



# Working vacations: Jobs in tourism and leisure



**R**oyce Rosenhauch knows how to have fun. As a resort activities director, it's his job to keep guests entertained. "On a given day, I might be setting up anything from bingo night to s'more-making to paddle boats."

Vacation jobs, like Rosenhauch's, often mix work and play. And for some, the job is their ticket to career happiness.

Keep reading to learn more. The article's first section describes four selected vacation jobs. The second section helps you decide if a vacation career is a good fit for you. A third section explains how to find and get these jobs. Sources of information are at the end.

## Vacation jobs

Vacation-related jobs are as varied as types of vacations themselves. Many vacation jobs are associated with travel, lodging, food, entertainment, or leisure.

Flight attendants, bus drivers, and other transportation workers help people get to their destinations. Travel agents arrange vacations. Bellhops, front desk personnel, housekeeping staff, and others provide accommodations in resorts, hotels, and other lodging places. Landscaping and groundskeeping workers create and maintain idyllic outdoor settings. And cooks, servers, and bartenders, are among the food service workers providing vacationers with food and drink.

Together, these occupations provide many opportunities—and many have few requirements for workers who are new to the jobs.

In certain settings, almost any occupation can be a vacation job. For example, electricians are needed aboard cruise ships to ensure that the boat's electrical system works. Retail workers sell souvenirs to tourists. And accountants help resorts balance their books.

However, some occupations focus primarily on vacations. This section takes a closer look at four jobs specific to entertainment and leisure: cruise ship musician, destination marketing manager, resort activities director, and river rafting guide. Workers in each of these occupations help vacationers enjoy their

leisure time. And see the box on page 5 for a brief description of work in the relatively new, but increasingly common, field of sustainable tourism.

### Cruise ship musician

People who are on vacation like to be entertained. That's why cruise ships offer musical entertainment ranging from Broadway productions to top-40 bands. And many types of musicians provide this entertainment.

Most cruise ships have an orchestra or show band, as well as a variety of other group performers or soloists, such as piano bar entertainers and lounge musicians. Ships typically have several lounges, each featuring a different type of music. One lounge may feature a classical string quartet; another may offer the syncopated sounds of a jazz trio.

"There are so many different music positions on board ships," says Dave Hahn, a keyboardist who has had several cruise ship jobs. His first job was in the show band, where he performed at welcome receptions and as the backup for all main stage performances.

In his position, Hahn would work about 10 to 20 hours a week, mostly in the evenings. "We would do about four or five sets a night, six nights a week," he says. Many of the musical offerings aboard cruise ships are at night, but when the ship is at sea, musicians sometimes play during the day. Musicians also attend rehearsals, although they should be ready to play with little preparation.

Cruise ship musicians often have other responsibilities besides practicing and performing. "When you're not playing your instrument, you're like a crew member," says Hahn. This means that musicians are required to take part in the regular safety drills required of crew members, such as lifeboat drills. It can also mean living in crew quarters, often with a roommate.

Musician jobs vary considerably. In his second job on a ship, Hahn was hired as a guest performer. "I was kind of like a performing passenger," says Hahn. He performed about 5 hours a week, stayed in a passenger cabin, and didn't participate in safety drills.

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Cruise line musicians usually work under a contract, which stipulates the duration of the job, pay, and other benefits. Most contracts last between 3 and 6 months. Many musicians are on cruise lines for a limited time. “People tend to work between 6 months and 3 years,” says Hahn, “although there are a few lifers.”

The fact that musicians must live aboard the ship is one reason why careers are short. “You don’t ever leave work. You’re always there,” says Hahn. Cruise ships also have rigid rules and regulations. That’s something musicians don’t encounter in other jobs, and some feel inhibited by the lack of freedom. “Cruise ship musicians often have problems with the structure,” says Hahn. And although constant travel can be great in the short term, many prefer more stability in the long term.

But these musicians also have a lot of free time, especially when the ship is in port. During this time, they are free to leave the ship and enjoy the locale. “The ships follow beautiful places and beautiful weather,” says Hahn. “Every day we’d go to some gorgeous place.”

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*Cruise ship musicians  
play a variety of  
musical styles.*

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**Employment and wages.** In May 2009, there were 47,260 musicians and singers employed in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). A small percentage of these jobs were held by cruise line musicians; because many of these workers are considered to be self-employed contractors, however, their employment is not included in the data.

BLS data show that the median hourly wage of all musicians and singers was about \$22 in May 2009. (BLS does not publish annual wage data for these workers because most of them are paid an hourly rate that might not span a full year of employment.) But cruise line musician wages vary significantly. Sources suggest that wages range between \$450 and \$2,000 or more a week; health insurance coverage may also be included. Cruise line jobs have other benefits as well, such as free travel, room, and board.

**Qualifications.** Musical ability is the primary requirement for getting a job aboard a cruise ship. To secure a position, musicians must first audition. Being able to play a variety of musical styles and repertoires can improve the chances of getting a job. Employers also take into account a musician’s previous performance history and related education or training.

Orchestra or show band musicians must be able to sight read music. Skilled players of the keyboard, piano, saxophone, guitar, electric bass, drum, trumpet, and trombone are in greatest demand. Big band or jazz band experience also is required for some orchestra positions. In addition, ability to improvise is beneficial.

Some cruise line musicians get their jobs directly from the cruise line, and others go through a talent agency. Agencies facilitate the hiring process, but they also take a percentage of the musicians’ pay.

### **Destination marketing manager**

In planning a vacation, or in planning what to do while on vacation, you’ve probably encountered the work of destination marketing managers. These workers promote vacation

## Vacation alternatives: Sustainable tourism

Vacation careers are directly linked to the tourism industry. A popular segment of that industry is sustainable tourism, which promotes economic development, cultural preservation, and environmentally friendly tourism in underdeveloped countries.

Cat Wood recently spent 2 years in the Dominican Republic involved in sustainable tourism. She awarded U.S. Government grant money to local community-based organizations for ecotourism projects. “Tourism is the Dominican Republic’s number one export,” says Wood. “But most of the tourism is in all-inclusive resort towns.”

Part of Wood’s mission was to bring visitors to other regions of the country to diversify the economic effects of tourism while limiting environmental impact. For example, Wood helped to build cabins for visitors in a remote area near the Cordillera Central mountain range; she also oversaw installation of safety equipment at a series of waterfalls down which vacationers jump or slide.

Wood spent some of her time at a desk, but her work also presented her with



opportunities to enjoy her surroundings. “I oversaw the progress on projects,” she says, “sometimes taking hikes on new trails or testing new ecotourism activities.”

International development jobs abroad, such as the one Wood had, usually last only as long as it takes for the grant projects to be completed. But even in the short term, these jobs can be a great way to gain leadership and other practical experience.

“The best part was working with the rural communities. Dominicans are known for being hospitable,” says Wood. “And once you get out into the countryside, the scenery is breathtaking.”

spots or attractions to tourists and other visitors. They work for a variety of employers, including visitors’ and convention bureaus, State tourism agencies, and marketing firms. And they have a variety of job titles, including tourism marketing managers and destination marketing coordinators.

Destination marketing managers draw people to a destination in several ways. They start by identifying possible market groups for their destination, which may include everyone from local families to international travelers. They then develop a plan to reach those groups within a specific budget, targeting them through promotional materials—such as newspaper ads, visitors’ guides, and television commercials—and they often oversee the creation of these materials.

Lilly Kelly works as a destination marketing manager for the Anchorage, Alaska,

visitors’ bureau. “We advertise at the local, national, and international levels to draw people to Alaska,” she says. Many visitors’ bureaus, including the Anchorage one, publish official guides for tourists. These guides usually include information about local restaurants and entertainment, as well as audience-specific resources, such as guides for budget-conscious travelers.

To create these materials, destination marketing managers work with advertising agencies, photographers, graphic designers, and others. Destination marketing managers also work with the local businesses that are members of the visitors’ bureau and are featured in its publications.

The job tasks of a destination marketing manager vary by the size of the visitors’ bureau and by individual position. Teresa Ide works for the Spokane, Washington, visitors’



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*Excellent research and communication skills are important for destination marketing managers.*

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bureau. Her job involves managing social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. “I post to the Visit Spokane fan page on Facebook once or twice a day, I tweet about five times a day, and I blog for our Web page,” she says in describing some of her activities.

Some of Ide’s messages promote Spokane itself; others are about some of the 600 hotels, bars, and other businesses that are members of the visitors’ bureau. Still others are conversational. “In a post, I might ask questions like, ‘What are you doing tonight in Spokane?’” she says. Fans then reply, listing their activities, and these interactions serve as indirect advertising for the locations and attractions the marketing manager represents.

E-newsletters are another way that destination marketing managers promote their locales. “Whenever we go to trade shows or have visitors come into our visitors’ information center, we have people fill out a form to get on our mailing list,” says Ide. People sign up to receive emails on different topics, such as food or art, depending on their interest. An e-newsletter on the outdoors, for example, might feature short stories about picking

apples at local orchards or cross-country skiing. “It’s challenging always coming up with new ideas,” says Ide, “but it’s fun.”

Communication is a big part of destination marketing managers’ job—and not just talking to others, which they do a lot. “Between the print publications, our Web site, and email, I do a lot of writing,” says Kelly.

Sometimes, destination marketing managers participate in the vacation activities that they write about. “Last weekend I went to a play in Spokane, and I wrote about that in our blog,” says Ide. She is occasionally invited to events, but mostly she uses personal time to visit area attractions.

The work of destination marketing managers is similar to that of other marketing managers; however, there are nuances unique to the travel and tourism industry that set it apart. One difference stems from the products being marketed: namely, a vacation destination and its numerous options for fun and leisure. “I get to write about different, exciting things,” says Ide. “I’m always researching what’s current and the latest fad.”

**Employment and wages.** Cities and towns of all sizes have visitors' bureaus, and many of them employ destination marketing managers. In May 2009, there were 169,330 marketing managers, according to BLS. Some of these workers market tourist destinations.

Wage data from BLS show that marketing managers had a median annual wage of \$110,030, or a median hourly wage of about \$53, in May 2009, although anecdotal sources suggest that destination marketing managers may earn less than this amount.

**Qualifications.** Requirements for destination marketing managers vary, but most workers have at least a bachelor's degree. Degrees are usually in marketing, business administration, advertising, or a related subject. An emphasis in travel industry management or tourism studies, or coursework in tourism marketing, is helpful.

Hands-on experience in the tourism, hospitality, or convention industry is also important for these workers. Ide was an intern at an advertising firm that works with the Spokane visitors' bureau, for example; Kelly worked as a tour guide for the Alaska Railroad.

And destination marketing managers must be creative and work well with others, as they often complete projects as part of a team.

Some of what it takes to be successful in the field isn't related to education, experience, or skills, however. Most people in the occupation are fond of both the places they promote and the concept of these places as a destination spot. "I feel like I got the job because I love the location," says Ide. "I've lived in Spokane my whole life, so I really know the area. And I love to travel, so I know what people want to know when they travel."

## Resort activities director

Vacation resorts exist nationwide, and most offer a wide range of activities for their guests to enjoy. A ski resort, for example, might offer after-ski activities such as ice skating or wine tastings. A beach resort might organize cookouts, water sports, or luaus.

The person in charge of these offerings is the resort activities director. Activities

directors either lead activities themselves or oversee the work of others who run them.

Royce Rosenhauch is an activities director at a ranch resort in Canton, Texas. There are four facets to his work. "I do activity, event, Web, and brochure development," he says. "The last two are very important because otherwise, no one knows about the first two."

Activities directors might put together a calendar of events and schedule of activities, which are usually posted on the resort's Web site. They also help to create brochures for distribution. Other promotional materials, such as newspaper or magazine advertisements, may also be created under the activities director's supervision.

When planning events, activities directors consider the interests of their clients. Some activities directors develop programs specifically for children, for example; this is true of Rosenhauch, who welcomes many guests to the resort for family reunions.

Activities directors usually offer a variety of recreational options—including some that involve less strenuous fun. "Almost anything you'd have in a physical education class can be an activity," says Rosenhauch, "but I'm working on a cooking show because some of our guests don't want to do something physical." Music and skits are among the other activities he helps to organize; sometimes, he performs in the skits himself.

Rosenhauch is especially involved in developing new ideas for activities because his resort is fairly new. Other activities directors oversee well-established or recurring programs and events. Often, these events play a larger, promotional role for the resort. Well-attended events can serve as an attraction themselves, bringing in more people and stimulating new business. Last summer, for example, Rosenhauch organized a fishing tournament, which helped draw more people to the resort.

**Employment and wages.** Many resorts hire activities directors. Other vacation-related jobs exist on cruise ships, where the person in charge of coordinating activities is often referred to as the cruise director. BLS does

not collect data specifically for resort activities directors. Their duties, however, closely match those of workers in the broader occupation of recreation worker. In May 2009, there were 286,230 recreation workers in the United States, and 8,760 workers were employed in the accommodation industry.

According to BLS, in May 2009 the median wage for recreation workers in the accommodation industry was \$22,280 a year or about \$11 an hour—somewhat less than the corresponding wage for all types of recreation workers. Activities directors, however, reportedly earn more than this amount.

**Qualifications.** Organizational ability, leadership, and communication skills are important qualifications for activities directors. And being able to assume responsibility and work well with diverse people of all ages is critical.

Computer design skills are also valued. “The more you can do with the Web and graphics, including photo and video editing, the more desirable you are to employers,” says Rosenhauch.

Employers also look for workers with experience running activities or events, particularly in a social or recreational program. This experience might include an internship at a resort, a summer spent as a camp counselor, or time volunteering to run church events. “When I was looking for jobs,” says Rosenhauch, “more people said experience, rather than education, was what they wanted to see.”

But higher education also may be required. Many activities directors have a bachelor’s degree, often in parks and recreation or a similar field, and some have a master’s degree. Activities directors in other settings, such as nursing homes, may have additional or different requirements.

### **River rafting guide**

Adventure travel is a popular vacation choice for some. River rafting guides lead clients on single- or multi-day whitewater rafting adventures.

When leading people down a river, guides experience—just as their clients do—the

thrill of the rapids and the beauty of their surroundings. “It’s great to be in these incredible places,” says river rafting guide Kamron Wixom. Wixom works on the Colorado River as it runs through the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

Navigating the river is a big part of guides’ job, but it’s not the only one. Preparing for a trip is among their first tasks. “We load up a truck with ice, coolers, food, oars, paddles, spare motors, rubber rafts, and frames,” says Wixom. “Then we bring it to the ‘put in,’ where we unload, assemble the rafts, and strap everything in.”

River rafting guides are responsible for the safety of their clients, so they must be sure to have life vests and other safety equipment on board. When the clients arrive, guides talk to them about safety and what to expect on the river. Depending on the clients’ rafting experience, guides might seek extra whitewater excitement or traverse through calmer waters.

Guides also give environmental talks about an area’s geology and the flora and fauna around the river. They might discuss the history of an area or engage clients in other ways. “Talking and exchanging stories is a really important part of the trip,” says Wixom. Sharing information adds to a trip’s value, often creating lasting memories for clients and guides alike.

River rafting guides’ jobs vary, depending on the length of the trips they lead and on their employer. Some guides, for example, take multiple short trips in a single day. Wixom usually works overnight trips, staying out for 10 or more days at a time. On these extended trips, he helps to set up campsites and prepare meals. Other guides might also work off-river, helping to manage equipment rentals or to make reservations for trips.

But a key part of any guide’s job is making sure that clients are enjoying themselves. “One of the best parts is seeing people experience a trip down the river for the first time,” says Wixom. “We’re out there all the time, so it’s like our own little playground, but they’ve never seen it before. I love seeing their excitement and seeing the change that comes over



them. It really can change their lives, and that's cool to see.”

**Employment and wages.** Employment of river rafting guides is possible only near rivers that have a water level deep enough for rafting.

BLS includes river rafting guides in the larger category of travel guides. In May 2009, there were 4,270 travel guides of all kinds in the United States. They earned a median hourly wage of about \$15. Anecdotal information suggests that river rafting guides earn \$50 to \$100 or more per day. Some also receive tips, and pay can be higher for trip leaders.

Work as a river rafting guide is seasonal. “There are some guides who work all year long,” says Wixom, “but you definitely have to move around, because the rivers dry up.” Many river rafting guides supplement their income by working at ski resorts or some other adventure-related endeavor.

**Qualifications.** No formal education is required to become a river rafting guide. However, these workers need special training. Training is often provided by employers and covers first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation

(CPR), food safety, wilderness response, swift water rescue, and river safety training.

Through on-the-job training, guides typically learn about the logistics of planning and leading a trip and about geology and related topics. Some guides start their training as “swampers,” or extra crew members, learning the job tasks while they help more experienced guides. Certain States, such as Utah, require guides to be licensed before they can become trip leaders.

Experience with river rafting is also helpful, although not always required, to get a job. Rapids are generally classified by difficulty level, and only the most experienced guides lead trips down higher level rapids.

In addition to being friendly and dependable, river rafting guides should be athletic. “It’s very physical work,” says Wixom. “You have to be limber and able.” Guides who are outgoing, have an engaging personality, and can entertain guests also stand out. “We have one guide who does hula-hooping,” says Wixom. “Employers are looking for someone personable and with an interesting story to tell.”



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*“It’s great to be outdoors and in these incredible places.”*

*—Kamron Wixom,  
river rafting guide*

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## Is a vacation career for you?

People doing vacation work say that it's often fun and dynamic: The jobs are associated with enjoyable activities, and workers interact with an ever-changing clientele as vacationers come and go. "Every day is different, every day holds something new," says destination marketing manager Lilly Kelly. Teresa Ide agrees. "I'm not one who likes to do the same thing over and over again," she says. "The best part is that everything is always changing."

Many vacation workers enjoy meeting new and interesting people, whether they're

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*Travel and tourism workers experience vacation destinations firsthand.*

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colleagues, vacationers, or local residents. "The camaraderie between the guides is fun," says Wixom. Hahn adds, "I got to meet people that I never would have had a chance to meet and to learn about cultures that I never would have known about."

Undoubtedly, some of the appeal of vacation work is the chance to see the world and experience vacation destinations firsthand. "The travel is amazing," says musician Hahn of his jobs aboard cruise ships. "After my first gig, I'd seen 32 countries—the best parts of those countries."

And many times, these workers benefit when they take their own vacations, often receiving discounts for travel, accommodations, or other services. They might also have a better idea about where to go or what to do on vacation, given their experience in the tourism industry.

But, says Hahn, it's not all fun in the sun. For example, the work felt isolating to him at times. "People come and go so much," he says. "It's a very transient lifestyle."

In contrast to vacationers, who are relaxing and having fun, vacation workers have many responsibilities. "There's a lot of potentially backbreaking work," Wixom says. "It's not 100 percent glamour." Some of the jobs require working long days or nonstandard hours to accommodate vacationers' needs.

Also, because people tend to vacation seasonally—such as during the summer—vacation work itself is often seasonal. Workers might be very busy at some times and less busy, or not working at all, during others.

Vacations aren't always perfect, but vacation workers strive to make them seem that way. Workers who deal directly with vacationers need to be extroverted and upbeat. "People like to see enthusiasm, because they're on vacation," says Rosenhauch.

Remaining cheerful all the time is sometimes challenging, says Wixom, but that's where workers' traits can help: "Having a personality that's fun and entertaining, and that can remain that way even during difficult times, is important."

But good customer service can't fix everything. "Bad weather can be a challenge," says Rosenhauch. "You always have to have a backup plan."

Despite its occasional pitfalls, however, vacation work has at least one advantage over many other types of jobs: location. For many of these workers, a vacation career offers the chance not only to be outside of an office but to actually be outside. "The best thing about my job is being outdoors," says Wixom. "I'll be swimming in a waterfall and think, 'Man, I'm getting paid for this.'"

## Getting the job

Depending on the type of vacation job that you want, you might approach jobseeking several ways. Often, the best way to find a job in a specific destination is to search locally. Visit nearby resorts or other tourist-oriented businesses and ask about available openings. Check classified ads online or in newspapers to see who's hiring. Visitors' bureaus and chambers of commerce can help you identify businesses in your area that cater to tourists.

When searching for jobs online, target your search. For example, go directly to the Web sites of resorts, cruise lines, tour companies, or other vacation-related businesses to find out if they're hiring. Most sites have a section on employment opportunities that is accessible from their home page.

There also may be specialty Web sites dedicated to vacation work, such as jobs at resorts or on cruise lines. However, use caution when accessing these sites. Some charge for information that may be available elsewhere free of charge. Job postings for some positions are also on association Web sites.

Getting a vacation job requires persistence. Internships or volunteer work can help prospective workers gain experience and make contacts in their field. "Hands-on job experience in the tourism industry can give you more of a competitive advantage," says Kelly.

And networking is crucial, say workers. Rosenhauch stresses the importance of

networking because of the competition for vacation careers: "There aren't a lot of these jobs," he says, "so who you know is really important."

Rosenhauch applied for several positions before he landed his current one—and getting the job meant relocating. Nevertheless, many vacation workers say that their jobs are well worth the effort it took to get them.

## For more information

The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides detailed information on many vacation-related occupations, including waiters and waitresses and retail sales workers. The *Handbook* is available in many public libraries and career centers or online at [www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh).

In addition, check the resources below to learn more about vacation jobs. Keep in mind, however, that the resources featured are not the only ones available. Broaden your search by researching businesses in your desired locale.

To learn more about becoming a cruise ship musician, visit [www.musicianwages.com](http://www.musicianwages.com). And Cruise Lines Association International has links to several cruise lines' career sites at [www2.cruising.org/shipboardEmployment.cfm](http://www2.cruising.org/shipboardEmployment.cfm).

Find available job openings at visitors' and convention bureaus on the Destination Marketing Association International's career site, <http://careers.destinationmarketing.org>, and by visiting the Web sites of individual visitors' and convention bureaus.

Hospitality jobs are listed on [www.hcareers.com](http://www.hcareers.com), also accessible through the American Hotel and Lodging Association's Web site, [www.ahla.com](http://www.ahla.com).

For information about river rafting guide opportunities, Rafting America, online at [www.raftingamerica.com](http://www.raftingamerica.com), has a list of selected companies in the United States and Canada that offer whitewater river rafting.

Information about scholarships for travel and tourism or hospitality students is available from Tourism Cares: [www.tourismcares.org/scholarships](http://www.tourismcares.org/scholarships). 