

## To fee or not to fee?

Gone are the days when travel advisors work for “free.” In today’s travel industry, many advisors are charging professional fees to compensate for the time, effort, and expertise it takes to put together extraordinary travel experiences.

That said, charging a fee is a personal decision for each of our Travel With Awestruck independent advisors. You can use this helpful guide to determine whether you should charge a fee, how much you should charge, and how to package your fees in the right way to your clients.

### Should you charge a planning fee?

Charging fees is about positioning yourself as a professional service provider, not just a booking agent. Think about it – every other professional service provider you work with charges a fee. Your commission is intended as compensation from the brand you are booking with in exchange for directing your clients to their services. A planning fee, on the other hand, is meant to compensate you for the time, effort, and expertise you bring to your client’s experience. Most clients (especially quality clients) recognize the value of this service and are more than happy to pay a fee when they receive quality expertise in return.

You should especially consider charging a fee if:

- **You're delivering bespoke, high-touch service.** Everything you do is custom and tailored to your clients
- **Your clients value your expertise, not just bookings.** You have a defined niche, and your clients recognize you as the expert in it
- **You spend significant time on research, planning, or curation.** Think FITs, multi-country itineraries, groups with event planning components
- **You're targeting affluent or ultra-luxury clients who respect time-based value.** Affluent clients are used to paying more for exceptional service – and may even doubt your value proposition if you present yourself as just another “free” offering

You might consider delaying charging fees if:

- **You're still learning your niche** and testing your process, and don't yet have credible expertise
- **You're building a portfolio or reviews**, and do not yet have a stable book of repeat business
- **You're working mostly with low dollar value travel or budget-focused clients** who view price as a major differentiator

One helpful rule of thumb: if you are a seasoned advisor (3+ years in the industry full-time) and you are spending more than 1 hour before making a booking, you should seriously consider a fee.

### What are the pros and cons of charging fees as a new advisor?

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positions you as a professional and communicates quality</li><li>• Filters out clients who are price shopping or not serious about booking</li><li>• Compensates you for your time if a trip is not booked or if the clients cancel</li><li>• Builds dependable recurring revenue</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May deter price-sensitive leads</li><li>• Requires confidence in your value</li><li>• Requires you to have a clearly defined, differentiated value proposition</li></ul>

### How do I figure out the right fee level?

There is no universal answer to the "right" fee. When you think about the most appropriate fee for your business, you should be balancing four factors:

1. **Time.** Your fee is ultimately compensation for your time. If you are planning highly detailed itineraries with customization and high-touch service throughout, you are spending significantly more time per trip than with an all-inclusive vacation package. Calibrate your fee structures accordingly.
2. **Expertise.** Your fee should be a reflection of your expertise. A 25-year industry veteran can likely command a higher fee than an advisor who is brand new to the

industry. Likewise, if you are especially well known in your niche, you can likely charge a higher fee to reflect that expertise.

3. **Complexity.** Your fee should reflect the level of complexity of your itineraries. Charging a \$500 fee for a \$3,500 vacation package likely will not sit well with your clients. That said, most corporate incentive clients hosting complex meetings would think a \$500 planning fee is a steal.
4. **Value proposition and ideal client profile.** Think about how charging a fee resonates with your value proposition. If you are marketing yourself as an accessible travel advisor specializing in affordable fun and sun for families, a fee might not make sense. On the other hand, if you are positioning yourself as a strategic travel partner to ultra-high net worth individuals, you may need to charge a fee just to be taken seriously.

One helpful tip: Look around at what others in your niche are charging and calibrate against them. You can always reach out to our Travel with Awestruck leaders as well if you want more personalized guidance on what to charge.

## How do I communicate my fees to my clients?

The best way to communicate fees is to define clear service packages. This builds client trust, creates transparency in what your clients are paying for, and justifies your fee, without you needing to explain yourself.

When defining each service package, be clear to state:

- **What each package includes**, specifically to avoid any confusion (e.g., proposals for up to X destinations, Y revisions)
- **Who each package is best for** (e.g., this package is best if you are planning a single destination, all-inclusive vacation)
- **The terms of the package** (e.g., this package is nonrefundable)
- **The investment for each package** (your service fee)

You can use our sample fee letters as inspiration or templates, or follow this step-by-step guide to building your own service packages.

1. List everything you do (planning, calls, holds, concierge)
2. Group services into logical tiers (basic, custom, ultra-personalized)
3. Put a time estimate next to each tier — then multiply by your hourly target rate
4. Add a buffer for communication, edits, and support

## 5. Name each package to reflect your value proposition

Helpful tip: Keep your package premium by using language like “investment” or “professional fee” instead of “charge” and “cost” when presenting and discussing your fees.

## How do I present my fees to my clients?

- **Use confident, calm language.** Example: “As a service-based business, I charge a planning and design fee to ensure every trip is tailored to your preferences. This allows me to dedicate my time fully to crafting something exceptional and unique to you.”
- **Frame the fee as an investment.** Example: “My \$299 fee includes expert trip design, insider access to our exclusive supplier networks, and white-glove support. This package saves you hours of research and coordinating time – and likely reduces your total trip cost, too.”
- **Be up front with your fee early.** You should present your service package and be sure the client agrees to it after the discovery call and before you begin working on trip design

## Should you ever waive the fee?

It is important to be consistent when charging professional fees. Clients talk, and word gets around if you are inconsistent, which can erode trust in your services and in your brand.

That said, there are some instances when it may make sense to waive your fee. Some examples of these may include:

- Extremely high-commission luxury products (e.g., \$200K+ corporate incentive group)
- Referrals from VIP clients
- Repeat, high-value clients

Even if you do decide to waive your fee, you should be clear in communicating the value of what you are waiving and why you are waiving it in this instance. For example, if you are speaking with Mr. Smith who has booked with you for 10 years and he talks about referring a friend, you should let him know that due to his long-standing loyalty, you do not charge your typical fee, but do typically charge a fee for your services.

## Closing thoughts

Implementing fees can be nerve-wracking, but at the end of the day, serious professional advisors charge for their brains – not just their bookings. Whether you are ready to start charging fees today or would prefer to wait a bit longer, we are here to support you every step of the way.

If you have further questions or need further guidance on whether or not to charge fees, please reach out to Alexis ([alexis@travelwithawestruck.com](mailto:alexis@travelwithawestruck.com)) for support.