

Group Tour Training Basics

What is a group tour?

Pre-arranged, prepaid journey to one/more destinations. Usually includes transportation, accommodations, meals, sightseeing and other components. Sold as a unit, rather than individual price breakdown, perhaps with auxiliary components at extra cost.

What is the face of a group tour?

- Motorcoach retail tour offerings
- Affinity groups: e.g. Red Hat Ladies, auto enthusiasts, cooking club, historical society
- Music: choral/band groups (usually seeking performance opportunities)
- Reunions: family, military, alumni, fraternity/sorority
- School classes/youth organizations
- Bank loyalty programs
- Church groups
- Retirement communities/senior centers
- Park & recreation departments
- International tours.

What is the appeal of group tours?

- Economical (Good value through tour planner negotiation)
- Worry-free convenience (reduce driving fatigue, no DWIs)
- Unique – some components not available to individuals
- Companionship/fun (built-in socializing)
- Educational (tour leaders offer great insight on trips)
- Green (six times more efficient than autos)
- Safety (expert drivers found at well-run coach companies)
- Variety – giving different options to meet participants' varying interests.

Why target a group tour?

- One booking fills multiple rooms, multiple tables, multiple attraction/theater admissions
- Fills the books far in advance
- May be very useful in filling shoulder/low seasons or steering to off days
- The percentage of repeat business for a successful tour supplier is high.

The cost of targeting groups

- Requires a long-term commitment, the pay-off is not often immediate
- High level of service needed for long-term success
- Some groups can create additional staffing requirements, challenges (hockey teams)
- Can occasionally displace revenue in hindsight

Why pursue the mature market?

- Seniors spend more than \$30 billion on travel each year
- People over 50 account for 43 percent of all U.S. households
- Median age in the U.S. is on the rise due to aging Baby Boomers
- Baby boomers are retiring: the youngest are 47, the oldest are 65.

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Group booking economics:

Tour Group of 46		Family of 4	
• Lunch: 44 @ \$12 ea	\$ 528	• Lunch: 4 @ \$12 ea	\$ 48
• Attraction: 44 @ \$7 ea	\$ 308	• Attraction: 4 @ \$8 ea	\$ 32
• Dinner: 44 @ \$20 ea	\$ 880	• Dinner: 4 @ \$20 ea	\$ 80
• Theater Tix: 45 @ \$22 ea	\$ 990	• Theater Tix: 4 @ \$25 ea	\$ 100
• Hotel: 23 @ \$109 ea	\$ 2,398	• Hotel Stay: 1 @ \$119	\$ 119
Total	\$ 5,104	Total	\$ 379

Note: group discounts generally offered, including comp rooms/meals for driver and escort (scalable based on group size)

Some definitions/characteristics

Types of Tours

- Day Tours – usually traveling within a 90 mile radius and not including an overnight stay
- Extended Tours – multiple day tours, resulting in overnight stays during a longer journey
- Hub and Spoke Tours – using a key overnight destination with multiple in-area day excursions. Customers like tours with two/more nights in the same destination for more relaxed pace.

Types of Itineraries

- Eco/Green Tours
- Culinary Tours
- Educational
- Historical
- Volunteerism
- Girlfriend getaways
- Sporting events (attending event or tournament participants)
- Multi-generation (grandparents/grandkids)
- Pilgrimage/spiritual growth
- Mixed elements for mixed audiences/interests: culinary and arts, golf and spa.

Mystery Tours

- Promote a destination that may be not be high on a bucket list but has potential
- Create a buzz for those that have been everywhere
- Test the waters of a new concept before adhering to a label/theme.

Tour Operators

- May or may not have their own fleet of motor coaches
- If they don't own, they charter a coach to meet group needs
- Execute itineraries on behalf of group leaders
- Often feature retail tours individuals us through a catalog and website

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- Spend significant time and resources on research and development of their programs
- Are deluged with solicitations from suppliers.

Tour Leaders/Escorts

- Lead a tour on behalf of a tour operator company
- May be an employee of the tour operator or free lance
- Are often NOT driving the vehicle
- Take on superhuman characteristics – able to forecast weather better than Paul Douglas
- Act as timekeeper, nurse, babysitter, counselor, confidant, police, on-the-spot negotiator.

Group Leaders

- Serve as generator of affinity and specialty tours
- May be a church leader, scoutmaster, chapter president, choir director, family matriarch
- Know best what their peeps will want to experience and how much they'll want to pay
- Are not always the largest sphere of influence in choosing a destination.

Groups seek the following in achieving a successful tour:

- **Location** (location, location): convenience to the main route
- **Staging:** overhead clearance, area to park, load/unload near main entrance, or separate entry
- **Cleanliness:** reflects an entity's ability to deliver a quality product
- **Facilities:** accommodate a swell of people on the same timeline, reception space, storage
- **Flexibility:** deposits, confirmation deadlines, comps, cancellation penalties
- **Marketing and planning support:** itinerary assistance, images, on-coach promotions
- **Accessibility:** mobility needs
- **Consistency:** communication, product, service, pricing, value

Marketing:embrace the uniqueness of groups

- Advertise in group publications
- Customize communication
- Simplify product/service/message/contracts
- Provide suggested itineraries
- Collaborate with others in your area to create a comprehensive product
- Meet with them: trade shows, sales calls
- Network with peers, competition, other geo areas, social/service organizations
- Interact with social media

Groups yield more heads in beds, more dining chairs, more theater seats through a focused effort.

A well-orchestrated delivery brings repeat business.

Group leaders are loyal to well-run organizations.

