

Tips for Group Travel Leaders

Planning, marketing and escorting travel groups can be both satisfying and rewarding for your club, school, special interest group, civic organization or church. The following tips for Group Travel Leaders are designed to help you through the process of creating a special travel experience for your organization.

Before Consulting a Travel Planner

- While you may have several reasons for sponsoring or hosting a group trip, establish an overall primary objective with which prospective travelers can identify.
- Recognize the opinion leaders within your organization, who will likely become strong proponents for a group travel experience and among the first people to join the travel group. Solicit their ideas regarding the itinerary, organizational goals, best travel dates and other trip details. They likely will become an important influence encouraging others to join your trip.
- Depending upon the complexity of the itinerary, you should be planning nine to 12 months in advance of your proposed departure date, and possibly earlier for a group cruise. In some cases, when the group is fully constituted and ready to make their reservations, a shorter window before departure may be appropriate. Yet, always allow enough time for participants to work the cost of the trip into their budgets.

Contact a Travel Professional

- Planning a group trip is a complex process best handled in concert with a travel professional; it's not a do-it-yourself project. We recommend working directly with a travel agent or tour operator to help you with the details.
- The travel professional you contact should be more interested in discovering information about your group needs and travel objectives rather than in selling travel. If you get a quick travel recommendation or sales pitch in your first conversation, look elsewhere for a genuine *travel partner* focused on your group's needs and desires. You should also decide whether you prefer a pre-packaged tour or a tour design specifically for your travel group.
- Items to discuss with the travel planner include your goals for the trip, the approximate group size, a preliminary itinerary that supports your objective a budget range and the travel items that you and your fellow travelers might wish to be included in the travel package, including whether the package will include a fundraising component.
- Always include optional travel-medical insurance with your travel package, especially on international itineraries. A single person with a medical issue or other emergency without insurance can disrupt the trip for everyone in your group.
- Expect a preliminary proposal for your review and adjustments before receiving a final proposal or letter of agreement. Such agreement should include every detail of the trip including a marketing plan, the responsibilities of the travel planner and the group's responsibilities. You also should determine whether you desire a group escort to handle the travel details during the journey. This process will require two or more meetings with the travel planner.

Implementing Your Marketing Plan

- Many of your travel group prospects will require five to seven touch points before they are ready to sign-on. This means that you will need to utilize all possible channels of communication, including live presentations, posters, newsletter articles and possibly a webinar hosted by the travel professional. Be prepared to answer questions from prospects.
- Be sure your agreement or contract includes who will prepare promotional materials and make live presentations.
- Depending upon the trip itinerary, consider providing pre-trip meetings to discuss the history and culture of the places you will visit.
- Encourage people who book into the trip early to invite other family members and friends to join the group for fun and fellowship.
- Emphasize that the group trip will be a “vacation with a purpose” with time for relaxation, sightseeing and exploring on your own.
- It will be important to remind people about the experience and objective ahead even after they have registered for the trip to build excitement and anticipation. Other people will want to join your group if you create a “buzz” about the trip.

[Note: Most people prefer travel in the range of 9 to 15 days including travel days on international trips; they also desire multiple nights in more than one location to minimize packing and unpacking; and they do not want to fill every day with 12 hours of travel from place to place.]

Getting Ready to Go

- If the group is not escorted by a representative of the travel professional, you as the group leader will need a detailed itinerary from door-to-door with names and contact information for each city you will be visiting.
- While each participant will need much less information, they also will require trip details, information about what to pack and contact information to leave with family members back home. In addition, they need to know about required visas, passports and other travel documentation well in advance. Tour operators will not be responsible for guests denied travel due to their improper documentation.
- A complete guest manifest with information about each traveler should be provided to the travel partner at least 70 days prior to departure on international trips.

You and Your Travel Professional

- Your relationship with the travel professional should be a partnership built on open communication and trust. The travel partner you select should be someone who will always put the best interest of your group ahead of their own.
- Leading a group of 30 to 40 people to a foreign land can be a stressful assignment. Yet, with the right travel partner and a sound travel plan, you can relax and enjoy the journey yourself.