

Tour Guide

Walk groups through a city, a park or a museum and make them care about it. Fun work, uneven money.

TYPICAL PAY

\$38,120

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$61k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**City walking tours, museums,
national parks, cruise ports, distill...**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Speak up in class, take drama or public speaking, and learn your own town's history. That is the actual preparation.
- 2 Get a first tourism job** A season
Front desk, ticket booth, attraction host, camp counselor. Operators hire guides out of these roles constantly.
- 3 Audition and train** 1 to 3 weeks
Most operators run a paid or unpaid training block: ride the route, learn the script, then do a test tour for a manager.
- 4 Build a niche** 1 to 3 years
Food, architecture, ghosts, Civil War, wildlife, a second language. A niche is what turns a seasonal gig into a career.
- 5 Salaried or self-employed** Ongoing
Either move into a museum or park education job, or register your own tour business and sell direct.

Pros and cons

- + You can start this summer with no qualification
- + You meet people from everywhere and get paid to know your city
- + Tips and private bookings reward anyone who is genuinely good
- Seasonal. Many guides need a winter job
- Low base pay and often no benefits
- Outdoors in whatever weather the day brings

Optional boosts

A second language. A commercial driver's license. Wilderness first aid. A real specialty.

Good to know

Free tours are not free

The free walking tour model pays the guide nothing per tour. The guide earns entirely from tips collected at the end, and usually pays the company a fee for each guest who shows up. Great guides do ve...

The park service runs on seasonals

The National Park Service staffs more than 400 sites, and a large share of the guides and rangers you meet in July are seasonal hires who applied through the federal job site months earlier. Plenty of perman...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Tour Guides and Escorts

National Park Service: work with us

USAJOBS (the federal government's official employment site)

American Alliance of Museums, careers and salary survey resources

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/tour-guide>



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