

How to Become a Tour Guide

To be a tour guide in San Francisco you don't need a license or certification, but joining the San Francisco Tour Guide Guild is one great way to network, find job opportunities, and continue your education.

There are various ways to be a tour guide. Some people find that it works best for them to do it as a volunteer. Most museums train docents to lead gallery tours, and most cities have organizations (e.g., historical societies) that train people to lead walking tours. For instance, there's an organization called San Francisco City Guides, sponsored by the public library, that gives free walking tours all over the city. They train new guides every January/February and can be reached at www.sfcityguides.org. (Also, taking their tours is a great way to learn more about San Francisco in preparation for leading volunteer or paid tours.)

For those who would like to be paid to give tours there are a couple general options:

- Some people lead "over the road" tours, which can last from 6-20 days and go anywhere in the world.
- Others prefer to be local tour guides in the San Francisco area. This is a great place for tour guiding since so many visitors come here.

For local tour guiding, employers can include local tour operators (many of which use the same person to drive the bus and give the tour, and offer training for new employees), and other companies called "destination management companies" (DMC's). The DMCs provide various services to corporate groups, ranging from greeting the guests at the airport to escorting them to dinners, to leading tours for them. The tour guides who work for these companies generally provide all of these services rather than just giving tours. Another type of employer is national tour operators who hire "step-on guides" to give a local tour when their multi-day tours are passing through a particular city.

It can be challenging to make a living as a tour guide, since it is not a high paying profession and it can be difficult to get enough work (most tour guides work as independent contractors or on-call employees rather than full time employees). Many people combine tour guiding with other part time work, or use it as a retirement job. At the same time, there definitely are people who work full time as tour guides and are able to support themselves, and some even do quite well financially. Those who achieve success in this field often love their work!

Although the San Francisco Tour Guide Guild does not endorse any particular school, there is a respected tour guide training school based in San Francisco. Many members of the Guild graduated from this school, and have found it very helpful in preparing them for their tour guide careers. The school is the International Tour Management Institute (ITMI) and can be reached at www.itmitourtraining.com.

ITMI graduates receive job placement assistance, but if you want to start looking for jobs on your own, one way is to visit the San Francisco Travel website, <http://www.sanfrancisco.travel/partners/>, for information on tourism-related companies, and send resumes to them.

Joining the San Francisco Tour Guide Guild has many benefits for new guides, such as the opportunity to network with experienced guides, participate in training tours, and participate in our mentoring program. You can download a membership application from the Membership section of our website, www.sftgg.org.

We hope this has helped answer your questions, but please feel free to send us an email at members@sftgg.org, if you need more information.