

6

Basics of Tour Guiding

Learning objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to understand:

- The general dos and don'ts of tour guiding
- The concept of heritage walks
- How to guide visitors on a walking tour
- The nuances of guiding on a coach
- Some essential tools required by tour guides

So far in the book, we have discussed the theoretical underpinnings for interpretation planning, interpretation, and interpretive narratives. However, on the ground, a more clinical approach is required. There are several situations where guides must lead the group. With this chapter, we begin a discussion on how to guide visitors in basic situations.

One of the most basic formats is to accompany guests as they look around a monument or a natural site. Recently, there have been innovations, and themed walks have become popular among visitors. Transfer of guests from one site to another is routine. During the transfers, professional tour guides have developed techniques to narrate on moving vehicles. This chapter also discusses guiding on a moving vehicle. Conventionally, tour guides lead the group in archaeological sites, historical places, religious sites and museums. Then they may have to accompany guests to a natural site. We discuss all these scenarios in the following chapters.

However, first, we have the general dos and don'ts for tour guides.

Dos and Don'ts

Dos

Tour guides must note down all commitments in the scheduler. Alarms must be set so that no commitment is missed, or one is never even late – it is a cardinal sin. The following are essentials that all guides in all situations must ensure.

A tour guide's commentary should neither be too short nor too long. As discussed earlier, the whole commentary must be woven around a planned interpretive theme. Additionally, a good tour guide will relate commentary with the situation: the audience, the events, etc. Guides must plan for Top Visual Priorities (TVPs). Identify which TVPs are to be brought to the audience's attention and when. TVPs deserve the first mention. Then, of course, some TVPs will spring up spontaneously. Tourists visit a destination to immerse themselves in the local experience. So, talk about the social saga and connect with contemporary community life. Tell about life, how people have lived here over the years: their values, beliefs and traditions.

There should be a provision to accommodate last-minute changes. Occasionally, guests may have some special requests. Tour guides must adhere to the daily visit list and achieve the itinerary, however, adaptability is crucial. Therefore, the rule is first to follow the list of things already committed to the guests and then accommodate their requests wherever possible.

Tour guides may be required to change the earlier planned routes or itinerary. For example, guests may like to spend more time some place. Advise them that this would mean cutting time allotted to other attractions. Alternatively, the guide may spend more time with the guests than planned. A good tour guide will always suggest alternative routes and itineraries; however, this should not be an additional cost for the company. Always seek prior approval from the operations team and keep the ground crew in the loop. Similarly, the tour guide may have to alter their narrative according to the audience: adults, youth, children, professionals, etc.

Follow the Rule of Three. Tell about not more than three things at a time. Do not get into the details of everything and unnecessarily stretch the commentary. Instead, say what is important and likely to excite the visitors' inquisitiveness. Remember, only the 'should tell' and 'must tell' begin. Then, if the guests appear interested, elaborate with 'could tell'. Avoid technical terms and jargon, especially if they are in vernacular. If a technical term is used, speak out slowly and syllable-by-syllable.

A tour guide must not be restless or in haste. Instead, they must allow guests to talk and interpret for themselves. Offer them the opportunity to put across their understanding of things and events. This exchange, in turn, allows tour