

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

By Michael Evans • Bankrate.com

So, you're thinking about a package tour 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ▶



When you think of a tour vacation, you might imagine retirees dressed in Hawaiian shirts and Bermuda shorts packed on a bus making an exhausting number of stops at tourist traps. But today you can find package tours for different age groups and trips designed for people interested in doing something more than seeing the usual sights.

If your career leaves you with little time to travel, a package tour may help you get the most out of your vacation. "Package tours are best suited for someone who doesn't have a lot of time but wants to experience a lot," says Rich Sorensen, a spokesman for the Europe Through the Back Door tour company launched by

author and TV host Rick Steves.

For families and young adults, package tours can provide cost savings while eliminating many of the hassles of independent travel.

Certain types of package tours are not for everyone. However, the market offers all sorts of options, from fully guided, one-size-fits-all tours to custom packages that put you in control.

Before choosing a package tour, there are a few things to know. So let's get going!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ▶

SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

More On Travel:

- 6 best-bet destinations for package tours
- Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types
- 7 classic American vacations on the cheap

[Create a news alert for "smart spending"](#)

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates

30 yr fixed average
3.59%

About our rates

Search

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

Bankrate's community sharing policy

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

You can leave the planning to them



With tours, you can do as much or as little planning as you choose.

Fully guided tours enable you to leave the logistics to someone else, though you must stay with a group on a set schedule much of the time. Many packages include accommodations, attraction tickets, ground transportation, tour guides and several meals -- all rolled into one price.

"It's a very efficient way for some people to travel who lack the time to plan or the travel skills to feel confident about using time wisely," Sorensen says.

If you're not the most experienced traveler, a guided tour can reduce your stress level, so you can relax and enjoy the trip. You won't have to worry about language barriers or missed connections because a professional will be escorting you.

Some tour operators offer semiguide packages, which cover major travel arrangements and accommodations but leave the sightseeing to you.

If you want to be completely hands-on, a travel agency in your area can help design a custom tour package, allowing you to choose all travel dates and stops. Besides helping reserve flights and accommodations, an agent can pre-purchase vacation activities, such as city tours or helicopter rides.



SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

More On Travel:

- 6 best-bet destinations for package tours
- Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types
- 7 classic American vacations on the cheap

Create a news alert for "smart spending"

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

Bankrate's community sharing policy

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates
30 yr fixed average
3.59%

About our rates

Search

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement

CD rates | Mortgage calculator



Bookmark this page Follow Us:

Search Bankrate.com Search

- Home
- Compare Rates
- Calculators
- News
- The Lighter Side**
- Blogs
- Mortgage Rates
- Refinance
- Home Equity
- CDs
- Investment
- Checking & Savings
- Auto
- Credit Cards
- Debt Management
- Insurance
- College Finance
- Retirement
- Taxes
- Find rates ▼

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

You can take a vacation geared to your interests ◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ▶



Whether you're an adrenaline junkie or a laid-back artisan, you can find a tour geared to your interests. For example, Silver Lining Tours leads storm-chasing tours through the central U.S. "Tornado Alley," and Arena Travel offers trips for knitters to Scotland's Shetland Isles.

Before buying a special-interest tour, find out about any special requirements. For example, a backcountry trek might require previous wilderness hiking experience, or a photo safari might recommend special gear, such as a hard-shell camera case.

Social and professional organizations often sponsor tours geared toward their members' common interests. For example, Carole Harris, of Columbia, Tenn., visited Scotland on a tour with her then-husband, who was involved with the Clan Wallace Society, an organization for Scottish history buffs.

"My ex-husband was interested in the William Wallace 'Braveheart' story (a la the Mel Gibson movie), and we thought a bus tour was a great way to see the country without having to drive. We had a blast," Harris says.

Tour operators who offer more conventional package tours sometimes arrange custom packages for organizations. Groups that purchase these custom tours typically can choose the travel route and attractions and even supply their own guide.

◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ▶

SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this. Share Tweet

LinkedIn Delicious Reddit Stumbleupon Email story

More On Travel:

- [6 best-bet destinations for package tours](#)
- [Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types](#)
- [7 classic American vacations on the cheap](#)

[Create a news alert for "smart spending"](#)

Like Be the first of your friends to like this. Share

Bankrate's community sharing policy

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates

30 yr fixed average

3.59%

About our rates

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

You need a tour operator you can trust



A good tour experience requires homework. If you book with a bad tour operator, your vacation might turn into a travel disaster.

"Book with a reputable company, one that's been in business a while, one that has experience and contacts on the ground in these locations. Ask about who their tour guides are: Are they native speakers, are they employees of the company?" says Bowman.

Ask friends, family members and co-workers about their experiences with tour companies and travel agencies. Look for recommendations and warnings on online travel forums, and check the company's rating with the

Better Business Bureau.

When you find a tour prospect, find out how large a group you'll be traveling with. Group size is important because some companies run a numbers game, filling buses to the brim and treating passengers like cattle.

"A company that markets skillfully and ethically will convey in its promotional material what sorts of people will find their tours to be most rewarding," says Sorensen. "A company that is not skilled at this will simply try to attract everyone, which I think is a recipe for disappointed customers."



SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.
 LinkedIn Delicious Reddit Stumbleupon

More On Travel:

- 6 best-bet destinations for package tours
- Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types
- 7 classic American vacations on the cheap

Create a news alert for "smart spending"

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

Bankrate's community sharing policy

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates
30 yr fixed average
3.59%

About our rates

Search

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

You'll have to read some fine print



Before you book a tour, explore all those "what if" details. Will you get a full or partial refund if you have to cancel? Will the company reimburse you if the tour misses stops due to weather? Can you transfer to another tour if your plans change?

Go online to check out places mentioned in the itinerary because the tour operator might be skimping on something important.

While Harris enjoyed her Scotland adventure, the accommodations could have been better. "The innkeepers and hotel staff were all very good. Just terrible beds."

Shadier tour operators may not tell you everything you need to know, so find out exactly what your tour package includes. For instance, travel agencies in Cusco, Peru, sell a tour that takes tourists to several historic sites in the city, located near the famed Inca ruins at Machu Picchu. But some agencies neglect to tell passengers that the price doesn't include entrance fees at the attractions.

"This is not an isolated problem, so always confirm that all the costs have been covered," says Susan Birkenshaw of YourTravelQuest, a travel agency based outside Toronto.

Give yourself time to think it all over before making a final decision.



SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

More On Travel:

- [6 best-bet destinations for package tours](#)
- [Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types](#)
- [7 classic American vacations on the cheap](#)

[Create a news alert for "smart spending"](#)

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

Bankrate's community sharing policy

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates

30 yr fixed average
3.59%

About our rates

Search

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement



Bookmark this page Follow Us:

Search Bankrate.com Search

- Home
- Compare Rates
- Calculators
- News
- The Lighter Side**
- Blogs
- Mortgage Rates
- Refinance
- Home Equity
- CDs
- Investment
- Checking & Savings
- Auto
- Credit Cards
- Debt Management
- Insurance
- College Finance
- Retirement
- Taxes
- Find rates

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

You can't forget travel insurance

◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ▶



A great tour guide can give you the lowdown on sights, but if you sprain your ankle while tango dancing, you'll need a doctor. If your tour package doesn't include travel insurance, purchase a policy on your own before you leave home.

Insurance plans vary but generally can help if you need to cancel your trip or if you have unexpected costs due to issues such as injuries, stolen baggage or missed airline connections.

If you've never bought travel insurance, ask your travel agent or tour operator to recommend a company. You also can look for recommendations in a travel

guidebook, such as Frommer's, or there are websites where you can compare rates from several companies.

When looking at plans, consider all your travel needs and activities. If you won't be traveling with many valuables and don't plan to drive, a basic policy might be all you need.

Plans that are more expensive typically provide coverage for more misfortunes and can offer higher coverage rates. If you plan to carry expensive camera gear, jewelry or computer equipment on your package tour vacation, you might need to increase coverage for lost, stolen or damaged items.

◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ▶

SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

LinkedIn Delicious Reddit Stumbleupon

More On Travel:

- [6 best-bet destinations for package tours](#)
- [Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types](#)
- [7 classic American vacations on the cheap](#)

[Create a news alert for "smart spending"](#)

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates

30 yr fixed average **3.59%**

About our rates

Search

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement

Bankrate's community sharing policy

advertisement

LIVING

Print Subscribe

7 things you need to know about package tours

You may not really be the tour type

◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8



Group tours are perfect for some people but not everyone. It's important to be flexible and personable -- and you may ultimately decide that's just not you.

A willingness to step out of your comfort zone is essential on a group tour. "We're really looking to appeal to people who have a playful sense of discovery," says Sorensen. "One of our little slogans is 'Great guides, small groups, no grumps.'"

Typically, the tour operator has lined up the people you'll travel with, the departure times, attractions you'll visit and the hotels you'll sleep in. And staying on schedule is crucial.

"If you are looking for the experience of wandering off the beaten path and getting lost in the little towns of Europe, then a package tour might not be for you," says Bowman.

For many travelers, group tours offer the efficiency, adventure and social experience they're looking for in a vacation. "If you enjoy meeting new folks or traveling with friends and you don't mind sticking to a predetermined schedule, a package tour can be really enjoyable," says Harris.

◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

SHARE THIS STORY

Like Be the first of your friends to like this. Share Tweet

LinkedIn Delicious Reddit Stumbleupon Email story

More On Travel:

- 6 best-bet destinations for package tours
- Travel insurance policies for 5 trip types
- 7 classic American vacations on the cheap

[Create a news alert for "smart spending"](#)

Related Links:

- National auto loan rates for March 28, 2013
- National CD rates for March 28, 2013
- National credit card rates for March 28, 2013

Related Articles:

- 6 package-tour best bets
- Cheryl Tiegs' home
- The pros, cons of an LLC
- Bankrate.com's corrections policy

Posted: April 5, 2013

CONNECT WITH US

Compare Rates

30 yr fixed average
3.59%

About our rates

Search

advertisement

MOST READ

- 10 ways to turn off a homebuyer
- 11 most pampered rich kids
- Car models that lose value
- What's under your front lawn?
- Celeb homes for sale: Cheryl Tiegs
- \$12K in checking? You're Lemon-ing
- 6 must-have features for next home
- Hackers empty \$900K bank account
- Closing costs: Most expensive states
- Closing costs: Least expensive states

advertisement

Partner Center

advertisement

Like Be the first of your friends to like this. Share