

How to Choose A Tour Operator

If you want to travel anywhere in North America with great ease and comfort, take a tip from more than 774 million travelers a year: go by motorcoach!

Whether you know your destination or merely have a desire to tour—either alone or in a group—members of the American Bus Association can handle all the details.

Following are tips for consumers interested in motorcoach travel in general, or in organizing their own group charter or tour:

Go to www.buses.org and look for [Find ABA Members](#) to obtain the names and contact information of reliable motorcoach and tour companies in your area. You will see details about types of groups they serve, their main tour destinations, and availability of wheelchair lift-equipped buses.

Affiliation with a professional association is an important sign that an operating company has a network of contacts that can be of help to your group in the event of breakdowns or other unexpected events during your trip.

Motorcoach companies must have **federal operating authority** if they will be crossing state or provincial lines, and should be able to offer you proof of that authority, which is issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation or Transport Canada. Additionally, many states and provinces require that a carrier obtain operating authority for intrastate operations. This ensures they meet insurance requirements.

Ask the tour operator about the **safety record** and equipment and maintenance practices of the motorcoach they use. The company should be comfortable with your questions and prepared to respond. As an outside source, you might also ask your state highway officers about any experiences they may have had with motorcoach companies you are considering. You can view carriers' safety ratings online at [www.SafeStat Online](http://www.SafeStatOnline). Be advised that many carriers have yet to be rated—not having a rating does not mean the carrier is unsafe.

Reliability is very important in a transportation provider. Look for companies that conduct themselves in a professional manner over the phone and that promptly follow up on your inquiry.

Remember that tour company professionals deal with **lodging, restaurants, destinations, and tourist attractions** daily. As "preferred customers," they can often negotiate favorable rates and even provide some extras. They can save your money!

Be sure you are comparing apples to apples when you compare **trip costs**. What type of lodging is included? How many meals are included and where? Is insurance an additional cost or is it included in the tour price? What model coach the company will be using? Is

there a restroom aboard and is it available for passenger use? Ask how videos, music, and other coach amenities you may desire will affect your costs, so that you know exactly what to expect when your trip begins. Are baggage handling, attraction admission and gratuities included in the cost? Will there be a tour escort along to assist the group?

Always understand the company's **policies on payment and cancellation** before you book a tour. Many operators offer various types of modestly priced trip insurance that can protect your deposit in the event that you must cancel. Ask about this type of protection at the time of booking. Some operators include this in the tour cost.

Sidebar: **IMPORTANT POINTS**

- A tour operator not only arranges the trip, but can save you money.
- Choose a tour operator that has a proven track record, that friends and family members use and trust.
- Choose a tour operator that is a member of a national professional organization such as American Bus Association. Members are required to adhere to a strict code of ethics.
- Motorcoaches in the U.S. and Canada carried an estimated 860 million passengers in 1999, 774 million of them in the United States. This compares with 568 million by commercial air carriers, and 377 million by commuter rail and Amtrak.
- In 1999, motorcoaches were driven about 2.6 billion miles, with the average bus traveling 50,600 miles. The industry consumed 498 million gallons of fuel, yielding a conservative performance of 160 passenger miles-per-gallon.
- Motorcoaches are the most fuel-efficient way to travel. (U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation Energy Data Book, 1999)

