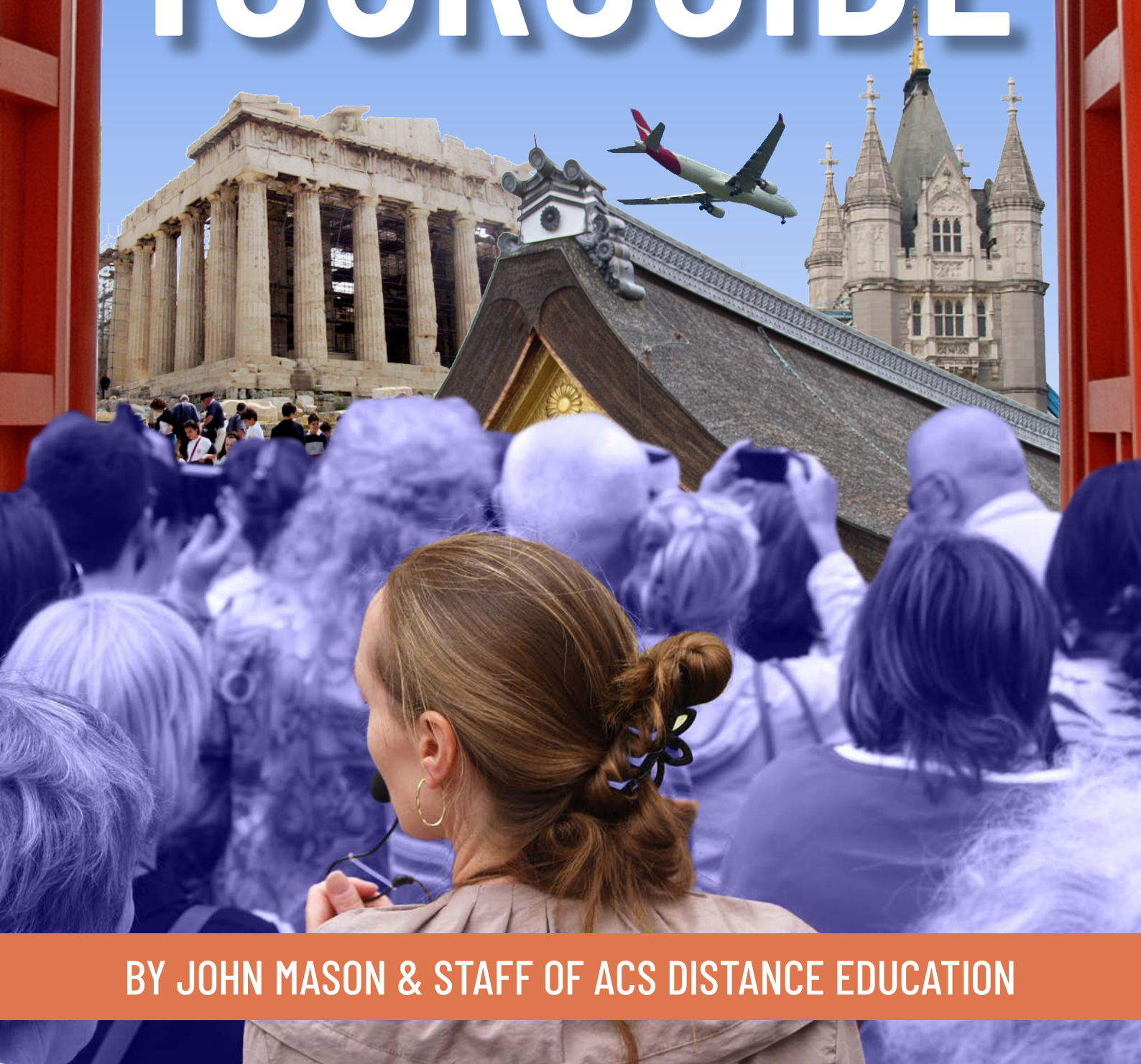


HOW TO BE A TOURGUIDE



BY JOHN MASON & STAFF OF ACS DISTANCE EDUCATION

CHAPTER 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).

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

- 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.



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.

- Indications from other visitors that someone is irritating them. For example, if one person is particularly loud and taking over the group.

It is important to pay attention to visitors to make sure that they are enjoying their trip. If they are not happy for any reason they may complain or post poor recommendations online. As a tour guide, it is important to get positive feedback to encourage other visitors to come on the trips. It is important to be aware of visitors' emotions and engagement.

Organisation

Being able to lead a group takes organisation. No matter how many times a tour guide has run the same tour, they will still take time to plan for a new group.

Organisational skills can relate to the individual activities included in the tour as well as organising the people participating in the tour. Ensuring that everyone sticks together when moving through a garden, museum, or city, means that you need to control the way in which that place is navigated.



Many tourism attractions are vulnerable to damage (eg. Museums, historic sites, national parks). Guides need to understand and enforce the rules of access that apply to such sites.