



10 Questions To Ask  
Before Booking A Tour



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### About Stride Travel



*"Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore." - Andre Gide*



## **Introduction**

So you are considering taking a guided tour - sometimes called a tour package or multi-day tour. The benefits appeal to you: not having to plan all the details before or during your trip, getting easy access to special places with knowledgeable local guides, making your travel dollar go further and -- contrary to some conventional thinking -- actually having a more authentic local experience. But picking the right trip and tour company can be daunting if you aren't sure what to look for. By nature it's a bigger travel decision than your typical run-of-the-mill vacation.

No matter your age, gender, relationship status or level of physical activity, there's a tour with your name on it. There's only one problem: what's the best way to search for a tour that gives you the adventure and comfort levels you seek?

The truth is that finding your ideal tour amid the myriad options available can feel like trying to spot one of those shy, striped hyenas on an African safari—it's out there somewhere, but takes some work for the reward.

Be prepared to unleash your inner savvy traveler with some must-have, can't-live-without-it advice to help you plan less, save money, and explore more.

## 10 Questions to Ask... Before Booking Your Next Tour

### 1. Does the tour operator have a good reputation?

“Reputation” comes from the Latin, “*reputare*,” meaning, “think over.” Well, one thing to think over when searching for the right tour company is their reputation in the industry. The digital world has made mining such data easier than ever. You can find the associations and professional affiliations of which a tour operator is a member - for example, the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) or the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA).

Another resource to gauge tour company quality and reputation are online traveler reviews. It’s important to hear from actual travelers, and not just the company itself, regarding trip experiences and expectations. Online marketplaces, such as Stride Travel, offer these reviews for you to browse, which can be very helpful when deciding on a company to travel with. After all, it’s a big decision!



## **2. Did you calculate the full tour price?**

We all know that airline ticket pricing can be confusing, with extra costs for taxes and fees. Tour pricing can be equally difficult to calculate. A big factor is which items are included, are not included or are optional: airfare; accommodations; meals; excursions; visa fees; park fees; and more. There may also be an innocuous-sounding pricing term called a “kitty,” which can add up. The kitty, sometimes listed as a “local payment,” is a cash contribution to a central fund that is overseen by the travelers and the guide. This helps fund accommodations, meals or activities for the entire group, all the while keeping money in the local economy and thereby fostering responsible tourism. While such a contribution to the kitty is compulsory on most trips, it is sometimes voluntary. Make sure you pay attention to all pricing details so that there are no surprises.

Traveling by yourself? You may need to factor in a single supplement, in which solo travelers are charged extra for having their own room. This



additional charge may be worth paying if you prefer some privacy. Some operators do not require a single supplement as long as you are willing to room with another solo traveler of the same gender.

Once you have figured a tour's total charge and are doing a comparison, keep in mind that if a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is; you may not want to make your choice based on tours being last-minute deals. Also, consider whether the security of procuring non-refundable travel insurance, generally in a range of five to eight percent of the total trip price, is worth the additional cost. Many times, you might not have a choice, as many tour companies require basic travel insurance when booking a trip.

### **3. Is the tour group's size right for you?**

Do you prefer a more intimate travel experience? If so, be sure to ascertain the group size for a tour, including the guide-to-traveler ratio. If this detail is not in the trip description, call the tour operator's customer service number and they can provide you with historical averages of group size and projected size for the tour in which you are interested.

While the cost of tours with smaller groups may be higher, the benefit is often worth it to gain more attention from the guides, and see more off-the-beaten-path locations, translating to a more in-depth travel experience.



#### **4. Do the pace & physical requirements match your needs?**

Think of the tale of the tortoise and the hare. Odds are you fall somewhere in between their paces, but where on the spectrum is your comfort zone? As in the fable, you'll still get to the finish line (a.k.a., your destinations), as tour operators are adept at meeting your needs; it's just a matter of what tour pace makes sense for you.





What to consider? You should research such items as the number of places to be seen in how many days or if there are strenuous activities planned. Be sure to factor in weather conditions. For example, if you come from the drier western U.S., you may not be used to humidity levels topping 90%, which means your usual level of physicality gets taken down a notch in tropical spots featuring such sweat-inducing weather. Also, if you are signing up for a true adventure, such as hiking the [Inca Trail to Machu Picchu](#), ensure you are adequately prepared by following an exercise regimen leading up to your departure. The better shape you're in, the more fun you'll have!

## **5. Are the tour accommodations, meal, and service offerings up to your standards?**

Many tours include meals, accommodations and services, so be sure that the levels of these items meet your travel needs. Start by booking the correct room size and hotel type, if multiple options exist. Also, if you have dietary restrictions, you may want to call the tour company to see your meal options. Customer-service representatives are there to help you with any questions about a tour, so never hesitate to call.

Also important is how the tour operator works with local services. Are the tour's lodgings Western chain hotels or locally owned properties? What about restaurants and guides? Locally owned businesses offer an authentic travel experience, with the added benefit of responsible tourism, since keeping money in the pockets of locals is vital to developing economies.

## **6. How important is cultural immersion to you on your trip?**

It takes cultural immersion to enhance your travel experience, but to what degree? Some travelers want more interaction with locals than others, so make sure your chosen tour reflects your desires, keeping you within your comfort zone. Cultural immersion translates to



anything from dinner with a local family, to visiting a local school where you

are entertained by children, to longer homestay vacations. Learning the history of a place straight from a local's mouth is an oral-history lesson to the max—one no history book could ever provide.

Many tours provide a connection to nature and the environment, showcasing how the area's residents have been historically tied to their land for generations. If your tour operator shows respect for the region to which you are traveling, then future visitors can experience that destination in the same way, too

## **7. Are all of the attractions you want to see showcased on this tour?**

Be sure to check each day's itinerary for your prospective tour. Do the sites to be seen match your wish list? If not, check further, as another tour may offer what you want. While you may not find that perfect tour, a bit of compromise can still provide a memorable vacation.





Keep in mind that some trip packages offer pre- and post-tour excursions that may take you somewhere you find of interest or give you more time in a locale that seems worthy of extra sightseeing. Remember to factor the price of such excursions into the total cost of your tour.

## **8. What is your optimal balance between free time versus scheduled time with the group?**

By checking a tour's day-by-day itinerary, you'll be able to see how much free time is built into the schedule. This amount of free time varies, so make sure the tour schedule works for you. Some travelers enjoy the flexibility of being able to spend more time wandering the streets of that charming Italian village or eating a lunchtime meal along the idyllic Sydney Harbor. Shopping aficionados may want extra time to peruse markets and bazaars at their own pace.

Are you more of the independent traveler—someone who wants a few things planned but way more free time to explore on your own? Then check out tours that offer as much as 75% free time, allowing you more time to be your own trip planner.

## **9. Is the tour departing at the best time of year?**

Vacation destinations offer a different feel at different times of year, so choose what makes sense for you. You may see sales for low or shoulder-season travel. While such sales are certainly eye catching, be sure *your* eyes will still be seeing what you wanted.

Let's say Vienna's calling. Venturing to this sophisticated Austrian capital in winter means having the city to yourself, a chance to attend the annual Vienna Opera Ball and the occasional light snowfall that creates a romantic ambience. In contrast, if the streets are icy, your travel experiences can be limited. Heading to Vienna in summer means longer daylight hours for wandering, but you'll definitely be in the company of a plethora of fellow tourists. A trip to Vienna in August means many of the locals will be off sunning themselves at their favorite Mediterranean beach for the entire month, which can lead to a less authentic experience for travelers to Austria.

Another seasonal example pertains to wildlife viewing. Take East Africa's Lake Victoria, which has a wet season from March to



May, perfect for birders flocking to this prime spot to see avian splendor. Conversely, a trip to Lake Victoria in dry season can offer the opportunity for spotting much more big game – who gather at watering holes during those times -- so if elephants and lions interest you more than birds, you would want to head to Lake Victoria any time other than spring.

Smart trip planners always check historic weather conditions before booking their tour.

## **10. Is the tour operator practicing responsible tourism?**

Tourism is one of the largest industries worldwide. Traveling to a place not only affords you a chance to create lifelong memories—you are also supporting local people and the environment. Think of visiting a holiday destination as like going to someone’s house for a dinner party: you would never want to insult your host, so you would not want to insult your host nation either. By choosing a reputable tour operator, you can rest assured that your impact on a region is positive.

The intent of every good tour operator’s mission is to protect, and when possible, enhance, local resources. Many such businesses are affiliated with local organizations and have regional affiliations, usually touted on websites. One respected organization is the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which has a “Global Code of Ethics for Tourism” that any reputable tour operator should espouse. Two major tenets of responsible tourism are the protection of children and the safekeeping of the environment.



To get started, check the [tour operator profiles](#) researched by Stride specialists. There you can find summaries of their professional associations and responsible tourism practices.

### **Venture forth...you are not alone...**

All that may sound like a lot, but investing a little time up front in selecting the right guided trip will pay off big time - for you and the places you visit. The difference between picking the best guided trip and picking an okay one, not to mention a poor fit, is the difference between having to control yourself from bragging too much about the incredible experiences you had or spending your time pondering whether things could have been a little (or a lot!) better. This is especially important if you, like many travelers, only have the ability to take one big, international trip each year.

Don't be daunted, however, since there are many great trips, and with resources like Stride -- which offers both easy tools to find your perfect trip and unique destination guides to help with inspiration -- you don't have to research alone. Responsible travel professional associations like the Adventure Travel Trade Association are another great resource, whose entire mission is to maintain high quality standards throughout the industry.

Venture forth and get ready to make some of the best memories.



## **About Stride Travel**

Stride enables travelers of all stripes to authentically explore the world at their pace. It is the first marketplace site for all professionally planned, experiential travel - tours, adventure trip packages, small ship & river cruises, and self-guided active vacations.

Stride makes it easy to find and compare the most comprehensive variety of trips to every continent from over 400 leading and local travel companies. With trusted user reviews on thousands of itineraries and companies, travelers can pick their perfect trip with confidence.

Stride is based in San Francisco, California with staff and Destination Experts around the globe.

