

ASTA - A Living History



Since its founding on April 20, 1931, as the American Steamship and Tourist Agents Association, ASTA has remained true to its mission: to enhance the professionalism and profitability of members worldwide through education and training, effective representation in industry and government affairs and identifying and meeting the needs of the traveling public.



In the 1930s, when agents were booking 80 percent to 90 percent of all steamship travel, the association was urging ship lines to adopt agent-friendly policies and trying to persuade hotels and railroads to pay agent commissions.



American Society
of Travel Agents

When World War II curtailed all but essential travel in the 1940s, members fought for their association's survival. In 1946, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) cut agent commissions from 7.5 percent to 5 percent, a mere year after its formation. ASTA's parent group once again fought for its members. Around the same time, the association changed its name to the American Society of Travel Agents.

In the 1950s, ASTA won a 27-year battle for rail commissions and broke new ground by introducing a home-study course, the industry's first basic training tool.



In the 1960s, the Society made numerous strides in education, holding its first School at Sea and opening seven travel-agent schools. In 1968, when President Lyndon B. Johnson restricted residents' travel outside the United States, ASTA waged the largest grassroots campaign of its history.



In the 1970s, ASTA formed several groups that continue to benefit members today. ASTA Marketing Services, Inc. (AMSI) a subsidiary of ASTA, helps member agents obtain high quality products and services at discounted prices. The ASTA Political Action Committee (ASTAPAC) leads the fight for agents' interests in the political arena. ASTA's Chapter Presidents' Council made its debut, and the decade also saw the first rise in air commissions in 25 years, from 5 percent to 7 percent, before the '70s ended with the deregulation of airlines.

In the 1980s, the Society continued its emphasis on education, holding Trainingfest, School on Rails, School at Sea and School on the Road.

In the 1990s, ASTA published the *Travel Agent Manual*. In 1995, when seven major airlines capped agency commissions on domestic tickets at \$50, ASTA filed an antitrust lawsuit that was settled out of court for \$86 million. Before the end of the decade, commissions were cut or capped five more times.



In 1999, ASTA prompted a U.S. Justice Department investigation of five carriers' plan to launch a joint Web site. ASTA published the Air Travelers Bill of Rights and secured Congressional endorsement of the Bill's key principles, as well as spurring passage and funding of the Consumer Access to Travel Information Act.

In the first decade of the new millennium, ASTA continues to support travel agents and fight for the traveling public in the legal and legislative arenas. Several ASTA-endorsed bills to protect passenger rights and end airline preemption have gone to Congress. ASTA has also pursued legislation to address the consequences of airlines' anticompetitive, predatory behavior by giving travel agencies the right to bargain collectively.

The Society is also improving its member communications and member relations, engaging more segments of the travel agent community by forming the Corporate Advisory Council (CAC). ASTA empowers members to reach out to consumers; it provides new tools for members to launch or improve their own advertising and public relations campaigns. To this end, the Society launched TravelSense.org, a consumer-driven Web site that gives the traveling public direct access to member agents.

Education and training are also being updated. ASTA has created new home-study courses, such as the Model Agent and Model Agency programs, along with new national and international conferences that focus on continuing education and destinations. The Society also works with emerging destinations to form specialist courses for members, in print or online. And ASTA continues to produce resources with information on all the subjects affecting travel retailers, such as GDS programs and copyright laws.

In 2007, ASTA launched an ambitious new business model that reorganized its membership into two new categories: Travel Agent and Premium Travel Agency. This model helped ASTA use its strengths more effectively to emphasize its unified front in working on the business and legislative issues affecting travel retailers.

From 1931 through the present, the industry has continually faced rapid changes in technology and shifting alliances among the travel community. Yet through all those advances and realignments, ASTA has remained relevant to its members and to the travel industry, and it will continue to do so.

ASTA - Dedicated to the Business of Selling Travel

