HOSPITALITY RISING

A STUDENT SUMMIT

TRAVEL AGENT COMPETITION

September 2026

About The J.W. Marriott, Jr. Institute

The **J.W. Marriott Jr. Institute at the University of Utah is redefining hospitality education** by focusing on leadership development and student engagement in ways that extend beyond the traditional industry approach. We believe that hospitality is not just about hotels and tourism—it is a mindset that fosters exceptional leadership, service, and strategic thinking across all fields. Our institute is designed to connect with students from diverse academic backgrounds, introducing them to the principles of hospitality through innovative experiences, industry collaborations, and hands-on learning opportunities. By emphasizing leadership as a core component of hospitality, we aim to inspire students to see its relevance in areas such as technology, healthcare, business, and beyond.

To get involved, and learn more about the institute, visit our website and connect with us on social media @marriottinstitute

About the Utah Tourism Industry Association (UTIA)

The **Utah Tourism Industry Association is the collective voice of Utah's tourism industry**. We advocate and educate to enhance Utah's economy and quality of life. UTIA strives to deliver exceptional value to its members. To that end, we offer a variety of member-driven public policy initiatives, business networking opportunities, marketing programs and educational offerings all to help our members and our industry succeed today and in the future. UTIA is a 501c6 non-profit organization.

To learn more about UTIA's mission, visit their website.

Dear Participants,

We are delighted to welcome you to the inaugural Hospitality Rising Summit Competition at the University of Utah.

This competition is designed to give you a unique opportunity to assume the role of a travel agent and pitch your dream Utah destination vacation. Along the way, you'll showcase your creativity, research skills, and organizational expertise while developing a deeper understanding of hospitality and tourism as dynamic and diverse fields.

Imagine a group of friends planning a trip to Salt Lake City. Would their itinerary include museum visits or a tour of Temple Square? Certainly dining at local eateries, but what makes Salt Lake City's food scene unique? What else would they do? Perhaps tickets to a concert or a sporting event? This is just one example of the many destinations Utah offers. With thoughtful budgeting for accommodations, meals, and entertainment, any destination can become an engaging getaway that balances culture, recreation, and relaxation.

For this competition, proposals will be submitted as four-page written report and reviewed by a panel of judges. The top three most creative, well-organized, and unique experiences will be presented and awarded during the Summit on November 4, 2026

This document includes detailed information on competition guidelines and timelines, grading criteria, rules, and prizes. Please review the General Rules section for a comprehensive list of guidelines.

We can't wait to see what you create, and we wish you the very best in the competition!

Best regards,

Marc Brown

Executive Director

J.W. Marriott, Jr. Institute

Travel Agent Competition Overview

The Travel Agent Challenge is a competition designed to test students' abilities to plan, organize, and present a well-structured vacation itinerary within a specified budget. Acting as professional travel agents, participants will select a destination and create an itinerary for a three-day, two-night trip for four, ensuring that all aspects of the journey align with the allocated budget of $3,000. For the purposes of this activity, assume the traveling party is willing to drive their own vehicle, and will be departing from the University of Utah campus.

A successful travel plan requires a well-researched and detailed itinerary that includes transportation (including gas money), accommodations, meals, entertainment, and cultural or recreational activities. Students must consider various travel factors such as seasonal demand, cost fluctuations, and travel regulations to create an engaging and realistic experience. Effective budget management is a crucial element in this challenge, requiring careful allocation of expenses to maximize the overall value of the trip while maintaining financial constraints.

Participants will need to compile a comprehensive report outlining the planning process, including justification for their choices, an expense breakdown, and potential alternatives to enhance the travel experience. Creativity will play a significant role in the evaluation process, as students are encouraged to explore unique destinations, local experiences, and cost-effective strategies to enhance the trip’s appeal.

Judging criteria will focus on the level of detail in the itinerary, financial efficiency, originality in the selection of activities, and the overall feasibility of the proposed travel plan. The ability to balance an immersive and enjoyable vacation experience while adhering to the budget will determine the participants' success in the competition. By engaging in this challenge, students will develop valuable skills in trip planning, financial management, and travel logistics, preparing them for real-world scenarios in the travel and tourism industry.

Competition Guidelines

Travel Agent Competition

- Open to all currently enrolled high school students
- Participants compete individually
- Selected destination must be in Utah
- Choose travel dates between December 1, 2026, and August 27, 2027.
- Plan a three-day, two-night trip for four with a $3,000 budget
    - Assume trip attendees are willing to use their own vehicle, but would still need to be reimbursed for gas.
- Plan a detailed itinerary including transportation, accommodation, activities, and dining
- Stay within a designated budget while maximizing value and experience

Submission:

- Submissions must formatted as a 4-page written report with the process of planning. Report must include an itinerary, travel budget document, and present key highlights of the project.
- All materials must be submitted via the official online entry form at marriott.utah.edu/summit by **September 19, 2026**
- Late submissions will not be considered unless an official extension is announced
- Only one entry per person

General Rules

Eligibility

- Open to all actively enrolled high school students in Utah
- Must attend the Hospitality Rising Summit on November 4, 2026

Evaluation

- Judges will include hospitality professionals, academic leaders, and sponsors
- Projects will be evaluated based on the judging criteria

Mentorship & Guidance

- Students are allowed to seek mentorship from professors for guidance on their projects and to receive advice from industry professionals, travel agencies, or any other hospitality/tourism professionals

- Any mentorship or support must be acknowledged in the paper, this should include in text citations and a "references and contributions" page

Conduct

- Participants must adhere to ethical standards and avoid plagiarism
- Any external assistance or AI use must be disclosed

AI Use

- **Responsible use of AI is allowed** in this competition; however, **all AI use must be disclosed** on the references page with a detailed description of how AI was used and in what sections of the report.

Winners

- Winners will be announced during the Hospitality Rising Summit on November 4, 2026

Awards

- 1st place $1,000 Scholarship to the University of Utah **PLUS the winning Utah dream vacation, all expenses paid!**
- 2nd-5th place will each receive a $1,000 University of Utah Scholarship.

Award Considerations

- The trip must be redeemed by September 1st, 2027
- The student must be accompanied by an adult.
- The winner must inform The J.W. Marriott, Jr. Institute team at least 6 months in advance of their travel plans.
- The trip must be documented with photos and videos to be used in future marketing and promotional materials for the J.W. Marriott, Jr. Institute.
- Students must provide all required personal information to the J.W. Marriott, Jr. Institute to process their scholarship as soon as they are enrolled at the University of Utah.

Judging Criteria

1. **Destination Knowledge & Expertise**
    a. **What it measures:** The depth of knowledge and research demonstrated about the chosen destination.
    b. **To score well:** Conduct thorough research and demonstrate a strong understanding of the destination, including its attractions, culture, logistics, and travel opportunities.

2. **Itinerary Planning & Organization**
    a. **What it measures:** The thoroughness, organization, and feasibility of the proposed itinerary.
    b. **To score well:** Create a carefully planned itinerary with realistic timing, thoughtful logistics, and consideration for travel time, reservations, and other practical details.

3. **Value, Experience & Cost Efficiency**
    a. **What it measures:** The quality, value, and efficiency of the accommodations, transportation, meals, activities, and other experiences selected.
    b. **To score well:** Make thoughtful choices that maximize the travelers' experience while demonstrating a strong balance between quality and cost.

4. **Budget Accuracy & Compliance**
    a. **What it measures:** The accuracy, completeness, and organization of the trip budget and compliance with the $3,000 limit.
    b. **To score well:** Provide a mathematically accurate budget that accounts for all trip-related expenses, including transportation, accommodations, meals, activities, amenities, and other costs.

5. **Technology & Booking Efficiency**
    a. **What it measures:** The effective use of technology and credible online resources to research, price, compare, and plan the trip.
    b. **To score well:** Use credible resources to research pricing and availability, compare options, and demonstrate an understanding of the booking process.

6. **Creativity, Rationale, and Report Quality**
    a. **What it measures:** The originality of the trip, reasoning behind the student's choices, and overall quality of the final report.
    b. **To score well:** Create an original and thoughtfully designed trip, clearly explain your decisions, and present your work in a clean, organized submission that follows all guidelines.

Resources

What is a Travel Agent?

A travel agent is a professional who assists individuals or groups in planning and booking various aspects of their travel, including transportation, accommodations, tours, and activities. They act as intermediaries between travelers and travel suppliers, leveraging their expertise to provide personalized recommendations and ensure a seamless travel experience.

Budgeting templates to calculate travel expenses. Click Here

Itinerary templates

- Microsoft Create
- Visme

Sample itineraries with detailed activities. Click Here

Additional itineraries ideas

Guides on researching transportation, accommodations, and dining options. Click Here

Tips on crafting compelling travel experiences. Click How to make travel meaningful