

How I Organized Tours for 1994

by Alice Love, Prairie Waves Morris

1. Read "The Book". Some occasional tidbits, but mostly useless.
2. Call people who have done this before and ask questions.

Determined:

Drive the distances yourself and add 30%. It really does take buses longer, especially in town.

Have dancers start loading 5 minutes sooner than you want them to load.

Add 10 minutes to the time you think it will take to load.

Have whoever is in charge of the group give the group a 10 minute warning before they are leaving. Especially important at bar stop so those that need can visit the restroom.

Find and publish the whereabouts of restrooms and water fountains for every tour stop if possible.

Individual tour stops for the bus run from 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Mass Dancing runs 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

If possible plan and publish rain backups.

Will need Liability Insurance, amount of insurance is determined by the places you choose to dance. Cost us \$225 for event Liability Insurance required by many of our dance stops. This is cheaper than normal, remember where we toured. The people requiring the insurance are your best source for where to obtain the insurance.

3. Talk to your team and decide what is most important to you. We decided that as much as we wanted people to tour Omaha, it wasn't fair to make them ride 2 hours on the bus. We also really wanted to limit the number of times you loaded or unloaded a bus. People noticed and complimented us on these choices. I heard no complaints on the low audience.

4. Decide where you want to go. It is important to discuss these on going site decisions with the people on your team. They may have knowledge you don't have and may have strong feelings that need to be considered. Above and beyond finding a place that is flat with some trees you need to consider:

Location of camp.

Distance (wanted short bus rides)

Keeping the number of times you load and unload that bus low.

Are there good bars in this area?

What was really neat or interesting that met the criteria above.

Requires at least one trip to assure suitability as a dance site. I really don't think dancers cared what or where they were dancing except that it was flat with some shade and a breeze. Then they loved the place. Flat and no shade, they disliked the place. Buildings, history, scenery and audience were not commented on even though a certain amount of energy was put into finding dance sites that would maximize these as well.

5. Once you decide where, then you must determine who you need to get written permission from for use. In cities, you may have to obtain street permits that go through the police department. These permits often include a fee. Got most of my help through the Lincoln Downtown Association, Parks and Recreation Department and the Chamber of Commerce in the smaller towns. Need to get past the little old ladies manning the phones at the Chambers.

Write and phone these people. Helps to have a publicity packet with pictures of Morris dancing and we used reprints of the May 1981 Smithsonian to try and prove respectability. Copy of press release is in "The Book"

6. Once dance sites are determined, then must find bar in general area that will let 40 sweaty dancers dance and sing for 45 minutes to one hour. Should have a different bar (if possible) for each bus tour. In case of heavy rain, the dancers have someplace to go. Confirm in writing if possible. Keep the name of who you talked to.

7. Hire Bus company. Number and type of bus is determined very much by location and amount of travel.

When looking at school buses, do not take the bus company's word for how many can fit. Go and sit on the bus. Make sure it is a High School bus (adult sized leg room) and that you are talking about two people to a seat. Remember at least three seats will be needed for sticks, hobbies, coolers and instruments. School buses generally hold about 35 people. Coaches hold 47 people, stuff is stored in luggage compartments.

Buses and coaches are hired on a per hour per bus bases. (\$40/hour/bus) When comparing costs it is easiest to estimate the number coming to the ale, determine how many school buses you would need vs how many coaches would be needed. Individually coaches are more expensive, but you need fewer. Coaches will give you bigger numbers of dancers on tour. Number of dancers determines space needed to dance.

8. Now you have your tours set up with bar stops and mass dance sites. All your written permissions and the correct insurance. Time for publicity.

9. Get a list of newspapers, radio and TV stations and Chamber of Commerce Offices in the areas you will be dancing (Yellow pages, Downtown Associations). Each gets a press release the first week of May with complete schedule. I chose to call bar time a Break on this version of the schedule. Copy of final schedule is in "The Book".

10. Two weeks before the ale we sent out Posters, advertising the specific dance performances to be put up in those areas we were dancing. Sent to Chambers of Commerce, Downtown Associations, who ever we had worked with who might know where to put them up.

At this time sent confirming letter to Bar with Poster. Told the bar the number of dancers and time and date to expect, how the dancers would want water first, then beer etc.

11. In our group, the person doing the registration also did the grouping for the bus tours. Tried to keep the Minnesota teams apart, numbers even and those who specifically requested to be together, together.

12. Last week, put together the tour packets.

Packets included: (sample enclosed)

List of teams on that tour.

Schedule of that tour.

Maps and addresses.

Step by step instructions for getting from camp, through the tour and back to camp.

Extra packets were made up in case some one chose to drive instead of take the bus. All originals were kept by me.

A packet with Maps, addresses and specific instructions needs to be made for Bus driver as well. Signs were made to be posted in each bus identifying the tour. The signs should use the same tour titles as the schedules.

13. We chose to tour as a team, so recruited retired morris dancers and gregarious friends to act as native guides on the bus.

Native Guides have:

list of Mass Dances

list of teams on tour.

addresses and times of tour stops.

copies of all permissions, permits etc.

maps of areas to be toured.

First Aid Kit

Emergency numbers and coins for pay phone.

Signs to identify the tour it would be taking

Native Guides are responsible for:

Getting dancers to the right place at the right time.

Deciding who will organize the dancers into a performance.

Relay questions to and from Driver. Give Driver any necessary instructions.

14. Some time between the beginning of the ale and the first tour, talked to Native Guides about the particulars of their tours. (ex. no dancing in Lincoln bars)

15. Just before the buses loaded, one person gave the bus drivers their instructions, second person gave Native Guides their bags containing stuff listed above, third person loaded buses with drinking water and snacks. Guides handed out additional packets to those who wanted them.

16. At the end of each tour, the Native guide should carefully look and make sure nothing is left on the bus.

Some final notes from the author:

It is important for all people who are working on this to communicate. Tours must be scheduled so that they work with what the meal folks are planning. Final ale schedule is a cooperation between tours, meals, morning activities, evening plans with enough free time to allow folks to brush their teeth, take a shower or forget something and have time to get it.

In addition, little details between different planning areas are important. The person who divided up the teams into groups for the two days did not realize that the Saturday Lincoln tour was identical to the one of the Sunday Lincoln tours and had to redistribute the teams at the last minute. The person making the signs for the buses called the tours by different names then was on the schedules. The person doing food didn't tell me there were snacks to put on the bus. These are little confusions you don't want to have to deal with at the ale, talk them out ahead of time.

I was very careful to tell guides what could be blown off, And what performances had to be on time, but did not say, "Unless specified you must stay with the schedule." It needed to be said. If buses make unscheduled stops on the way home, they add to the time the drivers are out and increases the cost. Can you afford an additional unexpected bill at the end of the ale? As for changes in the beer stops, it ended up not being a problem, but could just as easily become one. Guides need to know that unless specified, follow instructions.

Finally, I am not sure the detailed instructions are worth the time it takes to write them. Can easily just supply maps and addresses.

Budget 1994:

Buses	\$1680.00	Street Permits	\$ 40.00
Posters	22.15	Park Permits	155.00
Handouts	8.00	Insurance	225.00
Postage	20.00	Copies maps etc	15.00