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Tour Guide's Handbook

Principles and Recommendations

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I Introduction to Tour Guiding



Dear Reader,

This handbook provides an overview of the principles and recommendations related to tour guiding. We explain the role of a guide and their importance in introducing Estonia to visitors. Additionally, we help you assess your readiness for guiding work and offer advice on finding better solutions when working with guests.

Who is a Tour Guide and Why is Their Work Important?



A tour guide is a person who leads guests through places that are unfamiliar and unknown to them. They represent not only their local area but also the country as a whole.

Tour guiding is regulated by the Tourism Act, the Professions Act, and professional standards, which define the requirements and conditions related to the profession. According to the current Tourism Act (Estonia Tourism Act RT I 2000, 95, 607), a guide must prove their competence.

While anyone can share interesting stories about their hometown and show it to visitors, a tour guide is a professional with the necessary training and a certificate or official recognition. A guide can specialise in various fields — for example, as a city guide, museum guide, nature or national park guide, factory guide, or subject-specific expert, such as a certified guide recognised by Soomaa Tourism NGO or an accredited guide at the KUMU Art Museum in Estonia.

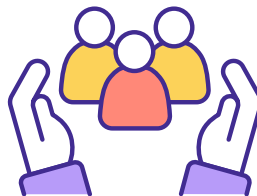
Tour Guiding and Guest Expectations

At the heart of tour guiding are people who want to explore new places, enjoy meaningful experiences, and do so at a time that suits them, at a fair price, in a pleasant environment, and in an engaging way. A guide's success depends not only on delivering interesting information, but also on their ability to understand and accommodate the needs and motivations of their guests—whether they are family travellers, visitors with special needs, or any other target group.

The decision of guests to use tourism services can be explained through four key factors (Gilbert, 1991; cited in Sharpley, 2018):

- **Demand-generating factors**, including motivation — the internal drivers that inspire a person to go on vacation, a hike, an excursion, etc.
- **Demand-filtering factors** — demographic and socio-economic aspects that influence which services are preferred, when, and where.
- **Demand-influencing factors** — information about the destination, personal experiences, opinions, and other external inputs.
- **The guest's own role**, or the perspective from which they choose to engage with tourism services. For example, when travelling as a parent, it matters whether the services offered support being with children and caring for them.

Although this framework is general, it helps to analyse the characteristics and expectations of different guests. The reasons people travel can vary widely – from leisure and the search for unique experiences to a break from everyday routines. Guest choices are shaped by factors such as age, health, financial situation, time constraints, or other personal circumstances. The destination's reputation is also important – both in the eyes of others and from the guest's perspective. Additionally, the travel context matters: who the guest is travelling with and their status at the destination (e.g., VIP, family traveller, person with special needs, member of a sexual minority, etc.).



Why Do People Travel?

Researchers have identified several motivators that drive people to travel. One of the most important reasons is the desire to escape everyday life and rest mentally and physically. Travel offers an opportunity to break from routine, discover new places, and experience something extraordinary. In this process, the tour guide plays a key role – helping to create variety, provide enriching experiences, and turn a trip into something truly memorable.

The visitor's needs and desires strongly influence their behaviour – **the push factors** that motivate them to travel, as well as **the pull factors, which refer to the services offered and their availability**, which sway the guest's decision to choose one service or destination over another (Sharpley, 2018: 128). In addition, one can distinguish between internal and external factors, which may be linked to concepts such as anomie versus ego boosting. Anomie refers to a situation where societal norms and values have diminished or where a person has lost their own values and goals. In such a situation, an individual feels isolated, trapped in their daily routine. Travel provides an opportunity to temporarily escape this routine and find balance within themselves and in the surrounding world. On the other hand, ego boosting is related to the desire to indulge or reward oneself, to receive recognition, and to create new social connections that contribute to a sense of well-being (Frochot, 2022: 41).



Destination Choice and the Traveller's Decision-Making Process

People seek relaxation, but at the same time, they want to feel successful and recognised in their everyday lives. As a result, destinations are chosen carefully, with travellers looking for a balance between adventure and safety. The decision is influenced by a variety of factors, including the destination's safety—which encompasses its historical background, stability, social equality, and inclusivity toward people with different or special needs. Other important aspects include price level, accommodation availability, the uniqueness of the trip, and the additional services offered. It is also crucial that the destination allows for relaxation and meets the traveller's expectations.

By the time a traveller arrives at a destination—where they may be greeted by a tour escort or guide (if such a service is included)—they have already undergone a thorough decision-making process. This decision results from carefully weighing their needs, desires, and all the factors that led them to choose that particular service.

Frochot (2018: 43, 45) also describes different levels of everyday life (see Table 1) that travellers wish to escape from during their journeys. This framework helps us understand how service providers, including tour guides, can support people in distancing themselves from daily routines and offering the kind of experience they seek.

Guests often choose a destination based on how much it differs from their usual living environment. Although relaxation is often the primary purpose of travel, it can also be tied to work, education, health, or other reasons. Therefore, the motivations for travel vary widely. For example, in cases where travel is driven by work or other obligations, the primary motive may be cultural—the desire to learn and grow in a field offered through tourism services, even if it is not directly related to the traveller's daily job or responsibilities. Such trips include study visits, business travel, and attendance at conferences or seminars. In these instances, guides with specialised expertise are invaluable, offering the knowledge and skills that visitors with specific interests expect.

Table 1. Dimensions of everyday life

Daily routine	Everyday responsibilities (e.g. cooking, cleaning, etc.)	Does the service provided relieve the guest from everyday responsibilities, and if so, how?
Weekday	Responsibilities related to children, paying bills, home repairs, etc.	What responsibilities disappear during a vacation, and does the service help fulfil responsibilities that remain even while on holiday, such as caring for children?
Work	Work-related routine, schedule, tasks, deadlines, etc.	Does the service help guests leave their work schedules and avoid work calls and emails?
Social obligations / responsibilities	Relationships with family and friends	How does the service help rebuild, refresh, strengthen relationships, and maintain connections with significant others?
Society	The environment where guests spend their daily life – city, countryside, apartment, climate, etc.	In what ways can services offer guests experiences in a new environment and opportunities to meet and interact with people from different backgrounds?
World	Natural, social, political, and economic environment – beautiful and safe, but also stressful, full of conflict and pressure	Does the service allow guests to discover what is exciting, beautiful, and mentally stimulating, or to escape from conflict, stress, anxiety, and similar pressures?

Source: Frochot (2022)

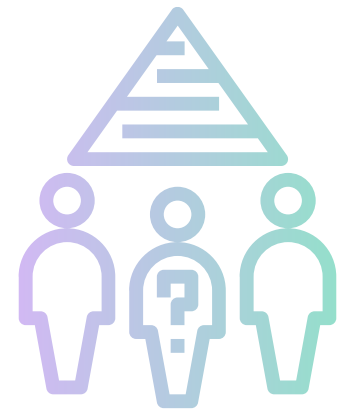
One of the key motivators for travel is modern society itself. The development and structure of society have, on one hand, created a need for rest and so-called escape, and on the other hand, provided the means to do so—through the legal right to vacation, values that emphasise the importance of free time, and the understanding of leisure as a natural part of life. Furthermore, the leisure economy is closely linked to other sectors such as the development of technology and transportation, which influence the possibilities and accessibility of travel.

Several theories have been developed to understand guests' internal motivations. One of the most commonly used is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In its simplicity, this model effectively explains what motivates guests to travel. It also provides valuable insights for destination developers on what kinds of services and experiences to offer in order to meet guest expectations.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is divided into five main categories that shape people's choices and behaviour, moving from lower needs to higher ones:

1. Physiological needs: hunger, thirst, rest, etc.
2. Safety needs: absence of direct danger, fear, and anxiety.
3. Social or belongingness needs: friendship, connection, love.
4. Esteem needs: good self-esteem, self-confidence, reputation, and status.
5. Self-actualisation needs: the opportunity to achieve something, to fulfill oneself.



Once lower-level needs are satisfied, the next level of needs starts to influence human behavior. Researchers have sought to understand how these internal psychological factors direct goal-oriented travel behaviour. For example, a region with many museums and exciting attractions might experience low visitor numbers if it is associated with security risks. This suggests that without ensuring a sense of security, higher-level motivators—such as cultural experiences or social belonging—may not fully manifest.

However, Maslow's theory does not always apply linearly. Higher-level needs can begin to dominate even before the previous level has been fully satisfied. For example, a strong desire for self-actualisation might drive a person to overlook basic physiological needs—a hiker might skip eating or drinking to reach the mountain summit before sunset. Similarly, the desire for status and the pursuit of the perfect photo to share on social media can cause a tourist to forget about safety, putting their life at risk. Therefore, travel behaviour is multifaceted, and different motivations can influence one another and shift the balance depending on the situation and the individual's personal priorities.

Guides can ask themselves several important questions when planning a tour or hike, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

- **Firstly**, how will the physical needs of guests be met during the hike or tour? It is essential to consider where and when it will be possible to eat, drink, and use the restroom. Providing rest breaks is also crucial so that participants have the opportunity to catch their breath and relax. More broadly, guides should think about how the hike or tour will help guests disconnect from their everyday routines and offer them a chance to rest and unwind.
- **Secondly**, how is safety ensured? The guide must be prepared for dangerous or extreme situations, considering potential risks and how to prevent them. For example, are life vests in good condition and of various sizes available? Are there dangerous insects or plants in the area that could cause allergies? It is also important to be prepared for emergencies—how to seek help and what first aid options are available.
- **Thirdly**, what are the group dynamics like? The guide must be skilled at balancing the needs of the group, ensuring that everyone receives enough attention and that no one feels left out.
- **Additionally**, it's worth thinking about how to recognise and motivate participants. Does the guide notice and acknowledge the guests' contributions and participation? For example, the guide could give participants a certificate or another symbolic keepsake for a slightly more challenging hike to commemorate their achievement.
- **Finally**, how does the hike or tour contribute to the guests' self-esteem and self-actualisation? Does it allow them to learn something new, challenge themselves, and experience a sense of accomplishment? A well-planned guided tour can provide both physical and mental satisfaction, leaving guests with a memorable and meaningful experience.

The same needs that influence guests' travel experiences also affect the guide's work. Therefore, the guide needs to think about their well-being and working conditions in order to provide the best possible service.

- **Firstly**, how does the guide satisfy their physical needs? They must plan when and how to eat, drink, and rest.
- **Secondly**, how is the guide's safety ensured? Physical, social, and emotional safety are important aspects of the guiding profession. The guide must be able to spot and prevent potential risks, including hazardous situations that may arise from guest behaviour.
- **Thirdly**, how does the guide cooperate with the team? The travel agency, partners, and service providers directly impact the smoothness of the guide's work. Does the team support and share the necessary resources? Is information exchange effective, and are assistance options readily available?
- **Additionally**, the guide should consider what kind of recognition they need to perform their work and maintain motivation. Are they recognised sufficiently by both clients and employers? How can they notice and value the meaning of their work themselves?
- **Finally**, how does guiding contribute to the guide's self-actualisation? Does the work offer sufficient challenges, learning opportunities, and fulfilment?

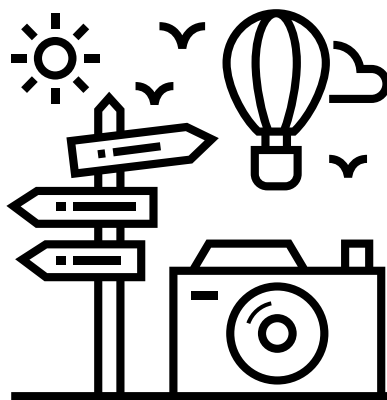
One interesting factor influencing tourists' characteristics and motivations is their "career" as a tourist. Philip Pearce's (2005) tourism career model explains how tourists' motivations and behaviors evolve over time, similarly to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As their travel experiences increase, tourists progress from simpler needs to more complex and profound goals.

- **At first**, relaxation and physical comfort are the primary focus. Tourists prefer convenient and straightforward solutions that allow them to rest and recover.
- **Next**, safety—both physical and emotional—becomes important. Tourists choose destinations where they can feel secure and calm, avoiding excessive risks.
- **Once these basic needs are met**, belonging and social relationships become significant. Travel often becomes a social activity, whether it's family vacations, visiting friends and relatives, or group excursions where shared experiences are enjoyed.
- **The next level is** self-esteem and personal development. Tourists seek opportunities to improve themselves, grow, and gain new knowledge.
- **At the highest level** is self-actualisation. In this case, travel becomes a personal challenge or mission—through spiritual journeys, self-discovery, volunteering, etc.

Pearce's model helps to understand that tourists are not all the same, and their expectations and motivations can change over time. Therefore, it is important for guides and tourism providers to recognise different stages of a tourist's career and adjust their services accordingly.

A person's previous travel experiences and life stage influence their expectations and behaviour when using tourism services. Therefore, it is a great advantage for the guide to have at least a general understanding of guests' previous travel experiences. While this information might not always be available before the meeting, communication with the group helps understand their expectations and needs. This, in turn, allows the guide to tailor the tour or hike to meet the participants' expectations better.

In conclusion, travelling is a complex decision-making process influenced by many factors, from safety and comfort to self-actualisation. As a guide, it is important to understand and consider these factors in order to provide an experience that is valuable and memorable for travellers.



II Guiding Different Social Groups



Client Segmentation Criteria

Guiding people is always varied and challenging, as each individual is unique. In the service sector, including guiding, there is an increasing focus on personal customer preferences and applying a customer-centric approach. However, offering a completely individualised approach to all guests is not always possible. Therefore, when customising the service, it is often helpful to segment clients by grouping them based on similar characteristics and needs. Client segmentation can be based on various factors, such as their traits and service purchasing behaviour. Tooman, Roosipõld, and Rekkor (2023) have classified clients according to geographical, demographic, psychographic, and behavioural characteristics (see Table 2).

Table 2. Client segmentation criteria

Geographical features:

- Region (urban settlement, rural area)
- Size of the region
- Climate and season
- Time zone
- Population density

Demographic features:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Income
- Education
- Occupation
- Marital status
- Family size
- Religion
- Culture
- Social class

Psychographic and behavioural characteristics:

- Personality traits
- Motivations
- Lifestyle
- Adoption of innovations

Purchase behaviour characteristics:

- Purchase frequency
- Type of purchase
- Buyer role (private or business client)
- Expected benefits
- Brand loyalty
- Price sensitivity

Source: Tooman, Roosipõld, Rekkor 2023: 77

Cultural, Religious, and National Background

Culture has many different definitions, but generally, it can be understood as all the ways in which a person thinks, behaves, and acts, which are acquired through learning. Culture functions as a filter through which information from the environment is interpreted, and appropriate behaviours and actions are chosen. Culture is closely related to religion, which refers to the belief systems of people, and ethnicity, which pertains to an individual's national or ethnic origin.

As people travel the world, guides often encounter guests from various cultural backgrounds. Therefore, understanding the peculiarities of different cultures, religions, and nationalities is essential. However, it is impossible to learn all the specific details about every nation, culture, or religion. A helpful tool in this regard is to be familiar with broader cultural frameworks that help characterise various cultural groups and provide general guidelines for interacting with people from those cultural backgrounds.

The following table 3 presents Richard D. Lewis's model (n.d.) for understanding cultural differences. In this model cultures are categorized as Multi-Active, Linear-Active, and Reactive. While some cultures clearly fit into one of these categories, many others fall somewhere in between, displaying characteristics from multiple categories. For example, Estonian culture primarily belongs to the Linear-Active cultural space but also contains features of the Reactive cultural space.

Table 3. Distribution of cultures and their main characteristics according to the Lewis Model

Multiactive Cultures (e.g., Latin America, Southern Europe)	Countries that exhibit traits of both Multiactive and Linear-Active Cultures (e.g., Russia, Slovakia, Croatia, France, Lithuania, Poland, Israel)	Linear-Active Cultures (e.g., Northern and Central Europe, USA)	Countries with both Linear-Active and Reactive Cultural Traits (e.g., Finland, Estonia, Canada, Taiwan, Singapore)	Reactive Cultures (e.g., Vietnam, Japan, China)
<p>Collectivist, large families. Speaks a lot. Communication is in a dialogue where people interrupt each other. Touching is common.</p>		<p>Individualist. Speaks and listens to others equally. Communication is dominated by dialogue, where both parties listen to each other politely and without interrupting. Physical contact need is very small or absent.</p>		<p>Collectivist culture, non-contact culture. Rather listens than speaks, indirect communication style. Communication is dominated by monologue, where one party speaks more.</p>
<p>Justifies own decisions, flexible with time, reacts very emotionally, "doesn't lose face," meaning reputation is very important.</p>		<p>Decisive, sets goals to focus on, values data and facts. Patiently waits for their turn.</p>		<p>Reputation maintenance is important, uses a lot of networking relationships, avoids confrontation. Aligning with others.</p>
<p>Charisma, self-expression, very rich body language; people-oriented, diffuse, manipulative.</p>	<p>Honest and direct, calm, does one thing at a time, body language is limited, has personal goals.</p>	<p>Harmony is important, a command is a command, respects age and experience, body language is almost non-existent, business and personal life are linked.</p>		

Source: The Lewis Model (n.d.)

In collectivist cultures, solidarity, harmony, and a sense of belonging are essential, where personal reputation is closely linked to family and other groups. In contrast, **in individualist cultures**, independence, self-actualisation, and individual identity are considered important. Estonia, located on the border between Linear-Active and Reactive cultures, combines traits of both individualistic and collectivist cultures. For Estonians, personal fulfilment and standing up for individual interests are important, but they also consider what others think.

Recommendations for communicating with guests from Multi-Active cultures:

- Be open and ready to engage actively throughout the tour, and provide opportunities for small talk in addition to the information related to the tour.
- Don't be bothered by interruptions. Use friendly humor to manage the group, for example, saying that you really want to do your job and first introduce the sights you have prepared for them.
- Show respect for both individuals and the group.

Recommendations for communicating with guests from Linear-Active cultures:

- A personal approach is essential.
- Punctuality and adherence to the program are necessary.
- Give people the opportunity to share their experiences, but don't force guests to talk or participate actively if they don't want to.

Recommendations for communicating with guests from Reactive cultures:

- Always listen attentively when a guest addresses you.
- Try to understand the guest's true desires.
- Value silence and the need for it before making a final decision.
- Pay great attention to complaints and respond constructively and seriously.
- Observe the guest's expressions and subtle gestures.
- Strive to be very precise and stick to the agreed program.

As a supplement to the previous information, intercultural differences can be viewed through three main components: material, normative, and cognitive. The material component encompasses everything related to the environment, space, art, and other material aspects, influencing people's lives and behaviors. The normative component refers to the rules, customs, and habits that form the cultural foundation and regulate people's behaviour in daily life. The cognitive component is related to understanding worldview, values, and language, as these help shape people's perceptions and attitudes toward the world around them. Understanding the components of different cultures helps the guide better understand the guests' distinctive needs and explains why they may behave in certain ways.

The material component in cultures includes aspects such as space, clothing, and food. When a guide works with guests from a different cultural background, it is important to understand the specific customs of their culture, including dress codes. For example, on a hot summer day in Estonia, wearing a sleeveless top might be considered normal, but in Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, this could be seen as inappropriate. When organising catering and entertainment, cultural peculiarities must also be taken into account – for example, halal tourism is becoming increasingly popular for Muslims, meaning that services should adhere to their religious dietary norms. Additionally, it is essential to consider whether it is appropriate in different cultures for men and women to bathe or relax together, such as in the same pool or room.

The normative component in cultures refers to the rules and norms that people follow in their everyday lives. One crucial aspect to consider in intercultural communication is how and to what extent emotions can be expressed. Should the guide be concerned if a guest listens politely without displaying any emotions? If the guests are from Argentina, their lack of emotional expression may signal discomfort, as it is customary in Argentina to be more open and expressive with emotions. In contrast, in Japan and Estonia, it is common for emotions not to be directly displayed, and there may be a certain level of reserve, which in some cultures is even considered polite. In Estonia, constant conversation between a tourism worker and the guest is not always seen as necessary, as it may be tied to cultural norms of politeness. However, guests from Multi-Active cultures (such as Latin American countries) might interpret this as shyness or cold communication.

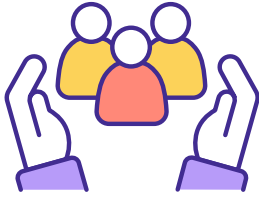
The cognitive component refers to how different cultures interpret the world and which symbols are significant to them. The same symbols can hold entirely contrasting meanings in various cultures and religions. Therefore, it is recommended for guides to avoid exaggerated body language and to use more universally understood and recognized gestures and symbols to prevent cultural misunderstandings.



A suggestion for independent reading: Erin Meyer *“The Culture Map: Decoding How People Think, Lead, and Get Things Done Across Cultures”*, 2015, New York: PublicAffairs. This book provides insights into cross-cultural communication, helping to understand how different cultural characteristics influence people’s mindset and behaviour.

See also:

Different Social Groups



Different social groups refer to groups based on status, power, and material opportunities, which in turn are influenced by various demographic characteristics.

For example, one can talk about VIP guests, middle-class representatives, and backpackers (who are generally young people and students), but also about guests with special needs or distinctive requirements.

Distinctive needs are similar to the term “special needs,” but differ in several ways. While special needs are often associated with a person's permanent condition or health issues that affect their daily life in the long term and broadly, distinctive needs are more temporary and context-specific. These needs can affect a person's ability to cope in the short term, for example, in certain situations or during a particular period, and are not often related to the person's health condition. For instance, a mobility impairment is a permanent medical condition, but families travelling with infants have very different needs, which are not related to health concerns. Nevertheless, their needs are distinct compared to a regular guest.

VIP Guests

VIP guests, often referred to as VIP clients, may include high-ranking officials, extremely wealthy individuals, and people with very high prestige and recognition. Although power, wealth, and reputation are often interconnected, they do not always go hand in hand. VIP guests are primarily characterized by their desire to receive high-level, personalised, and private service. Their schedules and needs are often unique, and they are willing to pay a premium for their desires to be fulfilled.



When providing service to VIP guests, the following aspects should be considered:

- **Uniquely tailored service package.** The service should be customised to meet the unique desires and needs of the guest. In addition to basic services, this includes luxury products, gifts, and other supplementary services that enhance the exclusivity of the experience and provide the guest with an exceptional experience. As a guide, it is essential to consider how the service can be adapted and personalised. For example, would a tour or hike offered to a large group differ from a private service provided to a couple? How would this affect the pricing?
- **High level of service.** VIP clients require a high level of service, which includes discretion and careful attention to detail to ensure that there are no delays or interruptions during the service provision. This also includes the availability of services at the guest's preferred time. As a guide, it is crucial to consider whether the service provided to a regular guest should differ from that provided to a VIP guest.
- **Exclusive access.** VIP guests expect exclusive access to attractions, locations, or people they would not normally encounter on a regular tour, or places not open to the wider public. The service should allow for a more private and comfortable experience. For example, when organising a hike, it is essential to think about whether there should be a designated relaxation area for VIP guests or whether a special menu or other unique services will be provided.
- **Privacy and security.** Privacy and security are especially important for VIP guests due to the higher security needs associated with their position. This must be carefully considered and planned. As a guide, this may mean that the guest will be accompanied by a security team, overseeing the guide's work before and during the service, checking the necessary equipment, or requiring extra security gear.
- **Flexibility.** Flexibility is a key characteristic of personalised and exclusive service, and it is particularly important when dealing with VIP guests. If a guest needs to make last-minute changes to their visit due to their obligations, how can the guide adjust the service? How should the guide respond to changes, and how are the additional costs covered?

In summary, working with VIP guests involves thorough preparation to offer a service that meets the guest's expectations and needs. It is important to consider how much flexibility and personalisation the guide can offer during the tour or hike and what resources are required to do so.

Age and Gender

Guests of different ages and genders may have distinct needs, even when they are willing to use standard services. Due to their specific characteristics, they may require certain adjustments—both in the physical service environment and in communication.

Things to consider when serving children:

- Information signs and other materials should be placed at a height suitable for children.
- Children need appropriately sized (but varied) tables, chairs, attractions, safety equipment, etc.
- Various service elements, such as meals, activities during the hike/tour, relaxation options, etc., should be offered with child-friendly alternatives.
- Choose a communication style, language, and tour content that is appropriate for children.
- Communication should be open, patient, and friendly, as children might be shy, unsure, or unaware of how to act in different situations. It is important to encourage them and provide clear explanations and information.
- Children should be respected equally to other guests and have the right to express their opinions and make choices.
- The service should engage multiple senses. Since children's attention span and self-regulation are still developing, suitable methods should be applied: multisensory engagement, varied activities, clarity and concreteness, and flexibility.

Things to consider when serving elderly guests:

- Be mindful of potential health issues limiting the pace, duration, or terrain suitability (e.g. uneven surfaces, stairs, slopes).
- Older people require more light for proper vision, so movement in dim or dark environments can be challenging.
- Reading very small, complex fonts or low-contrast text can be difficult. Therefore, printed information should be in a larger font, with a simple and clear typeface and high contrast. A magnifying glass might also be helpful.
- Many older people experience hearing loss, making it difficult to hear speech that is too quiet, poorly articulated, or surrounded by noise. As a guide, pay attention to your speech pace, clarity, and volume, and choose locations without background noise if possible. Also, ensure that your face and body are clearly visible to assist with lip-reading and facial cues.
- Older guests value communication and the opportunity to share their experiences, so the guide should make time for conversation and active listening.

Things to consider when serving clients of different genders:

- Women often need more time and privacy for restroom use and hygiene management. As a guide, it's important to consider how to ensure their comfort during long hiking days, especially during menstruation. Are the toilet facilities spacious enough for women or guests with small children to care for themselves or their children comfortably?
- Appearance can be important to guests, and this may come with distinct needs. For example, guests may have long nails, false eyelashes, or makeup that could be at risk in outdoor or unusual conditions. It's helpful to provide information or supplies that help guests in maintain their appearance or prepare for the excursion. On rainy days, guides could offer guests a chance to check and adjust their appearance—like wiping smudged makeup.
- Tolerance and readiness to acknowledge gender-specific needs are essential. Particular attention should be given to guests of alternative gender identities. If guests include members of the LGBTQ community, it's vital for both the guide and the group to demonstrate acceptance. Are restroom facilities gender-neutral? Are all guests provided with appropriate services and a comfortable environment?



Special Interest Visitors

These are individuals seek knowledge and experiences based on a specific hobby, specialisation, or passion. They may have a deep interest in nature, culture, military history, or any other niche — the possibilities are endless.

Tips for working with special interest visitors:

- Involve experts related to the visitors' interests when planning a hike or tour. For example, for a group interested in nature, include professionals such as a marine biologist or an ornithologist. For history enthusiasts, collaborate with a historian.
- Personalise the standard tour or hike by adding attractions and activities tailored to the group's specific interests. This could include exclusive visits to institutions, production sites, or locations where interest-based topics and practices can be demonstrated.
- Offer hands-on experiences that allow guests to actively participate. For example, for those interested in handicrafts, organise workshops to learn local craft techniques, considering the group's size and logistics.
- To enhance the quality of the service, provide guests with materials and equipment related to their specific interests during the tour or excursion. For example, during birdwatching, suitable binoculars or additional informational materials (books, audio files, etc.) on the topic can be offered.
- Share (public) information about places and people in the area related to the specific topic, enabling interested guests to further explore the subject independently, get in touch with specialists, and focus more on their interests.

Visitors with Special Needs

Visitors with special needs are considered individuals who require specific accommodations to use services, often related to health and deviating from the general norm. People with disabilities always have special needs, but not all people with special needs are necessarily disabled. Special needs can range from health conditions to specific mental, behavioural, or emotional requirements—for example, giftedness, behavioural and/or emotional disorders, phobias.

A disability is defined as a loss or deviation in a person's anatomical, physiological, or psychological structure or function, which, in combination with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders equal participation in society (Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act, 1999). Disabilities are categorised as mobility, visual, hearing, intellectual, speech, multiple, or other disabilities resulting from a medical condition.

In addition to disabilities, there are special needs resulting from other health issues, such as mental disorders, allergies, skin diseases, food intolerances, haemophilia, and various chronic illnesses. In some cases, these special needs may also be grounds for officially recognising a disability. For example, complications arising from leukaemia may cause severe mobility issues, which in turn may justify the classification of a mobility disability.

Based on the definition of disability, an important aspect lies in how individuals with special needs are perceived by others and by society as a whole. Suppose a person has a physical limitation due to health reasons, but the surrounding environment is accessible and they are treated with respect and equality. In that case, their disability may not manifest socially and might not become a barrier to daily functioning.

Approximately one billion people in the world live with some form of special need. In Estonia, there are over 110,000 people with disabilities. According to modern perspectives and regulations, every person, regardless of their special needs, has the right to participate in society equally with others, including the right to access and enjoy various tourism services. Considering these rights and the shift in mindset, it is crucial that guides are able to apply appropriate methods in their work to provide meaningful experiences and a break from routine for guests with special needs.

Below is an overview of the main types of disabilities and what a guide should take into account when working with guests who have special needs. The general and most important requirement is to treat all guests according to common standards of politeness and in a person-centred manner. This means recognising each person's individuality, being attentive to their needs, and remembering that the guest themselves knows best what is most suitable and comfortable for them.

The expectations of guests with special needs do not significantly differ from those of other guests: rest, entertainment, a change of pace, discovering something new, etc. A guide must consider general measures needed to serve guests with special needs, but individual attention is equally important. During the excursion, it is essential to clarify what adjustments need to be made so that the guest with special needs feels as comfortable and well-supported as possible.



Visual Impairment

In Estonia, there are about 10,000 people with visual impairments, including both the partially sighted and the blind. People with partial sight may have difficulty judging distances, perceiving contrasts, or seeing in the dark.

Even people with normal vision may struggle to see clearly if the room or environment is too dark or dusty, or if the text or visual material is difficult to distinguish—for example, due to small font size, low contrast, text blending into the background, or colors that are too bright or similar to the surrounding environment.

The guide's role during an excursion is to support visually impaired visitors so they can fully experience and enjoy the activity. To do this, it's essential to thoughtfully plan the tour itinerary, communication methods, and the delivery of information through various senses.

Below are communication guidelines provided by the Estonian Blind Union and the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities for working with groups that include visually impaired individuals.

When there is a visually impaired person in the group:

- Plan the excursion route and activities in advance – ensure that there are audio guides with description translations, tactile information (e.g., area plans or maps), braille texts, and information signs at the sights.
- Think about how to include more sensory elements (e.g., smells, sounds, tactile experiences).
- Before the excursion, explain the route and activities to the visually impaired participant and ask how you can best support them during the tour.
- When starting a conversation, asking questions, or providing clarifications, address the person by name and introduce yourself so the guest knows who you are.
- If you don't know the name of the visually impaired person, gently touch their arm to let them know you are speaking to them.
- Communicate naturally; there's no need to speak louder than usual.

- If the visually impaired person is alone and without a guide dog, offer your arm to accompany them and say something like: "I will walk with you."
- Pay attention to obstacles, turns, steps, or low objects on the path that can be avoided. If so, lead the person around them.
- Movement is smoother when you walk about half a step or 50 cm ahead and the visually impaired person holds onto your arm.
- When entering through a door or navigating tight spaces, don't push the blind person ahead of you, but guide your arm behind you so that the person follows behind you.
- As you move, provide ongoing information about the terrain, possible steps, obstacles, etc.
- It is important to describe the surroundings continuously to the visually impaired person. Try to do this clearly, briefly, and naturally. In addition to describing the surroundings, it is essential for the visually impaired person to understand the story or narrative being shown. Therefore, always focus on telling the story in addition to a brief description.
- If there are partially sighted people in the group, use descriptions of contrasts, such as "dark columns on a light background."
- When describing the location of something, use words like "left," "right," "up," "down," etc. You can also use clock positions (e.g., "to the six o'clock direction," "at three o'clock," "the church is at seven o'clock from us"). The word "there" doesn't provide any useful information about the location to the visually impaired person.
- If visual information is used during the excursion (e.g., descriptive text on walls, photos, paintings, objects), offer alternatives, such as reading or describing the text aloud.
- When leaving the visually impaired person, let them know and guide them to a safe place, such as by a specific object or to another person.
- It's fine to use words like "see," "look," and "read" in your speech.
- Do not disturb, pet, or call the guide dog. It is performing its tasks and must not lose focus.
- Watch the pace of the excursion so that the visually impaired person has enough time to orient themselves and process the information.
- Ensure that guide and service dogs have access to water bowls and, in that there is a blanket or mattress where the dog can rest in accommodation establishments.

Hearing Impairment



In Estonia, there are 5,470 people diagnosed with hearing impairments, of whom approximately 4,500 use sign language. There are 115,644 people in Estonia diagnosed with hearing loss. A large portion of those with hearing impairment have developed hearing loss throughout their lives. Hearing-impaired individuals can be found in all age groups, but their proportion is generally higher among older people than younger ones.

If there is a hearing-impaired person in the group:

- Some people with hearing impairments may use sign language and a sign language interpreter. Sign language is the native language for deaf people who use it, as spoken language and written language may not be the most comfortable mode of communication.
- People with hearing loss may use hearing aids, implants, or other assistive devices, but many people with hearing loss may not have them. Additionally, hearing aids may not be effective in noisy environments. Therefore, choose locations on the excursion route where there is little or low external noise. It is also much more difficult to convey information to people with hearing loss in echoey spaces. For people with hearing loss, it may be helpful to have a transcriptionist who writes down the guide's and other people's words in real time, allowing the person with hearing loss to read the text on their phone or tablet.
- It helps people with a hearing loss and the deaf if they can see the speaker's face and mouth. Try to face the person with a hearing impairment. It's also helpful if the light falls on the guide or interpreter's face.
- On bus tours, it's useful if the guide provides paper materials to those who want them, faces the group when speaking, and doesn't cover their mouth. If someone asks a question, repeat the question first and then answer.
- On walking tours, ensure the distributed technical devices are suitable for people with hearing loss, such as those with adequate volume, Bluetooth connectivity, and/or loop systems.
- If it is necessary to communicate safety alerts (e.g., an approaching car from behind) on a walking or cycling tour, use hand signals as well.
- If people with hearing loss or sign language users have an interpreter with them, do not proceed until the person with hearing loss has had the chance to read or view the interpreter's translation and has familiarised themselves with the object or location described. If the person with hearing loss is looking at the guide or interpreter, they cannot focus on the object being described at the same time.

- Speak more slowly, with clear diction, and enunciate word endings. It's also important to speak louder so your voice doesn't get lost in other background noise. There is no need to shout.
- People with hearing loss may be provided with information cards during the tour, which include a photo of the object and a short text that the guest can read quickly. However, it should not be forgotten that the tour is communication between two people (including the guide and the group). Therefore, an information card serves as an aid rather than a substitute for direct contact between the guide and the guest.



What should a guide consider when there are deaf people in the group?

In deaf culture, sign language is the primary means of communication. Estonian sign language is the first language for the deaf, while Estonian is considered a second or foreign language. Deaf people are proud of their culture and identity, and they strive to preserve their language, Estonian sign language.

Everyone has the right to participate in cultural life and use public services. Starting in 2025, accessibility requirements will apply to both products and services. Therefore, it is important that, in visual materials, Estonian sign language translations are also provided in addition to Estonian language subtitles.

In Estonia, much attention is given to mother-tongue education. The primary target group for visits to museums, exhibitions, and similar places are children, youth, and families with children. Among people with special needs, deaf children and youth are one of the most vulnerable groups. Children from diverse backgrounds, for example, learn at Tallinn's Helen School or Tartu's Hiie School. However, some children and youth who attend regular schools but still require information in sign language or other forms. When going on a tour, the teacher is aware that there is a hearing-impaired child or youth in the group. For services with a guide, it is necessary to either include a sign language interpreter or find options for using an FM system (wireless listening device), a loop amplifier, or providing subtitles or other written information. Many people with hearing impairments use various hearing aids and CI devices (cochlear implants and other hearing support systems), but external environmental support is also needed to ensure hearing.



If a guide wishes to involve a sign language interpreter to facilitate their work, the request must be made well in advance, at least two weeks before the visit. A sign language interpreter can be ordered from the website of the Sign Language Interpreters' Ltd at www.viipekeeletolgid.ee. Another good option is to seek assistance and guidance from the Estonian Deaf Association by writing to them at ead@ead.ee. It is important to remember that if a sign language interpreter is needed or additional information is required to support the deaf, it should be arranged in advance so that people have time to prepare.

Checklist for guides on using a sign language interpreter:

- A sign language interpreter acts as an information mediator between a deaf person and a hearing person.
- Only certified sign language interpreters should be used.
- The interpreter will likely want to review relevant event materials before the tour, museum, or exhibition visit to prepare.
- The materials must be simple and understandable for the deaf person (child/young person/senior).
- It's important to make eye contact with the deaf person, not the interpreter. The deaf person also observes the speaker.
- There is no need to use foreign words.
- Choose a normal speaking pace. Speaking too quickly or too slowly is unnecessary, as the interpreter will translate at the same pace as the guide speaks.
- The sign language interpreter always stays beside the guide.
- Questions should be directed to the deaf person, not the interpreter.

A guide preparing a tour or hike with deaf participants must consider various aspects to ensure a smooth experience and participant well-being. This means the entire route should be checked in advance to assess whether there are clear signs and (visual) instructions at stopping points and attractions, including building entrances, ticket counters, exhibition/museum halls, restrooms, and other rooms. The entire visual environment helps the guide perform their work better.

Here are some examples and suggestions for ticket counters and attractions on how guides can collaborate with institutions to make the experience better and more comfortable for deaf individuals:

- Ticket counters should have visual information indicating that it is possible to borrow a tablet or other assistive devices that help the deaf person receive or communicate information. To share this information, a few-word sentence and sign language pictograms can be used (the colours of the pictograms can be changed, but contrast with the background and surrounding elements must be ensured).
- Museum or exhibition exhibits and materials should be visually easy to follow and displayed properly. In addition to regular text, there should be text written in simple language that is easy to read.
- At each exhibit or display, there should be a sign language translation available, as well as an option to use a tablet or view the sign language translation on their own mobile device (via QR code or link).
- Museums or exhibition halls should have interactive visual boards and touchscreens where deaf visitors can practice and learn by themselves.

If a deaf person can lip-read:

- There is no need to shout or speak near their ear (without showing the lips).
- It is important to maintain a sufficient distance so that the sign language user can see both the face and the hands.
- If the guide knows sign language at a communication level, it is ideal for them to wear a name tag on their chest or a badge indicating that they know sign language.

Space and lighting are very important when working with deaf individuals. Deaf people need lighting to see the guide and the sign language interpreter, as they can only receive information by seeing them. If there are places during the tour or hike that are not well lit, or where lighting can only be provided for one person, it has to be the interpreter relaying the information. Interpreters can use white gloves as an aid to help the deaf person see the interpreter's hands. The light should not shine directly into the faces of the deaf individuals or blind them. A strong light behind the guide or interpreter can distract viewers as it can shine into their eyes and prevent the deaf person from receiving information.

Visitors often prefer a guide who knows sign language or a deaf guide, as this allows for direct and immediate communication. Since deaf individuals primarily perceive the world visually, their eyes may often shift between the exhibits and the interpreter. The duration of the tour with a guide will certainly be longer than with a regular group of hearing visitors.

The group size can vary. For example, the average number of students in a class at Helen School is 4 (the maximum is 6 students). The visitor experience is often influenced by other group members as well, so it is very important that each guest feels safe. The sense of security is affected by factors such as the group size, familiarity among group members, and many other factors. Therefore, it is recommended to keep the group size small for deaf guests, as well as other individuals with special needs, and to avoid mixing guests from different schools or regions, even if they come for the tour on the same day. Every individual's needs are different, and the guide must ensure there is enough time to pay attention to each guest. The maximum group size for visitors could be 10–15 people.

Additional information:

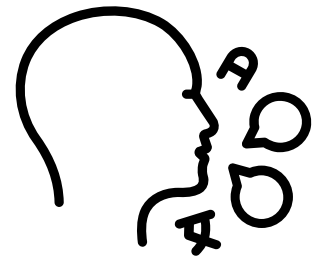
Deaf individuals who use sign language are always interested in the creators of exhibits and images who share the same experience and are also deaf. For example, when the guide speaks about a deaf artist, items made by deaf individuals, or historical events in the deaf community, it increases the value of the tour. The guide can confidently focus throughout the visit on deaf culture, art, or history. Exhibits and items related to deafness or sign language are of particular interest to them as they allow for a connection to their identity, culture, and experiences.



The opportunity to provide feedback is a very important part of the visitor experience.

A simple feedback form (such as Google Forms, where written responses can be supplemented with video files) is suitable for feedback collection. Alternatively, feedback can also be gathered via email. The guide should provide a clear overview of the feedback options to the visitors in advance, either through the service's introductory website or during the tour, offering written materials for this purpose.

Museum and other institution staff, as well as guides, should be aware of accessibility requirements and the needs of deaf visitors. It is important that staff are trained to communicate with visitors with special needs in a considerate and respectful manner.



Speech Impairment

Speech impairment, which hinders communication, may affect up to ten percent of people. Speech problems are generally divided into two categories: one concerns situations where a person is unable to express their wishes and thoughts clearly in speech and/or writing, and the other refers to difficulties in understanding spoken language and/or written text. In the most severe cases, typically after a stroke or brain trauma, speech damage (aphasia) may occur, where normal speech usage is disrupted in both directions. It is important to remember that this does not imply intellectual impairment.

People with stuttering, muscle weakness, coordination disorders, or vocal cord paralysis may experience obstacles in speaking. Additionally, neurological impairments such as aphasia (speech and language comprehension disorders), dysarthria (speech disorder caused by muscle weakness, paralysis, or coordination issues), and apraxia (a neurological disorder that makes it difficult for a person to perform certain movements intentionally, including speech) can also complicate communication. Other factors, such as autism spectrum disorder, stress, or depressive states, can impede speech comprehension, even when physical hearing is intact. People from other linguistic backgrounds with limited language proficiency may also experience similar obstacles to communication as those with speech impairments.

If there is a person with speech impairment in the group, the guide's role is to support them in understanding speech, expressing themselves, and receiving information.

1. Supporting speech-impaired individuals in understanding speech:

- Eye contact with the speaker – the guide should try to position themselves as close as possible to the person(s) with speech impairment, within their line of sight.
- Supporting audible speech through pointing, gestures, context-based images, maps, diagrams, and perceivable body language.
- Clear diction, moderate speaking pace.
- Information delivery in clear, short, complete sentences.
- Pauses between topic changes.
- Avoiding background noise and multiple people speaking at the same time.

2. Supporting individuals with difficulty expressing themselves:

- Respectful and understanding attitude.
- Giving time. With good eye contact, it is possible to notice when the person wishes to ask or convey something. The guide should gently encourage the guest and give them time to communicate their message.
- Avoiding assumptions or finishing sentences for them, as this could hinder the delivery of their message.

3. Delivering important information and ensuring safety:

- The guide must ensure that there is eye contact with the speech-impaired person when delivering important information.
- Information should be delivered one unit at a time. For example, if agreeing on a meeting time after free time, the guide should first provide the time, and only after confirming the person has understood, provide the meeting location.
- When delivering important information, it is essential to use duplicative and alternative methods of communication. For example, show the agreed-upon time on an actual clock, mark the meeting location on a map, or, if the bus remains stationary, point to the bus and highlight landmarks to assist with orientation.
- Pen and paper should be readily available to quickly write down important keywords, names, numbers, or other references that help mutual understanding.
- For independently mobile individuals, especially those with aphasia, it is useful to provide them with important information such as the guide's contact number, the agreed meeting time, and the address of the meeting point. In this case, the person can request assistance if necessary.
- To ensure safety and smooth operation, it is essential to be equipped with the client's contact details.



Mobility Impairment

Mobility impairment is the most common type of disability. Statistically, there are over 66,000 people with mobility impairments, which means more than half of people with disabilities have mobility-related challenges. Difficulties with movement and mobility may, but do not necessarily, hinder communication. People with mobility impairments may have limited movement or difficulty grasping and lifting objects, but challenges can also arise with other activities. For example, mobility impairment can make daily tasks such as dressing, eating, or other routine activities more difficult. Mobility impairment can also be temporary, such as after a bone fracture, or related to chronic conditions. Before offering help, always ask if the person needs assistance and listen to their instructions on how to support them best.

People with mobility impairments may use various aids such as wheelchairs (including electric wheelchairs), walkers (walking frames), canes, crutches, grips, and others. Many people may not use assistive devices, especially if their mobility issues are related to arm movement difficulties. Some individuals can manage to cover short distances without assistance, particularly if the environment has been appropriately adapted (e.g., rest areas and ensuring accessibility). In such cases, special treatment may not be required.

Mobility impairment is a broad concept because people with mobility impairments have varying levels of functionality. For example, wheelchair users may have either weak or strong arms, depending on their health condition which determines how much assistance they need in daily activities. Therefore, it is important to approach each person individually, considering their specific needs and abilities.

When communicating with people who have mobility impairments, it is important to be polite and not overdo the offering of help:

- Always ask before providing assistance if help is needed. Inquire how you can assist and follow the instructions given.
- Always speak directly to the person with the disability, not their companion.
- Do not speak in a patronising or pitying tone, but rather in a normal, respectful manner.

- Avoid using insider slang or making jokes about people with disabilities. Do not use the term “invalid.”
- A person with a mobility impairment is just as valuable as anyone else; they “go” to work, shop, and “move” around. These expressions should not be feared!
- Create an environment/atmosphere where the person can be as independent and “disability-free” as possible. For example, step out from behind a high desk when assisting someone in a wheelchair.
- Ensure that the path of movement is obstacle-free. A person feels more comfortable when they are not a source of problems (e.g., their arrival does not require moving tables or chairs, searching for a wheelchair-accessible toilet key).
- If necessary, assist with opening doors, moving, and crossing thresholds. Use portable ramps to overcome steps, but ensure they are safe and properly installed beforehand.

When planning a guided tour or excursion:

- Think through the tour route: check if there are ramps, the type of pavement, whether there are high steps, and if electric lifts can be used. If there are inaccessible areas along the route, plan an alternative route or activity for individuals with mobility impairments.
- When moving up stairs or ramps, it is important to have handrails that start and end at the stairs or ramp. The incline of the ramp or stairs should be between 5 and 10%.
- For wheelchair users and others who require assistance, it is important to ensure sufficient space for movement (e.g., the width of doors and corridors should be at least 1.2 meters).
- When pointing out details of various objects, ensure they are visible to all visitors, including wheelchair users. Items placed too high, such as information boards, showcases, or other objects, are inaccessible not only to wheelchair users but also to children or short adults. To mitigate this, consider taking pictures and providing information in advance so that visitors with mobility impairments can receive all necessary details before viewing the object. Also, consider offering alternative activities that are accessible.
- When interacting with a person in a wheelchair, try to be at their eye level, but do not kneel or lean on the wheelchair.
- Choose an appropriate pace to ensure that visitors with movement difficulties have enough time to absorb information and observe all the details.
- When planning the route, include small breaks and places where people can sit or lean for support if necessary.
- When entering or exiting rooms, make sure that the doors open in a way that allows people using wheelchairs or other mobility aids to get in and out easily.

Recommendations

When organising a guided tour, it is wise to follow the saying “seeing is believing” because people who are not familiar with the topic might underestimate possible obstacles.

Therefore, before the tour, it is essential to review the following aspects that are important for participants with mobility impairments:

- **Steps:** Even a single step on the route can be a significant obstacle.
- **Accessibility of attractions:** You cannot assess the accessibility of attractions, stopping points, and other objects along the route based solely on pictures, as photos can be misleading. Additionally, no photos may be available for each stopping point along the route.
- **Doorway width:** The width of doorways should be at least 80 cm.
- **Threshold height:** Check the height of door thresholds to ensure they do not impede movement.
- **Door opening resistance:** Try opening doors to check for difficulty, applying no more than 2.5 kg of pulling force.
- **Ramps:** If there are ramps along the route, their slope should not exceed 6%. This can be measured using mobile apps such as an Inclinometer.
- **Restrooms:** Check the suitability of restrooms. The minimum dimensions of a restroom should be 2.5 m x 2.2 m.

By taking these steps, you can ensure a smooth and comfortable experience for all participants, particularly those with mobility impairments.



Mobility impairment is always diverse.

It is always a good idea to discuss the details of the excursion with participants who have mobility impairments, as they can often suggest their own solutions to fully enjoy the experience. Here are some examples that may affect the planning of the guided tour, and which should be coordinated with the participant in advance:

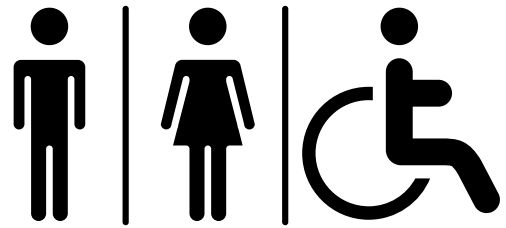


- For some, an accessible restroom is essential, while others may only require a suitable place to change diapers or hygiene items. It is crucial that there is enough space to enter the restroom with an assistive device.
- The length of the route and the obstacles to overcome can vary significantly depending on the type of assistive device (walker, cane, wheelchair, electric wheelchair) or physical strength.
- The needs of the guest and the necessary assistive devices (e.g., lifting equipment, breathing support devices) can affect the organisation of the excursion.
- Participants may have special dietary needs (e.g., finely processed food or tube feeding).

Accessible transport is an important aspect when planning an excursion – it is essential to ensure that the transport used meets the needs of people with disabilities.

- In Estonia, there is a concern about the lack of large tour buses with lifts, so it is important to clarify their availability and booking options in advance.
- Providers of accessible transport services may not always be available, so it is crucial to book transport well in advance.
- Sometimes, it may be necessary to use the participant's own accessible bus for transport, and the costs for this may require compensation.
- When preparing the itinerary, it is advisable to allow extra time for securing wheelchairs, as well as for loading and unloading them.





Accessible dining options and accessible toilets are crucial when organizing any excursion, so it is important to consider the following when planning the route:

- Identify where accessible dining locations or destinations with accessible toilets (accessible WC) are located.
- Ensure in advance that a wheelchair can easily reach the dining table.
- The chairs in dining establishments must have armrests and/or a backrest.
- Providing an obstacle-free path is essential for people using wheelchairs and mobility aids.
- When arranging tables, such as in dining areas and conference rooms, leave enough space for easy movement between the toilets, dining area, and stage. If this is not considered, a person might get trapped behind an obstacle or require assistance to move objects, which could lead to discomfort and create dependency on others for help.



Accessible accommodation

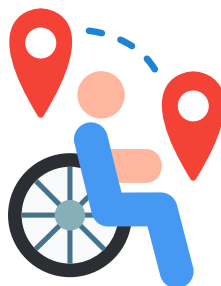
Since a significant portion of assistance arises from an inaccessible environment, it is essential to consider the accessibility of facilities and locations throughout the planning of the excursion. It is important to choose accommodations that take into account the needs of people with disabilities. The accommodation must meet the following conditions:

- Level or ramped entrance.
- An elevator and sufficiently wide doorways (at least 80 cm).
- Wheelchair-accessible toilets and shower rooms, with the minimum dimensions of the toilet room being 2.2 x 2.5 meters.
- Carpet-free floors, bed height (45–50 cm), and clear space under the bed are important aspects that may impact the ability to transfer into bed independently or with assistance.
- If the accommodation does not have enough accessible rooms, for larger groups of people with mobility impairments, access schedules for accessible bathrooms may be helpful, and the availability of general accessible toilets can also alleviate the situation.

Rest breaks and road conditions

Age, muscle weakness, or the use of assistive devices may limit how far someone can travel or how long they can engage in activities. Therefore, seating options are important to allow breaks between activities.

- Consider the pace and needs of travellers with disabilities.
- For long walks, it is recommended to plan more rest breaks or, alternatively, provide foldable chairs.
- Fatigue can be avoided by offering shorter or lower-intensity activities.
- Check the accessibility of nature trails, gardens, and parks (e.g., even ground, surface material, boardwalk width, and edges).
- The boardwalk must be at least 1.6 meters wide, the gaps between the boards should not exceed 5 millimeters, and there should be a 50–70 millimeter edge on both sides of the boardwalk.
- The slope of the access path should remain within 6%, be smooth, and free of edges or steps.



Clarifying support needs

The need for assistance should be discussed with the guest in advance to avoid misunderstandings and to ensure appropriate support. It is essential that any help is provided according to the wishes and instructions of the person needing assistance, not solely through an accompanying relative or personal assistant..

- Determine whether a helping relative or personal assistant will accompany the person in need of assistance.
- If necessary, help arrange professional support services, such as caregivers or assistance providers.
- For group trips, it is advisable to involve a sufficient number of assistants.
- The guide should be prepared to assist personally or involve other group members. For example, a wheelchair user might need help with pushing the wheelchair or bringing food to the table.

If an essential assistive device fails

A person with a mobility disability often relies heavily on their assistive devices (e.g. wheelchair, walker) for daily functioning. Although the guide is not directly responsible for maintaining these devices, it is still helpful to be aware of the following:

- Where are the nearest repair shops (e.g., bicycle shops or workshops) where tires can be inflated or minor repairs carried out?
- Who are the local contacts who can provide quick assistance if needed? For example, mobility aid maintenance services or organizations offering support services for people with disabilities.

Creating inclusive experiences and activities

When designing experiences that are accessible to all, it's essential to consider the needs and expectations of different target groups.

- Activities and excursions should be chosen so they are accessible and suitable for people with disabilities.
- It's important to ensure that no one is left out due to a lack of information or inaccessible environments.
- One of the keys to sensitive and informed guiding is creativity in overcoming obstacles and finding alternatives. For example, if a part of a building is not accessible, it may be possible to offer photos or videos, or organise substitute activities such as a café visit, workshop, additional reading, or a discussion.

Mistakes to avoid

Planning a route only on paper and checking accessibility by phone is not sufficient.

- In Estonia, there is often a lack of awareness about what to consider when a person with a mobility impairment joins an excursion.
- Even a single step can be an insurmountable barrier for a wheelchair user, even if it seems insignificant at first glance.
- An inaccessible toilet can ruin the entire experience. Requirements are set out in the regulation “Requirements for Buildings Arising from the Special Needs of People with Disabilities”.
- Ramps that are too steep, doorways that are too narrow, and similar issues can prevent access for people with mobility impairments.
- For accurate and reliable information about route accessibility, consult local advocacy organisations for people with mobility impairments. Each Estonian county has disability associations or unions dealing with these topics. Contact information can be found on the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities website epikoda.ee/kes-me-oleme/koja-liikmed.

The attitude “but we can help lift” is not a good solution

- Electric wheelchairs cannot be lifted, as they can weigh up to 250 kg.
- Even manual wheelchairs are not designed to be lifted and may become damaged.
- Lifting can also pose a health risk to helpers, potentially causing injuries.
- For overcoming small obstacles like a couple of steps, a portable ramp is a much better solution — for example, the Stepless Lite ramp available from Invaru: www.invaru.ee/ee/kaldtee-stepless-lite.

A well-planned guided tour that considers everyone’s needs ensures a safe and enjoyable experience for all participants.





Intellectual Disability

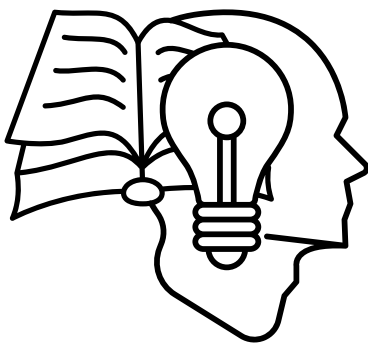
Intellectual disability affects approximately 1–2% of the population. It is not a mental illness or disease, but rather a lifelong condition that is either congenital or develops in early childhood. Individuals with intellectual disabilities may find it more difficult to learn, adapt to new situations, or understand social and societal rules such as behavioural norms or abstract thinking. They may also struggle with navigating unfamiliar places, understanding the value of money, or asking for help from strangers.

People with intellectual disabilities may experience:

- Limited ability to learn new information or skills
- Difficulties with speech, movement, and social interaction
- Challenges in understanding complex relationships or consequences
- A need for clear, simple instructions

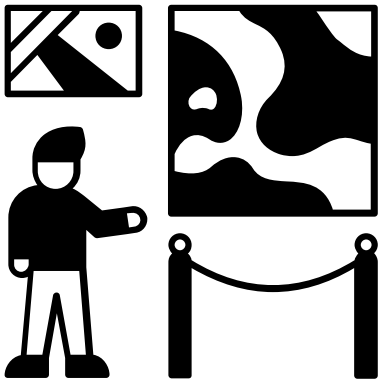
Some individuals require significant support in daily life, while others manage well in familiar environments. The guide plays a crucial role in ensuring the person with an intellectual disability feels safe, comfortable, and included. A supportive and positive attitude helps them fully participate in and enjoy the excursion.

How does a person with an intellectual disability perceive the world?



People with intellectual disabilities often think in concrete and immediate terms. They may interpret language literally—for example, if someone says “blue-blooded,” they might ask how blood can be blue when it’s actually red. They may also display strong emotional reactions, be sensitive, and respond directly or intensely to situations. Importantly, individuals with intellectual disabilities are not dangerous. While their behavior might sometimes resemble that of a child, they are adults with life experience and should be treated with respect and dignity as adults with special needs—not as children.

In exhibitions, museums, and public spaces, easy-to-read texts are a valuable support for people with intellectual disabilities, as well as for their support persons and companions. These simplified texts help make the content more accessible, understandable, and inclusive.



Examples of easy-to-read exhibition texts:

- “Venice – Queen of the Seas” at the Seaplane Harbour of the Estonian Maritime Museum. [See the example in easy language on Vaimupuu's website](#)
- Photo exhibition “People with Disabilities in Afghanistan” by the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (EPIKoda). [View the exhibition description in simplified language](#)

Providing information in simple, clear language helps bridge communication gaps and ensures that everyone, can fully participate in cultural and social experiences regardless of ability.

Communication tips (for guiding people with intellectual disabilities):

- Always use short and simple sentences with a clear message.
- Take more time than usual when communicating.
- At the beginning of the tour, clearly explain what will happen, where, and for how long.
- Repeat important information throughout the tour.
- Speak directly to the person. Using the informal “you” (like “sina” in Estonian) is fine.
- Ask permission before touching the person.
- Use familiar and simple words.
- Explain things using examples from everyday life.
- Avoid metaphors or abstract expressions.
- Don’t use foreign words unless they are very commonly understood, for example “okay”.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Large numbers and percentages are difficult to grasp — use “a little” or “a lot” instead.
- Give a clear and simple overview of what to expect at the start of your interaction. If you’re together longer, repeat it throughout the day.
- When making agreements or explaining rules, make sure they are understood — repeat if needed.

- Understand that no response or slow replies are not signs of rudeness.
- Plan for more time for any activity — whether it’s a tour, paperwork, or shopping. If possible, adjust the activity by: reducing the amount of information, or breaking longer activities into smaller steps.
- Avoid sudden or spontaneous plan changes — people with intellectual disabilities feel safer with routine and knowing what comes next.
- Long and fast-paced tours may be tiring.
- Include short rest breaks in your schedule.
- Allow people time to adjust and absorb new information.
- Never leave a person with an intellectual disability alone.
- Make sure they know where they are, who they are with, and what time and where they need to go next.

Tips for better accessibility:

- Engage different senses — let people touch objects, hear sounds, or smell things.
- Use plain language in written materials.
- Support spoken explanations with pictures, drawings, or other visual aids.

People with intellectual disabilities are interested in new contacts, experiences, and adventures, although in their daily lives, routine and a set schedule are often important to them. They value open, friendly, and direct communication, which creates a safe environment where they can gain new experiences and knowledge. Many people with intellectual disabilities are independent in familiar environments and situations, but in new spaces and circumstances, they often need additional support and a sense of security to cope. The guide’s role in this is very important and irreplaceable.

In addition to the aforementioned special needs, a guide must also take into account various other health issues that may affect the excursion experience.

Allergy is an extreme sensitivity to a normally harmless substance, causing a strong reaction in a person's immune system. Common allergens may be related to animals (e.g., cat and dog allergies), dust (e.g., carpets), or pollen, as well as certain foods (e.g., honey, eggs, nuts, etc.). When moving around nature or the countryside, the most common allergy triggers are pollen, wasps, bees, and other insects. If the excursion takes place in nature, where contact with allergenic plants and insects is likely. In that case, participants should be informed in advance about when and how likely such exposure may occur. Since this involves sensitive personal data, the responsibility for allergy risks and necessary medication lies with the individual. However, it is the guide's responsibility to share relevant information about possible allergens and to respond if a severe reaction occurs.

People with mental disorders are individuals with mental characteristics that differ from the average, where their mental, emotional, or cognitive condition causes significant difficulties in daily life, communication, or participation in social life. Mental disorders are often regarded as pathological conditions, but there are various interpretations and approaches to them. Mental disorders include various conditions, such as anxiety disorders (e.g., phobias), dementia, addiction disorders, personality disorders, mood disorders (e.g., depression), autism spectrum disorder, and more.

A guide may not always know or notice if someone in the group has a mental disorder. However, it is important to be aware of these conditions in advance and take them into account in the work. It is highly likely that the participants on the excursion will not be in an acute crisis situation and can manage well in normal circumstances. However, individuals with dementia, autism spectrum disorder, or mental disorders that are severe enough to require special care services will need external assistance. These individuals are more likely to attend the excursion with a companion who can provide the guide with the necessary information to ensure the well-being of the group.

Some recommendations for the guide:

- Be calm, accepting, polite, and have a positive attitude.
- Try to avoid sudden changes in tone, noise, and movement, which may startle and disorient participants.
- Always inform the group in advance about what to expect. People fear many different things, from bats to dark rooms and large challenges. If there are things on the route that might trigger phobias, such as spiders or narrow, dark corridors, make sure to inform the group beforehand and offer alternative routes or activities if necessary.
- Avoid excessive auditory and visual stimuli. A person with a mental disorder may struggle in a room where background music is playing and there are words coming from screens, while movement and voice noise are also distracting. Special visual stimuli, like flashing screens or bright patterns in large spaces (e.g., on carpets), may also be disruptive. If you plan to show any sound or different visual images, inform the group in advance.
- Motivating people with depression can be challenging, and they may need more time to feel included. If they have come with a companion, offer them the opportunity to participate, but don't force them to do something they don't want to. It's essential for them to feel safe and to have the freedom to decide how much they wish to participate. Just coming on the excursion is already a big step for them.
- Avoid direct and intrusive eye contact, physical contact, or other potential interactions that might irritate and disorient a person. The key is to maintain a gentle and friendly, yet clear attitude.
- Be flexible. Distribute your attention among the group members based on how they express their needs, but maintain balance so that no one monopolises your attention exclusively, and no one is left unnoticed.

Food intolerances, chronic illnesses, and other conditions affecting well-being

Many people have specific needs that they pay attention to in their daily lives. As a guide, it is not possible to be fully aware of all the different needs of guests or to prepare thoroughly for them. However, when providing services, it should be common practice to ask questions about these needs and provide guests with a discreet opportunity to inform you about their specific needs. Based on this information, a personalised approach can be offered. If such an approach is not possible, the relevant information should be communicated clearly in advance, and the reasons why certain needs cannot be accommodated at the moment or in the given situation should be explained.

Creating a good and successful visitor experience

Creating a positive and successful visitor experience begins the moment the customer contacts either a travel agency or the guide directly to start planning the excursion.

The communication process can be divided into several stages:

- **Pre-excursion communication** can broadly be divided into booking (placing the order, providing an offer, confirming the booking) and coordination, during which the excursion route, content, special needs, and details related to the excursion, such as the starting point, time, meeting place, etc., are clarified. Often, booking and coordination occur between the customer and the travel agency, with the group only meeting the guide on the day of the excursion. In such cases, there is a significant risk that an important detail may be lost in the communication between the tour operator and the guide. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the customer also have direct contact with the guide with whom the guests will meet on the excursion.
- **During the excursion**, direct communication takes place between the guests and the guide. If the previous stages have gone well and the communication between the customer and provider has been open, there are usually no unpleasant surprises during the excursion. The guide must continuously pay attention to the well-being and needs of the guests, remain flexible, and be open to communication. The success of the excursion is also influenced by each participant's understanding of their role – for example, the guide, who is the leader and facilitator of the excursion, or the customer, whose task is to ensure appropriate group behaviour.
- **The excursion concludes** with feedback (either verbally or in writing), completing the order (billing, returning lost items, answering questions, etc.), and discussing and clarifying future collaboration if desired.

In conclusion, guiding work with different social groups requires an open mind and flexibility. The planning of the excursion primarily considers the target group for the service, but also leaves room for considering the needs of other diverse target groups.

III Guide as a Profession



This chapter explains the various terms and concepts related to the guide profession that an aspiring guide should know.

Terms Used in Guiding Work

- A guide is an individual who has in-depth knowledge of a region and leads visitors in a chosen language, conveying cultural and natural values. Guiding work is related to customer service, which requires proper appearance, ethical behaviour, good communication skills, and an understanding of cultural differences. According to the Tourism Act, a guide must prove their professional competence after a certain period.
- **Qualification** is a certification obtained after passing a professional exam; its level is specified in the relevant professional standard. The presence of a qualification is confirmed by a certificate issued by the Chamber of Commerce.
- **Vocational qualification** – Guide, level 5, and Master Guide, level 6 – confirms the guide's professionalism, work experience, and professional skills. The professional title is a Certified Guide. Specialisations include Nature Guide and Cultural Guide. For more information: www.eestigiideliit.ee/kutse-andmine/2-1-kutse-dokumendid.
- **Nature guide** conducts tours in natural environments, introducing nature and heritage landscapes while promoting environmental awareness. This role does not require physical or professional preparation from clients.
- **Cultural guide** conducts tours in cultural settings, conveying cultural and historical values, including intangible heritage.
- **Rural guide** conducts tours in rural areas, including agricultural and farming enterprises, highlighting rural lifestyles and promoting agrotourism.
- **A sub-qualification** can be an independent entry to the labor market or part of the guiding profession.
- **A tour leader** (sub-qualification guide, level 5) is a route administrator who organises the provision of services included in the travel package.
- **Certification** is a process through which a guide's knowledge of a specific object, region, or field is evaluated. Certification is organised by regional guide or tourism organisations, business centers, or local governments. For more information and explanations: www.eestigiideliit.ee.

- **Tourism** refers to travelling outside of one’s everyday environment for entertainment, business, or other purposes, along with consuming services related to travelling.
- **Agrotourism** combines agricultural production with tourism services, offering the opportunity to visit farms and agricultural enterprises, learn about rural life, and participate in farm work. More information and explanations at www.agroturism.ee.
- **Excursion** is an activity led by a guide to present cultural and natural values, as well as rural life.
- **Client** is a person who orders an excursion conducted by a guide.
- **Guest** is a person who participates in an excursion led by a guide.
- **Visitor** is a synonym for “guest,” but is less personal and not directly related to the service provider.



A Guide is the Living Business Card of Their Country and Region!



QUESTION: Do you know who is the “business card” of their country?

A guide is the living business card of their country and region. They carry the traits, values, and attitudes of their nation’s culture, conveying the historical, cultural, and/or natural characteristics of the area within the context of world culture. They also create connections between the visiting tourists and their home countries. The guide is the creator of experiences and may be the only local person the tourists meet during their visit.

QUESTION: Do you know what steps need to be taken to become a licensed guide?



There are several pathways to becoming a licensed guide. One can start by self-studying the topics and questions for the certification exam. Many guides in museums and local governments are teachers, students, history enthusiasts, and others who have not undergone formal guide training but have gained the necessary knowledge through various workshops, training courses, and learning materials. Several vocational schools in Estonia offer guide training, such as the Pärnu County Vocational Education Centre and Kuressaare Vocational School. Some universities also include guide-related courses in their curricula. For example, at the University of Tartu Pärnu College, tourism and hospitality management students can take an elective introductory course in guiding. Taking regional needs into account, some Leader groups, local associations, or manor schools that are open to visitors during the summer also organise guide courses in rural areas.

Certification of guides

According to the decision of the Service Qualifications Council of the Estonian National Examination and Qualification Centre (SA Kutsekoda) in 2019, Eesti Giidide Liit (Estonian Guides Association) is designated as the certifying body for guides until 2029.

Guide certifications are issued according to the qualification standard at levels 5 and 6, with specialisations in nature and cultural guiding. The level 5 qualification is also applicable for the sub-certification of a tour leader. To receive the certification, candidates must pass a qualification exam. The certification serves as proof of competence and provides a competitive advantage. The Estonian Guides Association conducts qualification exams for guide students and field professionals at least twice a year.

Assessment and guide training

During the certification process, the guide's knowledge is assessed in relation to a specific object, region, or field of expertise. These assessments are organised by regional guide or tourism organisations, business centres, or local governments. In many museums, only those guides who have completed the museum's specific training and passed the certification process are authorised to conduct tours.

Those interested in guide work are advised to join mailing lists of museums and tourism organizations or follow them on social media to stay informed about various guide training programs and opportunities.

Different Types of Guides

Various definitions have been proposed for the profession of a guide. Below are several explanations that overlap in one way or another. The first definition was already mentioned earlier under the terms section: A guide is a person who has extensive knowledge of a region and leads visitors in a chosen language, conveying cultural and natural values. The work of a guide is related to customer service, which requires a proper appearance, ethical behaviour, good communication skills, and consideration of cultural differences. According to tourism law, a guide must prove their professional competence after a specific period.

According to Section 16, Subsection 1 of the Estonian Tourism Act, a guide is a person who presents points of interest according to a previously agreed-upon program, route, and schedule. There is also a distinction made for a guide-interpreter, who, in addition to the above, conveys information about the point of interest through consecutive or simultaneous interpretation. Furthermore, both guides and guide-interpreters are required to prove their professional competence.

The Estonian Museum Education Dictionary “Sõnastaja” (2015) states that a guide is a person whose task is to conduct tours. The content of a guide’s work is further explained on the website of the Estonian Guides’ Association (MTÜ Eesti Giidide Liit), where it is stated that a guide’s responsibility is to guide visitors and convey knowledge in unfamiliar and unknown places. The guide introduces their work area, shares the heritage of the region, and offers services, thus shaping the reputation of that area. This explanation refers to the guide as the “business card” of the region. They are the person whose work determines whether guests enjoy the institution, area, or country, and whether they would want to return.

In the job description of a guide, highlights that the guide leads visitors in the chosen language, conveys the cultural and natural values of their region, and possesses region-specific knowledge. The guide’s work involves serving guests, which requires ethical behavior, good communication skills, consideration of cultural differences, and a proper appearance.

This is supported by the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (n.d.), which defines a guide as a person who provides guiding services to visitors in their chosen language, interpreting the region's cultural and natural heritage. The guide holds the appropriate qualification, issued and/or recognised by the relevant organisation of their country or region.

Table 4. Overview of the classification of different types of guides

Type of tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City guide • Rural life guide • Nature guide • Adventure guide • Sports guide • Mountain guide 	Employment status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freelance • Employed by a specific institution or region • Volunteer guide 	
Type of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural guide • History guide • Architecture guide • Food guide 		Language and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilingual guide • Sign language proficient guide • Interpreter
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local guide • Tour leader • Local resident introducing their community • Expert involved in a specific part of the tour • Volunteer providing knowledge in a museum or region • Private guide 		Target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family guide offering separate activities for children • Guide for people with special needs • Museum educator, national park guide • Business guide • Guide working with distinct social groups, e.g., the elderly or people with special interests
Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified guide • Non-certified guide 			

Based on Table 4, guides can be classified according to various characteristics that indicate their specialisation. For example, business or corporate guides have the task of presenting the business sector within certain institutions or regions, facilitating the establishment of contacts, visiting trade fairs and exhibition venues, and explaining local business etiquette and practices.

The key role of an **urban guide** is to offer visitors an immersive experience in an urban environment, highlighting different aspects of the cityscape through architecture, infrastructure, and other significant landmarks, as well as exploring the city's cultural and social history, modern-day life, and lifestyle.

A **cultural guide's** task is to convey both tangible and intangible cultural elements of their region to guests. The landmarks introduced by a cultural guide may offer intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or material experiences through music, literature, food, and much more, all of which the guide helps interpret.

A **nature guide's** mission is to guide visitors through natural environments such as national parks, bodies of water, heritage landscapes, or other nature-related areas. They provide insights into the scientific, historical, and social significance of nature, and, depending on the visitors' social background, offer activities to enhance understanding, foster environmental awareness, and promote a deeper connection with the natural world.

A **rural guide** is knowledgeable about rural life, agriculture, and local food production, and can effectively communicate these topics to visitors in an understandable way.

There are even more types of guides that could be identified, but in all cases, it is crucial to understand that a guide is not just a provider of knowledge and facts. A guide is someone who creates experiences and a sense of well-being. The guide's role is to offer guests a physically, socially, and emotionally safe environment, where the guest does not need to worry about the organisation of the tour or walk. Guests can influence the course of the tour according to their preferences and well-being, feeling that they are cared for. While acquiring new knowledge is still important during excursions, the guide's ability to make the guest feel welcomed and valued has become increasingly important.

Guide as a Service Provider

Tourism forms a large part of our service economy. Today, we strive to find ways to differentiate ourselves from other service providers through hospitality. The guide, in turn, represents their own services and the hospitality of their country and region through their work. In this chapter, we will discuss the role of the guide as a service provider.



QUESTION: Do you base your actions as a guide on the principles of good service?

Service is the act of delivering a service. The broader concept of service is to help clients receive the desired service at the highest possible level. A guide's carefully planned service (in this case, a tour) and their professional communication skills help avoid potential problems and ensure positive memories that will stay with guests for a long time. The main reason for repeat visits is usually a pleasant experience from a previous visit.



ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: The fundamentals of good service

1. Patience

If this isn't a priority for you, you might as well stop reading this article. Fast service is not always the best service. A guide must recognise that patience is especially needed when a customer approaches them upset, dissatisfied, or impatient. Take the time to listen and understand the problem, and never push the person aside.

2. Attentiveness

For several reasons, it is extremely important for a guide to make their clients genuinely believe that they have their full attention. No one should feel insignificant or ignored. Equal treatment is paramount.

3. Clear communication skills

To communicate with clients on their level, it's very important to have prior information about the guests' age, needs, and special requests. Based on this prior knowledge, the guide can prepare the tour script with enough information that is both acceptable and understandable for the guests.

4. Product knowledge

The service provider must have excellent basic knowledge about the offered service (the tour) and also consider the clients' expectations. Otherwise, it becomes challenging to address any problems that might arise for the client and to respond to questions professionally.

5. Ability to use a "positive tone"

It is said that when a service provider smiles on the other end of the phone, they sound much more positive. When speaking into a microphone, smile. Using a positive tone is very important in all communication situations. With good persuasion skills, we can achieve success with very different types of clients. Clients really make decisions based on the emotion you convey to them.

6. Acting skills

Let's be honest, occasionally we deal with people we can never make happy. Situations beyond our control (a client having a bad day or simply being a complaining person by nature) do occur. In such cases, it may feel as if the client is intentionally trying to ruin your day. Every good service provider must have basic acting skills to remain cheerful and smiling, even in such situations.

7. Time management skills

When working as a guide with a large group of tourists, it is essential to be good at time management to avoid rushing the clients and justifying why we couldn't visit one or more attractions due to a tight schedule, blaming someone else for the situation.

8. Ability to "read" the guest

Understanding the guest's desires is an important skill on its own. Tourists on a trip know what the program offers, but sometimes they aren't exactly sure what they want or are looking for. One needs to understand behavioural psychology well enough to help the guest uncover their hidden desires.

9. Calming attitude

You've surely heard phrases like "keep your calm" and "maintain a patient attitude." The service provider must always remain calm, even when the situation gets a bit heated. A good service provider doesn't lose their head or let the client affect them. In fact, the service provider's role is to be the rock for the guest when their world is crumbling due to an unexpected problem.

10. Persuasion skills

Every service provider must hone their persuasion skills to offer suitable solutions for the guests.



QUESTION: Have you thought about how to create a first impression?

Communication with tourists is crucial in guiding and the first impression plays a major role. The same principles that apply to good service are valid here as well – we influence our guests 55% through body language, 38% through tone of voice, and only 7% through words. The first impression of a guide is formed within the first few seconds of meeting.



ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

1. Starting contact with guests

Establishing contact with guests takes about 30 seconds. It is essential to carefully consider a truly impactful greeting and the first approach to the guests, also known as the “icebreaker.” This reflects the guide’s (or service provider’s) readiness to focus on this particular group.

The guide introduces themselves by first and last name and also mentions their profession or main occupation, especially if it is relevant to the tour. Additionally, the guide names the travel agency they represent and introduces the bus driver. If possible, the guide sends the group the schedule and the route in advance or shares this information with them at the start of the day. Using a map or program as a reference, the guide describes the upcoming tour day.

2. Body language

Body language refers to posture, movements, and facial expressions. Like tone of voice, it conveys the guide’s attitude. The guide’s physical movements inform clients how the guide truly feels about them and about what the guide is doing.

Body language can even be perceived over the phone — it is a proven fact that clients can notice our smile even when speaking on the phone.

- When choosing body language, the guide considers whether they are energetic or apathetic, making eye contact with the client or avoiding it, keeping a close distance or maintaining space, smiling or remaining emotionless.

- In front of guests, the guide stands with their feet shoulder-width apart, firmly planted on the ground. This posture conveys confidence. Their head is up, and their hands are not on their back or stomach but relaxed by their sides unless they need to hold something. The guide makes sure that all group members are in front of them. Guests should always face the object, while the guide stands with their back to it.
- Each of us has our own natural gestures, some more, some less. The guide uses these gestures appropriately to emphasize and illustrate our storytelling, making their performance livelier.
- The guide avoids unnecessary gestures, such as stroking their hair, rubbing their hands, touching their nose and ears, putting their hands in their pockets, or jingling coins in their pockets, as these reveal nervousness and distract the guests.
- Eye contact is essential; through it, guests feel personally addressed. If the guide cannot make eye contact, they cannot do this job! During the tour, the guide lets their gaze move from one listener to another. This technique helps increase the listeners' attention as they feel directly addressed. If the guide feels unsure, they select one guest on the left and right side of the group and look at them alternately. Sunglasses interfere with eye contact, and if possible, the guide should avoid wearing them.

3. Voice quality

The voice often tells the client more than the guide realises, reflecting what they think and feel in a given situation. In other words, the guide's attitudes come through in their voice. When choosing the tone of voice, it's important to consider whether the guide's voice is:

- soft or loud,
- varied or monotone,
- emotional or dull,
- interested or bored.

The voice is the guide's most important tool. Without a healthy voice, the guide is ineffective, which is why special attention must be given to it. Every person's voice is unique and characteristic, and people can often be recognized by it. The voice should be clear, expressive, and easily audible, with clear diction.

4. Word usage

Language is a verbal expression. The guide uses it to introduce themselves and greet guests. Even a short greeting phrase shapes their opinion of the guide, partly due to the words they choose.

The preconceived notion guests form depends on whether the guide's word usage is:

- clear or stammering,
- fast or slow,
- clear and understandable or full of slang,
- specific and concise or vague.

Speech should be at a moderate pace and loud enough for guests to hear and understand the guide. The most economical way to use your voice is to speak at a medium pitch. The posture should be straight, both when standing and sitting. The throat must be free to move, meaning the head must be held upright.

5. Ending contact with guests

Just as important as a good beginning is the way contact is concluded. The feeling with which guests part ways sets the foundation for a future reunion (and influences the preconceived notion). It is wise to carefully consider how to end contact and allow for enough time. It's quite difficult to leave guests with a good final impression if the guide has to rush off to the next meeting. The last emotion is precisely what clients take with them.

- The guide concludes the tour in a way that everyone understands the tour has ended, rather than simply dispersing, leaving people unsure whether the guide will say anything important. Moreover, applause is always nice to hear.
- For a bus tour, the guide begins summarising what was seen and discussed early on, so it doesn't happen that the bus unexpectedly reaches the tour's final point, and everyone's attention has already faded.
- The guide thanks the guests for the time spent together.
- The guide checks whether any unanswered questions or concerns remain that they can assist with.
- The guide provides instructions on how to spend time after the tour (museums, concerts, City Cards, price differences in cafes and restaurants, souvenirs, etc.).
- The guide mentions books or brochures that tourists can use to enrich what they heard and saw during the trip, and also points out bookstores where they can purchase these materials.
- The guide clarifies what will happen next.
- The guide wishes the guests something good and beautiful.

The guide always ends contact on a positive note, expressing thoughts that sound enthusiastic, sincere, and inviting for future encounters.

QUESTION: Do you consider your appearance before meeting with guests?



A guide's appearance significantly affects communication with guests and contributes to the guide's confidence and well-being. A professional and well-groomed appearance supports social interaction and helps establish trust. When making a first impression, the guide's appearance plays a major role, as communication and knowledge only come through during the tour. Proper attire and a neat appearance signal that the guide values their work and aims to create a pleasant experience for the guests.

The guide's work involves not only communication but also performance – they are in front of the guests and with them throughout the tour. Both appearance, knowledge, and communication skills play an equally important role in creating the experience.

Therefore, a guide must pay attention to the following aspects:

- Personal hygiene
- Clothing
- Accessories

Personal hygiene includes not only regular self-care but also the use of makeup and perfumes. For female guides, moderate makeup use can support their performance by enhancing facial expressions and emotions, while excessive makeup might appear inappropriate. When it comes to perfumes, it's recommended to choose a fresh and subtle scent that does not extend beyond 1 meter from the guide. Strong or unpleasant perfumes might provoke negative reactions since people's sense of smell and taste can vary. Also, certain scents can cause allergic reactions, irritation, or evoke unpleasant memories in some individuals. In addition, as a guide, special attention should be paid to oral health, ensuring that teeth are healthy and breath is fresh.

The guide's attire should be professional, taking into account the location, theme, and weather conditions of the tour. Appropriate clothing creates trust and makes the guide a pleasant presenter. The environment and local culture play a significant role in choosing suitable attire that aligns with the local culture, the time of the tour, as well as the guide's age and gender. Furthermore, dressing according to the theme offers the opportunity to diversify the performance and make it visually more interesting—for instance, wearing period-appropriate attire on a historical tour. If the tour takes place outdoors, it is important to select clothing that is suitable for the weather, ensuring comfort and supporting the smooth flow of the work. Inappropriate attire may not seem professional, hinder the guide's work, and reduce guest trust. Therefore, it is crucial for the guide to carefully choose clothing and footwear that are appropriate for the job and support the various aspects of the work.

The choice of **accessories** allows the guide to express their personality and helps to create a suitable environment for the tour, enhancing their narrative with visual details. The main accessories to consider include jewellery, scarves, bags, watches, etc. In different cultures, there are various customs regarding jewellery, so it is important to familiarise oneself with local etiquette rules to understand what types and how much jewellery is appropriate to wear in different situations. Guides often carry various materials and items related to the tour that are necessary for administrative tasks (such as phones, itineraries, keys, etc.). Therefore, it is important to choose suitable handbags, shoulder bags, or other practical solutions for carrying these items.

The guide needs to carefully consider which bags are appropriate for personal items, which are for work-related tools, and how they all fit with their overall appearance. Additionally, it is essential that the bags are comfortable to carry and use, ensuring the guide can perform their work smoothly. Special attention must also be paid to the connection between appearance and ethics. A guide's appearance should take into account cultural, religious, age, gender, event, and general context-related factors. In general, clothing should not convey messages or attitudes that could be offensive, provocative, or disturb people's sense of fairness. When considering one's appearance, the location of the tour and the target audience must be taken into account.

In conclusion, a guide's appearance is their tool of the trade. By taking care of their physical appearance, subject knowledge, and communication skills, a guide can be confident that the experience they offer will be excellent.

QUESTION: Can you ask the right questions, acknowledge guests, and avoid inappropriate expressions when communicating with them?

Asking the right questions helps to create a pleasant communication process, where a mutually enriching exchange of information occurs. Listening skills are crucial in communication to notice the feelings and facts expressed by guests. Ensuring positive communication and building trust are of critical importance.

This skill requires full focus, especially in challenging situations with frustrated or "difficult" guests. In such moments, it is especially important to ask more questions, listen carefully, and reflect what has been heard with your own words. Even if you are completely sure that you understood everything, it is essential to make sure that the guest also understands that they have been heard. To do this, it is necessary first to show that you understand the guest's perspective, then reflect that in your own words, and demonstrate that you are aware of their needs and why it is important to them.





ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

1. There are three types of questions, each suitable for obtaining specific types of information:

- **Closed questions** – used to confirm facts. These are useful for quick, simple communication with guests and obtaining short answers. They often start with words like “is,” “when” (e.g., “What time are we meeting in the morning?”). When communicating with a group, these questions often help save time and avoid unnecessary, lengthy conversations.
- **Open-ended questions** – used to obtain more information from the guest/group. These are appropriate for more complex situations where the group's desires or needs are unclear or where there are different choices to be made. These questions typically start with words like “who,” “what,” “why,” etc. (e.g., “What specific historical period are you most interested in?”).
- **Substantive questions** – these questions prompt guests to evaluate, analyze, hypothesize, or express their feelings. They start with words like “what if,” “how,” “let's assume,” etc. (e.g., “How do you think medieval food would have tasted compared to today's cuisine?”). These questions encourage guests to think, engage with the content, and actively participate without fear of making mistakes or giving incorrect answers.

2. Appropriate and inappropriate expressions for customer service

As a guide, it's crucial to be very mindful of your language, as it significantly impacts the relationship with your guests. Here are examples of expressions that either help build positive relationships or hinder them.

Inappropriate expressions:

- Starting sentences with “No” can create a negative attitude and reduce the chances of solving a problem positively.
- “I don't know” conveys a lack of professionalism and damages your reputation. It's better to say, “I'll clarify that right away...” or “I'll look into it to find out exactly...”
- Saying “I'm not sure” is also not ideal.
- Commands lead to resistance from guests. Clients should always feel they have options, regardless of the consequences (“You need to be there by...,” “Call...”).
- “I can't do that” doesn't help the guest come closer to a solution. Focus on what you can do instead.
- Avoid blaming the client (“You misunderstood,” “But you said...,” etc.).
- Indifferent statements (“It's already been explained to you,” “Everything you need is written down there,” etc.) negatively impact the customer experience.
- Pessimistic attitudes don't inspire confidence in good service (“I can't promise anything,” “You can try, but it probably won't work...”).

- Belittling the guest's questions ("I don't understand what you mean," "Of course...").
- Other problematic expressions:
 - "What a shame the weather is like this."
 - "It usually looks better..."
 - "If only we could..."
 - "We just passed..."
 - "Those who looked to the right saw..."
 - "Here," "there," "around the corner," and "ahead." Use "on the right/left side" or "on the driver's side, in front on the left/right" or "near the door."
 - "Since we don't have time, then..."
 - "I already told you..."
 - "I've already explained this..."
 - "How many times do I need to say this..."
 - "Sorry, I have new tourists every day..."

Appropriate expressions:

- A customer service guide should have a rich selection of polite expressions ready for use at the right moment:
 - Expressions that show importance ("Would you prefer...?", "When would it be convenient for you?", "Does that suit you?").
 - Showing care ("I'll clarify that for you right away," "I'll double-check so you'll feel confident").
 - Offering constructive solutions ("I'll check on that right away," etc.).
 - Showing empathy ("You're always welcome," "Call me right away if you have any questions," etc.).
 - Acknowledging and recognising the client ("You're really well-informed," "That's a very interesting question," "Thank you for noticing that," etc.).

3. Group recognition

Creating a positive atmosphere doesn't always happen by itself. To ensure good relationships and encourage the guests' cooperative and friendly behaviour, it's important to give them enough positive feedback and support behaviours that contribute to the desired environment. To encourage guests to behave in the desired way, it's helpful to recognise actions such as actively asking questions, adhering to the schedule, helping one another, maintaining a cheerful mood, contributing ideas, demonstrating good historical knowledge, and sharing personal experiences. A great guide knows how to maintain a positive atmosphere and prevent conflicts by acknowledging any potential mistakes made by the guide and allowing the guests to help correct them. This shows humility, builds trust, and enhances the overall experience for everyone involved. Recognising positive actions and contributions, no matter how small, reinforces the desired behaviour and motivates the group to stay engaged and cooperative throughout the tour.

We can offer recognition on the following levels:

- Personal level – active interest, competent questions, good mental and physical condition despite advanced age, etc. Notice the individual!
- Group level – visiting Estonia, punctuality, lively interest, endurance, cheerfulness. These qualities can be especially highlighted when saying goodbye.
- National level – knowledge of Estonia's history and present.
- Cultural level – for example, the Baltic Germans or Swedes in shaping our culture and education.

Recognition should always be justified.



QUESTION: Do you understand the causes of conflict situations, including conflicts, and are you able to prevent them?

Interpersonal contradictions and disagreements are natural and inevitable. Since conflicts cannot always be avoided, it is extremely important in guiding work to be able to recognize and manage them early, already at the stage of their emergence.

A conflict represents a contradiction in the relationships between people, which prevents the parties from satisfying their needs and interests, creating emotionally tense and traumatic situations.



ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: Conflict prevention and resolution

In a conflict, a person loses flexibility in their behaviour and mechanically forces through a rigid course of action. Often, a person can only use a few behavioural patterns. Typically, all communication rules are forgotten during an argument. Aggression is triggered, there is an attempt to harm the other person as much as possible, or one gives up without a fight.

The possibilities for conflict arise from:

- Professional incompetence,
- Inability to adapt to one's role,
- Stepping outside the professional boundaries,
- Low behaviour culture,
- Inability to communicate,
- Incompatibility between individuals,
- Changes.

In a conflict situation, people sometimes try to impose their interests, while at other times they allow the other party to dominate.

Sometimes, the desire to maintain good relationships dominates, while other times, these relationships are not considered important at all. For a guide, it is extremely important to be able to notice group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and the potential for tension at the earliest opportunity in order to influence the course of conflicts with appropriate behaviour and prevent their occurrence. If the group has a spokesperson/representative, the guide can seek their advice and assistance to avoid potential conflicts.

In a conflict situation, the following methods are considered:

- Avoidance,
- Fighting,
- Defusing,
- Compromise,
- Problem-solving.

Avoidance involves behaviour where all opportunities for disagreements are suppressed, and neutrality is maintained in all issues. Both internally and externally, the goal is to maintain peace at all costs. This behaviour helps to avoid raising issues at a certain moment and allows the parties involved to calm down. It is suitable in situations where the issues causing tension are not very important to the participants. The cause of the misunderstanding does not disappear, but time and energy can be saved for more important tasks (there's no need to argue over trivial matters) and the final resolution of the conflict can take place at a more suitable time and situation.

This approach does not eliminate the cause of the misunderstanding, but it is often a necessary skill and the only possible way of communication in customer service roles.

Fighting means imposing one's own interests and working against the other party's attempts, with little regard for maintaining good relations. The person involved in the conflict wants to dominate and assert their power. They never question the validity of their interests and attempt to use power to influence the other party and suppress their interests.

A person might raise their voice or, conversely, speak quietly and ironically. Through a combative or power-based approach, one can quickly achieve success in making and implementing unpopular decisions—decisions that are difficult for others to accept. These may relate to discipline or other unpleasant matters.

According to general role expectations, a combative approach does not align well with the role of a service provider.

Defusing, or accommodating, occurs when one tries to maintain the best possible relationship. In this approach, long-term perspectives in interpersonal relationships are valued, and the desire to continue cooperation is expressed.

One's own interests or discomfort are pushed to the background, and the other party's desires and interests are allowed to dominate in order to maintain the appearance of harmony. The idea is that nice people don't argue. This approach is useful in the case of misunderstandings that arise from trivial causes, where maintaining good relations is truly the most important thing. It creates a solid foundation for future relationships.

Many misunderstandings require a defusing-style approach from the service provider, as good customer relationships are based on building long-term connections. This means that even in tense situations, the service provider must maintain and express goodwill toward the customer.

A compromise is an agreement achieved through mutual concessions. This means attempting to reach consensus on both parties' opinions, giving more importance to the acceptability of the solution than to its usefulness.

- Making compromises is useful when the goal is to reach a quick agreement. However, it is deemed inappropriate in conflicts related to important interests, as in reality, neither party's problem is substantively resolved. In customer service, a compromise occurs when the service provider gives up some of their own interests and successfully convinces the customer to make some concessions. A compromise is a good solution when both parties find a suitable and necessary compensation for the concessions they made.

Problem-solving involves finding a solution that satisfies all parties involved, and discussing the causes of the disagreements. Both parties must show a willingness to cooperate. The parties are allowed to express their views and listen to the other party's opinions. This approach is time-consuming and requires balanced behaviour from all parties. Collaborative behaviour is necessary when the goal is to find the best solution to the given conflict.

If a customer/guest/group criticizes you or gives negative feedback that you believe is true, accept your responsibility without denying it. Apologise, but don't berate yourself for things going wrong. Everyone makes mistakes, and it's one of the best ways to learn. Focus on finding a solution and improving the situation.

- In the case of criticism, the guide has every right to stand by their position and not accept the criticism if they believe it is unjustified. You do not need to accept feedback if you are convinced that it is incorrect. However, this does not mean starting an argument with the client, engaging in endless disputes, or defending yourself. In this case, you don't need to apologise for a non-existent mistake, but it is always possible to apologise for any unfortunate situation or misunderstanding that may have occurred.
- If a client criticises you, be open, not defensive. Listen carefully and engage in a dialogue. Do not respond until you are sure about what the criticism is about, and only then reply.
- If you do not understand the criticism, ask for clarification or specific examples. Look for clear suggestions on how to do things differently. It's reasonable to ask, for example, "Could you please explain what made you feel that way?" or "How did such a negative impression come about?" — this allows you to understand the reasons behind any misconceptions and to show the actual situation based on the facts.
- If the feedback you receive is unjustified, calmly and factually reject it. However, it can still provide valuable information that you can use and learn from in the future.

QUESTION: Do you follow ethical principles in your guiding work?

Guidelines derived from the ethics of the guiding profession for promoting ethical tourism:



- Whenever possible, encourage visitors to walk around on their own during free time and interact with local people, but at the same time, emphasise safety: it is better to walk in groups at night and avoid less-travelled areas, parks, dangerous neighborhoods, etc.
- Explain to visitors the local traditions, customs, and cultural specifics, including dress codes, photography rules, and other good practices.
- Direct visitors' attention to the importance of not leaving trash behind and following the rules of the environment, parks, nature reserves, zoos, and other places of interest.
- Behave respectfully and with consideration in sacred places (churches, cathedrals, cemeteries, etc.). The guide should provide information at least a few meters away from graves, leaving the graveyard visible to the visitors.
- Before visiting museums and private buildings, remind guests to follow the rules of the visit (e.g., what exhibits they may or may not touch).



ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: Relationships with colleagues, employers, and travellers

Relationships with colleagues

One of the rules of professionalism is maintaining good relationships with colleagues. Since freelance guides are also competitors, they often do not share enough information with each other and may not support or assist new and younger guides. However, colleagues quickly notice who is a supporter of teamwork and who works against it. A positive reputation among colleagues is very important for every guide.

Some rules that professional guides should always follow:

- Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. Guides often work together on larger programs (such as large conferences or events). Cooperation is essential to ensure that the overall result is of high quality.

- When taking a group to a crowded location where several tourist groups are present at the same time, observe the other groups and avoid interfering with them. If necessary, wait and allow the previous guide to finish.
- Always share important information with colleagues.
- Actively participate in guides' events and initiatives. Although such activities are usually voluntary and unpaid, they support the work of guides, the activities of guide associations, and the development of public relations, etc.

A whole set of ethical rules also applies when interacting with bus drivers:

- Always find time during the day to talk to the bus driver about the travel plan, schedule, stops, and route details, etc.
- At the start of the trip, always introduce the bus driver to the group and highlight their important role in the success of the trip.
- Although the guide leads the excursion, it is always advisable for them to consult with the bus driver and consider their advice.
- If possible, invite the bus driver to eat with the group and participate in events.
- If any issues arise with the bus driver, try to resolve misunderstandings between yourselves first, and do not rush to report it to the bus company or tour operator.
- Avoid chatting with other bus drivers or guides.
- At the end of the trip, always thank the bus driver for their work.

In guiding work, a good relationship with the company is also crucial.

- Just like any other employee, a guide is responsible for their work and committed to following the company's policies and standards. The guide's loyalty to the company is very important.
- Guides represent the company, and they often spend much more time with clients than other employees and managers. This means that when interacting with clients, guides must positively represent their company and behave and act according to the company's policies and instructions.
- A guide must speak well of their company and show pride in it.
- Freelance guides often work with competitors as well. Guides should never share information with employees about how other guides at different companies work, nor should they encourage clients to talk about other companies.

In relationships with employers, the following aspects are very important:

- Always maintain a clean and neat appearance, wear the uniform if provided, and display the name tag.
- Exhibit professional and socially appropriate behaviour, avoid rude behaviour, and refrain from alcohol consumption. Many companies prohibit the consumption of alcohol throughout the trip, especially during group dinners.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding company secrets and do not discuss internal company issues.

- Following the travel schedule precisely and always doing your best to ensure the success of the trip is essential. If problems arise due to bad weather, queues, accidents, etc., the guide must immediately contact the employer.
- When interacting with clients, always represent the company, avoid direct bookings and direct contacts with clients, and accept bookings only through the company. When providing contact information to clients, always give the company's address and phone number, not personal details.
- Avoid overly familiar and personal relationships with clients.

The guide's job is both highly responsible and often contradictory because, on one hand, they represent the employer, but on the other hand, they must work with the clients in their best interests. For example, the actual travel plan may differ slightly from what the passengers have, as the employer made some last-minute changes due to unforeseen circumstances. In such cases, the guide should not blame the company or justify themselves but should clearly explain the situation and the company's position to the group in an authoritative manner. Explaining issues arising from such situations often requires significant effort from the guide and can cause stress.

The guide should know that clients always have the right to seek clarification from the company and the company management. However, if the company repeatedly places the guide in such uncomfortable situations, the guide should consider ending their collaboration with that company and look for other employers.

When interacting with travellers, the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

- The guide must treat all group members equally, attentively, and with respect. Every client is a "very important person" (VIP) to the guide, regardless of their social status or financial situation.
- The guide should act diplomatically and be as objective as possible. Conversations about sex, politics, and religion should be avoided, as not all group members may share the same views on these topics.
- The guide must do everything to ensure the comfort and safety of the travellers. The guide should have completed first aid courses and be capable of providing first aid if needed.
- The guide must respect the customs and traditions of different regions and should not express surprise if these differ from their own customs and practices.
- The guide should never ask for tips, as it is against the professional reputation of a guide.
- Many travellers see the guide as more than just an intermediary; they form judgments about the place/region and its people based on the guide's behaviour. This means that the guide must fulfil their important role in relation to the place/region according to ethical principles.

IV Excursions – The Core of Guiding Work



The core of guiding work is the organisation and execution of excursions, which involves several important stages:

- Preparation (searching for materials, selecting sites)
- Creating the guide text
- Route planning (planning the excursion route and schedule)
- Pre-work with the client (gathering background information about the client, such as age, mobility, special needs, etc.) and, if necessary, adjusting the excursion accordingly
- Creating a backup plan and identifying potential risks
- Conducting the excursion

Excursion Preparation

Preparation is one of the most time-consuming stages, as it involves selecting the sites to visit, finding a suitable connecting theme, and gathering the necessary materials. Often, meetings and negotiations with various companies or individuals are necessary to ensure smooth and successful site visits.

QUESTION: Does the bus driver take responsibility for the excursion as a whole?



The guide is responsible for the excursion as a whole, ensuring that it is meaningful, aligns with the chosen theme (e.g., historical period, thematic, etc.), and provides guests with an educational and immersive experience. However, it is important that the guide, bus driver, and all other parties involved in the excursion work closely together. Poor relationship or communication problems, for example, between the guide and bus driver, can significantly affect the atmosphere of the excursion and even ruin the entire trip for the guests.

A tourism service provider stands for the reputation of their region. Each destination and area has developed landmarks that must be visited or themes that should be discussed. For example, it's hard to imagine a visit to Tartu without mentioning the university, and it would be just as incomprehensible to have a Haapsalu excursion without discussing the healing mud and the resort.

When preparing an excursion, there are three main aspects to consider:

1. **Mandatory landmarks or themes (must be):** These are the places and themes that are closely linked to the destination's reputation and are expected by tourists. These locations often appear in travel recommendations, people take photos of them, and share their experiences on social media, thus increasing the destination's popularity.
2. **Recommended landmarks or themes (can be):** These are well-known places, but the guide can decide if they are suitable for the program. They add value to the excursion but are not essential.
3. **Optional landmarks or themes (might be):** These provide the guide with a great opportunity to add personality and uniqueness to the excursion. These could be places the guide has a special connection with or ones that align with the theme and objectives of the tour.

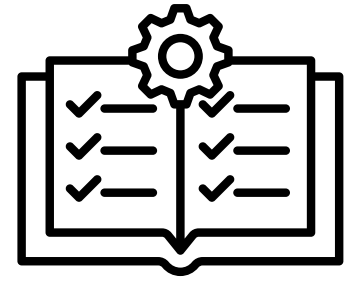
This structure is recommended and gives the guide flexibility in choosing which sites and themes to cover on the excursion, as well as how much time and attention to dedicate to each.



Here are the steps for preparing an excursion:

- Create an initial excursion plan
- Gather materials and create texts
- Consider the structure of the text and storytelling
- Plan the schedule
- Select the visit locations
- Create a backup plan and map risks

These steps ensure that the excursion is well-planned, smooth, and enjoyable for the guests.



Guide Script



QUESTION: Is a single guide script suitable for all target groups?

No, a single guide script is not suitable for all target groups. The guide's text must be tailored to the specific audience to ensure it is engaging, clear, and understandable. Different target groups (e.g., children, students, retirees, business visitors) may require different approaches, levels of detail, and presentation styles. For example, for children, the guide might use more stories and visual elements to capture their attention. In contrast, for adults, a deeper dive into history or culture might be more appropriate. Adjusting the content ensures that the excursion is relevant and interesting for all participants.

General recommendations for structuring a guide text:

- Create geographical and historical context (e.g., use cardinal directions, architectural connections, landscape zones, temporal comparisons), considering the environment and utilising appropriate tools.
- Think through your message (define the main themes, subtopics, and connecting bridges that help create a cohesive story).
- Don't overload your narrative with excessive details.
- Consider your audience and tailor your content based on who you're speaking to (e.g., children, local residents, foreign tourists).
- Show, don't just tell (use descriptive language and visual elements).

Important concepts, complex topics

- Words and concepts (e.g., architectural or scientific terms) that are complex or whose meanings you are not familiar with should be clarified. If you understand them yourself, you will be able to explain them easily and clearly to your audience.
- Learn to pronounce foreign words and names correctly; it's best to practice saying them aloud. Guided tours can be delivered in various ways.
- The guide's text doesn't have to consist solely of factual information; it can also include legends, personal stories, or anecdotes.
- The guide's task is not just to read from a book or retell the information, but to present the facts in their own words, with their chosen narrative, creating a personal and engaging presentation.

Information gathering

When compiling content, a variety of sources should be used. An engaging and interesting text includes not only essential facts but also memories and stories. A guide connects different parts of the text into a cohesive whole.

Here are some key steps and recommendations for effectively gathering and processing information:

- Sources can be very diverse: books, magazines, materials collected by local historians, archival materials (old maps, photos, films, etc.), interviews conducted with local people, and stories heard.
- Nowadays, a lot of interesting material is available in digital form: the ERR archive collection, TV and radio programs, the National Library's digitised collections, books and articles available through the DIGAR environment, etc.
- When searching for information, it is very important to verify its reliability. If possible, check the information using multiple sources.
- The gathered information must be properly saved and recorded systematically (e.g., book/article title, publication date, internet link), otherwise, you might not find the source again later.
- In addition to bookmarking online information, copy it as well, because the link may stop working.
- There are various tools for storing and organising data, from Excel spreadsheets to different web applications. Programs like Evernote, OneNote, and Obsidian can be used to take notes and manage information. Zotero and Mendeley are especially suitable for organising academic information.



Proverb:

**Wise men speak because they have something to say;
Fools speak because they have to say something.**

Storytelling



QUESTION: Does a tour guide invent the stories told during a tour?

No, tour guides do not fabricate stories. Instead, they skillfully narrate existing tales that are rooted in history, local traditions, or personal experiences. These stories are compelling because they are relatable, drawn from real life, or convey a meaningful message. Guides often weave such narratives into tours to illustrate events and biographies, and sometimes structure the entire tour as a cohesive story.

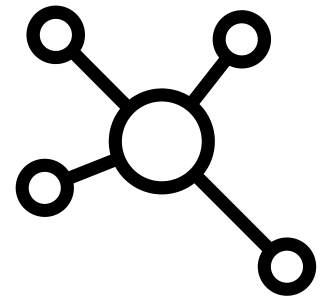


Research indicates that people retain stories significantly better than isolated facts. For instance, when information is presented through storytelling, retention rates can soar to 65–70%, compared to just 5–10% for standalone statistics. This enhanced memory retention is attributed to stories engaging multiple parts of the brain, including those responsible for emotions and sensory experiences.

QUESTION: Do you know what a narrative is?

A narrative is a structured account of connected events, forming the backbone of storytelling. Unlike a mere list of facts, a narrative presents events in a sequence that establishes cause and effect, transporting the listener into a different world. This immersive experience engages various senses—hearing, visualisation, even the imagination of smells—making the story more memorable and impactful.





The basic structure of a story is as follows:

1. **Main character**, who faces challenges and conflicts;
2. **Conflict/opposition/tragedy**, which captures the audience's attention and creates interest;
3. **Plot**, which conveys the sequence of events, descriptions, and moments of tension. The main character goes through challenges that lead to transformation or achieving a result;
4. **Purpose**, which helps convey the meaning of the story and keeps the audience engaged.

A story must be balanced; information can be gathered from interviews, cultural programs, lectures, elderly people in the community, and other sources.

Storytelling aims not to seek scandal or exaggeration, but to help people better understand and connect with historical events, the actions of cultural figures, or similar topics in a human and relatable way.

Telling a story has several purposes: to make people laugh, surprise the group, raise ethical questions, show consequences, help people understand something, or explain a concept.



Mark Twain's quote,

"Don't say the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream,"

emphasises the importance of vivid storytelling. Rather than merely telling readers that the old lady screamed, Twain advocates for showing the event — allowing readers to experience the scene directly. This approach engages the audience more deeply, making the narrative more immersive and impactful.

QUESTION: How can stories and activities support people's sense of well-being (including happiness and other hormones)?

A good and skillfully told story is one of the most important skills a guide can possess, helping to evoke strong emotions and a sense of well-being in the listeners. Storytelling helps explain people's lives, create order in the surrounding environment, and give meaning to our actions, both for others and ourselves. Stories clarify the reasons behind actions and help others understand the people and way of life of a particular region.



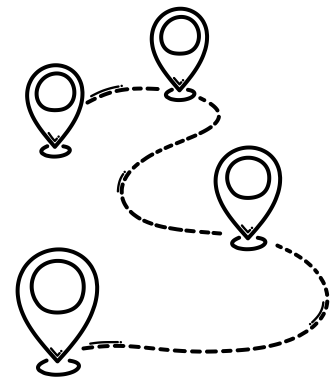
In addition, storytelling can be seen as one of the most important methods for building relationships between people and influencing the emotions of the audience. Stories help, through abstraction, simplification, and compactness, to better understand social reality, as a story acts as a model or simulation of the “real world,” which can often reshape previous experiences, expand perspectives on past events, reduce stress, deepen emotional capacity, increase empathy, and regulate self-esteem and emotional experiences. (Brockington et al., 2021)

Storytelling and narrating stories help to build trust and a sense of security, especially in situations where people feel uncomfortable, anxious, bored, or irritable. Research shows that oxytocin, which is associated with empathy, social bonds, and trust-building, increases during the process of listening to a good story. On the other hand, studies point to cortisol as a hormone that is released in response to imagined or real threat situations. Prolonged stress situations harm the immune system and a person's ability to deal with illnesses, for example.

Returning to storytelling, it can be said that a guide can influence the audience's hormones through a good and meaningful story presented in an understandable and engaging way. An engaging story helps to increase oxytocin levels and reduce cortisol levels. If the audience enjoys the story and gets involved with it, the bond with the guide (the storyteller) strengthens, while boredom and anxiety decrease, interest grows, and empathy increases.

In conclusion, a well-told story can significantly improve the listeners' sense of well-being by creating positive emotions and enhancing social and emotional security. It helps to establish a connection between the guide, group members, and the place being introduced, making the experience more meaningful and memorable.

Route Planning



QUESTION: Can a guide lead a tour without a clear plan?

Just as building a good home starts with a project, a guide should begin a tour by creating a plan. Every tour is the guide's creation, and the more personalised it is, the more enjoyable it will be for the guests.

How to create a good route?

- A good route requires that the guide is familiar with the area – they should know which attractions are available for visiting and which ones are suitable for a specific target group and fit within the schedule.
- Create a personalised and engaging guide text.
- Plan stops, the observation of objects, and visits. Based on the guests' interests and specifics, plan the time to spend at each location. Depending on the site, the stop time at one location can be around 20–60 minutes, sometimes even more.
- Walk or drive through the planned route, measure the time required for movement and guide commentary – this will give you an idea of the tour's overall duration and allow you to re-evaluate if all the planned stops and attractions fit within the tour's time frame.
- Stay informed about current events (traffic restrictions, major events, etc.).
- Create a route map that contains the necessary data and notes.
- Coordinate the route with the client and ask them to send the schedule to the guests in advance.
- Send the route and schedule to the bus driver as well.





Tour Stops and Schedule



QUESTION: Can the guests choose the route themselves?

The guide creates the route based on the guests' interests and preferences. The guide selects the sites that align with tour theme and are practically accessible.

Some criteria for selecting locations for the route:

- **Accessibility** – How close the site is to the transportation, whether there are stairs to climb or rough terrain to navigate, etc. Consider whether the visit is worth it if reaching the attraction requires walking a kilometer through the woods and back. It is also important to remember that visiting the site should not disturb the daily life of local residents.
- **Natural sites** – For nature attractions, consider physical endurance and environmental impact (littering, noise, protected species). Stick to existing paths and infrastructure to ensure sustainability.
- **Good visibility** – How well-maintained the site is, whether the whole group can see the attraction at once, or if guests will have to peer through a small opening one by one.
- **Proximity and logical order** – The route should be smooth, avoiding unnecessary backtracking, which would waste time.
- **Number of sites** – A person's capacity to receive information is limited, and they cannot process too much information simultaneously. If too many sites are planned, time may become tight, leading to rushing. It is better to leave some sites out than to overload the tour.
- **Age appropriateness of the target group** – There's no point in showing children architectural monuments if no fun activities are provided in between to keep them engaged.
- **Variety** – Especially in complex (overview) routes, there should be a mix of natural, historical, and cultural attractions, as well as simply beautiful places.

For thematic routes, it is advisable to ensure that the tour is not too monotonous.

Once you have selected the sites for your tour, you need to plan the movement schedule and timeline.

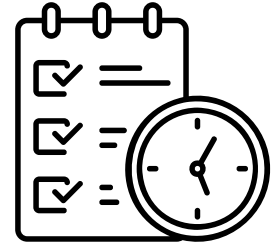


QUESTION: Should the excursion be based solely on a theme?

An excursion can be based on various principles – it can be thematic, complex, or based on the mode of transportation.

- A **thematic excursion** focuses on a specific topic, such as a particular historical period, architecture, legends, literature, film, music, art, a historical figure, or even fungi, birds, protected plants, erratic boulders, and so on. The excursion can also be role-played, where the guide embodies a historical character or a fairy-tale hero to turn the excursion into a mini-performance. The possibilities are endless. However, it's important to stay on theme throughout the entire excursion.
- A **complex excursion** takes place in a specific area where the guide introduces the area's attractions, from history and nature to architecture and modern times.
- A **mode-of-transportation-based excursion** takes into account the means of transport—whether the excursion is on foot, by bicycle, by bus, by boat, on horseback, etc.





Creating a Schedule



QUESTION: Does the guest create the excursion schedule?

The guide creates the schedule based on the route and the group's specific characteristics.

When creating the schedule, time must be planned for moving from one location to another, exploring the sights, meal and rest breaks, as well as entering and exiting the bus. The schedule should always be reviewed before each new excursion, as it depends on the group. For example, a ten-person group will take less time for walking, entering and exiting the bus, or using the restroom than a 40-person group. Older guests or those with mobility issues will move more slowly than younger ones.

The average walking speed of a person is 3–5 km/h:

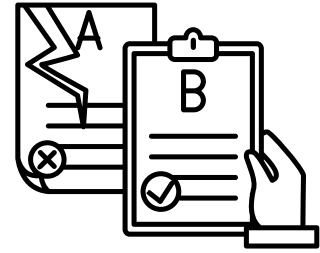
- A person in good physical condition walks at about 5 km/h.
- A person with average physical ability walks at about 4 km/h.
- People with lower endurance (children and seniors) walk at 3–4 km/h.

The average speed of a bus is around 35–40 km/h. For longer bus excursions, it is advisable to consult with the bus driver or bus company, as drivers are subject to work and rest time regulations that need to be considered. For longer excursions, rest, meal, and restroom breaks must also be planned.

Stops should be planned as follows:

- For longer trips, a stop should be made at least every 3–4 hours; for shorter trips, every 2–2.5 hours.
- The first stop after breakfast should be within 1–2 hours.
- Whenever possible, choose a stop where multiple things can be done at once (e.g., food, drinks, restrooms, souvenirs).

Always plan extra time to accommodate unexpected delays and avoid disrupting the flow of the excursion. **The route should be walked or driven through beforehand to determine how long each part will take and where things are located.**



Backup Plans



QUESTION: What to do if the group is delayed?

The guide should be prepared for unexpected situations and “force majeure,” which is why it is important to develop a backup plan and consider possible alternative activities.

If rain is expected, consider whether stops can be made under shelters or if more time should be spent talking on the bus instead of walking outside.

What to do if the group is delayed for any reason, and there is less time than planned for the excursion or the group has unexpected special requests (e.g., a shopping stop) that change the original plan?

In this case, the guide should think through the necessary adjustments to ensure the integrity of the excursion. Contacting the client and informing the relevant partners about the changes is also important.

Mapping security risks and first aid

A general risk plan should be created in advance, but specific risks should also be evaluated just before the excursion, based on preparatory work. During the excursion, the guide must be ready to prevent hazards, draw attention to potential risks, and act quickly in emergencies according to the risk plan. The guide will provide first aid within their competence and will call for professional assistance if necessary.

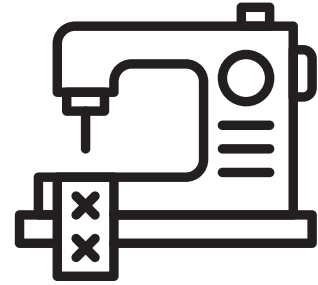


“Trust, but verify.”

Activities just before the excursion

A couple of days before the group’s arrival, it is important to review all agreements, times, meeting places, opening hours, and the route. Additionally, it is advisable to stay informed about the cultural calendar to take into account any events or traffic restrictions that might impact the excursion.

Guide's Equipment for the Excursion



QUESTION: Do you know what a guide should have in their bag?

When going on an excursion, take along:

- Guide name tag
- Agreed travel itinerary/program
- Contact information for the client / group leader / bus driver – allows for quick communication in case the group is delayed or other changes arise
- Confirmations / vouchers / entrance fees – required for paid visits where the guide has to make the payment
- Entrance information and contact details for the places to be visited
- A fully charged mobile phone (a power bank and charger could also be in the bag, in case the phone needs charging on the bus)
- Weather-appropriate clothing items (umbrella, raincoat, etc.)

The guide might also have or keep handy:

- A map of the area – it's useful for showing the bus driver or the group the locations of parking lots, restaurants, restrooms, and the excursion route (it gives the group a good idea of what's ahead)
- Necessary sample and supplementary materials to make the excursion more interesting (e.g., pictures, objects)
- A water bottle and throat lozenges or hard candies – talking can make the throat dry or hoarse
- Band-aids and paper tissues – for personal use and to lend to tourists if needed
- Dandelion or sunflower seeds
- Coin change – to be able to break large bills if needed (e.g., for paid restrooms)
- Pain relievers or other over-the-counter medications, but be cautious when giving them to guests. It should be clearly stated that taking the medication is the guest's own responsibility. If the person is a child or someone under another's care, the responsibility for administering the medication lies with their companion or caregiver.

V Conducting the Excursion



Conducting the excursion is the guide's responsibility to introduce the pre-planned and thoughtfully designed route to the guests.

Meeting the Group and Introduction to the Excursion (creative, personalized, engaging for the group)



QUESTION: Does the bus driver make the introduction to the excursion?

In conducting the excursion, the guide has a responsible role. The guide makes the introduction, acting as a speaker, explainer, mediator, interpreter, and translator, and does this purposefully. The introduction shows the guide's attitude toward the work: preparation, highlighting the good reputation of their area, and demonstrating care for the guests, among other skills.

The basic structure of the excursion introduction (about 3–5 minutes) could include:

- Self-introduction – The guide introduces themselves and establishes initial contact with the group.
- Overview of the excursion and technical information – A brief introduction to the excursion's theme, route, and schedule, along with practical information about stops, restroom options, and coffee breaks.
- Sharing information about leisure opportunities, whether during the excursion or afterward (depending on the order).

In the introduction, briefly talk about yourself: why you work as a guide, for how long, and in which area, and also share something unique about yourself. At the start of a bus excursion, introduce the bus driver, inform the group about the location of first aid supplies, and remind the driver to ensure that seatbelts are fastened. **In the excursion overview**, introduce the route, schedule, safety requirements, and other important details. For a bicycle tour, also introduce traffic rules and general safety aspects. **When sharing information** about leisure opportunities, focus on the area's unique options, current events, and the interests of the guests.



Group Management

In managing the group, the guide establishes an emotional connection with the group by being audible and visible in different environments.

- The guide positions themselves and the group appropriately in relation to the sites, ensuring both comfort and safety.
- The guide maintains a positive mood and leads the group's movement throughout the excursion, adhering to the schedule.
- The guide ensures that all group members stay together.
- At the beginning of the excursion, the guide explains the group's common behavior rules and provides guidance on using various technical tools.

When meeting with the group, always account for extra time, as any delay from the guide leaves a poor impression.

If the group is delayed, the guide should be prepared to adjust the program, consult with the client, and find a solution to ensure the excursion runs smoothly.

Choosing Stops



QUESTION: What should be considered when choosing stops for an excursion?

When conducting an excursion, it is important to avoid overly frequent stops, as they can tire the group. Therefore, the stops should be carefully planned in advance. For stops, do not stay too long at one place (no more than 15 minutes), as standing still for extended periods can cause people's attention span to wander.

When choosing a stop, make sure:

- The entire group fits and does not block traffic.
- The object being discussed is easily visible.
- There are no disturbing factors (car noise, trimmer, wind, rain, etc.).
- Group members can choose whether to stand in the sun or shade, sit or stand.
- You do not disturb other tourist groups.
- When speaking, the guide does not have their back to the group.

If there is no suitable stop, the guide can either refer to the object in advance or indicate that it will be discussed later.

Guide and group placement:

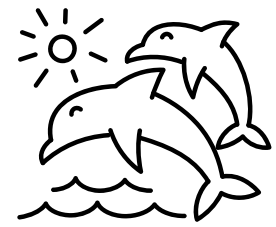
- Choose a spot for speaking where you stand with your back to the object, but the group faces it.
- Ideally, the sun should be to the side so no one has to look directly into it.
- Ensure that group members are not behind the guide and that the speech is audible to everyone.
- The guide should begin speaking once all guests have arrived. If it is clear that some members of the group are not interested in listening, the guide can start without waiting for them.
- When discussing an object, do not turn your body towards it but instead point at it with your hand.

Guide's Performance



QUESTION: Does the guide introduce the area and objects using only historical information?

- The guide conveys a balanced and meaningful script, taking into account the target audience and using various methods and tools to illustrate the environment and facts: auditory, visual, tactile senses, as well as audio and video technology.
- The guide introduces the area and objects using both historical and current information. They observe the visitors' reactions and adjust the content of the script accordingly. The guide is flexible, changing their style or engaging the audience.
- While speaking, the guide considers the audience's ability to absorb information – the speech should not become annoyingly long.
- If there are people in the group who know more about a certain topic, the guide allows them to contribute to the conversation and thanks them for it.
- The excursion has a clear start and end.
- At the end of the tour, the guide gives a summary, asks for feedback from the guests, and concludes the interaction with the group on a positive note.



Different Modes of Movement on Tours

The guide moves with the group either on foot or using a vehicle, following good conduct and respecting the surrounding environment.

Walking Tours



QUESTION: Do you know how to manage a group on a walking tour?

- Choose a suitable walking pace – if the “tail” of the group stretches out too far, slow down the pace.
- Be alert at turns to ensure no one misses the change in direction and gets lost.
- Pay attention to safety – warn about steps, holes, tree roots, slippery surfaces, etc.
- The guide does not speak while walking, as their voice cannot be heard from behind.
- The guide should not walk backwards while talking to the group, as this distracts the group from the content and causes concern for the guide’s safety.
- The guide gives explanations at stops – while moving between points, the guide may interact with participants if needed, but should avoid favoring individual group members.
- If a participant asks a question during movement that might interest others, the guide shares the answer with the whole group at the next stop.



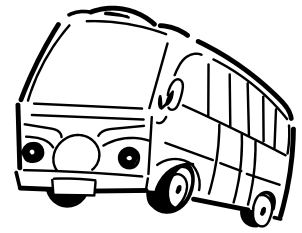
- On a walking tour, a mobile microphone and speaker (also known as a guide system) can be used. These are accessible and valuable tools that help group members hear the guide more clearly and reduce the need for the guide to raise their voice. However, care must be taken to ensure that the equipment does not disturb other people nearby.



Photo 1. A guide system consists of a device with a microphone for the guide and speaker units worn around the neck by the guests. The guests' devices also come with headphones. (Source: greensound.ee/teenused-audiogiidi-rent-sosintolke-tehnika/giidikomplektide-rent-ekskursioonidele).



Photo 2. Use of a guide system during a tour in Pärnu on 13 March 2019. The guide wears a grey device with a microphone around the neck, while the guests have red units with headphones. (Photo: Liina Käär)



Bus Tours

Compared to walking tours, a **bus tour** is more dynamic, compact, and concentrated. It requires a different kind of preparation, taking into account time, distances, and the specific objects to be introduced. During a bus tour, there's no need to fear moments of silence—guests often need time to collect their thoughts.

Key points for bus tours:

- **Visibility** – The guide speaks about what is currently visible, ensuring that what guests see and hear are synchronized.
- **Object referencing** – The guide introduces objects using the three-step referencing method: “We’re approaching,” “Coming up soon,” “Now take a look.”
- **Descriptive language** – When pointing out objects, the guide uses descriptive terms (e.g., “the green building,” “the monument in the middle of the roundabout”).
- **Driving speed and cooperation with the driver** – Smooth flow depends on good collaboration with the driver. The guide should discuss the route, stop locations, and where to slow down well in advance. If possible, send the itinerary to the driver ahead of time.



QUESTION: Does the guide speak into the microphone throughout the bus tour?

In the bus, the guide's main tool is the microphone. Before the tour begins, check the microphone's condition and sensitivity, and test the volume. A successful tour heavily depends on this.

Microphone usage tips:

- Keep your head and chin in a natural position—don't slouch.
- When moving your head, move also the microphone to maintain sound quality.
- At the start, ask guests if you are clearly audible.
- Speak with a natural, steady voice—not too loud, not monotone.
- Breathe through your nose to avoid amplified mouth sounds.
- Enunciate clearly.

- When a guest asks a question, repeat it and answer using the microphone.
- Use hand signals for the driver, or mute the microphone when speaking to them.
- Do not suck on candy or chew gum while speaking.
- Always turn off the microphone when not actively speaking.

Before leaving the bus at a stop, announce the following to the group:

- Your current location and where you're going next.
- The length of the stop and departure time.
- Where facilities (toilets, refreshments) are located.
- What to bring (e.g., money, clothing).
- Whether the site will be visited together or independently.

Before departure, double-check that all passengers have returned to the bus.

At the end of the tour, the guide delivers their closing words while standing, facing the group. The bus must be at a full stop.



Bicycle Tours

When planning a bicycle tour, it's important to review the traffic regulations, especially the rules related to cycling. Based on the tour route, the guide must ensure that the group moves safely and in accordance with the law.



QUESTION: Is the guide the only one who uses hand signals when cycling?

Cycling tours are popular because they are environmentally friendly, offer a more active form of movement, and allow participants to see more than they would on foot or by bus. When preparing the tour, consider whether the group can stay near their bikes during stops or if they'll need to walk a bit. This determines whether the bikes should be locked and if valuables should be taken from saddlebags.

A helpful source of information is the Estonian traffic education website:

www.liikluskasvatus.ee/et/taiskasvanule/1/jalgrattur

Cycling with a group – key guidelines

- Participants are responsible for their own cycling skills, but the guide gives an introductory briefing before setting off, reminding the group of traffic rules and etiquette, including demonstrating hand signals.
- The guide ensures the group's visibility and safety by providing suitable helmets and safety vests to all participants.
- During the introduction, the guide presents the tour route, ideally using a visual map highlighting potential risk areas (e.g., intersections, turns). The guide also explains how to behave at various points on the route: where the group will stop, where to ride in a single file, and where side-by-side riding is allowed.
- The guide always agrees with the group escort or leader on their positioning in the group (front, middle, or rear), and clearly defines everyone's roles and responsibilities.
- If there is no assistant, the guide asks a participant to ride at the end of the line.
- At turns, intersections, and stops, the guide uses hand signals.
- When crossing roads, the group must stop and wait for everyone to regroup.
- At stopping points, the guide repeats route details, highlights upcoming risks, and shares any additional information.
- The guide is responsible for safety and therefore rides the entire route in advance, identifying all high-risk areas.
- Cycling is suitable even for people with various health conditions.
- Avoid spontaneous stops, as they may require sudden braking or dismounting, which can cause safety issues.

Ending the Tour



QUESTION: Who ends the tour?

The guide ends the tour in a clear and concise manner, providing a brief summary of what was seen and visited during the excursion. The guide asks for feedback and uses the information received from guests to improve the tour and enhance their own performance. If the group has free time after the tour or is staying overnight in the area, the guide offers recommendations for how to spend their time—such as local attractions, places to eat, souvenir shops, and more.

Post-Tour Activities



QUESTION: Is written feedback necessary for self-assessment?

Yes, written feedback is important for self-assessment, as it is one of the most effective ways to understand how the guests perceived the service and what observations or suggestions they may have. Feedback can be oral, written, or digital, offering clients different ways to express their opinions.

Self-evaluation is a method that helps the guide set both short- and long-term goals. It allows the guide to reflect on their attitude towards their role and work, and, if necessary, make improvements in their behavior or performance.

After the tour, it's useful to make notes and reflect on the following:

- Did the original plan and content match the actual execution? Was anything forgotten?
- Did you stay on schedule?
- What challenges did you face, and how did you resolve them?
- What observations did you make about the group and the places visited?

Prepare a summary and provide feedback to the client or tour organizer.

Guiding in Different Environments



QUESTION: In which area do you feel most confident as a guide – cultural, nature, or rural life guiding?

The best guide is the one who creates an unforgettable experience for their guests. A guide can specialize in one or several fields.

Nowadays, it's common for guides to have certifications from different museums, enabling them to offer varied tours of different lengths and focus areas.

Cultural environment guiding:

- The guide introduces the main cultural and historical values of the area, including both tangible and intangible heritage, in places such as museums, churches, manors, castles, and more.
- The guide prepares tour materials tailored to the target audience, supporting memorable and engaging tours.
- The guide interprets the cultural environment using scientific facts, appropriate terminology, local stories, and folklore.
- The tour is conducted following sustainable tourism principles and with a strong focus on safety.

In a museum:

- Focus on the specific character of the museum and introduce only the relevant parts of the exhibition — avoid overloading the group with general knowledge.
- Choose a clear focus and select key exhibits to ensure an interesting and enjoyable experience.
- Manage the group actively, as visitors may be distracted by screens, films, or other exhibits.
- If possible, provide free time for guests to explore the museum independently and visit the museum shop.

In a place of worship:

- Arrange the visit in advance with a representative of the religious site.
- Provide guidance on respectful behavior inside the sacred space.
- Participation should be voluntary; for those not taking part, offer an alternative activity.
- Inform visitors about paid services available on site and recommend making a donation if appropriate.

Guide's work in a natural environment

- The guide introduces ecosystems, species, landscapes, protected areas, hunting management, and other relevant topics.
- Tours are tailored to the target audience, immersive, and educational.
- The guide checks the condition of equipment (e.g., compass, GPS, maps) before the tour.
- Tours follow sustainable tourism and nature conservation principles, promoting an environmentally friendly mindset.
- Scientific information is used, along with natural science vocabulary, local traditions, and landscape memory.
- ICT tools, maps, and compasses are used for orientation, with explanations provided based on public access rights and local regulations.
- Weather conditions are considered, and activities are adjusted accordingly if needed.

Guide's work in rural areas

Due to the diversification of rural tourism offerings, there is an opportunity to specialize as a rural tourism guide, combining agritourism and rural life.

Who is a rural tourism guide?

The goal of a rural tourism guide is to introduce and raise awareness among visitors about the essence of rural life, covering rural landscapes, local knowledge, cultural and biological diversity, as well as regional values and activities (such as agriculture, forestry, etc.). A rural tourism guide creates experiences through nature, agriculture, and rural life, emphasizing the importance of community.

Rural tourism guide:

- Introduces rural life and the operation of farms, village houses, and community activities, including cooperative markets and products;
- Has knowledge of various rural topics (such as regional development, administrative structure and operations, education, employment, culture, healthcare, and social welfare), community and rural network activities (such as local organizations, connections and relations with other communities, participation in various networks, rural support measures);
- Introduces local producers: food producers (including organic producers), artisans, fishermen, farmers, livestock breeders, hunters;
- Is aware of social farming and the concept of smart villages;
- Introduces the history and cultural heritage of the region, local traditions, social groups, and relationships within the area;
- Can explain the development directions and future perspectives of the region.

A rural tourism guide introduces local traditions, both historically, geographically, and socio-culturally, conveying the uniqueness and authenticity of the region. The information provided by the guide is primarily based on stories connected to a specific place or traditional activities within that area. Additionally, a key aspect to highlight is the sense of place, explaining how the guide presents an understanding of the place—its significance to the local people and their connection to it. (Kindel, M. 2005)

When working as a guide in rural areas, it is important to carefully think through how to tell the story of your place and how to present the topics mentioned above in an interesting and engaging way. When planning an excursion, the guide might ask themselves the following questions:

- What is my community like and what are its traditions?
- What is authentic about the area that differs from other communities and urban lifestyles?
- What is the community's cultural heritage: values, language, symbols, community rules and norms, material heritage?
- How do the history and roots of my area relate to the broader context of Estonians and Estonian identity? What is the history of the area?
- What is the natural environment of the area?
- What is the community's way of life and the lifestyle it fosters?
- What activities do people engage in?

Once these themes are considered, the next task is to figure out **how to present the rural area**. There are many different activities to showcase the rural lifestyle, and it's important to think about how to engage the visitors' senses and encourage them to participate actively in the excursion.

The following are some key areas to consider:

- **Engaging visitors' senses:** What will they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell during the experience?
- **Visitor involvement:** Are they passive listeners following the guide, or will they actively participate in different activities, such as cooking, hiking, sharing their own stories, etc.?

How to introduce visitors to rural life?

There are many ways to introduce rural life. The following list is based (but not fully) on what is presented on the European Rural Tourism umbrella organisation's website, RuralTour (ruraltour.eu):

- Hikes and adventures: Discovering nature by bicycle, ATV, jeep, horseback, or other means that allow direct interaction with the surrounding environment.
- Local tastes and food culture: Participation in cooking workshops, tasting local food, food gathering (such as picking mushrooms or berries, accompanying fishermen in emptying nets, etc.), working on farms, gardens, and fields.
- Experiencing everyday life on farms: Participation in Open Farm Days or visits to farms at other times that allow guests to experience daily farming activities (participating in farm work, overnight stays at local farms to immerse in the farm environment, etc.).
- Local attractions: Exploring places that reflect the local history and culture, such as national parks, churches, manors, monuments, etc.
- Community life and traditions: Participation in local events, including traditional community activities (village or town days, cemetery festivals, community theater performances, fairs, etc.). These events provide insight into what the local community is involved in and what is valued.
- Adventure tourism: Active and adrenaline-filled experiences offered by local businesses (e.g., sports challenges, adventure courses, and other experiences that require courage and effort).
- Slow travel or “chilling time” or “free time”: Visitors have the opportunity to explore the area at their own pace—visiting public beaches, recreational spots, shops, cafes, restaurants, and other attractions. At the same time, the local guide offers recommendations and directs visitors to explore places that might interest them the most.
- Learning and exploring nature: Bird and wildlife watching, nature hikes in the wild or on learning trails. This also includes learning traditional activities that are in harmony with nature (such as mowing with a scythe, haymaking, etc.).

What interests a visitor from another village, municipality, county, or country?

The main keywords associated with rural areas are authenticity, roots, nature and silence, rural lifestyle, community spirit, traditions, and history. Unlike urban areas, rural regions are characterized by a low population density, land use primarily related to agriculture and forestry, and closer community ties based on a traditional way of life. These are often the very aspects that attract visitors to the countryside and about which they expect information from a rural life guide.

At the same time, the main reasons for visiting rural areas can be considered the following:

- Escape from urban environments – a desire to withdraw from artificial surroundings and the fast pace of life.
- Experiencing an authentic lifestyle and way of living – an opportunity to get acquainted with traditions and ways of life specific to a particular country, region, or municipality (cities tend to become increasingly similar worldwide, whereas rural areas preserve authentic traditions and culture longer and more genuinely). This also includes more personal and direct interaction between guests and service providers – mass tourism does not dominate here; instead, the offering is more individual, intimate, and hospitable.
- Opportunity to spend time outdoors – various outdoor activities, including adventure and experience hikes as well as agritourism.
- Health and recovery – spending time in rural areas supports mental and physical well-being, offering an environment for relaxation and opportunities for engaging in health-promoting physical activities.
- Learning and personal development – the chance to gain new knowledge about nature, rural life organization, traditional professions (such as farming, fishing, hunting, etc.), as well as history and culture. Rural life also provides a suitable environment for creative work (silence promotes concentration for writers and researchers or allows for practicing yoga, painting, etc.).

Where can a guide find information about rural life?

To gather material on rural life, a guide can use various online publications, news sources, websites of professional organizations, and magazines. However, for information specific to their region, the following sources are particularly valuable:

- The local municipality's newspaper (and its archive) and various local websites.
- Local history research projects by school students or other history enthusiasts.
- Archives of different institutions within the region.
- Recollections and photo collections from local residents.

Depending on the focus area of the rural life guide (nature, historical heritage, agritourism, etc.), it is also important to read relevant literature and field-specific magazines, and to look for additional information on websites and in social media groups.

Validating guide texts

When preparing a guide text, it is essential to validate the information—i.e., check its accuracy. In this process, collaboration with local community representatives is highly recommended. These can include librarians, teachers, former and current employees (specialists) of local institutions, and long-time residents. Through joint discussions, one can refine the data, uncover additional information, and discover new memories or source materials.

Topic- or field-specific guides

In addition to guiding in typical environments such as nature or urban settings, a guide may also specialize in a specific topic, becoming a so-called thematic guide. Areas of interest can include, for example, botany, military history, or any other specialized field. Every guide has the opportunity to find their unique approach to engage targeted interest groups.



VI Risks and Their Assessment

Just like in any other profession, guiding work involves unexpected events and challenging situations. To better handle such occurrences, it is crucial to anticipate them and assess their potential harm to clients' and the guide's own health, as well as to property, equipment, income, and reputation. It is also important to consider not only your personal or company reputation but also the reputation of the entire country, which could suffer due to tragic incidents or poorly executed tours.

In risk assessment, two key concepts are essential: hazard and risk.

- **Hazard** refers to a situation or set of circumstances that can cause injury to people, damage to materials, equipment, etc. (What is the worst that could happen?)
- **Risk** is the likelihood, whether high or low, that the hazard will actually cause harm. (How likely is it that the hazard will cause damage?)

To effectively assess risks, it's wise to analyze all aspects of guiding work—whether you are personally responsible for them, a partner is involved, or the circumstances are governed by law. It's essential to consider the following components and reflect on the questions provided—does any of these pose a problem? If so, define the issue (the hazardous factor) and identify the specific hazard to your or the client's health, well-being, property, or reputation. Then begin identifying solutions or actions to **mitigate the risks**.

Team – What will you do if a team member or one of their family members falls ill, including yourself? Are there backup guides available if extra help is needed? Do team members know how to provide first aid, what languages do they speak, what skills do they have (e.g. driving)? What is their stress tolerance level, and so on? How is the mental and physical well-being of team members supported?

Transport – What kind of transportation do clients use to reach you? What transportation do you use together with the clients? What happens if the vehicle breaks down or is delayed? Where is the nearest partner who can provide a replacement bus/car quickly? Who will bear the costs and damages—for you, the client, or the partner? Is the vehicle in working condition, comfortable, and properly equipped? How is this ensured?

Communication and information – How is effective communication organized with colleagues, partners, and clients? What are the communication channels, and are people accessible? How quickly are client inquiries responded to? What information is available on the website or in the offer? What input is received from the client and what output is given to the client? Are group-specific needs and expectations identified before the service is delivered?

Activities – What activities do you conduct? Are they suitable for every target group, in every season, and in all weather conditions? What hazards might be associated with these activities (slippery surfaces, cold or hot temperatures, precipitation, steep slopes, difficult terrain, fast or slow pace, long distances, etc.) and with the equipment and its handling (appropriate size, weight, complexity, etc.)?

Equipment and venue – Is the equipment you provide (bicycles, canoes, safety vests, etc.) new, well-maintained, high-quality, and safe? Does it follow sustainable tourism principles (reusable dishes, materials, accessories)? Who is responsible for the inventory, are there internal rules, how often is maintenance performed, etc.? How often is the venue reviewed, how is information collected about road conditions, traffic, access points, and infrastructure? Are there partners?

Participants – How are participant profiles, expectations, and needs, including special needs, determined? Do you have sufficient skills to accommodate them? How are very large or very small groups handled so the service remains meaningful and profitable? How are participants' safety and needs ensured (toilets, hygiene, water and food, first aid, etc.)? How are emergencies handled if participants are not ready for the planned activities or wish to change plans?

Emergency situations – What are the possible emergency scenarios for each service or route offered? Do all involved know how to act in these situations? Are there backup phones, spare batteries, and communication devices that work in the service area? Do people know how to determine their location? Are there first aid kits and first aid skills available? Are the coordinates and contacts of the local rescue services, auto repair, bus rental, clinic, or pharmacy known?

Laws – Are there any laws or regulations governing your activities in this field or area? Protected areas may have movement restrictions according to protection rules. There may also be safety-related regulations or best practices (e.g., one chaperone per certain number of children, limitations on activities based on wind speed or temperature, etc.). For certain activities, make sure your partner has the necessary licenses or permits.

Administration and audit – Does the guide/company have an overview of costs and revenues, service cost price and sales price, and is the activity profitable? Are all clients served or only selected target groups? Is cooperation with partners well organized and smooth?

Risk analysis can be done in written form, but the following sample can also be used.

Table 5. Sample risk analysis table

Combination of risk-causing factors	Hazard (what could happen)	Risk level* (likelihood x consequence)	Risk-mitigation activity (action that can be taken on site)	Risk-mitigation requirements (company internal rules or legal requirements)

*The risk level can be effectively assessed using the matrix available at <https://www.tooelu.ee/en/79/risk-assessment>. However, this matrix is primarily focused on health aspects. When providing tourism services, it is also necessary to consider risks and factors related to the entrepreneur’s income, equipment, and reputation.

Table 6. Probability of consequences occurring

Occurrence	Minor Risk (no health disorders or damage to equipment)	Hazardous (mild health issue or minor damage to equipment)	Very Hazardous (serious health issue or major equipment damage/breakage)
Very unlikely	Low risk I	Acceptable risk II	Moderate risk III
Fairly unlikely but possible	Acceptable risk II	Moderate risk III	High risk IV
Likely	Moderate risk III	High risk IV	Intolerable risk V

Based on the severity of danger to health (and in the tourism sector, also to equipment, the entrepreneur's income, reputation, etc.) and the importance and extent of necessary measures, the risk levels presented in the table can be explained as follows:

- **Low risk (Level I)** – The danger to health is unlikely, and the potential consequences are minor. No special measures are required.
- **Acceptable risk (Level II)** – The risk involves either: a fairly unlikely chance of a minor health issue, or a fairly unlikely chance of a more serious health issue. Generally, this level of risk does not require additional measures. However, awareness of safety precautions and their consistent application is important. The general upkeep of the working environment must be maintained, and such risks should be considered in the company's occupational health and safety plan.
- **Moderate risk (Level III)** – The likelihood of a health issue can range from very unlikely to likely, and the severity can range from very serious to minor. In such cases, appropriate risk-mitigating actions should be implemented within 3–5 months after risk assessment.

- **High risk (Level IV)** – The likelihood of a health issue is fairly likely or likely, and the severity is either serious or very serious. These risks require prompt action, ideally within 1–3 months after the risk is identified.
- **Intolerable risk (Level V)** – The risk to health is high in terms of both likelihood and severity. Work must not be continued or started until the risk is mitigated. If the necessary measures cannot be implemented due to lack of resources, activity in the hazard zone is prohibited.

Example for describing various hazards and assessing risks (this includes only a few examples out of many possible hazards.)

Table 7. Sample for describing hazards and assessing risks

Circumstances causing the hazard	Hazard	Risk magnitude (probability of occurrence x consequences)	Prevention / mitigation / actions
Marine activities. Bad weather, risk of rain, wind at sea, waves	Changes in the program, participant dissatisfaction	Likely x hazardous (High risk IV)	Choose routes and activities suitable for the weather conditions. If necessary, cancel activities.
	Risk of getting cold	Likely x hazardous (High risk IV)	Monitor the forecast and provide clothing recommendations.
	Delays at sea due to strong waves and wind, missed transportation connections, hunger, thirst, hygiene issues	Likely x hazardous (High risk IV)	Choose routes and activities suitable for the weather conditions. If needed, consider canceling the trip and offer alternatives. Bring food and drinks.
	Risk of seasickness	Likely x hazardous (High risk IV)	Bring necessary medications, inform clients in advance.

Circumstances causing the hazard	Hazard	Risk magnitude (probability of occurrence x consequences)	Prevention / mitigation / actions
Icy street	Change in the program	Likely x minor (Moderate risk III)	Check the condition of streets before the tour and choose an alternative route. Inform participants.
	Slower pace of movement	Likely x minor (Moderate risk III)	Warn participants, choose a suitable walking pace, and, if possible, advise wearing appropriate footwear.
	Risk of falling and injury	Likely x hazardous (High risk IV)	Choose an alternative route, adjust the pace, provide warnings, and maintain constant monitoring.
High and uneven steps in old buildings	Difficult for older people to climb, risk of falling and injury, potential discontent from some clients, slower group pace. Delay in reaching the next destination.	Likely x minor (Moderate risk III)	Assess the group's capabilities beforehand. Provide repeated warnings; if possible, use an alternative route or offer individuals with difficulties the option not to climb.
High cliff or bluff	Risk of falling, possible injuries, cliff collapse	Fairly unlikely but possible x hazardous (High risk IV)	Inform the group about the dangerous edge and keep a safe distance. Depending on the group, apply additional measures to prevent accidents.

Circumstances causing the hazard	Hazard	Risk magnitude (probability of occurrence x consequences)	Prevention / mitigation / actions
Risk of ticks and snakes when going into nature	Risk of tick bite leading to encephalitis or Lyme disease, risk of poisoning from viper bite	Fairly unlikely but possible x hazardous (High risk IV)	Warn participants before entering the trail, and ensure they stay on the path. Before the hike, recommend light-colored clothing and closed shoes.
Changes in traffic arrangements (temporary road closures, roadworks, major events, etc.)	Need to change the route, delay reaching the next site, dissatisfied people, agreements with partners at risk	Fairly likely x minor (Acceptable risk II)	Always check the route shortly before the trip, monitor the Road Administration's information, and find the closest detours. Inform clients and have contacts for all partners. Provide water or snacks in case of delays.
Health issues of a tourist	Noticeable delay in the program, lateness to the next site, some dissatisfaction, impact on agreements with future partners	Very unlikely x extremely hazardous (Moderate risk III)	Assess guests' capabilities when meeting them. Ensure everyone has a water bottle, and the guide should carry extra water. Avoid overly fast pace, overheating on the bus, or too much time in direct sun. Have a charged phone and spare battery to call for help.

Circumstances causing the hazard	Hazard	Risk magnitude (probability of occurrence x consequences)	Prevention / mitigation / actions
Military objects	People are often slightly disappointed that everything is overgrown, with nettles and meadowsweet taller than them	Likely x minor (Moderate risk III)	Before visiting locations, inform participants the day before that sturdy boots, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants are needed. Warn about collapse hazards and advise against climbing everywhere. Watch your step — nails and glass shards are often found.
Forest hike, uneven trails, mosquitoes, ticks, and snakes, very strong wind	Generally, people are aware, but some still expect paved paths in the park. Not used to mosquitoes	Likely x minor (Moderate risk, III)	Warn of dangers in advance and emphasize the need for appropriate clothing and mosquito repellent. The guide can bring repellent. Warn about ticks and snakes. Avoid hikes during storms.
Birdwatching tower: open structure, high, sways in the wind, stairs with uncomfortable gaps	Many do not dare to climb up and voluntarily stay below waiting for others to return	Fairly unlikely but possible x minor (Acceptable risk II)	Do not climb the tower in windy or rainy weather—it's dangerous. Choose an alternative.

Circumstances causing the hazard	Hazard	Risk magnitude (probability of occurrence x consequences)	Prevention / mitigation / actions
Seal watching, boat trip: windy weather, boat engine may fail	Seasickness, trip canceled due to wind, dissatisfaction about not seeing any seals	Fairly unlikely but possible x hazardous (Moderate risk III)	Monitor the weather forecast and inform in advance if a seal-watching trip can't proceed. A plan B must be in place. Clothing is again crucial. Life jackets must always be worn. Have a spare boat driver's phone number.
Cycling tour: bad weather, poor preparation, flat tire	If something happens to someone, usually the whole group waits, resulting in delay to the destination	Likely x hazardous (High risk IV)	Provide clear instructions for roadside movement and warn about hazards. The guide must have an essential repair kit and know how to change a tire if there is no support vehicle.



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When creating experiences and adventures accessible to all, it is important to consider the needs and expectations of different target groups.



Please refer to the handbook as follows:

Tammela, R., Sarapuu, E., Vällmann, S., Sooneste, M., Kängsepp-Puun, L., Reiljan, K., Männik, M., Paatsi, A., Kakko, H., Käär, L., Jõul, T., Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities. (2025). Tour Guide's Handbook. Principles and Recommendations. NGO Estonian Rural Tourism.