapore, the role of a travel agent, the types of travel agents and the possible career paths ahead.

### 1.1 How did travel begin in Singapore?

Before the term ‘travel agent’ was coined, and before our little island came to be known as Singapore, travel organisation had already begun.

As early as the third century, we had visits by Chinese junks,

Indian vessels, Arab dhows, Portuguese battleships and Bugis schooners. Following the founding of Singapore in 1819, the island blossomed as a trading port and became a popular destination for early tourists looking to experience the exotic Far East.



*Singapore in the yesteryears*

#### *Did you know?*

There were travel guides on Singapore as early as the 1920s. They were created by American Express and travel agent Thomas Cook to cater to the affluent tourists. These guides played a role in making hotels like the Raffles and the Adelphi known all over the world.



Fast forward to the 1900s, Singapore had gained in economic strength. More people started travelling to this little city for business and leisure. The numbers grew and in time, the need for the organisation of travel became apparent.

Finally, in 1964, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) was formed to promote Singapore as a tourist destination. It was later renamed as the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in 1997 to reflect its focus on industry development, in addition to marketing and promotional activities.

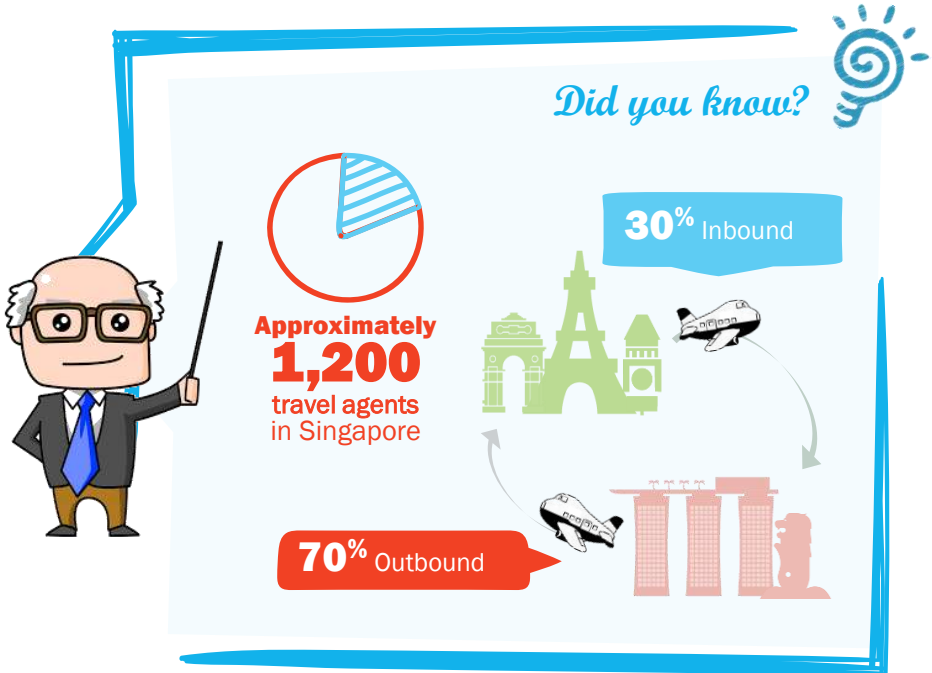
Today, tourism is bustling in Singapore and is an important economic contributor. We have seen more than 16 million visitors come to our shores in 2016, a significant leap from the 91,000 visitors received in 1964 when STPB was first formed!

Our people too have become avid travellers – we took close to 9.5 million trips in 2016, almost doubling the number over the past 10 years!

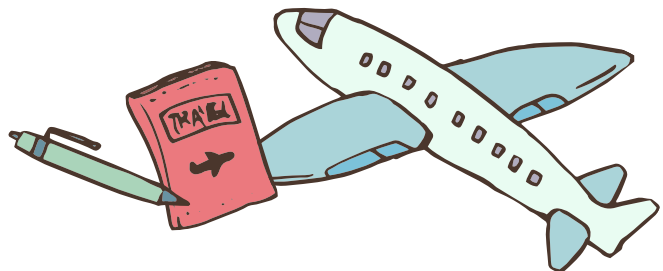
Watch  
Singapore's  
exciting  
tourism  
achievements  
in 2016 in  
this video!  
([https://youtu.be/PD\\_URUYmHpA](https://youtu.be/PD_URUYmHpA))



Looking ahead, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has forecasted that the world will see 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals by 2030. Can you imagine how many of these tourists will need to rely on the expertise of travel agents?



- Inbound and outbound sector classification is determined by the nature of activities that make up at least 80% of revenue.
- Percentages are approximate figures.

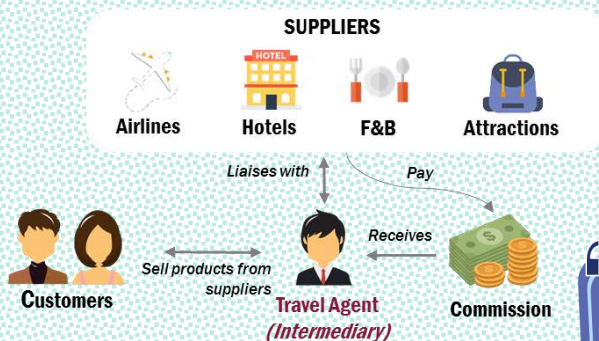


## 1.2 What do travel agents really do?

The travel agent industry is one of the most misunderstood industries out there. The regular man in the street would probably think that a travel agent just taps away at a keyboard all day to book tickets for their customers. But travel agents are so much more than that.

Travel agents help keep the tourism ecosystem going. For destinations, attractions, restaurants, tours and hotels, a travel agent is the all-in-one spokesperson who advises a customer to try out different experiences. They know all these offerings like the back of their hand, and help these suppliers to distribute their products to more customers.

The basic function of a travel agent, in short, is to act as an intermediary between these tourism product suppliers and customers. They perform this function by selling products singly or by bundling products into a package for sale to the customer. In return, travel agents earn a margin on the sale, which can be a mark-up or a commission.



Travel agents are important players in the travel and tourism ecosystem. They contribute to the vibrancy of our economy and provide good jobs for Singaporeans.

Lionel Yeo  
Chief Executive  
Singapore Tourism Board

Raymond just started his first day at a travel agent. His manager, Chloe, will be guiding him along and answering questions he may have about his new role.

Raymond



*I always thought my role as a travel agent only involves making bookings and travel arrangement.*

*Well Raymond, that is only one part of what we do. Did you know that travel agents are important in the entire tourism value chain?*

*We are at the frontline of the entire travel trade. We **front all the offerings** by helping to recommend or package products to sell to customers. We also **curate and design unique experiences** that bring out the best of travel destinations.*

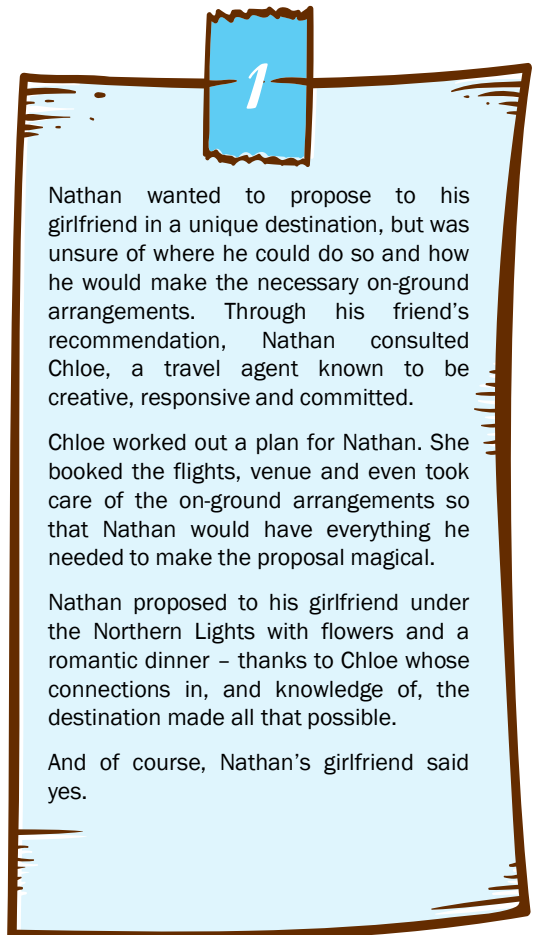
Chloe



## 1.3 Why does a traveller need a travel agent?

In this day and age where consumers can book tickets and research their holiday online, what role can a travel agent play?

A travel agent is far more knowledgeable about the geographic locations of the attractions and hotels, has access to rates and deals that the public may not know about, and is well-versed in the 'fine-prints' of travel to give important travel and insurance advice. Here are some examples of how a travel agent is essential for the perfect holiday.



2

In December 2016, the heaviest snowstorm in 50 years forced hundreds of flights to be cancelled while John and his wife were in Hokkaido for a couple of days. Thankfully, the travel agent who managed John's flight arrangement was able to handle the situation with professional care. The travel agent immediately arranged for complimentary transportation and accommodation so they would not have to spend their night at the airport. He also made it a point to keep John informed during this difficult time, giving him regular updates about the situation and the next flight out. Eventually, John and his wife travelled home safely and were thankful that they booked their flights via a travel agent who provided emergency help. Without the travel agent, they would likely have been left stranded at the airport, along with others who had not used a travel agent.

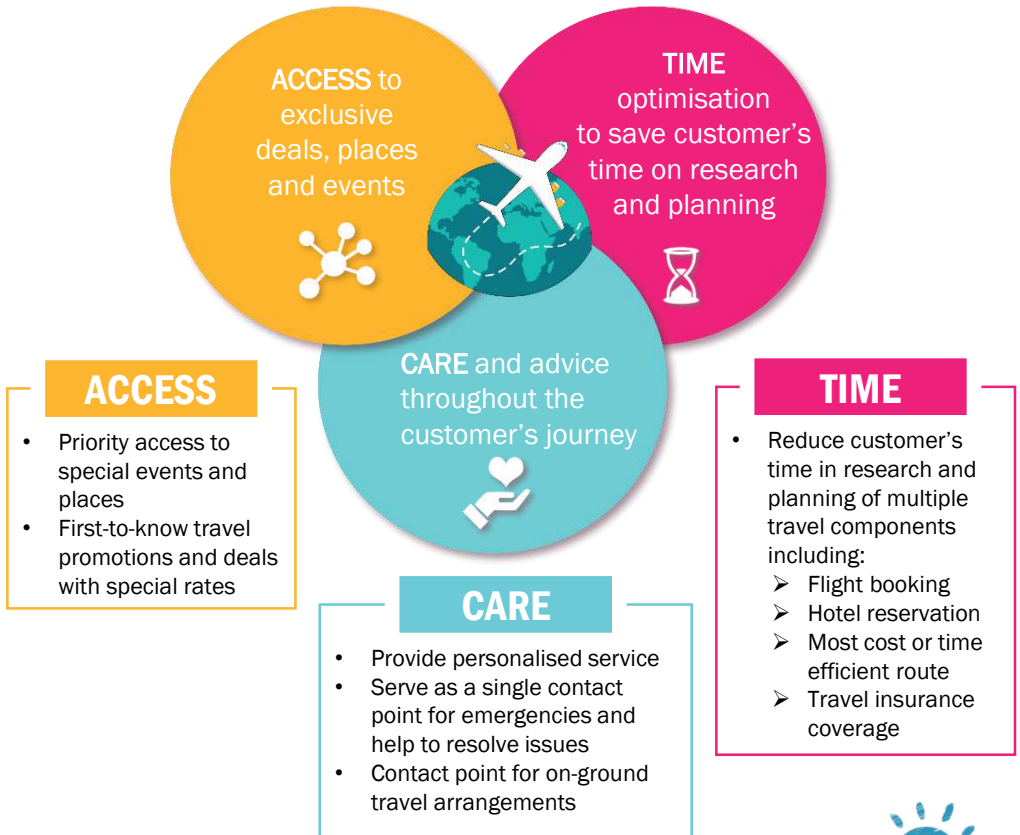
3

For her grandfather's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, Jamie initiated a big family vacation for all four generations of their extended family.

This was no easy feat. The coordination of flights was complex as they all lived in different countries. Jamie also had to deal with the different demands of everyone. Her grandparents wanted a slower holiday pace. Her father and husband wanted to play golf and her mother wanted to indulge in massages whereas the kids wanted to visit the underwater theme park. Jamie wished she could just relax and let someone else do the planning instead.

Feeling helpless, Jamie turned to a travel agent for advice. The travel agent was able to synchronise everyone's schedule effortlessly. He also analysed the preferences and needs from all family members, and was able to propose a destination and itinerary that included activities for family members of all ages. Having left the difficult part to the travel agent, Jamie could now spend her time getting ready for the big holiday instead.

As you can see, travellers approaching us before their trip is a smart A.C.T because of our...



### Did you know?



Surveys of British and American holidaymakers show an increasing trend towards using travel agent services. A high proportion of these travellers feel that vacations planned with travel agents were better than those organised without their assistance. You can find out more from these research papers by the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) (<https://www.asta.org/Publications/reschpaperlist.cfm>) and the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) (<https://abta.com/tips-and-latest/reports-and-trends>)





# OUR VISION: TRAVEL AGENTS AS DESIGNERS OF TRAVEL EXPERIENCE



Experts that consumers turn to in the curation of their travel



A workforce that is professional, creative and always up-to-date



A high-value industry contributing to the economy and creating good jobs

## 1.4 How many types of travel agents are there?

Travel agents can be broadly categorised into four types.



**Outbound Travel Agents** assist travellers with all their requirements for travelling out of Singapore. Some leverage on volume or packaged tours while there are also niche outbound travel agents that specialise in customised travel featuring bespoke itineraries, taking customers on adventures. Often, outbound travel agents have the privilege of going on familiarisation trips where they get to try out hotels, restaurants and other offerings so they know what they would be selling.

**Inbound Travel Agents** promote Singapore to foreign visitors and are experts in showcasing the different aspects of Singapore to suit different target segments. Within inbound travel agents, there is a class of travel agents called the Destination Management Companies (DMCs). DMCs offer a comprehensive range of ground services beyond the basic services. They are typically called upon to manage cruise groups, meetings and incentive programmes. Inbound travel agents are also often the first to experience Singapore's various products, especially its latest hotels and attractions.



### Corporate Travel Agents

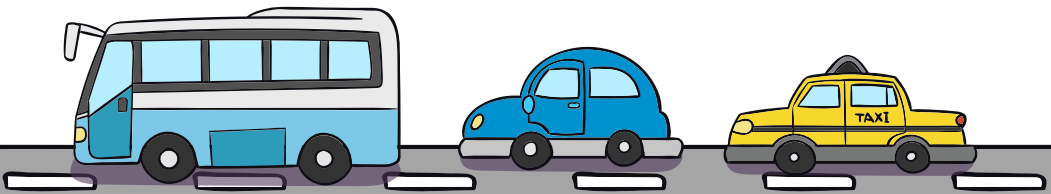


**Corporate Travel Agents** are also known as Travel Management Companies (TMCs). They excel in cost-effective management of travel for companies, and are a vital partner for companies in ensuring compliance with the latter's travel policies. TMCs are often experts in managing corporate clients and handling complex flight routes to optimise time and value for these clients.

**Online Travel Agents** are the latest addition to the world of travel agents. Without a shop front, they only serve customers online. Customers use their websites to book air tickets, hotels, transfers, tours and activities directly. They are also termed as 'OTAs'.



### Online Travel Agents



## 1.5 Where will a travel agent career bring me?

The travel trade is vast. It offers a multitude of options to grow and there is no fixed path of career progression. This is because you would have learned a myriad of skills which can help you move comfortably within your company or within the tourism industry at large.



**“** Many travel agent professionals have risen up through the ranks to make an outstanding career in the industry.

The world is your oyster and all you have to do is to reach out and be proactive in charting your own career path. **”**

- Industry veteran

*"I take pride in my profession as a travel agent. Just like my friends working as office executives or in hotel management, I need to dress smartly, communicate clearly and face my customers with a can-do attitude! In fact, my job also gives me the added opportunity to pick up important soft skills such as listening and empathising with people.*

*I am proud to be part of this professional community where we are dedicated to making peoples' dreams come true!"*

Chloe



Within your company, you may have options to move across different departments, such as product development, operations, or marketing and so on. Furthermore, you may have the potential to move upwards, an opportunity to take on supervisory positions and eventually move up the management ladder.



If your career ignites an interest in the wider travel trade, your time in the travel agent industry would have prepared you well. You would have worked with hotels, attractions, airlines and other industries within the travel trade, and have grasped a good understanding of how various stakeholders operate. This helps to carve your ideal career path.

Remember the Vision for the travel agent industry? You too have the option to design your own career journey in the travel trade. Just follow your passion!



### *Did you know?*

Find out more about NATAS, the travel agent association in Singapore, and other travel industry associations!

- [National Association of Travel Agents Singapore](#) (NATAS)
- [Association of Singapore Attractions](#) (ASA)
- [Singapore Association of Convention & Exhibition Organisers](#) (SACEOS)
- [Singapore Hotel Association](#) (SHA)
- [Singapore Retailers' Association](#) (SRA)



# Discover Treasures: WHERE WILL YOUR SKILLS TAKE YOU?



National Tourism  
Organisations



Travel  
Writer



Airlines  
Services



Entrepreneur

Tour  
Operations  
Management

Tourist  
Information  
Centres



Hotels

Travel Business  
Owner



Product  
Development

Sales &  
Marketing

Cruise



Attractions

Conferences  
& Events

Tour  
Manager

Operations



Human  
Resource

Finance



# Postcards from experienced travel agent professionals

## *From tourist guide to General Manager*

Judy fell in love with the travel agent industry because it allowed her to meet all sorts of people and that has enriched her life. To her, the most important trait of a travel agent is empathy, as you need to be able to understand the feelings of others to plan their perfect holiday.

“The worst thing you can do is to assume that your customer knows everything. Always take the pre-emptive stance and advise your customers on what they should expect.”



**Judy Lum,**  
**Diethelm Travel (Singapore)**

**Robin Yap,**  
**The Travel Corporation**



## *From aircraft parts discrepancy report staff to President of an international travel agent corporation*

The tourism industry has opened up the world for Robin and he would still choose this industry if he were to start all over again. Robin is a firm believer that you can carve your own career path with ambition, diligence and constant skills upgrading and that was exactly what he did. He believes it is important to stay humble and learn from everyone you meet, and that to succeed, you should ensure you are always adding value to your customers and your organisation. “The journey will not be easy, but success is not impossible.”

“In this day where technology is prevalent, communication skills is the key to distinguishing yourself. It is what makes stories come alive, and we must do that better than machines can.”



# Postcards from experienced travel agent professionals



**Fiona Lim,**  
**Concepts Golf**

## ***From travel assistant to co-owner and business development director***

Fiona started as the most junior staff in a small company. That allowed her to learn everything from serving customers and liaising with partners to making bookings with near-military precision for flawless travel arrangements. She loves the industry because it is filled with endless discovery and surprise. She finds herself regularly learning new things, meeting new people and travelling to new destinations even after years in the industry. For her, the business is all about people and there is nothing more important than taking a genuine interest in people.

*"Be thorough in your checks! No one will fault you for being extra careful, but you will be at fault if you're not careful enough."*



**Mabel Cheang,**  
**Travel Wander**

## ***From intern to travel business owner***

Mabel always had a passion for travel and her internship in a travel agent piqued her interest in the world of travel and travel organisation. After her internship, she went on to serve as a frontline consultant before becoming a team leader then a senior sales manager. Today, she is fulfilling her dreams as the co-owner of Travel Wander, a travel agent focusing on experiential and sustainable travel. She loves the industry because the work is all about making people's dreams come true. More importantly, travel agents play a key role in bringing the world closer through their travel recommendations.

*"Learn how to create a wonderful customer experience right from the point you meet your customers because for them, their holidays start from the second they come to you for advice."*



# TAKE

## Happy Quizzing

**1**

Describe the role of travel agents in the tourism ecosystem.

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2**

What is the definition of A.C.T?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3**

List the four categories of travel agents.

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4**

What are the characteristics of designers of travel experiences?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5**

How should you determine your career path in the travel agent industry?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Module 2

### Industry Basics



This module will share more on the operating environment you will be working in. You will learn about your customers' expectations and how to protect their interests. You will also find out more about the various departments in your company and the unique language they sometimes speak.

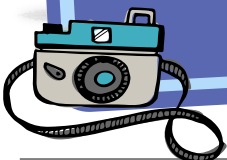
### 2.1 What will my customers expect from me?

Over time, technology, knowledge and rising income levels have changed customers' expectations. The digital revolution has changed the way consumers shop for vacations. They now have the ability to easily browse and compare multiple travel products, and the power to share experiences and influence others.

As choices and information increase, so do customers' expectations. What customers seek from their travels today is vastly different from the tourists of yesteryears.

*Whether corporate or leisure, customers want someone who is knowledgeable about travel and its processes. You will need to be accessible, approachable, and have to be the solution provider. All these, with a speedy delivery. Customers use travel agents because of these values that they are expecting.*

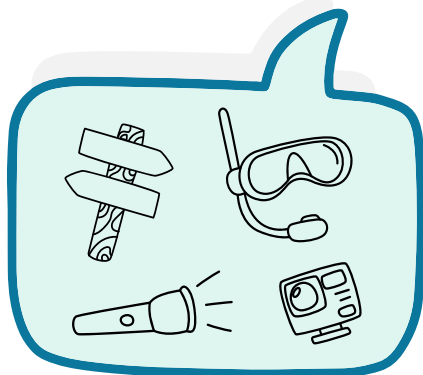
*- Industry veteran*



## Customers increasingly expect *experiential travel*

While there are customers who still seek the usual checklist of attractions, this profile is changing. Mainstream offerings are no longer enough – more customers will seek experiential travel that is more immersive, engaging, and in touch with the local culture. Understanding this means always being on the lookout for interesting and new destination products your customers can experience. They will thank you for it! *Watch the videos below to understand what experiential travel can be!*

- [Understanding What Visitors Seek](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Fu_CdjRY8)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Fu\\_CdjRY8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Fu_CdjRY8)
- [Staging a Visitor's Experience Journey](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqdf5Q9Vc1Q)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqdf5Q9Vc1Q>



## Customers expect *personalisation*

Consumers today also expect to be treated as individuals, meaning that they want personalised choices based on their interests and profile. Being able to sell someone exactly what they want can be very powerful. Adding a personal touch can mean the difference between “Yes, please!” and “No, thanks!”.

***Find out more about needs and preferences of different markets:***

## ➤ **Market Insights Report**

<https://www.stb.gov.sg/statistics-and-market-insights/Pages/market-insights.aspx>



With these ever-changing expectations, you might want to consider various ways of improving your customer service standard as a travel agent.

The travel trade in general is, after all, a very people-oriented industry. You will need to build strong emotional bonds with customers. In this way, you can also help improve your company's image by building trust and delivering exceptional service.

Chloe



*Travellers nowadays are very particular about the travel options available. You should be flexible enough to customise the trip based on their travel requirements.*

*How do I do that?*

*Think of each traveller as an individual. Try to understand their interests and design the itinerary based on what will engage them.*

Raymond



### Did you know?



Much of the demand for experiential and personalised travel will be driven by Millennial Travellers (born between 1981 and 1995) who will enter their peak earning and spending years by the next decade. Of these travellers, approximately 60 per cent reside in Asia, and are slated to drive the next wave of global tourism growth. Are you an Asian Millennial? If so, you are part of the change! Read more about "Capturing the Asian Millennial Traveller".

(<http://www.yoursingapore.com/content/dam/MICE/Global/bulletin-board/travel-rave-reports/Capturing-the-Asian-Millennial-Traveller.pdf>)

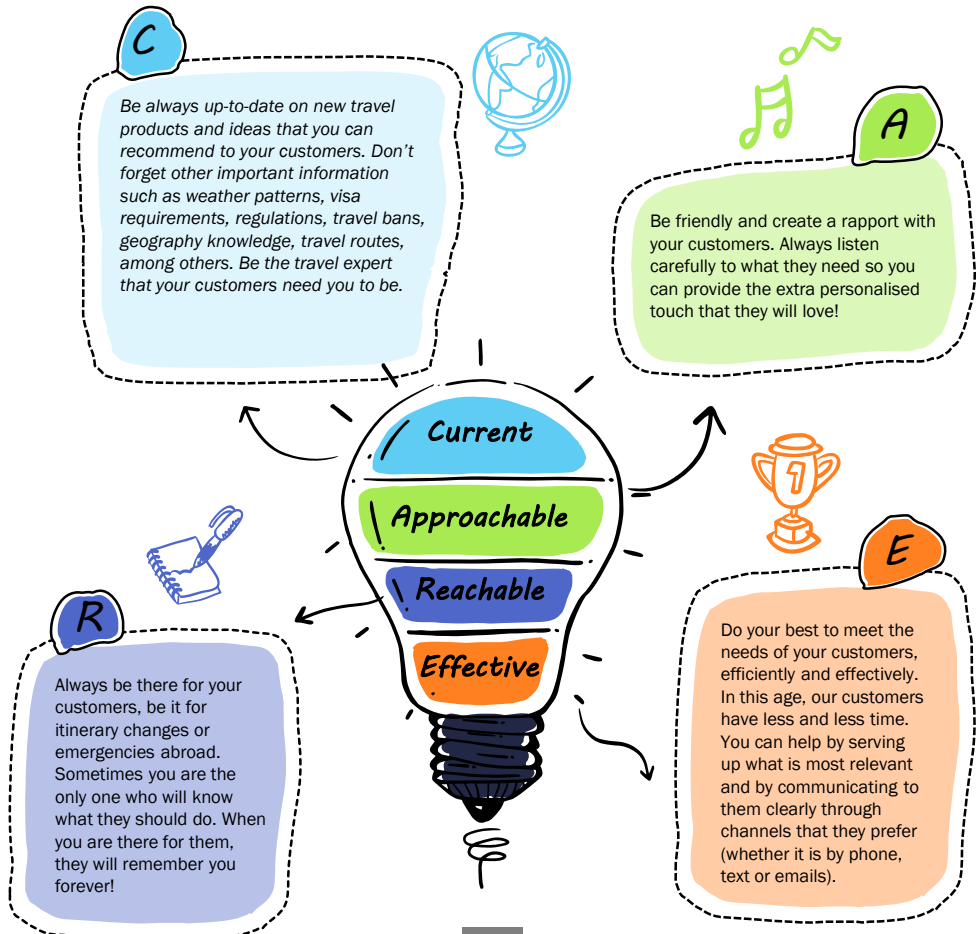


## 2.2 What does customer service mean as a travel agent?

Remember the last time you greeted a friend? The warm hello, the bright smile, and the knowing that this friend would be there for you?

Now, you can be that friend for your customers. With the right skills and approach, you can truly help make their dreams come true.

Just remember to CARE and you will be able to meet customer expectations as we had just talked about:



The illustration below depicts a conversation between Chloe and Raymond where Chloe recalled how she went the extra mile for a customer and how she felt gratified by the experience.

Raymond



*Hey Chloe, did you manage to help your customer yesterday who was trying to fly out from Dubai to Singapore?*

*Oh yes! I managed to help him eventually and it felt so great!*

*Initially, he attempted to reserve the tickets online but there were no seats available on the direct flights. I contacted several airlines, and with my business network, I managed to get him onto SQ! I also went further and arranged for an airport pick-up to save him from the hassle of looking for transport.*

Chloe



## 2.3 How may I better protect my customers' interests?

While travel is mostly fun and excitement, there will be times when the unexpected happens and it can be a costly affair without travel insurance.



Watch this humorous take on the importance of travel insurance (<https://youtu.be/czLudNgPjDA>)

Travel insurance is so important that the Singapore Tourism Board has imposed a specific requirement on travel agents.

Travel agents must inform customers to consider purchasing travel insurance in respect of any leisure travel out of Singapore if the deposit or payment before the departure date is equal to or exceeds S\$500, or if the aggregate purchase price is equal to or exceeds S\$1,000, per traveller.

**As a travel agent, it is vital to understand this travel insurance requirement.** You are advised to read more about this at



### Requirement on Travel Insurance

By STB, with effect from 15 July 2015

<https://www.stb.gov.sg/industries/travel-agents/Documents/Additional%20Licensing%20Condition%20on%20Travel%20Insurance.pdf>

**Understand what travel insurance should cover.** Don't be blur, be sure! Make sure that the insurer you are recommending covers all important contingencies, including travel agent insolvency. Find out more at <https://www.stb.gov.sg/industries/travel-agents/Documents/TInsurers.pdf>



### *Trip Cancellation*



### *Baggage / Personal Effects Coverage*



### *Major Medical Expenses*



### *Accident Death / Flight Accident*



### *Travel Agent Insolvency*

*Find out more about travel agent licensing requirements:*



### **Licensing Information for Travel Agents**

<https://www.stb.gov.sg/assistance-and-licensing/licensing/pages/travel-agent-licence.aspx>

**Travel insurance:  
no longer just for  
the overprepared**  
By Bill Saporito

TIME Magazine, Nov 02, 2015

### **Protect Your Vacation**

A comprehensive travel insurance policy covers all sorts of problems that might derail your trip. But mind the gaps. BY MIRIAM CROSS

Kiplinger's Personal Finance

### **Summer Travels That Include Peace of Mind**

Your HNW clients may consider themselves citizens of the world, but your job is to protect them where'er they roam

Investment Advisor, August 2016



## 2.4 What are the teams in my company?

Your company will have many functions and teams that help keep it ticking.

It is important for you to know how all these different parties are related to you, to each other and to your customers. This is because every booking that you handle will inevitably pass through many different departments!

While there are general departments, travel agents may also structure themselves differently depending on their business model. For example, some travel agents may also have a business unit focusing on Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) or even a dedicated customised travel unit which focuses on designing private tours. Take some time to find out what units your company has!

*You must show you add value to the organisation and are not just another “9 to 6” member of the company.*

**Industry Veteran**



## Sales & Reservations

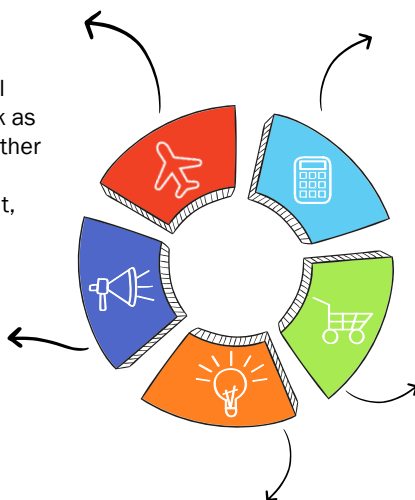
**Face of the business, handles customer enquiries and bookings**

You might be part of a larger team with several travel consultants. Work as a team and help each other through support and advice. As a new entrant, you can also learn from your more senior colleagues.

## Marketing & Communications

**Promotion of the company's services and packages.**

Understanding how your company brands and promotes its services will help strengthen your selling pitch to the customer! Always strive to be in line with your company's image and communications policy



## Management

**Decision-making, business development, crisis management.**

There will be times when you find it hard to make decisions or manage a crisis on your own or need some insights during business development. This is the time you will need the advice and suggestions of the management team.

## Finance

**Management of collection from customers and payment to suppliers.**

You are responsible to ensure that prompt payments are made or received on your travel bookings. It is therefore important to maintain good paperwork including purchase orders and invoices, and provide these to your Finance unit.

## Product

**Liaison with suppliers for contracting of products, planning and packaging.**

Your colleagues in this team help source for products and know the latest offerings and prices available. Being familiar with their work will help you in recommending the best for your customers.



## Did you know?

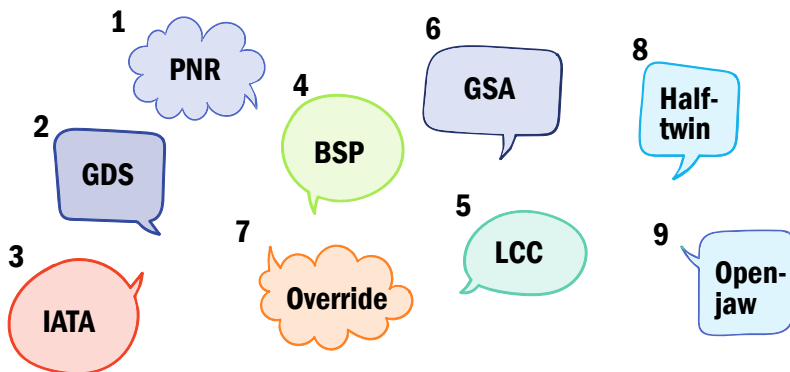


Tour leaders and tourist guides are important parts of the travel agent business as they are key touch points for your customers and help ensure they have a pleasant holiday. Tour leaders take care of outbound group travellers on their overseas holidays, while tourist guides are our Singapore ambassadors, taking care of our tourists and guiding them locally.

## 2.5 What jargon does our industry use?

You might be the only person in your company (if not the industry) if you decide not to use industry jargon in your daily work. An important category of jargon travel agents should know is the codes for cities, airports and airlines.

There is no need to worry if you cannot remember all of them at once. Take it one step at a time and start with the most frequently used codes and abbreviations in your company. You can gradually learn more over time. Here are some to get you started!



- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Passenger Name Record  | 2 | Global Distribution System                 |
| 3 | International Air Transport Association                              | 4 | Billing and Settlement Plan                |
| 5 | Low Cost Carriers  | 6 | General Sales Agents                       |
| 7 | Additional commission payable on sales above a certain agreed figure | 8 | One of two customers booked on a twin room |
| 9 | A ticket where the arrival city is different from the returning city |   |  |

*Finding out the full name of the above terms is only one step. Go online and find out what these terms mean!*



The dialogue between Chloe and Raymond below illustrates the usage of jargon in day-to-day conversations.

*Raymond, can you please help me to book on the GDS a return flight by end of today, from SIN to NRT, departing on 27th Feb and returning on 4th Mar? My client would like to fly with SQ on Juliet class. He is flexible with the timing and looking at maximum budget around \$4,000.*

Chloe



*Sorry Chloe, I have no idea what you have just said. Could you please explain to me?*

Raymond



*Apologies Raymond.*

*I forgot you are new at this.*

*I meant to seek your assistance to book a return flight on the Global Distribution System (GDS), an online booking platform for my customer. He wants to fly from Singapore to Tokyo Narita Airport, with Singapore Airlines on Business Class.*

*We often use abbreviations or rather, the industry jargon in our conversations. You may refer to the IATA website to learn more about airport codes: <http://www.iata.org/publications/Pages/code-search.aspx>*

Chloe



# TAKE

## Happy Quizzing

**1**

What are the two common customer expectations today?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2**

How may I provide better customer service?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3**

What should travel insurance cover?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4**

What business units does my company have?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5**

Which categories of jargon are important for travel agents to know?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Module 3

## Desired Skills as a Travel Designer



In this module, we will explore some skills which you should master as a travel agent. This includes the art of selling, how to plan for your customers, the importance of geographic knowledge and some basic tips for crisis management.

### 3.1 How do I master the art of selling?

Knowing how to sell your services is just as important as knowing what to sell. What good will a travel agent be if you can provide all the information in the world but you do not have any customers?

Remember A.C.T. ? You are not just an order-taker, you can provide Access, Care and Time to customers for all their travel requirements.

“

*“I don’t hire people to help me with booking and planning. I need them to think creatively in engaging customers with our products.”*

Industry Veteran

”

There are many different ways to approach customers. Here are some easy tips for you to get started. See how Raymond is practising these few tips in his encounter with his customer, Rebecca.

1

## Build a **PERSONAL BRAND**



Develop a professional image and always strive to make a good impression. Communicate well and effectively. Even small touches of thoughtful service can help cultivate a good relationship between you and your customers. They will remember you and look for you by name the next time!

**SMILE** as you greet your customers.

Your smile is infectious and can make the customer experience more enjoyable. "Hiring a smile" is probably your best starting point.



*Hello Raymond. My family would like to go on a vacation and would like to bring Auntie Irene along. Are you able to help us? We had an amazing experience in New York last year, thanks to you.*

Rebecca



*Hello Rebecca. Good to see you again and I am glad you enjoyed New York! Happy to help you again in every possible way.*

Raymond



## 2 Understand CUSTOMER NEEDS & PREFERENCES

Do you gather information about your customers before providing solutions to meet their expectations? Sometimes, understanding their needs can help you prepare something more suitable for them, beyond what they had originally asked for.



**LISTEN** as you hold a conversation with your customers. This means paying attention, empathising with the situation and responding to their stated and unstated needs. When a person feels heard and valued, a relationship is born.

*What type of family vacation are you thinking of and do you have any place in mind? Is there any special occasion?*

Raymond



*We were thinking of a 3-day beach holiday, somewhere around an hour's flight from Singapore. Do you think we can get something around \$600? And yes, you're right, it's Aunt Irene's birthday!*

Rebecca





3

*Sell based on  
**VALUE FOR MONEY,**  
not on lowest price*



Your customers may not only consider pricing as their purchasing criteria. The cheapest option may not be the most suitable for them. They may value time and convenience more, or value the comfort level of their holiday. By knowing what customers want, you can upsell your products and services, creating more value for them.

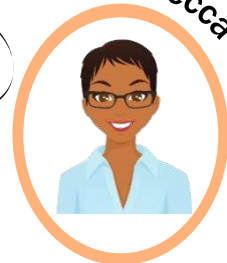
**Raymond**



*Let me check.*

*There are budget carriers to Penang, Langkawi, Kuala Lumpur or Port Dickson. Or if you prefer to visit Kuantan and stay at the beach resorts at Cherating, those are good for family holidays too. I can package something to meet your requirements and make Aunt Irene's birthday a memorable one.*

**Rebecca**



*Oh wow, I never knew there are places like that in Kuantan. Let's do that!*

## 4 Matching travel options with the **RIGHT FIT**



Selling is not just about knowing how to speak well. A responsible travel agent needs to be backed by solid knowledge and expertise. You will need to know products well to know how to customise your recommendations to suit your customers. You should also be very well-versed on the operational processes required to advance and close a sale.



**BE PREPARED** that customers can sometimes be over-sensitive or unreasonable. However, if a customer is unhappy, the responsibility falls on you to rectify that. You should find out what went wrong and how you can improve the experience.

**Raymond**



*Perfect. For Cherating in Kuantan, may I recommend you the beach resort located approximately 10 minutes drive from the city centre? There is a lovely family suite which I think is suitable for your family. It has two rooms and a private pool where Baby Anna can have an afternoon dip. During the day time, you can also visit the city centre for local food and sight-seeing.*

*Sounds like a plan! Thank you for always recommending a holiday plan which fits my needs.*

**Rebecca**



## 5 Taking the LEAD



The art of selling needs constant refinement to stay on top of the game. Do you remember your customers when they return? How can you proactively prospect for new customers? How can you identify and help iron out any issues before they occur?

« FOLLOW UP with your customers as it will reflect your sincerity and accountability. It shows that you are committed to build your relationship and to meet his or her expectations. Once you gain trust and respect from your customers, you are one step closer to increasing customer satisfaction. »



Raymond



*Before you go, do remember to buy travel insurance. This will help cover you for any unexpected incidents, especially since you are travelling with your family.*

Rebecca



*That's a good recommendation. I have completely forgotten about it. Thanks for reminding!*

There are many online resources to help you learn better customer service. One example is the toolkit at SPRING Singapore's website:  
<https://www.spring.gov.sg/Growing-Business/Toolkit/Pages/customer-service-toolkit.aspx>

## 3.2 How may I be a good planner for my customers?

As a travel agent, your day-to-day activities would be filled with logistics and coming up with new, fun, exotic and interesting travel ideas for your customers. Planning skills are crucial as you will spend a lot of your time doing research for the travel itinerary as well as advising your customers on the important aspects of their travel journey such as passports, travel insurance, visas, vaccinations and tours. It helps to develop a checklist so you can be certain all important areas have been covered.

Here is a basic list you can start adding on to!

Raymond



*"My client is travelling with young children and old folks. I will keep his needs in mind when booking his hotel, flight and tours."*

### PLANNING CHECKLIST

#### BASICS

- ☐ Adults
- ☐ Children and Ages
- ☐ Destination(s)
- ☐ Budget or style of travel
- ☐ Purpose of travel
- ☐ Number of days / nights?
- ☐ Travel insurance?
- ☐ Vaccinations?
- ☐ Weather to take note of?

#### ACCOMMODATION

- ☐ Preferred room layout?
- ☐ Preferred hotel or chains?
- ☐ Must-have hotel features?
- ☐ Intended activities?
- ☐ Tours – Day or fully guided?
- ☐ Specific places of interest?

#### AIR

- ☐ Preferred airline?
- ☐ Departure Date – any flexibility?
- ☐ Return Date – any flexibility?
- ☐ Seat request?
- ☐ Meal request?
- ☐ Suggested routes for the destination?

#### TRANSPORT

- ☐ Preferred mode of transport – Self-drive, car with driver, public transport?
- ☐ Travel time between sites?

#### VISA & IMMIGRATION

- ☐ Passport held?
- ☐ Visa requirement?
- ☐ Travel restrictions?

Chloe

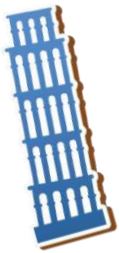


*Have you checked them all?*

### 3.3 Why is geographic knowledge important?

Today's customers are more likely owners of smartphones, with information readily available literally at their fingertips.

As you deal with such customers, there will be more reasons for you to arm yourself with travel information that may not be obvious to your customers.



Sometimes, pricing may not always be a logical factor when choosing the route to a destination. This is where you can add value to your customers by using your geographic and pricing knowledge.

Would a traveller rather go with a cheap fare that will take them a day to get to the destination? Or an expensive one to get there directly within hours?

Or, what is the best route between cities in a multi-destination itinerary? Based on their itinerary, where should they stay? What are the most attractive activities within their vicinity?

The answers to these questions are unlikely to be obvious to your customers without hours of research. Lay out the options for them, make your recommendations and let them decide.



Chloe



*Customers expect you to have basic ideas of popular travel destinations, climate, and a list of activities worth exploring. As travel agents, we have an edge over the internet because of our ability to listen, recommend and advise.*



Source: World Air-Routes, Maps of World, 2016

Understanding air-routes is particularly important for outbound travel agents. Some airlines may be able to provide a direct flight to the final destination while others may require a stopover at the airlines' hub airport before continuing the journey to the final destination.

You may also like to find out the partnership between your company and various airlines' services. Sometimes, this allows you to provide your customers with exclusive access to special fares, which can be an added value especially to travellers taking long haul flights. Your recommendation should take into account your customer's time, budget and preferences. See what other else Chloe has to say about geographic knowledge:

Raymond



Are **air-routes and international airports** the only geographic knowledge I should acquire? I hope I can absorb all the information!

It is not the only information but it will be a good start! There are some things you should take note of. **Different places might share similar names.** For example, Washington in US is different from Washington DC, the capital.

Chloe



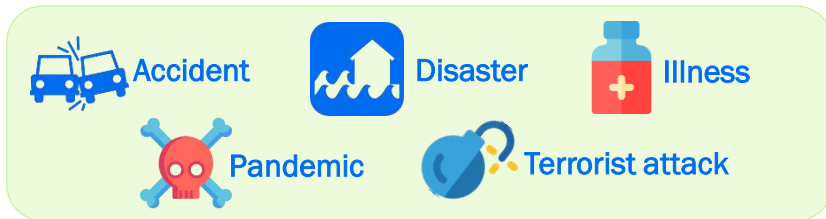
**Some cities might have more than one international airport.**

Recommend the right one, based on the customer's itinerary. There may also be **time difference** between countries. For example, Seoul is 1 hour ahead of Singapore while London is 8 hours behind. Even within the same country, there are **different time zones**. In Australia, Perth and Melbourne are in different time zones. Some countries also practice **daylight savings**. You should be aware of these and factor them into the itinerary to advise your customers.

### 3.4 What are some basic tips for crisis management?

We cannot assume the world will remain safe without natural disasters and political unrest. There will always be unforeseen events which are major concerns to both travellers and travel agents. Being the key contact for your customers, you are responsible to provide expert advice and care for their needs and safety through good and bad times.

The types of crises that your customers may encounter can be varied:



While crises can sometimes be inevitable, it is how well or how badly the crisis is managed that can make or break the reputation of a tourism business, the industry or even an entire tourism destination.

Regardless of the level or severity of a crisis, the first action is always to contact the Crisis Manager and keep the situation under control. If your company does not have a Crisis Manager, then inform your direct supervisor immediately.

Crisis management is to:

- Provide care for guests and employees
- Conduct due diligence by ensuring thorough investigation and quality checks are in place for customers' protection
- Protect company's brand and reputation to maintain a positive public image

## A Deadly Night of Terror

On 13 November 2015, a terror attack occurred in Paris - the capital of the world's leading tourist nation. It resulted in a scene of coordinated mass murders at the Bataclan Theatre. A night of supposedly fun concert ended with excruciating pain and broken hearts after gunmen burst into the music hall and fired indiscriminately at the crowd, leaving hundreds of dead bodies and injured victims behind.

Terror remains a very real threat all over the world, and travel agents can play a big role for their customers when dealing with such crises. On-ground, they could help by arranging transport for those who need it, be it to hospitals or a flight out of the country. They can also help convey the latest updates from embassies and hospitals so that worried family members may be informed of critical news as soon as possible.

In challenging times when hundreds of travellers are troubled with fear and lost hopes, travel agents are trained to react fast to minimise pain for travellers who have experienced such a traumatic event.

Terrorism continues to generate anxiety amongst travellers and travel agents. Travellers who want to and are accustomed to travel will continue to do so, although they may be more cautious in their choice of destinations and activities. As travel agents, it is important that you are well-informed of possible dangers and to advise your customers accordingly.





When faced with the aftermath of a devastating crisis, travel agents are the main touchpoints, helping to deal with various airlines and hotels while assuring customers that they are in good hands. The situation gets even more complicated when various stakeholders are put under tremendous stress and pressure. In view of this, you might want to follow some of these guidelines to keep the situation under control.



**Find accurate information about the crisis.** If need be, validate the information from different sources. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, the Ministry of Health (in cases of pandemics) and the Singapore Tourism Board can be useful sources of information.



**Discuss with your superior about possible solutions and communication messages.** It is your responsibility to be clear, truthful and compassionate to those who are affected. At the same time, it is imperative to act quickly to provide aid to the affected, after confirmation with your management on what should be done.



**Protect the brand of your company.** Find out and be familiar with what your company has decided to put out to the public and media, so that you can also help support its messaging in all your communication with customers and loved ones.



*It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you will do things differently.*

Warren Buffett



**TAKE****5**

# Happy Quizzing

**1**

What are the five steps in mastering the art of selling?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2**

Give 10 examples of items that should be on your planning checklist.

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3**

What kinds of geographic knowledge are important?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4**

What are the three guidelines for crisis management?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

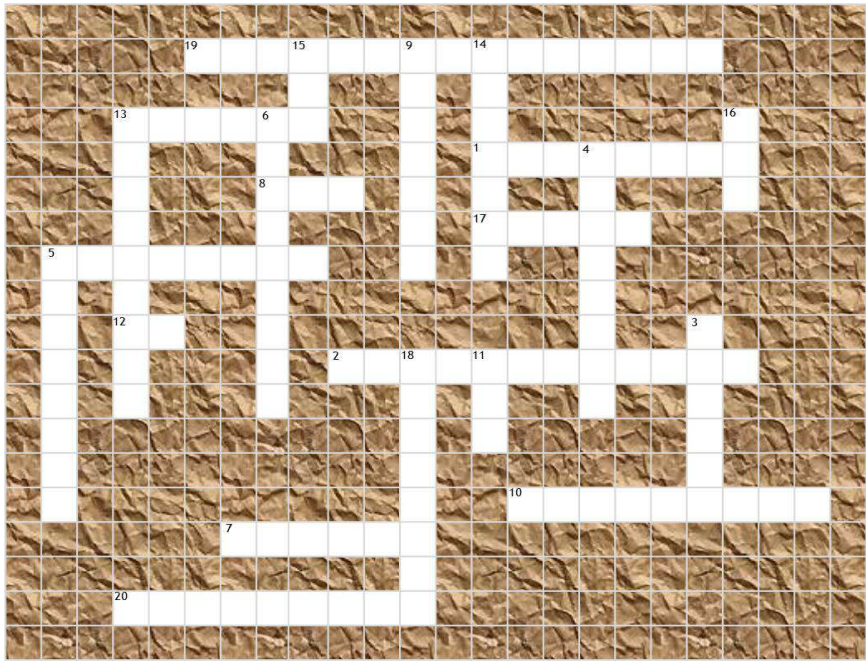
**5**

What other skills or knowledge can you think of that would be useful as you begin your career as a travel agent?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Time for a Challenge!

A good travel agent should be able to solve this within 30 minutes.  
Challenge yourself, my friends!



**ACROSS**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ travel agents assist travellers with all their requirements for travelling out of Singapore
- 2. A form of tourism in which people focus on experiencing a country, city or particular place by connecting to its history, people and culture
- 5. One of the most famous inbound visitors, Sir Thomas \_\_\_\_\_ Raffles
- 7. Primary airport for Singapore
- 8. Acronym for statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Singapore, tasked to promote the country's tourism industry
- 10. Travel agents are the \_\_\_\_\_ of travel experience
- 12. Acronym for one-way tickets
- 13. An event or incident that leads to an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, a group, a community, or the whole society
- 17. Acronym for an industry-led organisation which represents the Singapore travel agent community
- 19. An act of tailoring or customising a service or product to meet the needs of the customers
- 20. A type of knowledge that is essential for all travel agents

**DOWN**

- 3. A specialised or technical language used by a profession or industry
- 4. Your personal \_\_\_\_\_ is the impression your customers have of you, and how they will remember you
- 5. Customers look to travel agents to provide safety and \_\_\_\_\_ in times of crisis
- 6. A form of protection that is intended to cover medical expenses, trip cancellation, lost luggage, flight accident and other losses incurred while traveling
- 9. An important type of travel supplier for air transport which travel agents often make bookings with
- 11. Acronym for return tickets
- 13. One of the most historical precincts in Singapore
- 14. \_\_\_\_\_ travel agents promote Singapore to foreign visitors
- 15. An international code signal of extreme distress
- 16. An acronym for a reservation tool travel agents use when making bookings for air, hotel, car or other travel services
- 18. Good customer service is the topmost \_\_\_\_\_ for travel agents

ACROSS : 1. Outbound; 2. Experiential; 3. Jargon; 4. Branding; 5. Security; 6. Insurance; 7. Chang; 8. STB; 9. Airline; 10. Designers; 11. RTN; 12. OW; 13. Crisis; 14. Chinatown; 15. SOT; 16. GDS; 17. NATAS; 18. Priority  
DOWN : 3. Jargon; 4. Branding; 5. Security; 6. Insurance; 7. Chang; 8. STB; 9. Airline; 10. Designers; 11. RTN; 12. OW; 13. Crisis; 14. Chinatown; 15. SOT; 16. GDS; 17. NATAS; 18. Priority

# READY. GET SET. GO.

Your flight has touched down and you are all ready to get going. Peering through the window, you can already see the amazing destination that awaits you.

We hope this "traveller's kit" has been useful in getting you ready, and will make your journey ahead less bumpy. We are certain you will be able to bravely face any turbulence and turn it into a learning opportunity.

**An exciting future lies ahead.  
Now step out.  
Make your mark.**



## Resources

**Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ)** is a national credential system that trains, develops, assesses and certifies skills and competencies for the workforce. To continually upgrade your skills, consider taking courses specific to tour and travel services. Find out more about these WSQ-certified courses here: <http://www.ssg.gov.sg/wsq/industry-and-occupational-skills/tour-and-travel-services.html>

For other training support, find out more about **training programs and assistance** available here: <http://www.ssg-wsg.gov.sg/individuals.html>

The **SkillsFuture Study Award**, a \$5,000 cash award to support skills deepening, is available for travel agents. More information on the application windows and applicable courses may be found here: <http://www.skillsfuture.sg/studyawards/travel-agent>

The **Singapore Tourism Board (STB)** champions the development of Singapore's tourism sector and undertakes the marketing and promotion of Singapore as a tourism destination. STB provides informational resources and industry assistance for travel agents. Find out more at: <https://www.stb.gov.sg/industries/travel-agents>

The **National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS)** aims to strengthen and upgrade the professionalism and capabilities of the travel industry for sustainable growth and profitability. More information on NATAS and its activities may be found here: <http://www.natas.travel>

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# Credits

*Special thanks from STB and NATAS to all participating travel agents and organisations for their valuable input which has helped shape this project.*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Subject Matter Experts<br/>&amp;<br/>Participating Travel Agents</b> | Tourism Management Institute of Singapore |
|   | Institute of Technical Education          |
|   | Asia Travel Group                         |
|   | Chan Brothers Travel                      |
|   | Commonwealth Travel Service Corporation   |
|   | Concepts Golf Management                  |
|   | EU Holidays                               |
|   | Flight Centre Travel Group                |
|   | Global Travel                             |
|   | Insight Vacations                         |
|   | Luxury Tours & Travel                     |
|   | MISA Travel                               |
|   | Pegasus Travel Management                 |
|   | Sea Wheel Travel                          |
|   | Siam Express                              |
|   | Sindar Travel                             |
|   | The Travel Corporation                    |
|   | WTS Travel and Tours                      |

# Answers for Quizzes

## Module 1 Quiz

1. A travel agent acts as an intermediary between tourism product suppliers and customers. They also curate and design unique experiences to bring out the best of travel destinations
2. Access, Care, Time
3. Outbound travel agents, inbound travel agents, corporate travel agent, and online travel agents
4. Designers of travel experiences are experts that consumers turn to in the curation of their travel. It comprises a workforce that is professional, creative and always up-to-date, and is a high-value industry contributing to the economy and creating good jobs.
5. Career path may be determined based on interests, passion, and skills acquired.

## Module 2 Quiz

1. Experiential travel and personalisation
2. By being Current, Approachable, Reachable and Effective (CARE)
3. Trip cancellation, baggage/personal effects coverage, major medical expenses, accident death/flight accident, travel agent insolvency
4. Sales and reservations, Product, Marketing and Communications, Finance, Management
5. Codes for cities, airports and airlines

## Module 3 Quiz

1. Build a personal brand, understand customer needs and preferences, sell based on value for money, not on lowest price, matching travel options with the right fit, taking the lead
2. Refer to page 44 and list any 10 items from the list.
3. Air routes, location of international airports, names and location of cities, and time differences between locations.
4. Find accurate information about the crisis, discuss with your superior about possible solutions and communication messages, and protect the brand of your company.
5. Find out more about the skills and knowledge a travel agent would need at <http://www.ssg.gov.sg/wsqs/industry-and-occupational-skills/tour-and-travel-services.html>



