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Tour Director Terminology

➤ Vacation Packages

There are a several types of tours and package programs. One is the vacation package. This usually includes reservations for the airline, hotel, and airport transfers. The client is on their own during their trip. This type of tour is popular due to the flexibility and savings clients can access by using group rates.

➤ Escorted Tours

An escorted tour is different than a vacation package because it includes the services of a professional tour director. The tour director travels with the group throughout the tour taking care of the travel details. This leaves the tour members with time and confidence to enjoy the tour without the worries and details required when traveling independently.

Even though you are leading escorted tours, most prefer the term “tour director” or “tour manager.” Today in the U.S., the term “escort” has taken on a different meaning. Professional tour director better describes our career.

➤ Tour Director

The tour director, also called a tour manager, is hired to travel with the group on local, domestic and international programs, tours and cruises. They take care of details that include dealing with the airlines, hotels, attractions, transportation companies and tour members. Our job, as defined by our employer, the tour operator, is to,



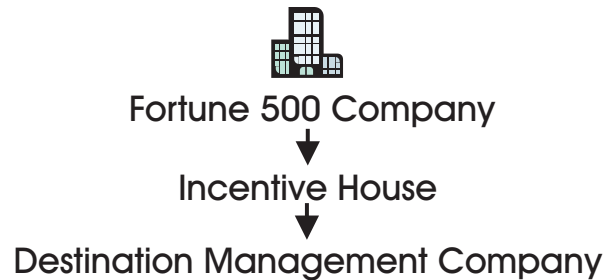
“Make sure the tour members get the tour they paid for and more.”

When you’re hired to lead a domestic or international tour, your job starts when you meet the group in the gateway city and ends when you say good-bye to the tour members at the end of the tour. You will have some pre-planning and document responsibilities which I’ll cover in later chapters.

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When I escort a tour to Australia that starts in Los Angeles, I meet the group at the ticket counter at LAX. I travel with them throughout the tour. At the end of the tour I say good-bye in the customs area of LAX, and I go home. On this tour I’m usually gone for about three weeks.

➤ Overview of the Incentive Market



The Fortune 500 Company hires the incentive house. This means the **Fortune 500 Company is the client** of the incentive house. The **employees** traveling **are the guests**. Since the incentive house hires the destination management company, the DMC's client is the incentive house.

When you are first hired by a DMC, this sometimes can be confusing. Realize your employer's client is the incentive house along with their tour directors and representatives. It is important that the incentive tour directors know everything is under control and their guests are being taken care of efficiently and professionally. It's not up to the tour director from the incentive house to take care of problems or in most cases even know there is a problem. (Some incentive tour directors see their job as finding problems with the DMC!)

**Just because the guests seem to be happy, it doesn't mean the client is happy.**

In most cases with destination management companies, you'll be working under the operations manager, also called the "ops manager." All problems and concerns need to be reported to the operations manager immediately. The ops manager needs to know what happened before the complaint is made by the client. Programs cost tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars and the clients expect everything to work perfectly. If the ops manager knows ahead of time, he may be able to take care of the potential problem in advance or be able to come up with another plan to make the clients happy.

When you work for an incentive house and/or a DMC, you'll need to be:

- Flexible
- A team player
- Professional in manner and dress
- Responsible
- Knowledgeable about procedures

### ➤ Handling Challenges

You need the ability to work with people in sometimes difficult and/or stressful situations. If you've had courses in assertiveness training, you may have practice with these skills. Everyone wants to be appreciated, pleasant, and to be liked by all. Sometimes to give our tour members the high quality and safe tour they deserve, this is not always possible.

Most of the people I travel with are interesting and pleasant. You will on occasion have a difficult person or persons that are causing a problem. If for some reason their actions or comments are affecting the quality of the tour, you may need to say something to the person in private. I find this difficult but sometimes necessary.



#### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** What if I have someone on tour that refuses to be on time?

**A:** If you handle being on time correctly it shouldn't be a problem. Most of the tour members are retired professional people. They are used to being responsible and on time. I stress we leave on time. I tell them if they are not there I will assume they aren't planning on attending the tour or are planning on staying longer at a sight. On international tours I make sure they have a card from the hotel with the hotel number and address. If I'm missing someone I can usually find them pretty quickly. If someone is inconsiderate of the group and is late more than once, just leave them the next time. Your group will support you and they will not be late again. You can't ruin the tour for all of the other members.

When you do have a complaint, problem, or an upset tour member, the easiest way is to handle it in four steps.

- First, empathize by apologizing; don't discount their feelings.
- Listen to the problem. Sometimes this is what they want the most.
- Come up with a solution.
- Last, follow up.

At the end of the tour write it up in your report. They will be listing the complaint on their evaluation. The tour operator needs to be able to compare their complaint with your report.

Never tell a tour member the tour operator or insurance company will reimburse them. We do not have the right to do so. I tell them I will write up their problem in my report and I ask them to do the same. Customer Service will review the problem.

In the tour brochures and/or tour documents, tour operators make it clear that they are not responsible for weather, strikes, delayed flights and other events out of their

## ➤ Tour Members

New tour directors want and expect to make everyone happy all of the time.

**Remember no one is always happy, even on vacation.**

Tours can be long and tiring leading to fatigue and frustration.

When tour members complain to a new tour director, she will often try to do what ever she can to accommodate them. Then when the tour director changes the plans to help the individuals, she often finds the rest of the group upset. They'll question why the tour director is letting other tour members run the tour. The amazing thing is that those she tried to accommodate are the ones that later complain about her.

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This happened to Mark on his first domestic tour. The third day of the tour several tour members said they were tired of leaving each morning at 8:00 AM and requested a later departure. Trying to accommodate them, he changed the departure time to 8:30 AM. He was then confronted by other tour members very upset that he would change the plans for them. After all, they stressed Mark was the leader. He said he learned a big lesson on his first tour.

When Edward, a more experienced tour director, was confronted on his tour with the same request, it came with additional pressure with the comment that the group had taken a vote. He calmly said that was fine. The tour members that wanted to stay longer could catch up with the tour later. He offered to leave instructions on how to get to the next hotel. It's not a surprise that everyone departed the hotel together the next day. Edward also said he still receives Christmas cards from the tour members that complained.

Elaine had the same problem on her first tour. She said she was very frustrated because the tour members she tried to accommodate complained. Her second year on the road I asked her if she still had the same problem. She said no and gave me an example from her previous tour.