



TEN TIPS: TOURING ADVICE FROM REAL PEOPLE **USTOA asks seasoned travelers to reveal secrets for successful touring**

What should people know about taking a tour? Why not ask the experts -- the people who have taken repeat tours! The U.S. Tour Operators Association queried a group of veteran tour takers -- some who had been on as many as 20 tours -- for their advice to others. Below are ten tips.

TIP #1 – Work with a travel agent - Retired teacher and frequent traveler Angela Pitman, 53 of Winston Salem, recommends using a travel agent “who has had experience and...who has traveled to the country you are going to. The help they provide can be invaluable: “They can tell you things that you wouldn’t even know to ask about.”

TIP #2 – Evaluate the itinerary carefully - Bonnie Free, 58, retired teacher from Greensburg, Pennsylvania suggests, “Check the itinerary thoroughly. Make sure it is what you want.” Trudy and Ken Thornton, 72 and 74, of Bowie, Maryland, recommend choosing a less hectic agenda, “...when you take a tour don’t get one that moves from city to city every day—look for one where you stay in one place for a while.”

TIP #3 – Pack to leave things behind - When Angela Pittman travels to some countries, she says, “I take old clothes, or go to Goodwill and Salvation Army and buy clothes that are appropriate for the trip I’m going on.. Then I leave them over there with the ladies I meet. It’s so meaningful to them, and to me.” Pitman also says she takes “one little black outfit,” which is suitable for a multitude of occasions.

TIP #4 – Take cash - Pittman also notes that she takes 100 one dollar bills with her whenever she travels overseas. “If you shop in the local markets, they aren’t going to take a credit card, and almost everywhere I’ve ever been U.S. dollars are accepted.. Dollar bills are also effective for tipping, when you haven’t had an opportunity to obtain local currency,” she says.

TIP #5 – Be flexible - Notes Gay Gagnon, retired, 64 of Lutz, Florida: “No matter where you go, but especially out of the U.S., you need to be flexible. Do a little research ahead of time about the country and its customs.”

TIP #6 – Keep a journal - If you’ve ever looked at a photo and wondered exactly *where* it was taken, or tried to remember what you did on a certain date, Angela Pittman has a solution. “Bring a tiny notebook and write in it every day. You think you are going to remember the experience, but by the time you get back you are on overload. If you don’t write it up that day, you can easily forget.”

TIP #7 – Use a tour to get an overview of what you’d like to explore later in depth - Trudy and Ken Thornton have taken 20 tours . They would take an “overview” type tour, to see the highlights and then return to the places they loved for a more in-depth look. Their system now is to tour one year and go independently the next.

TIP #8 – Rise and shine - Trudy and Ken Thornton also advise tour takers: “Be prepared to get up early, and have your bags packed.” This prevents later hassles.

TIP # 9 – Book and pay well ahead and look for customer loyalty discounts - Caroline Adams, 45, military pilot, who goes on a tour every year, books her trips as much as a year ahead, often just two months after she's returned from her last adventure. Adams then starts making monthly payments. "Three months ahead of departure, it is all paid for," she says. Adams advises travelers that, by reserving well in advance you can also take advantage of early booking discounts offered by some tour operators, as well as benefit from customer loyalty programs, where available.

TIP #10 -- Clip coupons - Since Bob and Lois Carlin, 66 and 72 of San Antonio, TX, started traveling, Bob began clipping grocery coupons out of newspapers. All of the money saved goes directly into their tour fund. The Carlins also shop around for the best price, even selecting the least expensive accommodations. Their reasoning: you spend little time in your room or ship cabin.

More Helpful Hints

The USTOA web site -- www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel -- offers helpful hints on tours and vacation packages, as well as a vacation finder, where travelers can select a USTOA member based on destination, activity, or even personality preference. A drop-down list of USTOA member companies also contains links to each member company.

USTOA member companies have met the travel industry's highest standards. including participation in the USTOA Travelers Assistance Program, which among other things requires each USTOA Active member company to set aside \$1 million to reimburse consumers in case the company goes out of business. For more information and a listing of USTOA Member companies, visit www.ustoa.com or phone USTOA (1-800-GO-USTOA)..

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Media Note:

The above travelers are willing to be interviewed. Please contact Kundell Communications for information.