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Professional Challenges while Guiding Tourists

Learning objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to understand:

- The demands of difficult tourists and how to handle them
- The difficult situations that the group may face and how to handle them
- The nuances of handling questions from guests
- The role of a tour guide in conducting the tours responsibly.
- How to lead a group on a multi-day tour
- The challenges of leading guests in a post COVID scenario

A visitor arrives for an entertaining experience, and delivering the same is the tour guide's responsibility. Often there are individuals, who for a variety of reasons, make the guide's job difficult. A guide must handle these guests professionally without letting the group's experience sour. Similarly, the touring party may encounter challenging situations when they look to the guide, as a leader, to navigate them through. Finally, it is a guide's job to satisfy the curiosity of guests who shoot all kinds of questions. Handling questions is a crucial tour guiding skill. In this chapter, we will discuss some of these challenges.

Visitors hire tour guides to assist them at the destination. They might require guides to help them make sense of the place or help them with logistical arrangements like getting quickly to the attraction, or helping them with tickets, or selecting what to engage with. It is in their best interest that their tour leaders and tour guides succeed. However, occasionally, awkward guests need to be handled prudently.

Most people in the tourism industry believe that post-COVID will be a different scenario. Visitor expectations will have gone a significant change. Destination leaderships also have come up with protocols. Tour operators must be ready to handle these changes through their tour guides.

Demanding tourists and handling them

Guests come to have fun, and they want the tour leader or the tour guide to help them have a good time. Most of the guests do not expect a super expert. However, some tourists behave obnoxiously. As a professional tour leader or guide, one needs to distinguish an obstinate tourist from a tourist with difficulty. Obstinate tourists are hard to serve because of their personality or behaviour. At times they may appear rude, unsympathetic or impatient. On the other hand, some tourists might be facing some difficulty and may have some genuine grievance.

Skill and professional competence are not about carrying out the routine job of a tour leader but handling the extraordinary situations that raise challenges. Handling a tourist who is obtrusive, obstructive, obstinate and obdurate is a challenge. Unfortunately, he is part of the party and has to be carried along all through, yet handled carefully, so that it does not lessen the fun that other members have come expecting. Let us consider some cases of demanding tourists:

■ The wanderer

The wanderer is a perpetual loiterer causing trouble when they do not report on time at a coach and other members of the party wait endlessly. This frequent desertion is a common problem. There are two possible reasons for defaulting.

The first reason is that perhaps the tourist did not understand the instructions given by the tour guide. So, these are not wanderers. A tour guide should give clear and precise instructions. Please ensure that such instructions are understood. Reconfirm. Do not give approximate time frames like, "we'll collect back here in one and a half hours". Instead, say, "We'll gather here by 4.00 by my watch. It is exactly 2.50 now. Please match your watches with mine." Tour guides must ensure that tourists understand the instructions. Use their language if you can, or ask someone who speaks their language to tell.

The others are compulsive defaulters who are often late. They may disturb the whole schedule and maybe the whole tour. Finally, there might be perpetual late arrivers who might not pay heed to your requests or express an insincere apology. They must be handled resolutely. Initially, the guide may reprimand them privately. On a subsequent occasion, they must try to create some peer pressure. They may take up the issue in the presence of the whole group and tell them how their behaviour is ruining others' fun. Enforce a five-minute rule: "that the party shall wait only for five minutes and will leave behind the late-comers." To penalise a perpetual latecomer, see if he/she can be left behind at the hotel at the beginning of the day. Please note that the guide may not enforce this on tour and leave missing guests at some far-off point where it would be