

Guided tours

In many cities, **guided city tours** are organized by professionals, companies and local organizations for those wanting to explore the city with professional guidance.

[Travel agencies](#) provide multi-stop guided journeys, including transportation and accommodation. This article describes day tours within a destination.

Also not covered by this article are the tours arranged within [museums](#) or other closed venues.

Understand

There are many different types of tours throughout the world. Tours can be valuable in destinations that are particularly difficult to navigate (like [Fez](#)), where a lot of interesting information is not obvious to a casual visitor (like [Pompeii](#)), or where walking down the wrong street can be dangerous (like [La Boca](#) in [Buenos Aires](#)). When deciding on a tour, think about the layout of the destination—a walking tour might be better in an old, compact city with many pedestrian-only streets, whereas a boat tour might be the way to go in a city of canals. Hotels and hostels often have information about available tours.



Walking tour in [Göteborg](#)

If you spend more than a day at a destination, a tour is usually a good starter activity, for several reasons. It provides a sense of orientation, an overview of attractions to see later, and a chance to find travel companions (especially when [travelling alone](#)).

Large cities and well-visited destinations usually have many competing tour services. They may have both generic overview tours and tours to different districts and on specific themes, such as [visual arts](#), [food and drinks](#), [infamous crime scenes](#), [fringe phenomena](#) or [works of fiction](#) set in the city. There may even be odd tours such as about [horror stories](#), or arranged [pub crawls](#).

The busiest destinations might have the same tour at several times during the day. Consider which of these times would have the most comfortable weather (avoiding noontime heat, or darkness after sunset) and least congestion.

Sightseeing tours are usually done by vehicles, to see several places from outside.

Walking tours

The most straightforward type of guided tour is a walking tour, where a guide leads their patrons through the city on foot. As there are no significant costs incurred but the time of the guide, there are many cities where people volunteer to guide tourists around for free, e.g. as part of the [Global Greeter Network](#). For many companies that advertise walking tours as "free" however, the expectation is that at the end of the tour, patrons tip the guide whatever the patrons thought the value of the tour was to them. In countries with tipping cultures, guides should usually be tipped — *especially* when the tour is free!

Some tour operators use a free tour as a sales pitch for paid tours and events, often providing discounts.

As large cities are difficult to cover by foot in moderate time, city tours tend to concentrate on the historical centre or some other district where there are many spots relating to the theme of the walk.

Walking is usually the most practical way to experience old towns and archaeological sites.

Bus tours

Larger cities can also be toured by bus or coach, usually involving stops for walking tours of selected areas. A more recent development that gained much popularity is the **hop-on / hop-off bus** tour, where buses run along a fixed route and stop at fixed points at given hours, and patrons can choose to get on or get off the bus at any stop at their whim, at a fixed price.

Another option is to make use of local public buses – circle lines are particularly good for that – which "just so happen" to stop at local landmarks. While you won't get a running commentary and the buses won't be open top, the price for a tour will be much lower (at least with a ticket including free transfers for enough time; there are whole day or 24 hr tickets in many cities). In some towns certain lines (e.g. the tram from the harbour to the centre) do have running commentary, pre-recorded or by a live guide. In the age of apps, you can also get the live commentary on your phone tied to the GPS track of the route.

Bus and streetcar tours can be an alternative to regular public transportation. They are however sensitive to traffic congestion around rush hours and major events.

Streetcar tours

Some cities with extensive above-ground public transportation systems offer city tours, sometimes in historic rolling stock. Those tours tend to be available for special events only and the vehicle is often as much part of the attraction as the tour. One obvious downside is the fact that the tour is limited to where tracks go.

Urban rail adventures include public transportation systems which are an attraction in their own right.

Personal vehicle tours

See also: Personal electric vehicles

For those who don't like walking, in many cities tours are organized using bicycles or personal electric vehicles such as e-scooters and Segways.

Boat tours

Boat tours are popular in canal cities and in areas with important rivers and lakes. They vary from chartered boat tours, where you're just in a small group, to larger groups with about twenty people, or even more than a hundred.



Sightseeing bus, London



San Francisco

An expanded version of boat tours are river or archipelago cruises, where you spend several hours on board, often with the option of a dinner. There are even overnight cruises (with lodging on shore, as these vessels seldom have cabins for all participants).

Also some cruise ships, travelling over the sea, can be seen as tours, in that they often arrange tours to the intermediate ports.

Air tours

Helicopter and general aviation tours can be offered at destinations where there's an incredible view to be seen from the air, such as Iguaçu Falls or Hawaii. These tend to be expensive.

Food tours

Many Southeast Asian countries, especially Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia, now have tour companies that specialize in food tours, in which you are taken to try the local street food.

See also

- Safaris, tours of African wildlife

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Boat tour in Melaka, Malaysia.