

Can You Get Paid To Travel?

It may sound ridiculous, but several companies say that you can turn your love of travel into cold hard cash—and you can globe trot for free while you do so.

Lillian Hughes leads a double life: a senior clerk for the New Jersey department of unemployment by day, globetrotter by night. Tucked away in her home office, this grandmother of four and her husband of 42 years are finding a whole new life as part-time travel agents.

Lillian and husband Ephraim have always loved to travel, so she decided to try to make it into a part-time business for herself. "I would love to tell other women about this," she says. "I think it's an excellent thing, especially for Black women. You can become an independent business woman—for yourself. I think this is definitely possible to do full-time, and that's what I am planning on doing in a few years when I retire."

After doing some homework, Mrs. Hughes decided to try working with one company in particular, Global Travel International (GTI). They offered a training program for new agents, she wouldn't have to do ticketing and there was no legal liability if anything went wrong with the trip. The start-up kit cost \$495 and some agents for the company reported making up to \$1,600 per month booking trips through the company.

The Hughes have been working at it for about six years by now, and they book five to six trips a year—often for church groups or for members of their extended family. "Global will give us a lot of the information. Then, if we book a large enough group, we will get a percentage off on our own trip. Sometimes we will even travel free!" The couple also gets hefty discounts on cruises and space-available upgrades from airlines and hotels.

"I didn't find it difficult to learn," Lillian Hughes confides. "And if you love it, it's not really work."



LILLIAN & EPHRAIM HUGHES

Another agent, Beverly Davies of Florida, switched from street-side to beachfront accommodations during a recent trip to Trinidad and Tobago, while lowering her room rate substantially to \$35 per night. On a tour through the Canadian Rocky Mountains, Beverly and her husband paid for a double room and got an enormous three-room Victorian suite. The accommodations were so big that they invited their entire tour bus into their suite to watch fireworks.

"I'm energized by people who want to go places," Davies says. "I've learned so much about the countries I've visited and the places my clients have gone."

Adriane Brown and Deborah Smith, best friends since they were kids, decided that they would partner up and start their own travel business. The New Yorkers have been in business part-time for about a year. GTI provided them with a Web site, which they named Corinthiantravel@globaltravel.com, and they find they are largely booking trips for church groups. "Our motto is 'Travel you can have faith in,'" Deborah laughs.

They recently booked a cruise for 120 people traveling through the Caribbean. "We wanted to try someplace different, so we picked a trip that includes New Orleans," Adriane explains. The duo attended a free travel agents' trip to New Orleans before the cruise, given so they could familiarize themselves with the area.

"We have been working at this part-time nights and weekends," says Deborah, who, like Adriane, has no intention of quitting her full-time job. "This is a lot of work, but we're really enjoying it. It's a chance to take charge and be in control and earn money while you're doing it."

Michael Gross, president of GTI, formed the company with his college roommate and now has 35,000 independent travel agents. Although he earns over \$100 million in travel sales every year, he is quick to point out that this is not a get-rich-quick plan. "We like to think of ourselves as the Avon Lady of travel—only instead of selling lipstick, we're selling travel, which is a lot more fun," CEO Gross tells BE. "People can build a small business in their spare time or when they are retired and there are discounts and perks that are really great." ■



ADRIANE BROWN & DEBORAH SMITH

For more information on Global Travel International, call 1-800-715-4440 or www.globaltravel.com — Contact the writer at lisaarcella@aol.com