

# 8 Tips for Being a Good Tour Guide

Adapted from “10 Tips for Being a Good Tour Guide” by Emily Potter. January 5, 2016. National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Use these [8] tips, compiled by Johns Hopkins, Executive Director of [Baltimore Heritage](#), to help you be the best tour guide you can be. (Not a tour guide? These tips can also give insight into being a good tour goer.)

- 1. Face the crowd, not what you’re talking about.** Tour guides often get so wrapped up in their subject they forget to face the people they are addressing.
- 2. Be personal.** No matter how much we love buildings, it’s a fact that people connect with people. So, it’s good to have a few personal anecdotes ready, even if they’re just about past tours you’ve done. You’ll build a more personal connection to your group and create a memorable tour. (For the beginning of the tour as you greet your guests.)
- 3. Tell a story (historical or contemporary).** Make sure you have a few fun and compelling stories to tell about the buildings and sites you’re looking at. People are more likely to feel engaged when they are listening to a story, rather than a list of dates and names.
- 4. Get moving right away.** Tours often get bogged down before they ever begin with tour guides doing the “big wind-up”—introductions, setting the theme, providing context, etc. **Don’t get caught up in your introduction.**
- 5. Don’t worry about being perfect.** People don’t expect you to be perfect. Set the stage for human imperfection by acknowledging that people who

may know more than you should speak up and share their knowledge with the group. The more interactive the tour is, the better!

6. **Get help to get organized.** Try to get a volunteer to check people in so you can chat with tour goers. People give tours for many reasons, but a big one is to meet new people, and the time before the tour is a great chance to get to know your group. **This is why we have the tour facilitator, but be sure to double check your list!**
7. **End on time. (Or try very hard to.)** Try like crazy to end on time. Nobody wants to feel like they are in tour jail. Tours on paper always seem too short and on the ground are always too long. Two hours is the absolute maximum. An hour to an hour and a half is better. **Our tour is 90-minutes. Be aware of the tours in front and behind you.**
8. **Send a follow-up email.** Follow up with an email—it can be as simple as a “thank you” note. If you can follow the tour with another contact, by email or otherwise, that’s another step towards creating a better link between the tour taker and your organization. **This step is taken care of by John Finkler, deputy director, Sunnylands Center & Gardens.**

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