

Group Tours vs Independent Travel

How to Know Which One Is Right for Your Trip

(Courtesy of <https://www.nomadicmatt.com/>)

1. Research the company's reputation. It might not always be what they claim, and it's important to find out the truth before you book. One disgruntled customer's bad experience doesn't mean the company should be avoided but, if there is a pattern, stay away.

2. Look at the cost. With tour companies, you don't always get what you pay for. Many overcharge customers, while others are great at giving value for your money. Find out how your money is spent to see if you are getting the best value.

Is your money funding activities and guides? Or corporate overhead?

Make sure you ask if there are fees to pay on arrival or at specific sites along the way. These on-the-ground costs can make a seemingly cheap tour suddenly very expensive.

3. Learn about the guides. They make or break a tour. You're with them your whole trip, and it's their information and help that gets you through your holiday. Make sure the company uses knowledgeable, local guides who speak the language, have prior travel experience, and know life-saving techniques.

I've been on tours where the guide was a walking encyclopedia, and others where the guide was a glorified timekeeper.

Ask about the guides before you book.

4. What's the environmental impact? Ecotourism is foremost about helping the environment. That means avoiding big buses, large resorts and hotels, and flying. It means staying in places that conserve energy. It means taking part in environmental

programs or at least providing information on the local habitat. It means only leaving behind footprints — not waste. I want to make sure I'm not helping to destroy the places I came so far to see.

5. Find out your group size. Larger groups tend to have a much higher environmental impact and require larger buses, bigger ships, and more resources. Tour companies that have smaller groups tend to be much more mindful of the environment and the impact they are leaving. They also tend to be a lot more personal and fun.

6. Follow the money. What companies does the operator use? Are they using local companies or businesses owned by large corporations? Are you being shuttled from hotel to hotel in a big bus? Are you staying at the Marriott, or a variety of smaller, locally owned hotels (and using other local services)? Ask the tour company where its money goes and what providers it uses. A good company keeps money local.

My Favorite Companies

If you choose to take a larger, multiweek tour, my favorite company is [Intrepid Travel](#). They have inexpensive small-group tours. It's the company I use whenever I book a tour, and it's one I think you should book with too.

Other companies I love include:

- [Take Walks](#) - They offer in-depth history, food, and cultural tours in cities around the world. Their small-group tours are curated and tend to offer exclusive behind-the-scenes access other companies can't get.
- [Fat Tire Tours](#) - They run bike tours that use expert local guides so you can cover a lot of ground while having fun!
- [Busabout](#) - A hop-on, hop-off bus tour company in Europe for backpackers!
- [Kiwi Experience](#) - A hop-on, hop-off bus tour company in New Zealand for backpackers!

- [Baz Bus](#) - A hop-on, hop-off again bus tour company in South Africa for all travelers.
- [New Europe](#) - Free walking tours throughout Europe.
- [Free Tours By Foot](#) - Pay-what-you-like tours throughout Europe and the United States. They are one of my favorite free walking tour companies in the world!
- [G Adventures](#) - Comprehensive multi-day small-group tours led by local guides.

Note from Sharon, which tour site companies do you use that you would like to share with our Boeing Leadership Network Retirees members? E-mail:

4sharonlu@gmail.com