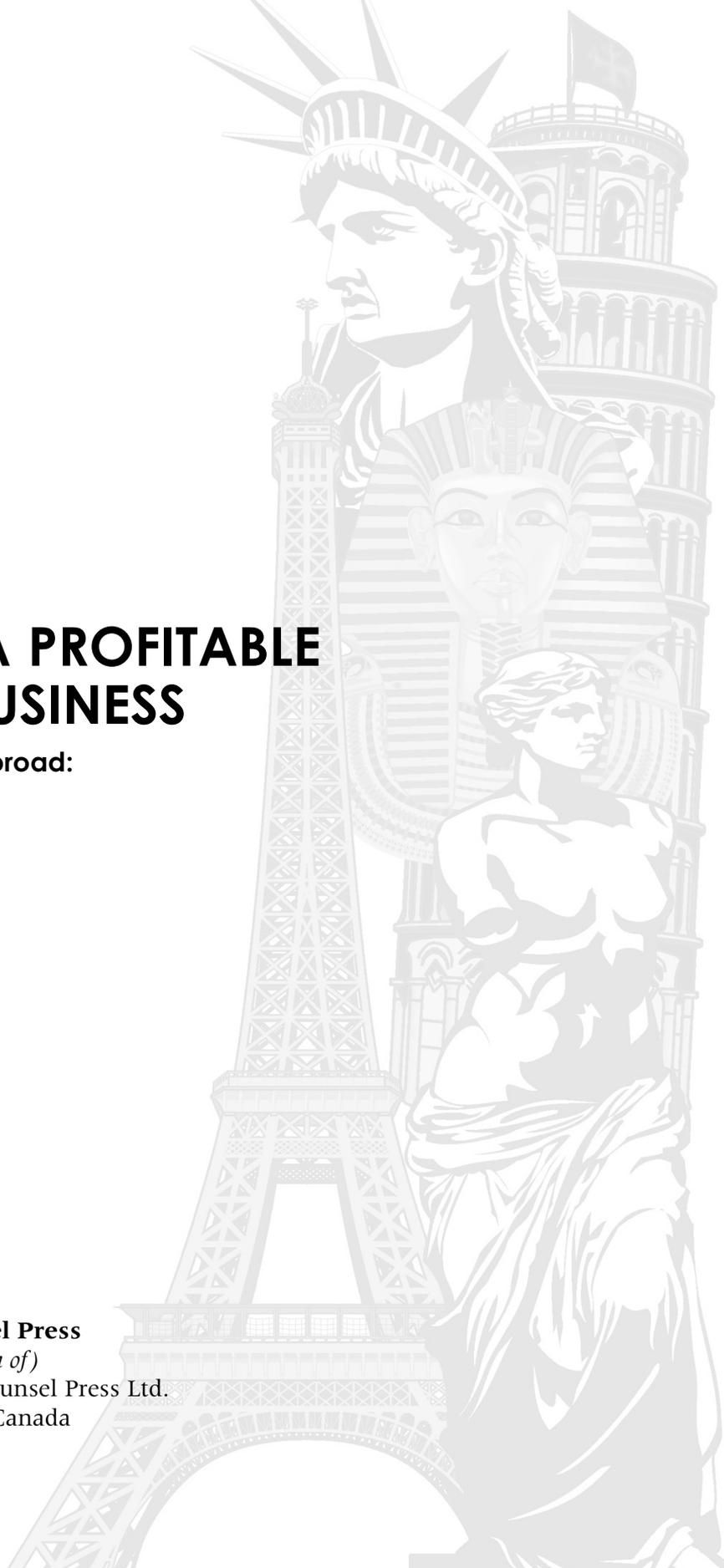


START AND RUN A PROFITABLE TOUR GUIDING BUSINESS

Part-time, full-time, at home, or abroad:
your step-by-step business plan

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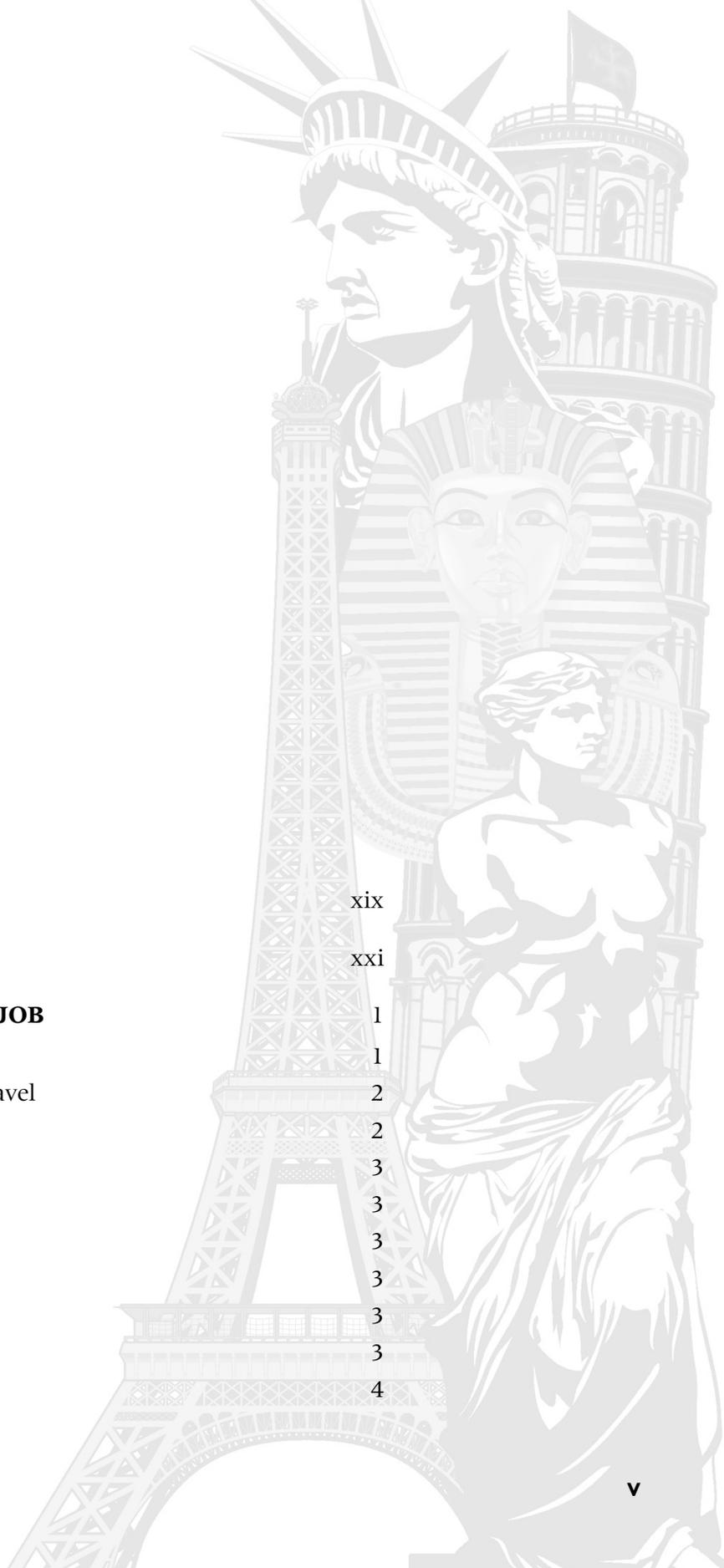
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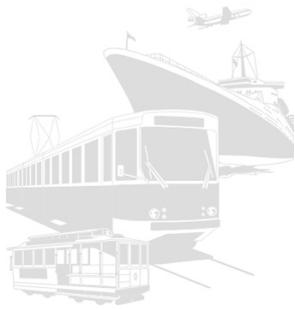
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1 BEFORE YOU QUIT YOUR DAY JOB

1. WHY GROUP TRAVEL?

Group travel is as old as humanity, a heritage passed down from the days of nomadic prehistory. The glorious quests of the Crusaders, the wandering routes of gypsy caravans, the Wild West migrations across North America, even the voyage of Noah's Ark can all be thought of as group travel.

These groups formed because of common interests, needs, and goals. While it is unlikely (but not impossible) you will ever find yourself in charge of a group whose sole purpose is to recover the Holy Grail, many of the reasons people banded together in the past still apply today. If you want to be successful as a tour professional, it is essential to understand these reasons.



Tours are an increasingly popular option for people who would rather pay someone else to look after the planning and deal with any problems along the way.

1.1 Convenient, hassle-free travel

The single biggest reason most people choose group travel is because someone else takes care of all the planning. They want a sense of luxury, the feeling that Jeeves or Max is constantly available to attend to minor details and inconveniences.

The word *travel* is actually related to the French word *travailler*, meaning “to work.” For people with limited annual vacation time to relax from the stress of today’s work environment, work is the last thing they want to do during their holidays.

Hassle-free travel can be enticing and worth paying for. People expect to be buffered from all worries, including the following specific concerns:

- (a) What happens if my plane gets delayed?
- (b) I’ve never been here. I’m afraid of getting lost.
- (c) I can’t even pronounce anything on the menu. I certainly don’t have any idea what it is. What am I going to eat?
- (d) How will I talk to people and make myself understood when I can’t speak the language?
- (e) How much should I carry in cash and traveler’s checks? What about my credit cards? Will my bank debit card work?
- (f) How much should I tip the waiters and hotel staff? Should I still leave a tip even if the service was lousy?
- (g) What kind of clothes will I need? Should I bring formal evening wear or just casual, comfy clothing?
- (h) Will the hotel be up to North American standards?
- (i) There is so much to see and I don’t want to miss any of it. How will I ever visit everything?

1.2 Companionship

We live in a world of ever-faster travel and communications. Ironically, it is also a world of ever-increasing isolation. Many people travel solo because they have no one to accompany them, and travel becomes a lonely experience. Tours allow travelers to share the joys of experiencing a new destination with other people. If your passion is painting, it is more fun to chat about the wonders of the Louvre with another enthusiast over a cup of cappuccino or a leisurely dinner than to be closeted in a room with no one but room service for company.

1.3 Safety

Safety in numbers may be a cliché, but it is a cliché based on truth. Travel in a foreign city or the wilderness can be dangerous, sometimes even life-threatening, for a solo traveler.

1.4 Affordability

Many first-time tour participants are surprised by the affordability of group travel. Because tour operators receive the benefits of group discounts and repeat booking bonuses, they can often provide first-class packages at economy prices. Costs other than personal spending are known up front, so there are no nasty surprises on arrival in a foreign country. That means additional savings for everyone who can resist the urge to spend three times as much on souvenirs.

1.5 Knowledgeable leader

Group travelers are confident their tour director's knowledge and experience will help them enjoy all the traditional sights as well as some they might not otherwise see — the “back rooms” of museums and theaters, for example. Vacation memories are almost as important as the holiday itself, and a competent, knowledgeable tour director will ensure there are many pleasant ones.

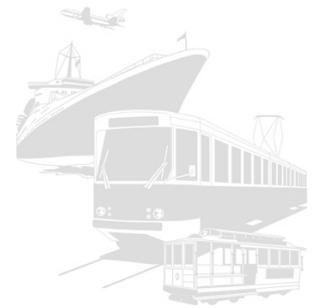
2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF TOURS

2.1 Cruising

A cruise is one of the easiest group tours to arrange and manage, ideal for the first-time tour director. It is the ultimate all-inclusive package: once your group is aboard there is no checking in and out of hotels, no luggage problems, no arranging meals, and entertainment is available on board virtually 24 hours a day. In fact, it is often easy to forget this is a working trip. A tour director's job on a cruise is more of a congenial host than a manager.

2.2 Rail tours

The days of the Orient Express are returning with a vengeance! Travel by rail has a unique, soothing sense of intimacy. Space on board is more restricted than on a cruise ship, but there is still room to move around, avoiding the cramped inactivity often associated with air travel. The sense of intimacy encourages people to strike up friendships with fellow

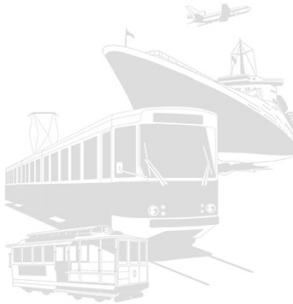


Tour participants, especially those travelling solo, want to feel safe in a foreign environment.

passengers. As well, scenery is more dramatic because you are so close to it physically. For example, there is an amazing difference between viewing remote areas of the Canadian Rockies by train and by road. When you are on a bus there is a sense of separation, but on a train it often seems you are alone in the wilderness, so close to the trees that you could reach out and touch them as they whisk past.

2.3 Bus tours

Also known as motorcoach tours, travel by bus is a perennial favorite group tour method. For the guide, it is also more demanding than cruise or rail travel. You will be checking your group in and out of hotels daily throughout the trip, so organization and superb planning skills are essential, and you will be responsible for the logistics of the entire tour (e.g., route, entertainment, accommodation).



With the rapidly expanding interest in eco-tourism, many urbanites want to experience the Great Outdoors but lack the necessary skills to do so safely on their own.

2.4 Adventure/eco tours

“Getting back to the land” is enjoying a new wave of enthusiasm. According to the National Tour Association, based in Kentucky (see Appendix 1 for information on the NTA and other travel organizations), wilderness travel now ranks among the five most popular types of tours in North America, along with evening entertainment, historical, heritage/cultural, and beautiful gardens. Many city dwellers want to experience nature but lack the survival skills to travel safely in remote areas.

While the sound of an eagle’s cry overhead may be awe-inspiring, the reality of packing 60 pounds of gear dims the exhilaration all too quickly if the traveler is not accompanied by an expert to look after things such as firewood, shelter, food, and water.

2.5 City tours

City tours are usually four- to eight-hour bus tours conducted by a local step-on guide, though some are walking tours. They give tourists an overview of the history and interesting features of a city.

2.6 Theme tours

Most tours have some element of theme, but a true theme tour is organized around one idea — anything from the latest science fiction fad to Chocolate Lovers Anonymous. One example is a recent gravesites tour arranged for a group of Korean War vets.

3. DIFFERENT TYPES OF GUIDES

There are two basic divisions in the tour guiding business — local guides and tour directors. Both guides and directors can work on their own or for a tour operator.

3.1 Local guide

Local guides are on the front line for sightseeing adventures. They are the ones who give commentary and make visitors feel welcome in a specific destination. They can be divided into four subcategories.

(a) Site guide

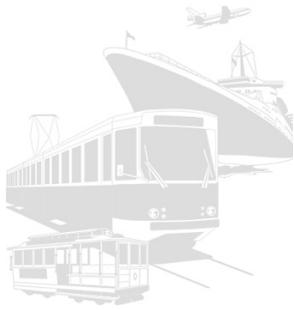
Site guides work at a specific location such as an historical site (the Little Bighorn battlefield) or an entertainment attraction (Paramount Studios). They are often volunteers but are sometimes employed directly by the owner/manager of the attraction. A site guide is responsible solely for providing commentary to people going through the attraction. This is a great way to gain some volunteer experience.

(b) Step-on guide

City tours and single-day events require a step-on guide — literally someone who steps onto the bus and provides commentary. These are often freelancers working on contract but may also be guides employed directly by a tour company and paid an hourly rate. Many people break into professional tour guiding here. Some love it and stay without ever having a desire to become a long-distance tour director. A step-on guide works close to normal hours, is home every evening, and still has all the excitement of meeting people from around the world. If you want to see how you like this type of work, try taking a group of out-of-town relatives or friends around your hometown. Better yet, take a group of people who live there. If you have uncovered enough fascinating information to hold their attention and can impress them with the charm and wit of your delivery, you have taken the first big step to becoming a successful step-on guide.

(c) Driver guide

A driver guide does all the same things a step-on guide does, but drives the bus as well.



Tour directors must be organized, physically fit, have an endless supply of patience, and be able to laugh at almost anything.

(d) Meet-and-greet guide

Just as the name implies, a meet-and-greet guide assists when groups are arriving and leaving a destination. Visitors arriving at an airport will often be welcomed by a meet-and-greet guide who will ensure everyone is present and all luggage has arrived, then assist with customs clearance and transportation to hotels, cruise ships, or other accommodations where the tour director will take over.

3.2 Tour director

Multiday tours require a tour director. Also called tour manager, tour escort, tour leader, or tour host, this is the job most people are envisioning when they say “tour guide.” A tour director is a guide with all the additional headaches of planning accommodation, meals, and long-distance travel. This is a demanding job which requires outstanding organizational skills, endless patience, physical stamina, and a great sense of humor about life’s foibles. Chapters 5 through 10 describe the demands on a tour director in detail.

3.3 Tour operator

Tour operators — also known as tour companies, tour packagers, tour brokers, or tour wholesalers — design and market tours that they sell either direct to the public or through travel agencies. (Chapters 14 through 23 provide information on setting up as a tour operator.) Whether you work as a direct employee or as a freelancer on contract, you will most likely be working for and paid by one or more tour operators. Since most people who become tour guides or directors are bored by sameness and routine schedules in their workplace, it is common in the industry to freelance for several different operators at the same time. What is not wonderful with one company will be fantastic with another.