

LESSON 1 ROLE OF THE TOUR GUIDE

Tour guiding is an interesting and varied job. Tour guides spend their days sharing their knowledge and chatting with guests. A tour guide provides information, assistance and guidance to tourists while they are travelling or visiting a certain location. The aim of the tour guide is to enhance and improve the experience for the people on the tour. Tours may be to educational settings, cultural attractions and other diverse locations. Let's look more at what a tour guide is and what they do.



Tour Guides need 2 main things: communication skills and information to communicate. A guide may be no more than a guide (not a manager).

Suggested Tasks: ▼

Throughout this course you will be provided with suggested tasks and reading to aid with your understanding. These will appear in the right hand column.

Remember: these tasks are optional. The more you complete, the more you will learn, but in order to complete the course in 20 hours you will need to manage your time well. We suggest you spend about 10 minutes on each task you attempt, and no more than 20 minutes.

WHAT IS A TOUR GUIDE?

Tour guides accompany individuals or groups of visitors to attractions. This may be a day trip or a longer visit. For example, they may take a group of people on a tour through a remote forest and be away overnight or for a few days.

They may show a group around –

- Historical locations, such as monuments, buildings, stately homes, archaeological digs etc.
- Areas of natural beauty
- Areas where there is interesting wildlife or plant life
- Tourist attractions
- Towns and cities, such as London, Sydney, New York
- Walking or cycling tours
- Remote locations, such as woods or forests

Tour guiding may be year-round or seasonal work. A tour guide may be involved in guiding visitors around a wide range of different places that are potentially of interest to visitors. The guide will enhance the tour by giving the visitors information and more insights into the experience.



Recognise that any tour group is made up of individuals with varying interests and needs. On a walking tour they may want to walk through an attraction at varying rates. Guides need to ensure no one gets lost, and everyone's needs are satisfied as much as possible.

TYPES OF TOUR GUIDE

While both the travel industry and the tour guides' roles are constantly changing, there are some standard types including:

Historical

Historical tour guides focus on the history of a location and work to bring the past to life for their tour groups; This is a very traditional role and can be found anywhere as every location has some kind of history.

These tour guides take visitors to;

- archaeological sites
- ruins
- buildings of significant historical interest
- sites of culture significance
- battle sites
- monuments
- famous landmarks.

City tour guides

City tour guides show visitors around urban areas, showing them important buildings, local night life, and cultural hot spots. They will show visitors places of cultural and historical interest. This may involve –

- walking tours
- tours along canals or waterways

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Suggested Tasks

Select 3 tourist attractions in your region, then ask someone (eg. friend, colleague) about those attractions. These should be places that conduct tours, or have potential for tours.

Write their comments down with a pen & paper as you talk.

Ask them:

1. What type of person would be attracted to this place?
2. How accessible is this attraction (eg. by car, wheelchair)

When are/should tours happen?

Allow up to 20 mins for the conversation.

- open top bus tours, such as in London
- visiting unusual locations, such as
 - unused tunnels beneath the city, such as the old railway tunnels in Birmingham, UK
 - old railway stations
 - graveyards, such as Highgate Cemetery in London, UK
 - markets – food markets, country markets, vintage fairs or similar
 - cultural highlights – such as areas known for artistic or musical activities, like Montmartre in Paris, France



Bus tours have the advantage of keeping all of the clients together as a captive audience.

Museum

A museum tour guide will lead groups of visitors around the museum, telling them more about the different exhibits and answering questions.

Park

A park tour guide will lead visitors around a park, pointing out flora and fauna that would be of interest, and answering any questions.

Nature

A nature tour guide will take visitors around a natural setting, answering questions and pointing out fascinating aspects of the natural world. This may involve –

- walking through forests or woods
- visiting areas of outstanding natural beauty
- climbing hills and even mountains
- other similar tours where the visitors want to get out there and see the world around them with an informed guide.

Adventure

Some visitors want adrenaline-filled and exciting tours. An adventure tour guide will guide their visitors to certain locations where they can engage in exciting activities, such as climbing or rappelling, white water rafting or hiking.

THE ROLE OF THE TOUR GUIDE

A tour guide's purpose is to accompany small or large groups around a specific location, whether that is a city, specific building or a rainforest. That group will rely on the guide's knowledge and expertise to navigate an unfamiliar setting, learn more about a location, develop skills or just simply get them from A to B.

Trips can be a matter of hours, a full day, or an extended time period, depending on the location or area that is being explored.

WHAT ARE THE TOUR GUIDE'S RESPONSIBILITIES?

The tour guide's responsibilities will vary according to the complexity of their role. Someone who is hired to take groups

around a museum will require very different skills to someone creating a trekking package in a remote location. However, there are some key similarities:

Sharing knowledge

Whatever role the tour guide plays, they are very likely to need in depth knowledge of something. That knowledge could include the works of art, local landmarks, or flora and fauna found in a set location.

Carrying out research

A tour guide may need to carry out research to ensure that they have a detailed knowledge of what they will show their visitors. It is no good showing visitors around a museum, without being able to answer questions or provide interesting information. A visitor can simply walk round a museum by themselves. If they have paid more for a tour, they wanted additional value to their visit.

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Suggested Tasks

Select a tourist destination you are familiar with.

Obtain a physical plan or map of the area, or draw one (paper, not digital).

This could for example, be a map of a park or floor plan inside a building, or a street map of a district.

Identify 3 to 6 points on the plan/map that would be appropriate stops on a tour.

Write down a key fact to share with a tour group at each of the stops.

Allow 15 - 20 mins for this task



An umbrella can double up as a pointer when a tour guide is talking.

TOUR GUIDE SKILLS

The types of skills required as a tour guide will depend upon the type of guiding work. More specialist skills will be required for some locations and roles. However there are some key skills which are transferable from one guiding role to the next.

- First aid skills are useful for any tour guide. However, tour guides who are involved in some types of tour may require more specialist knowledge. For example, an adventure or nature tour guide may need more knowledge on how to deal with bites or falls or injuries more than a city tour guide.
- Language skills can be useful. It is obviously not possible to speak every language in the world, but a good understanding of the languages spoken by most of the tourists visiting the area will be an advantage. For example, if you find that most visitors are English, French or Japanese, then a good understanding of those languages will be useful.
- Driving/chauffeur skills can be very important, particularly if you are transporting visitors to different locations.
- Being fit and healthy is also important. Tour guiding can require guides to be walking a lot each day.
- Having energy and confidence is also important. Visitors want a tour guide who is interested, informative and enthusiastic. The tour guide's passion for their subject matter can make the tour a success.

- A tour guide should be able to work under their own supervision.
- They should be disciplined, punctual, and well organised.
- Customer service - Working with the group that they are leading, or interacting with people in the places they stop at along the way, all require strong customer service skills.
- A calm manner is also useful.
- Good interpersonal skills are important. Good verbal and written communication skills, patience and humour can be particularly useful.
- A good tour guide will have good research skills to help them to plan and develop their tour.
- A tour guide also needs good planning skills to ensure the tour runs smoothly
- A good tour guide will have good problem-solving skills. Things do not always go according to plan, so being able to think on their feet and find alternatives is essential.

Leadership

Good leadership skills are important for a tour guide. Popular current theories on leadership are that leaders are -

- **Enablers** - a person who enables others to experience or achieve something.
- **Motivator** - a person who aspires to goals or ideals and inspires others to achieve them.

- **Innovator** - a person who inspires others to adapt, change directions, try new ideas, or take risks.

A good tour guide will be all these things. Helping people to achieve and experience something, motivating them to reach their goals and encouraging the person to try new ideas or take risks.

For example, a museum tour guide will –

- Enable the visitor to experience something different.
- They will help the visitor to reach their goal e.g. to visit the museum or find out more about a particular exhibition.
- The guide may encourage the person to think about things in a different way, find out new information and ideas.

An adventure tour guide may –

- Help the visitor to climb a mountain.
- Achieve their goal of climbing the mountain.
- Motivate visitors and inspire them if they are finding things difficult. Perhaps take risks to achieve what they want to achieve.

Communication

Being able to communicate with a wide range of people is essential. Each group that a tour guide works with is likely to have different backgrounds and skills. Understanding the variety in each group helps the guide to ensure that *what* they communicate, is done at the right level.

The guide's ability to alter the delivery of information will make them stand out. For example, being able to remove the technical language so that those with less understanding of arts or plants remain engaged.

Communication is also about being able to articulate well to project their voice. This is particularly important when managing large groups.

Often a tour group will include members who are not confident in their grasp of the tour's language. It is important to ensure that the guide speaks clearly and avoids words which could be misunderstood such as jargon or colloquial phrases. As well as being comfortable communicating in a large group, it is also a skill to be able to speak one on one with group members. Being able to answer questions, while under pressure is also important to develop.

Being a tour guide is not just about verbal communication. A tour guide may be required to communicate in written form, for example -

- Answering emails or queries about your tours
- Posting on social media
- Writing blogs or other promotional materials to promote your tours.

Tour guides also need to be aware of non-verbal communication. For example –

- Signs that a person is bored.
- Signs a person is tired or uncomfortable.

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Suggested Tasks

Visit a local hotel lobby to have a look at their guided tour offerings (perform some online research if it is not possible to visit a hotel). Choose three brochures to take away; they should look as different from each other as possible, e.g. a water-based tour, a city-based tour, a trekking or hiking-based tour. Take the brochures to a comfortable, preferably outdoors, location away from your computer for a peruse.

As you are reading the brochures, consider what sorts of skills each tour guide would need to aptly perform their tours. Think about: what sort of knowledge would they be sharing? Would they need to have any particular physical skills? Which emergency preparedness skills or equipment might they need?