

Tour Guiding Tips

It is all about passion! I never remember dates or facts (unless the fact is hilarious or really weird) but I'll remember if they got me excited to be there because their passion rubbed off on me!

1. **Get to know your audience.** Meet your group at least five minutes before the tour start time so you can get to know them, their needs, languages, disabilities, interests, etc.
2. **Face the crowd, not what you're talking about.** Speak audibly and clearly. Tour guides often get so wrapped up in their subject they forget to face the people they are addressing. One secret to avoid this is to ask if they can hear you, and give them permission to tell you if they are unable to hear. Your visitors need to hear you properly so that they can digest the information and remain engaged.
3. **Be personal.** No matter how much we love buildings, it's a fact that people connect with people. So it's good to have a few personal anecdotes/stories ready. You'll build a more personal connection to your group and create a memorable tour. So, tell a story (historical or contemporary). Make sure you have a few fun and compelling stories to tell about the buildings and things you're looking at. People are more likely to feel engaged when they are listening to a story, rather than a list of dates and names.
4. **Get moving right away.** Tours often get bogged down before they ever begin with tour guides doing the big introduction, setting the theme, providing context, etc. Plan to scrap 90% of it.
5. **Don't worry about being perfect.** People don't expect you to be perfect. Set the stage for human imperfection by acknowledging that people who may know more than you should speak up and share their knowledge with the group. The more interactive the tour is, the better!
6. **Help visitors to learn.** As Benjamin Franklin has famously said, "*Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn*", it is crucial to engage your audience and facilitate their learning. Simply informing them of the facts is boring. Encourage conversation, demonstrate enthusiasm, ask questions, answer questions.
7. **End on time.** Nobody wants to feel like they are in tour jail. Tours on paper always seem too short and on the ground are always too long. Half an hour to forty-five minutes is the absolute maximum. Extend your time if needed after the tour has finished for those wanting more information.
8. **Continue to learn & improve.** A good tour guide should continuously work on fine-tuning the tour to make it an exceptional one. You can identify the areas that require improvement by paying attention to what visitors enjoy the most and the least about the tour, by asking your visitors some questions and answering theirs, and by encouraging visitor feedback at the end of a tour. These practical steps can help you realise what further steps you need to take in order to enhance your tour.
9. **Relays accurate information.** When faced with a question you may not know the answer to, a good tour guide never makes up facts. It is vital to relay accurate information to your visitor. If you do not know an answer to a question, point the visitor to a resource which will help them attain the answer, or better yet, make note of the question and request their contact information so you can supply them with an answer after conducting research. This will help you raise your credibility, provide

great customer service, and at the same time, allow you to acquire new knowledge yourself.

10. **Act professionally.** A tour generally takes place in a relaxed environment. However, as a tour guide, you are still giving a professional service and should act accordingly. It is important to act professionally to establish authority and credibility with your audience. Also, small but important details such as being punctual, greeting tourists warmly, dressing well, and being courteous and attentive, helps you build rapport with your audience.

With thanks to Clive Howarth, Volunteer Guide

The difference between a good guide and a great guide

On starting the tour:

- A good tour guide will introduce themselves, welcome you, and give you an introduction of what to expect on the tour.
- A *great* tour guide will also take the time to get to know you – where you're from, why you're visiting, your interests – and if there are others on the tour, s/he will introduce everyone on the tour to each other. The best guides get to know the visitors on the tour, not in an intrusive way, but in a way that shows genuine interest.

On seeing the sites:

- A good tour guide will cover all the items on the itinerary.
- A *great* tour guide will not only ensure you see what's promised, s/he will modify the itinerary depending on the conditions to ensure you will receive the best experience. A great guide will be willing to showing you additional things on request and give your further information based on your interests.

On time management:

- A good tour guide will not only be on time, but he will manage the time so you know how long you have on the tour, and what time you're expected to finish, and will ensure you're back on time.
- A *great* tour guide is aware of the start and end time but is flexible with the time and will tailor the tour based on the groups specific interests and time constraints. Great tour guides never rush you.

On colour in your commentary:

- A good tour guide follows a script and gives you the historical and cultural background.
- A *great* tour guide is a gifted story teller who is passionate about the Bishop's Palace. The historical accounts will take you back in time. A great guide will weave in interesting/amusing anecdotes about the Palace and its history and people.

On wrapping up:

- A good tour guide will conclude the tour with closing remarks, thank you for coming on the tour.
- A *great* tour guide will thank you for your visit and may make recommendations for other activities you should consider during your visit.

With thanks to Dr. Mark Hutchinson, Volunteer Guide at The Bishop's Palace