

ROADMAP TO *travel*
nursing





Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
HOW DOES TRAVEL NURSING WORK?	4
HOW MUCH DO TRAVEL NURSES MAKE?	6
BUILDING YOUR TRAVEL NURSE RESUME	7
BENEFITS OF TRAVEL NURSING	9
HOW TO BECOME A TRAVEL NURSE	10
BEST LOCATIONS FOR TRAVEL NURSING	12
YOUR DESTINATION AWAITS	13



Introduction

A lot of nurses in permanent staff roles may be missing out on a powerful opportunity. Travel nursing offers nurses a compelling proposition: see the country while earning above-average pay rates.

What exactly is travel nursing? Travel nursing involves short-term contract positions at health care institutions filled by nurses who travel to work. These assignments are typically at hospitals, and they can offer nurses higher pay, professional development, and the ability to move around the country. Plus, due to the current nursing shortage forecast by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, nurses who are willing to travel will [have more career opportunities](#).

This guide features interviews from two nurses who have decades of experience in travel nursing. Michelle Baker, whose advice appears in the CSP blog post [“Choosing the Right Travel Nursing Agency for You,”](#) and Kelly Sturm, whose advice appears in the CSP blog post [“Pros and Cons of Travel Nursing.”](#) Take a look at the following sections to learn more travel nursing, including how it works, salary information, and getting started.



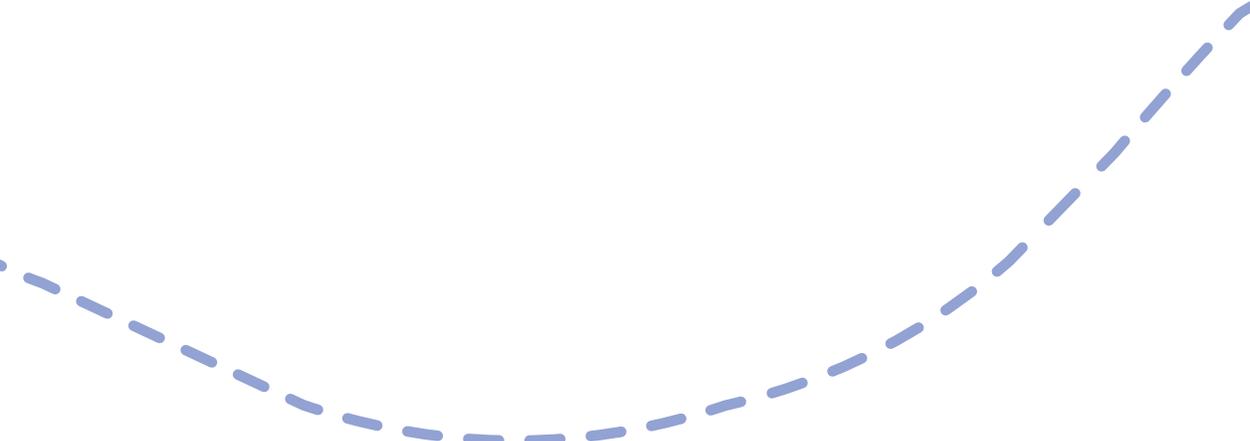
How Does Travel Nursing Work?

THE BASICS

Travel nurses work with agencies responsible for filling positions at hospitals and other health care institutions. Recruiters will find travel nurses for specific opportunities, which are based on contracts of 13 to 26 weeks. Most contracts last 13 weeks.

Other basics are taken care of through the travel agency chosen.

For instance, some companies will find housing for travel nurses, while others provide nurses with a housing stipend. Typically, benefits are not provided. Travel nurses may need to pay out of pocket for health insurance and malpractice insurance, and that is offset by travel nurses' higher payment rates. Benefits packages, if any, will vary based on the travel company.



LONG-TERM PROSPECTS

Often, travel nursing contracts are extended and can lead to permanent staff positions. For Michelle Baker, a travel nursing assignment led to a staff position at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. Baker has worked in the endoscopy department for their cancer treatment and research institution for nine years.

Her journey to her current position involved a mix of travel nursing contracts and permanent positions. After graduating and working in Cooperstown, New York for a year, Baker became a travel nurse. Starting in Manhasset, New York, she left after a year for Fort Worth, Texas and later for Dallas. She worked for four years in Dallas and then joined the permanent staff.

Three years later, Baker became a travel nurse again. She worked in Forest Hills, New York and then headed to New York City, where she worked at New York-

Presbyterian Hospital for two years. Finally, she joined her current employer. All of Baker's assignments lasted for three months; many were extended and two led to permanent positions.



"I loved being able to go to new cities that I hadn't been before," Baker said. "Also, I knew that if I loved it, I could probably stay longer. If I didn't like it in three months, I'm out."

Other nurses embrace travel nursing for a larger part of their careers. That was true for Kelly Sturm, a progressive care unit nurse who has 36 years of experience. From memory, she mentioned working in Arkansas, Nebraska, Iowa, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee before losing track of the other places she has been.

How Much Do Travel Nurses Make?

The salary for a travel nurse is often considered higher than the salary for permanent staff positions. Based on real-time data from PayScale, travel nurses earn \$33.64 per hour on average, compared with \$29.24 per hour for all registered nurses, which is roughly a 15 percent difference. However, information on travel nurse salary is limited and several factors are in play.

According to Baker, it depends on experience, where the pay for travel nurses is generally higher for less experienced nurses: "If you are an experienced nurse 10-plus years out, your base rate with the travel agency is probably going to be lower than what your base rate would be if they hired you as staff," she said. "If you are starting out, you need at least one year of experience before you can travel. If you are in that group, that is one plus years to five years. Your base rate is probably going to be a little bit higher than the ones that are salaried in the hospital."

Housing is one factor that can significantly benefit travel nurses' compensation. A housing stipend is typically provided when housing is chosen independently of the travel nursing agency. Baker pointed out how that can work to a nurse's advantage: "In New York City, rent is extremely, extremely high here," she said. "For a one-bedroom apartment, you easily need \$2,000 or \$2,500 a month just for your rent. You can pocket the housing stipend if you can find your own apartment. So, if you have someone that you can live with, like family here, you can pocket that \$2,500 a month and add that to your salary."

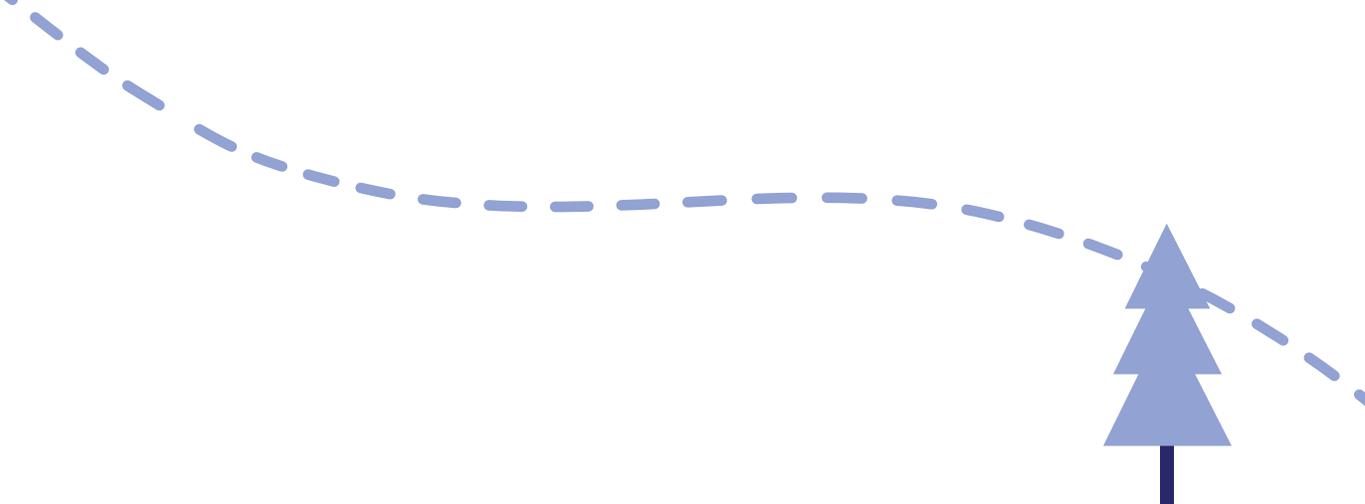
Building Your Travel Nurse Resume

What will you need to get started in travel nursing? The right mix of education, characteristics, and a specialty can help. Michelle Baker and Kelly Strum expanded on those aspects of becoming a successful travel nurse.

EDUCATION

Many hospitals in the United States have required all nurses to have at least a bachelor's degree. That movement was largely driven by the Institute of Medicine's 2010 landmark report, "[The Future of Nursing](#)," which called for 80 percent of registered nurses to hold at least a bachelor's degree by 2020. Since then, U.S. hospitals have encouraged or required the degree, often in an effort to achieve Magnet status, an award from the American Nurses Credentialing Center that recognizes the [strength and quality](#) of nursing. As a result, hospitals are searching for BSN-prepared nurses. The same trend exists in travel nursing. When Baker was a travel nurse, it was irrelevant whether she had a bachelor's, even though she held the degree. Now, things are different.

"If you don't have a bachelor's, unless you go to a nursing home here in New York City, you aren't going to find a job," she said.



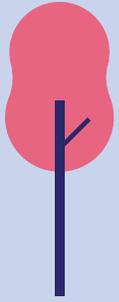
CHARACTERISTICS NEEDED

A feature of travel nursing is that there is not long to get acquainted with new positions. Travel nurses must be fast at getting used to their new environments. “You really have to jump in quickly and learn their system, everything in a matter of two days,” Sturm said. “That is kind of hard to do if you are not really good with time management, knowing what is important, and what is not.”

Balancing all of those factors can help travel nurses enjoy their experiences. “Most all the travel nurses I met... were all pretty much easygoing, very flexible, very cooperative,” Baker said. “They are not a routine needy group. You have to roll with the punches. If you could describe yourself as that, then you would probably be a good fit as a traveler.”

APPEAL OF SPECIALTY

Having a specialty can increase the number of opportunities travel nurses receive. Baker found success as a travel nurse with her telemetry, cardiac catheterization lab, and step-down specialties. She mentioned that medical-surgical nurses “always have the most openings,” because “they are the most short-staffed across the country.”



Benefits of Travel Nursing

Some of the benefits of travel nursing are obvious. After all, travel nurses get to make more money than permanent nurses while seeing new places. Although travel nursing requirements mean that it is not for everyone, for many people, it is a lucrative and exciting job.

Travel nursing offers above-average compensation and the ability to explore new destinations. For 13 weeks, travel nurses get to work with other professionals and see other hospitals up close. That experience is valuable for learning new skills and approaches, along with getting exposure to certain specialties.

Flexibility is another benefit of travel nursing. Michelle Baker said that if she liked a place, she knew there was a good chance her stay could be extended. There might also be the chance to stay there permanently, which happened to her twice and resulted in a position for nine-plus years. If a travel nursing assignment is not a good fit, then it is only for 13 weeks. Travel nurses can easily move onto the next high-paying opportunity at a different hospital.

How to Become a Travel Nurse

Having the right skills and mindset for travel nursing is important, but that is not all you will need. Here are some tips on finding a good travel nursing agency and reacting to different assignments and contracts.

FINDING A TRAVEL COMPANY AND RECRUITER

"I have worked with three different companies," Baker said. "There was one recruiter that I would trust completely. Everything she promised about housing, everything she promised about following up and staying in touch with me, she always did." However, the other two companies were not straightforward. Baker learned how she needed to be wary of who her travel company and personal recruiter were, because they were such an important source of support and information. Baker recommended that nurses find other nurses who are travelers in their hospital to find out the travel company and recruiter they use. Nursing blogs are also a good source of information for investigating their reputations.

Sturm also recommended talking to travel nurses and getting familiar with the different options for travel nursing agencies: "You can go online and look at all the companies that are out there," she said. "I mean, there are so many of them." By doing some online research and asking around with travel nurses, you can gain insight into how to proceed.

A QUICK NOTE ON NURSING LICENSES

Traveling to other states to work as a nurse can be complicated when it comes to your nursing license. If your home state participates in the Nurse Licensure Compact, then you can work freely in states with your [compact nursing license](#). Otherwise, you will need to apply for a license in the state where you intend to work, but your travel company will work with you on the specifics.

CHOOSING AN ASSIGNMENT

"The more experience you have, the easier it is to adapt to the area you are going to," Baker said. "I definitely would not go into an area if, when they give you the job description, there is anything

on that floor under what they expect of you that you cannot do going into that unit. I would definitely pick a unit where everything listed is something that you are very familiar with."

NEGOTIATING CONTRACTS

"What the recruiters offer you; it is always a compromise," Baker said. "They are not going to tell you exactly how much they are making off of you. So, you can negotiate your rate with them. You can negotiate the housing stipend with them. It is never exactly what they tell you the first time. But, from experience you learn this."

Sturm recommended investigating housing in depth, especially when interviewing with agencies. "Places will say, 'Oh, yeah. We will get your housing for you, and it will be done, it will be paid for. You do not have to pay for it,'" she said. "Well, when they do that, when most places do that, it is really kind of a yucky place [to live]. Not very nice or the best because they are paying out of their pocket for it."

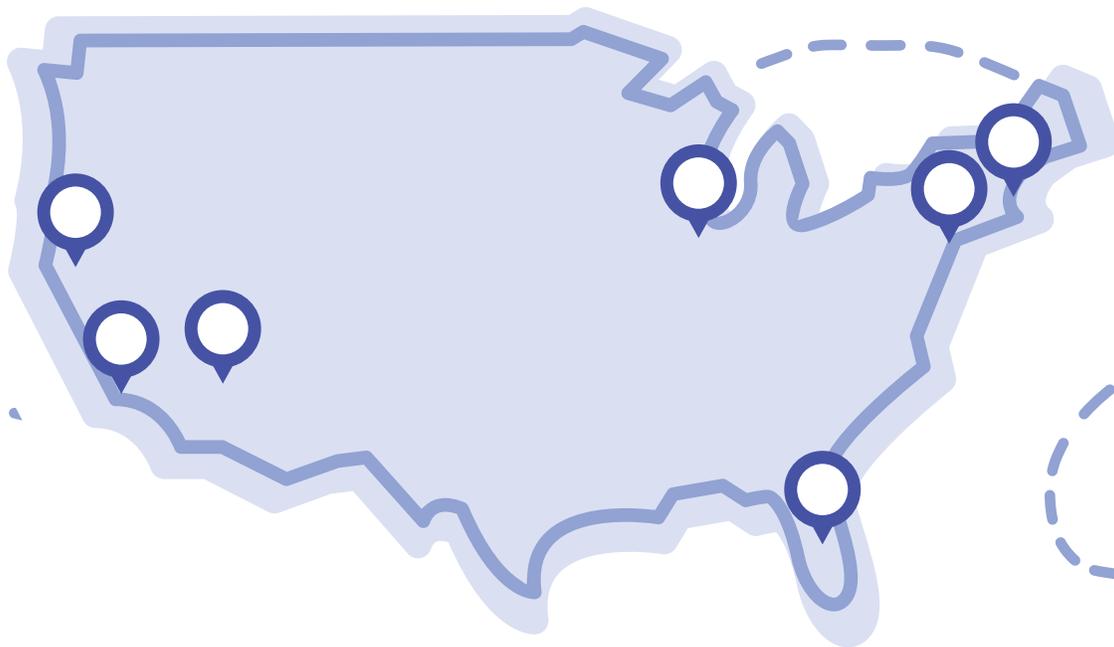
One option is to go for the monthly stipend. Sturm pointed out how that allows you to negotiate with hotels to

get the price down significantly because you are making a 13-week booking. "So, it is a little bit easier for the travel nurse themselves to negotiate, but some places will get you... really nice places and you will have it there for the whole thirteen weeks," she added. "It is just according to what company you are working for."

Negotiating contracts is also the time to take care of other matters, such as time off. "When you do decide you are going to interview for a position, if you have any dates, like you are going to a wedding or you need a specific holiday off, I would put that date up front in your interview," Baker said. "And make sure those dates can be preapproved in your contract. You never want to wait until you start, and then ask, 'Can I have this date? Can I have this date?' You want it already prewritten in the contract."

Best Locations for Travel Nursing

Ready to become a travel nurse? You may be wondering where you should go. We have compiled some of the [best places for travel nursing](#). Here are some highlights:



- **NEW YORK, NY:** This metro area has the largest concentration of RNs in the country by a margin of 70,000.
- **BOSTON, MA:** There are only two metro areas with at least 60,000 RNs and an average salary of \$90,000: Boston and Los Angeles.
- **ORLANDO, FL:** Florida leads all states in the proportion of people 65 and over.
- **CHICAGO, IL:** Chicago's metro area represents the third highest concentration of RNs in the country.
- **LAS VEGAS, NV:** Health care is experiencing major growth in Las Vegas. One medical group took on 100,000 new patients, and local practices are actively recruiting professionals across the country.
- **LOS ANGELES, CA:** California beats all other states for average RN salaries.
- **SAN JOSE, CA:** California is the only state that has legalized minimum nurse-patient ratios.

An illustration at the top of the page shows a person in blue pants and a pink shirt walking to the right, pulling a red rolling suitcase. A large blue location pin icon is positioned to the right of the person. A dashed blue line curves across the page, passing behind the text area.

Your Destination Awaits

Travel nursing is an exciting opportunity that can take your nursing career to the next level. You will have the opportunity to earn an attractive salary while seeing new places and learning new skills.

There is plenty of competition for the best assignments, and most hospitals will not consider you without a bachelor's degree. Thankfully, with an [online RN to BSN from Concordia, St. Paul](#), you can get the credential you need in a convenient learning environment. Our program is offered 100 percent online with six starts per year. Experience an innovative curriculum that is responsive, relevant, and real to your nursing practice.

If you would like to pursue informal and formal leadership roles in a variety of health care settings, an [online MSN from Concordia, St. Paul](#) can help you reach your goals. In a flexible format, you will gain the knowledge and experience to improve health outcomes. After completing hands-on practice experiences (practica) through simulations, the workplace, and your local community, you will be able to lead innovative teams in care coordination, quality improvement, and population health.

GET STARTED TODAY WITH CSP.