

Outdoor Adventure Guide

Take people down rivers and up mountains for a living. Low pay, seasonal work, and an office nobody else gets.

TYPICAL PAY

\$38,120

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$61k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Rivers, mountains, national parks,
ski areas, outfitter base camps**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
Get outside constantly and keep a log of trips. A season of personal climbing, paddling or ski touring is worth more on an application than a grade.
- 2 Core certifications** 2 to 6 weeks of courses
Wilderness First Responder plus CPR, then the safety certificate for your sport: swiftwater rescue for rivers, avalanche training for winter.
- 3 Assistant guide season** 1 to 2 seasons
You carry the heavy bag, cook, drive the shuttle and watch. This is the real apprenticeship and it is paid, barely.
- 4 Lead guide** After 1 to 3 seasons
You run the trip and you own the decisions. Employers want a number of logged days before they hand you a group.
- 5 Professional certification, if you want the top** Several years, part time
The training and assessment courses run by AMGA (the American Mountain Guides Association) in rock, alpine and ski, or an outdoor leadership program from NOLS (the National Outdoor Leadership School).

Pros and cons

- + No degree and no license required to start
- + Work outdoors in places people save all year to visit
- + Strong projected growth in the wider tour guide field
- Low pay and seasonal gaps with no income
- You are legally and morally responsible for other people's safety
- Hard on the body, and injuries end seasons

Optional boosts

Wilderness First Responder. Swiftwater rescue. Avalanche training. Single Pitch Instructor.

Good to know

The field is growing fast

The Department of Labor counts about 55,800 people working as tour guides and escorts and projects growth of 7 percent or more through 2034, with roughly 13,000 openings. Outdoor recreation is one of the...

One American body sits at the world table

The American Mountain Guides Association, founded in 1979, is the only United States member of the International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations. Its full certification is recognized by gui...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Tour Guides and Escorts (39-7011.00)
O*NET OnLine: Tour Guides and Escorts, wages and outlook
American Mountain Guides Association
National Outdoor Leadership School: courses

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/adventure-guide>



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