



From Side Hustle to Full-Time: Building a Profitable Independent Travel Business in Canada

Description

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- [Home](#)
- [Why us](#)
- [Our Offerings](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Get Started](#)



From Side Hustle to Full-Time:

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- [Home](#)
- Blog

So you’ve been booking trips on the side for a while now. Maybe it started with planning vacations for friends and family, then a few referrals came your way, and suddenly you’re thinking *“could this actually become my full-time income?”*

The short answer? Absolutely. But like any business, the difference between staying stuck at a “side hustle” and actually scaling to full-time comes down to having the right foundation, the right support, and the right timing. And right now, in 2026, the timing for independent travel agents in Canada has never been better.

Why Now Is the Best Time to Go Full-Time

Let’s start with the good news. The Canadian travel industry is thriving and travellers are actively seeking out professional guidance more than ever before. Why? Because travel has gotten complicated.

Canadians are navigating shifting destination trends (with more people pivoting away from U.S. travel toward Europe, Asia, and domestic destinations), increasingly complex itineraries, and a flood of online options that are overwhelming rather than helpful. People don’t just want someone to book a flight. They want someone who *knows* who can cut through the noise, personalize the experience, and make it stress-free.

That’s you.

The Honest Challenges of Going Solo

Going fully independent â?? building everything from scratch on your own â?? is a tough road. Youâ??re not just a travel agent anymore; youâ??re suddenly also your own IT department, marketing team, accountant, and customer service rep. You need supplier relationships, booking technology, errors and omissions insurance, and a way to actually get paid commissions without the buying power of a larger organization behind you.

Many agents who try to do it all alone find themselves spending more time on the *business of running a business* than on actually selling travel. And thatâ??s the fastest way to burn out before you even get off the ground.

This is exactly why most successful independent agents in Canada donâ??t actually go it fully alone â?? they partner with a host agency.



What a Host Agency Actually Does for You

Think of a host agency as the backbone of your business. Instead of spending years building supplier relationships from scratch, you plug into an established network on day one. Instead of negotiating your own commission tiers, you benefit from the collective booking volume of an entire agency group.

Here's what a good host agency relationship looks like in practice:

Higher commissions. Solo agents typically earn standard industry rates. Agents working under a host agency's umbrella benefit from the host's volume-based commission tiers with major suppliers which can make a significant difference to your bottom line, especially in your first couple of years.

Technology and tools. Booking platforms, GDS access, CRM systems – these are expensive and complex to set up independently. A host agency provides them, so you can work from anywhere, anytime, without the headaches.

Training and education. The travel industry changes fast. Supplier updates, new destinations, booking procedures, marketing strategies – ongoing education keeps you sharp and credible with your clients.

Support when things go wrong. Flights get cancelled. Clients miss connections. Having a support team in your corner – people who've seen it all before and can help you navigate it – is invaluable.

A community. This one's underrated. Being a home-based agent can be isolating. Working with a host agency connects you to a community of fellow professionals who share knowledge, refer clients, and genuinely root for each other.

How Travel Masters Fits Into Your Journey

Here in Western Canada, [Travel Masters](#) has been doing exactly this for over 25 years.

Travel Masters has grown into one of Ensemble Travel Group's top 10 travel agencies in Canada with a thriving community of home-based and independent agents.

For independent agents specifically, Travel Masters offers:

- **High commissions** – giving agents access to top-tier rates from preferred suppliers
- **Advanced technology** that lets you work seamlessly from home, a café, or anywhere else that suits your lifestyle
- **Bi-weekly support calls** so you're never left figuring things out alone
- **Training through Ensemble University** and access to supplier platforms
- **No long-term contracts**, so you're not locked in

And perhaps most importantly: a genuine, hands-on support team based right here in Vancouver. This isn't a faceless corporate structure. It's a tight-knit group of people who actually want to see you succeed.

What the Transition Actually Looks Like

If you're currently booking travel on the side and want to take it full-time, here's a realistic roadmap:

Step 1: Get honest about your numbers. What are you currently earning from travel? What would you need to replace your full-time income? What's your current client base, and how many bookings are you doing per month?

Step 2: Fill the gaps in your knowledge. If you haven't done formal training, now's the time. Whether it's a destination certification, a supplier course, or a program through your host agency, credentials build confidence — yours and your clients'.

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Step 3: Choose your niche. The agents who thrive aren't trying to book everything for everyone. They're the cruise specialist, the luxury honeymoon expert, the family adventure planner. Niche down, and you'll attract better clients and command better rates.

Step 4: Get the right support structure in place. This is where partnering with a host agency comes in. Before you leave your day job, make sure you have the tools, the commission structure, and the support network you need to actually sustain the business.

Step 5: Treat it like a business from day one. Set your hours. Build your client follow-up process. Show up consistently on social media. Track your revenue. The agents who make it full-time are the ones who never let the "side hustle" mentality carry over.

The bottom line

Building a profitable independent travel business in Canada is genuinely achievable â?? and 2026 might be the best year yet to make the leap. Canadian travellers are booking more, seeking expert guidance more, and are willing to pay for the value a great travel advisor brings.

The path from side hustle to full-time isnâ??t about grinding harder on your own. Itâ??s about building smarter â?? with the right partnerships, the right tools, and the right community around you.

If youâ??re based in Western Canada and thinking about what your next move looks like, Travel Masters is worth a serious conversation. With over 25 years of experience, a genuinely supportive team, and a track record of helping agents at every stage grow their business, itâ??s the kind of partner that can turn your travel passion into a real, sustainable career.

Curious? Book a discovery call with the Travel Masters team and find out whatâ??s possible.

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- [Home](#)
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