

IS TRAVEL NURSING RIGHT FOR YOU?



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Your guide to selecting a travel company



The right travel company—and recruiter—means everything when going on your first assignment. Learn how to choose wisely.

To make your first travel assignment a success, you'll need to select a travel company very carefully. With so many companies to choose from, you'll want to separate the ones that meet your needs from those that don't. By doing research, asking plenty of questions, and finding a recruiter you have confidence in, you'll be able to select the company that's right for you.

Be thorough when doing your research

Start your search in your own backyard. Ask travelers in your hospital why they chose their current travel company and how long they've used them. Find out if they've used other companies and why they switched.

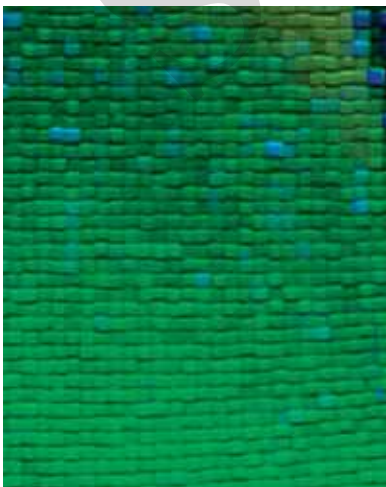
Ask about good and bad experiences. Although their answers will be subjective, similar feedback from several nurses may give you insight into how you'll be treated.

Failing to ask such questions can spell trouble, says Tina Mees, RN, CNOR, a traveler who works with NovaPro Staffing. "If you enter into a contract 'green,' you might have issues you'll regret."

Next, look for company advertisements in nursing journals and supplements. Call companies that you're interested in or scan their Web sites for information. Select an Internet search engine and type in "travel nursing."

If you call a company for information, pay attention to how they speak to you during the phone call. A representative who's courteous, helpful, and knowledgeable, for example, is a good indicator of how you'll be treated if you work for the agency.

"The first call indicates the level of professionalism and service that the company offers," says Ryan Hoffert, a recruiter with FASTAFF in Denver. "Even if you only reach a receptionist, you'll get a sense of how



(Photocopy and fax/mail this form to the agency of your choice. Or, use it to familiarize yourself with questions travel agencies may ask you.)

Travel nurse employment application

Your current information:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

Fax number _____

E-mail address _____

Professional license: RN LPN

Other: _____

State of licensure _____

Specialty _____

Years of nursing experience _____

Company being applied to:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

Fax number _____

Are you currently on a travel assignment?

Yes No

Where would you prefer to work?

Hospital Nursing home Clinic

Rehab School Other: _____

important you'll be to the company. It's like dealing with the customer service department of any company. If you have a bad experience, you'll be turned off."

How companies treat travelers is crucial in the selection process, according to Adrienne Hollingsworth, who is the head of customer care for Cross Country TravCorps. "Statistics show that, above all else, travelers usually choose a company based on the quality of its service," she says.

Determine what it is that you want

As you contemplate travel companies, think about what's most important to you in an assignment. Is your primary concern benefits or salary? Do you want to work in a particular field or find an assignment in your dream city? Do you want to make your way across the country or try a city where you might settle down? "Make a list of what is important to you, and shop around," suggests Mees. "You have a lot of companies and options to choose from."

Rank your needs in order of importance. For example, your priorities might be working in an oncology unit in southern California, followed by salary, and then benefits. Or a high salary might top your list, followed by benefits, and then location.

Prioritizing your needs will help you prepare a list of questions for prospective travel companies. You can adapt the following checklist, which is based on recommendations from recruiters and travelers, to meet your needs.

How long have you worked in travel nursing? Ask about the experience of the company's recruiters and how many years they have

worked with the company.

How large is your company? Find out how many travelers they employ and how many hospitals have signed contracts with them. Ask, too, if they have exclusive contracts with any hospitals.

What is the pay scale? Be clear about the company's hourly rate of pay. "Make sure the rate you are quoted is truly the base rate and not an average that includes possible overtime pay," says Hoffert.

How many hours will I work? Hours vary by assignment, but find out how many hours will be stipulated in your contract. Ask if company contracts guarantee that you'll be paid for a certain number of hours, even if low census prevents you from working some shifts.

What benefits do you offer? Find out if the company offers medical, dental, vision, and life insurance. If they have a retirement plan, ask about the funds they're enrolled in and if they make matching contributions. Find out when you're eligible to receive benefits as well as the starting date of your health coverage. To make it easier to compare companies, Mees recommends asking each company for a list of what they offer, either in writing or via e-mail.

What types of assignments are available? Ask for a list of openings by specialty, city, or both. Find out if the company offers the typical 13-week assignment or if shorter stints are available. A "four-week assignment might be more appealing to a first-time traveler who's uncertain about traveling," says Hoffert.

What are my housing options? Inquire about whether the company offers free private or shared housing. Ask if they pay a monthly housing allowance if you find your own place to live. Find out if bring-

ing a spouse, child, or pet complicates your living arrangements.

What support systems do you have? Ask the company about their policies if you have a question or problem with your hospital, housing, benefits, or paycheck.

Do you offer bonuses? Some companies offer incentives for signing up, staying on board for a defined length of time, or referring other nurses.

What are the fine print issues? Ask about unusual situations that may not be described in the company literature, advises Hollingsworth. For example, find out if there are penalties "if you verbally commit to an assignment and then can't go for personal or health reasons," she says.

As you gather information, compare companies. Consider which ones more closely meet your needs in terms of salary, benefits, and positions.

Your recruiter makes all the difference

For new travelers, the relationship that they have with their recruiter is crucial to a successful assignment. Travelers need someone "they can trust and call with any questions or concerns so that their experience is rewarding," says Hoffert.

Marianne Toppen, RN, a neonatal ICU nurse traveler who works with Cross Country TravCorps, believes the recruiter is the key.

"How experienced is your recruiter?" she asks. "If he is new to the job or recently worked in something completely unrelated, you may want to request someone else!"

Whether you have been assigned a recruiter or you've requested one, travelers and recruiters agree that this person should possess certain

traits. Here's what to look for:

Personality. It may seem obvious, but you'll need an excellent relationship with your recruiter. If she understands your personality and needs, you'll have a better chance of getting assignments that you really want.

"Make sure you have a good rapport with your recruiter so you can talk to her freely and won't be caught by any surprises," Mees advises, adding that she's had the same recruiter for 18 months. If you find that you don't "click" with your recruiter, you should call your travel company and ask that you be reassigned.

Empathy. A recruiter should be a good listener, says Hoffert, and "understand the goals of each nurse."

Accessibility. It should be easy to reach your recruiter by phone. "Is someone available 24 hours a day for support?" Toppen asks. "What if you're in a car accident and can't complete your assignment?"

Knowledgeability. Understanding the industry and knowing the hospitals where the company has contracts helps nurses get the most out of traveling.

Resourcefulness. Because recruiters serve as a traveler's main liaison and support person, they need to serve as the traveler's advocate when a problem arises at the hospital.

In the end, you'll want to make sure that the recruiter—and the company—is a good fit. For Linda Perry, RN, a critical care nurse and traveler, that means having "everything in writing. I understand exactly what is expected of me and what benefits I will receive," she explains. "I know what to expect as soon as I walk into the hospital. There are no surprises." **CS**