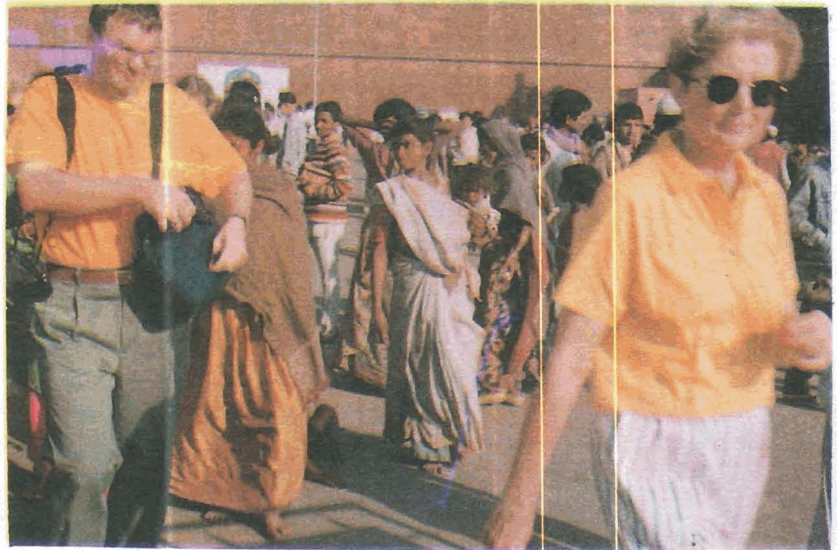


UNIT 15 GUIDES AND ESCORTS

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- know the definitions of a guide and a tour escort,
- understand the difference between them,
- get details about different type of guides and their roles,
- learn the techniques of guiding, and
- understand the details of escorting a tour.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Guides and escorts in the context of Indian tourism have been a neglected lot traditionally. It is only recently, since tourism has come to be recognised as a great economic asset that some slight recognition has come to them. However, the traditional mould in which guides and escorts were cast might take a little time in freeing itself for setting pace along with the growth of tourism. This Unit aims to be a small effort in this direction. We have described the role of guides and escorts and discussed some modern techniques pertaining to successful professional guiding. As a professional involved with tourism we recommend the issues discussed in the Unit to be the minimum standards of competence in the field of guiding or escorting a tour. You will read more about guides in specialised areas in Block 2 of TS-2.

15.2 DEFINING GUIDES AND ESCORTS

No sooner do we speak of guides, the wrinkled face of a man who would mingle a lot of fables with few historical facts begins to emerge. Almost all of us, the tourists and the professionals in the business of tourism, have come to form a stereotype image of the guides, irrespective of the fact that guiding and escorting tours are highly professional business and require acquisition of special skills for successful careers. We have ventured to break these stereotypes by defining guides and escorts in the context of modern day demands of the tourism system. A careful perusal of following aspects will help you evolve the role of a professionally competent guide or an escort for yourself.

15.2.1 Who is a Guide?

Finding an answer to this question that would be acceptable universally is a difficult task. In fact the perceptions about guides differ from region to region. We can therefore select some of the more commonly sought traits in guides and arrive at a definition which is rather broad in scope. One good definition is given below:

A professional guide is in varying degrees a business person — often freelance, sometimes employee; a travel industry representative; a public relations representative for his or her site, city, region, and country — as well as an educator, an entertainer, and a public speaker, among other roles.

(Kathleen Lingle Pond, **The Professional Guide**, New York. 1993)

Here it is necessary to point out that the guide may not have to perform all these roles simultaneously. It is quite possible that in specific situations his attention needs focussing on his role as an educator and an entertainer only. In other situations he may be expected to be an eloquent public speaker. The only thing we would like to lay stress on is that the guide is a public relations representative for his site, city, region, and country in situations all and sundry. He or she must, therefore, possess a broad-based knowledge of the “areas” or subject being dealt with so as to be able to “inform” the tourists about it. (You will get more details on this aspect of guiding in Sub-sec. 15.4.2)

15.2.2 Who is an Escort?

The scope of an escort’s terrain and expertise also varies considerably. Depending upon the nature of the tour, an escort is supposed to perform the role of an accompanying manager to a subject expert. He may escort the tour to a:

- specific piece of art,
- rural area,
- geographical region,
- historical site,
- shopping centre,
- metropolitan area, and
- business site, etc.

The role of an escort begins as soon as the tourist/s arrive/s at his place. It ends only with the departure of the tourist/s. During the stay of the tourist/s an escort may get a few intermissions, but unlike a guide, he may not be free from his responsibilities throughout the duration of the tourist/s stay. In escorted tours the job also involves looking after facilitation, aspects like getting the custom clearances done or check in etc. at the airports. In fact an escort is **responsible for the entire group during the journey and at the destination.**

15.2.3 Tourist Expectations

The knowledge of a tourist group’s expectations from its guide/escort is an extremely helpful tool in charting your own course of action. In fact you must do an exercise on profiling the tourists soon after their arrival. Two main areas in this regard which deserve your attention are the tourists demands for:

- developing an awareness and understanding of the area they are visiting, and
- efficient and responsible management of their programme.

The tourists demand from their guides or escorts accuracy with regard to the knowledge of facts, astuteness, to deal with tricky situations and sympathy with regard to their own problems, however trifle in nature they may be. You should, therefore, be particularly thorough with facts, resourceful and full of understanding for the demands and problems of the tourists.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Define a guide in 50 words.

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2) Define an escort in 50 words.

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3) What do tourists expect from a guide?

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15.3 ROLE OF THE GUIDE

The role of the guide, as it is perceived today, has a history. It is infact a mixture of two different roles viz. of the one who would traditionally lead the way on an unknown terrain and an advisor on any kind of travel. The two roles do not always harmonize yet exist in a guide in varying proportions today. In the context of our own country we can then say that in the former role we have location guides and in the latter there are guides for city tours.

15.3.1 Location

Location guides are the leaders that take the tourists into a hitherto unknown partially known terrain. Since the nature of the terrains differ widely, the guide's role also varies. Depending upon the setting, the tourists and their purpose of visit we can categorize location guides in India under several heads. here we have selected the three most common types for detailed description.

Monuments: The most commonly found guides are those who specialize in describing the monumental heritage of our country. As a matter of fact guides available at these monuments have come to project a particular perception of the guides in India. Most of those guides lack a proper historical understanding of the architectural wealth of the region where they operate. We have given the role model of such a guide in Unit 6 (Block 2, TS-2). It will be suffice here to list the abilities of such a guide:

- The foremost in this list is obviously the requirement of **adequate knowledge of the history** of the region so as to be able to describe the monument in perspective,
- The guide should be well versed with the **stylistic and architectural details** of the monument,

- All **historical facts** about the monuments such as the date of its construction, the agency responsible for construction, time taken, design and architect, the purpose of the monument, etc. should be known to the guide.
- The guide should be able to **sift fables from history**. Though it is not suggested that the anecdotal details should be rejected, they can certainly be kept at deep discount.
- The guide should **not construct history on one's own in the absence of firm evidence** (See Block 7)

Museums: Museum is a fantastic place for a guide to describe. It is here that the role of the guide, both as educator and as entertainer, comes to fruition. In Unit 8 (Block 2, TS-2) we have given the details of the description of a museum as a guide would give, here we list a few pre-requisites.

As a tourist guide or otherwise also when you take visitors to a museum, it is important for you to **know the variety and the range of the collections** housed there. This information is of immense help to you in catering to the tourists who may not have common taste for all things kept in the museum. On the contrary, it is most often the case that there are as many different interests in a group of tourists as their actual count. In such situations the variety and the range of your knowledge regarding the exhibits of a museum will stand you in good stead. You will also find this information handy in deciding to curtail or extend the visit of the group to a museum and may at times reap rich dividends if you succeed in evoking the appreciation of the tourist for the varieties and the artistic merit of the exhibits.

We shall therefore insist that you:

- **collect** detailed information about the museum,
- **arrange** this information to convenient categories,
- occasionally **sift** your information, and
- regularly **update** this information

Besides when you guide visitors to a museum you should:

- make sure how much **time** the visitor has to spend their, and
- the area of **interest**.

Accordingly you can adjust your commentary on exhibits and decide what to show, gloss over or give a passing reference only.

Wildlife

Wildlife Tourism is potentially one of the most viable and economically rewarding area of tourism. Hence, it is imperative on a tourism professional and more so on a wildlife guide or escort to understand its intricacies and use this information to his/her fullest advantage. Most of the tourists visiting a wildlife area are innocent and therefore willing to learn from you and follow your instructions. Unlike several other situations, as a wildlife guide or escort you are located in an enviably privileged position. But this simultaneously entails upon you the additional responsibility of being thoroughly familiar with the peculiar features of wildlife tourism.

The details of guiding a group of tourists to a National Park have been given in Unit 9 (Block-2, TS-2). We shall list you some essential requirements here:

15.3.2 City Tour

The following aspects have to be considered:

- You must profile the group of tourists who are intending to visit the wildlife preserve by reading carefully:
 - a) their **purpose** of travel (i.e. recreation, relaxation, study of nature, etc.) and
 - b) the **behavioural characteristics** of the tourists.
- You should understand the following problems areas in wildlife tourism:
 - a) **timing** – the preserves are open during day hours only thereby eliminating all possibilities of evening or night watch of the animals.

- b) **accessibility** — not many places are easily accessible nor are there adequate preparations made. The two more important aspects on which we would like you to pay greater attentions are in the **commentary for the tour**, and **useful material and travel tips** to be given to the tourists.

Now that everything is ready, the coach departs. Here you must remember that:

- the length of the trip should not be very taxing physically
- there should be adequate stops during the trip
- sufficient time should be made available for shopping, and
- You must take care of a few problem spots such as sudden illness to the tourist, loss of luggage/passport/money, and missing tour members.

15.4 GUIDING AS A TECHNIQUE

In modern day tourism the job of guiding is a technique. You should acquire the skill in conformity with your specific requirements. In the following Sub-sections we shall deal with the general trails of the technique.

15.4.1 Leadership

It has been rightly said by Kathleen Pond: “Most people have a fairly well-defined image of the ideal tour guide: outgoing, affable, well-informed, enthusiastic. Certainly the best guides are an eclectic composite of these positive personality traits”. You will appreciate that all the personality limits stated above suggest one specific feature — the leadership quality. This is one of the most effective social limit a guide must possess to become successful in his trade. Leadership requires:

- enthusiasm,
- self-confidence,
- proactive nature,
- sensitivity,
- flexibility,
- decisiveness, and
- sense of humour.

Some of these traits are natural gifts. But most can be acquired as skills. We would like to emphasize that the traits listed here do not lend themselves to any kind of measure. They can be acquired with practice. A judicious mix of these traits in any individual’s personality is purely a personal matter.

15.4.2 Factual Knowledge

Knowledge of a wide array of subjects is absolutely essential for the persons involved in guiding the tours. However, subject matters differ for guides from region to region. Therefore local educational programmes should be paid careful attention. Some of the common areas, the knowledge about which cannot be ignored by any guide, are:

- Geography and topography
- History, Culture and religion,
- Folklore,
- Economy and Industry,
- Travel and Tourism, and

It can be said that a guide is infact a representative of the place he chooses to work. He should, therefore, be culturally literate because tourists can ask a guide questions about several related

or even unrelated aspects of the region of their visit. It should be emphasized here that authenticity of information passed on to the tourists by the guide is the key factor in the success of his career.

Most tourists are instinctively drawn to and trust guides who are genuine and who have an honest, open aura about them.

15.4.3 Presentation

A guide has only two basic tools to work with in his profession — the **voice** and the **body language**. It is therefore essential that the presentation skill of the guide is tuned perfectly. Presentation can also be an engaging and enjoyable experience. Since presentation by a guide is a simpler affair than lecturing, it contains enormous possibilities for effective and captivating communication. People want to listen to you if you are:

- lively and delightful,
- vivid in descriptions,
- simple with language, and
- comfortable with the audience and the topic.

Since body is a very powerful communicator and has a language of its own, it is imperative upon you to pay careful attention to the posture and movement of your hands as well as features and the eye contact. (See Unit 24) Your presentation must make the listener believe that what they hear is what they see.

In the kind of presentation a guide offers, voice plays a very crucial role in making it convincing and impressive. “The voice” writes Kathleen Pond, “is the speaker’s most valuable commodity and, like a musical instrument, it must be cared for and kept in tune”. You must remember that the tourists would often listen to your voice for eight or more hours a day.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What is the role of a location guide working at a historical site?

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2) What are the leadership qualities that a guide should possess?

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3) How is presentation an important feature in guiding skills?

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Escorting a tour involves careful preparation and planning. The escort has also to keep himself ready for special situations that may arise from unforeseen circumstances. We shall discuss each of these aspects separately in the following Sub-sections.

15.5.1 Planning

Planning has today become almost a scientific operation. The tour escort should know:

- the rate of success with similar tours in the past.
- how to broaden the scope of the tour with the help of the experiences gathered by others, and
- the problem areas of the tour to workout the remedies.

It needs to be emphasised that while planning a tour the escort must live the tour day by day. He should take special care of the following areas.

- Scheduling:** It is a combination of factors with some uncertain variables. The central idea is to look for the right place, at the right time, for the right people and at a right price.
- Events:** The events to be covered on a tour should be so planned as to suit the taste of most of the tourists. No event should offend anyone. All the events should keep cost factor into focus.
- Variables:** Weather, unforeseen occurrences, transport upsets are some important variables which must find a place in tour plannings. This will enable you to keep alternatives handy and save the tour.

15.5.2 Preparation

Advance preparation is an essential feature of successful escorting. You must:

- know what information is needed in connection with the tour and where to get that,
- understand what items become part of your preparations for the tour and how to obtain them,
- appreciate the **needs** of the tour members and how best to meet them, and
- know what **basic information** needs to be supplied to tour members.

All successful tours tell the same story i.e. good preparation. As an instance you may pay attention to the following details at the preparatory stage:

- **Checklists:** Travel checklists are a very useful tool your successful preparation. You may not forget even the smallest item/detail pertaining to the tour.
- **Tour itinerary:** We emphasize that you mentally tour for entire route/place and plan all possible events in scrupulous details.
- **Commentary:** This is a very important, (though most often neglected) aspect of escorting the tour. A crisp, informative, delightful commentary punctuated with humour is a sure key to the success of the tour.
- **Travel Tips:** Vital for tour party. It must contain those little tips which can make or mar the tour. The tourists are appreciative of such help and their gratitude is your final reward.

15.5.3 Special Situations

The tour escort should invariably have the energy and courage to cope with special situations. Some of the more frequently encountered "situations" are:

- **Loss of Money and Passport:** The most common complaint. We advice you keep everyone's passport deposited under your custody for the duration of the tour. Also advise them not to carry too much cash with their person and transact most of the business in traveller cheques or credit cards.

- **Sickness:** Warn the tourist against eating at sundry places, drinking unclean v weather vagaries such as a heatstroke during summers or exposure to cold during the winters.
- **Missing Tour Member:** Take care that the tourists adhere to the schedule. You have to be persuasive and at times stern too. But under no situation even lose your cool.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What important things you take note of, as an escort, while planning a tour?

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2) How do you prepare for a tour as an escort?

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15.6 LET US SUM UP

Guiding and escorting are the most exciting features of tourism profession. These are the roles that are truly the soul of the tour. Guides and escorts are in fact an amalgam of several independent roles. Thus while they retain a part of these individual roles such as that of an entertainment, an educator, or even a public relations man of their region/place, they are never to be stereotyped into anyone exclusively. They retain an independent identity of their own. It is this identity that makes them such lively and delightful persons in the perceptions of the tourists.

15.7 KEYWORDS

- Enthusiastic** : Full of energy and will to learn
Fascinating : Attractive
Stereotyped : Typical
Terrain : Geographical landscape
Wrinkled face : Weather—beaten face

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) A professional guide embodies several roles into one. He is an entertainer, an educator, a public speaker—all at one time. See Sub-sec. 15.2.1.
- 2) An escort performs a variety of roles, from an accompanying manager to a subject expert. See Sub-sec. 15.2.2.
- 3) See Sub-sec. 15.2.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) He must possess a proper historical understanding. See Sub-sec. 15.3.1.
- 2) He should be outgoing, affable, well-informed and enthusiastic. See Sub-sec. 15.4.1.
- 3) See Sub-sec. 15.4.3.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The three main areas that call for attention are scheduling, events and variables. For details see Sub-sec. 15.5.1.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 15.5.2.