
Tours and Vacation Packages

INTRODUCTION

Being able to suggest the perfect tour will help you become the professional whom clients rely on and return to with future travel needs. When you select the right Hawaiian tour package for a honeymoon couple or arrange a unique Asian adventure tour for a retired couple, you offer more than just airline tickets. You build an entire package that fills your clients' needs as completely as possible. In this way, you establish a loyal clientele that will come back to you for their future travel needs.

How Important Is Selling Tours and Vacation Packages?

Tours are not only important—they're crucial to any travel agency's profitability. According to a recent survey conducted by American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), 81 percent of all tours and packages are sold by travel agents. With a number that high, travel agents are sure to have a variety of



needs and wants from their customers. As a travel agent, you need to be up on the latest trends in group tours and vacations packages, as well as have trips that are more unique from the rest of the tours out there.

Group tours and vacation packages have varied in type over the years. The shift in touring preferences is largely driven by the baby boomer population. The demands of this generation are changing, as baby boomers want travel that matches their specific needs and interests. They like the idea of adventure and they want to travel in smaller, more concentrated groups. They also want more free time, flexibility, and some independence while travelling (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1—Vacationers want more flexibility while on vacation.

What Are Tours and Vacation Packages?

Tours and vacation packages include everything from relaxing on a sun-drenched beach in the West Indies to trekking through the Himalayas. Tours most often refer to escorted tours, while vacation packages often refer to independent tours. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Escorted Tours

An *escorted tour* can be defined as a trip taken by a group of people who travel together throughout most or all of the trip by following an organized and prearranged itinerary. Most tours include accommodations, most meals, sightseeing, and transportation. They also include the services of a *professional tour manager* or *escort* who accompanies the group, and perhaps other transportation such as cruises or trains.

Independent Tours

An *independent tour* is a vacation package designed for those traveling independently who don't want to be part of an organized group or itinerary. A package combines multiple travel elements in an all-inclusive price. The price is usually lower than if the elements were purchased separately. Volume purchasing makes this possible.

Any two or more of the following can be part of a vacation package:

- Air transportation
- Accommodations
- Meals
- Motorcoach
- Rail or private vehicle
- Entertainment
- Car rental
- Airport transfers
- Sightseeing
- Tickets to major attractions, theme parks, or theaters

Air transportation from and to the client's home city may or may not be included in a published tour or vacation package; you must check each tour brochure carefully for this information. If air transportation *is* included, it's called

an *air and land tour*. The tour company will use a specific airline or airlines, and will usually prepare the tickets and include them in the client's tour documents.

If air transportation is *not* included, it's called a *land-only package*. The travel agent books the air flights and will issue the airline tickets following standard procedures. In this case, the client can select the most appropriate airline, fare, and schedule.

By the Way

Transfers are a common feature included in a tour or vacation package. A transfer is local ground transportation that provides arrival and departure services at each destination in a tour. Transfers include

- Transportation from the airport, city air terminal, rail station, or pier to the hotel; or from the hotel to the airport, city air terminal, rail station, or pier
- Baggage handling service, called *portage*
- Tips

Who Operates Tour Packages?

Tours are put together, marketed, and operated by companies called *tour operators* and *tour wholesalers*. These two terms are often used interchangeably, but there are some essential differences between these two types of tour companies.

Tour Operators

Tour operators put together all of the components of a tour or vacation package. They market and then sell these packages to the general public, usually through travel agencies. Tours and packages are commissionable to travel agents, who, in turn, sell the product to their customers.

However, some tour operators also deal directly with the general public, thus bypassing the travel agency. Some large tour operators, such as American Express and Carlson, act as travel agencies since they deal directly with the public and provide other travel services.

Another characteristic of tour operators is that many operate specific ground services and other aspects of the tour at each destination. They may actually employ personnel such as drivers, escorts, and guides. Tour operators might also arrange tours that utilize tour guides at destinations such as national parks, wildlife reserves, and historic preservation sites (Figure 2). They also often own their own motorcoach touring vehicles and in some cases, hotels or other accommodations.



FIGURE 2—*This guide is showing a tour group through the Florida Everglades.*

There are thousands of tour operators. A few examples include American Express, Bennett Tours, Inc., Brendan Tours, Collette Tours, Cosmos, Educational Travel Services, Inc., EuroCruises, Inc., Globus, GoGo Worldwide Vacations, Insight International Tours, Maupintour, Pacific Delight Tours, Inc., Rail Europe, TNT Vacations, and Trafalgar Tours, Inc.