

Can we live on travel nursing income?

Question:

My husband and I plan to start traveling in 2005. I am a Critical Care RN and he will be a retired Sergeant. We have a daughter who will be college-age. Is it feasible to think that we can travel on just my income? How easy is it to go from assignment to assignment and not miss paychecks or time off between assignments? Can I expect the work to be plentiful and steady or will I experience times without a job?

Response:

I am glad to see you are planning ahead. Your husband's retirement is a great opportunity for you both to travel. Many couples do it and so can you. Often couples tell me that each new place is like starting their honeymoon all over again. I once knew a couple who traveled seasonally. He was a farmer. During crop season, they stayed home in Pennsylvania and she worked at the local hospital. When crop season was over, they were on the road again. What a fun life.

You must simply plan for success. I say simply, but it will take some work on your part. The following are a list of things to do in order to get organized:

1. Call around and find 3 agencies you like. One of them needs to have a large assignment selection.
2. Also, find out the average pay you would make in your specialty area as a traveler.
3. Calculate how much you need to make to cover your bills.
4. Cut back on your bills as much as possible.
5. Talk with your accountant and plan the least expensive way you want to maintain a permanent residence. Some travelers rent a room from someone in the local area (a place they call home). Find out what is acceptable for accounting purposes. You're out of town housing and travel expenses will be paid for while you are on assignment. However, you want to maintain a permanent residence in order to be eligible for all the tax deductions available to travelers.

Finally, make a game plan. Sign up with at least 3 companies. Pick one company you want to try to stay with. This company needs to have good long term incentives such as paid vacation time, for example. Use the other 2 companies as back up in case the first company cannot find an assignment for you in time. Then begin planning for your next assignment at least a month in advance. You should make more as a traveler which will help make up for the expense of possible in-between travel time (from one assignment to another). Consider negotiating for completion bonuses. Also, you may want to take assignments that often have an ongoing need for travelers so you can extend the assignments as long as you want. More importantly.....if you are willing to travel, the work will be there. You are in demand.