

Safety Is High Priority in Selecting a Tour Bus Company

Whenever travel on the highways is involved safety should be a top priority. That is no less so when selecting a bus company for your tour. Several elements are involved in the issue of safety when bus tour companies are concerned. They are: The condition of the bus itself The driver The length of time a tour bus company has been in business and that company's safety record A bus tour company's understanding of laws and regulations A company's involvement in such organizations as the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Its compliance to U.S. Department of Transportation and Department of Defence regulations

The Bus

One issue that is up front for you to actually see is the tour bus itself.

The age of the fleet of buses used by a tour bus company should be considered. It should be obvious that the latest models of buses should be in the fleet. The latest, the better. Many companies like USA Bus Charter says that they replace their buses after 10 years of service. They also point out that there are bus companies that own buses that are as old as 25 years. In short, you don't want the transportation you will be using to be too old. Inquire with the [Bus Tours](#) company about the age of their fleet.

If at all possible, go to the tour bus company and inspect their buses. Check the interior, the exterior and underneath. Look at the tires including the tread depth and examine the seat covers, dents, bumps, scratches and cleanliness. If all of that is not up to your standards, then it is possible that the company is not concerned with safety and appearance as a top priority.

If things look good after a visual inspection, don't be afraid to ask questions concerning things you don't see.

And that would be how often the buses are analyzed by the company's mechanics. It is not uncommon for well managed tour bus companies to have their mechanics inspect things every time a bus returns to the garage.

The Driver

The driver of a tour bus, not the president of the tour bus company, is probably the most important employee.

When push comes to shove, it is the skills of the driver that assures that the bus gets to its destination on time and that the trip is safe.

Of course, you would expect that the driver has experience. Industry standards call for the driver to have at least three years experience. Some companies are stricter than that and call for them to have a little more.

This could be as much as five years or more. Of course, the more experience they have, the more skilled they are in driving the bus. But they are also knowledgeable of the routes they are expected to drive and would be well seasoned to be able to find alternative routes should the need arise.

An important element in assuring that you get to the destination on time.

You will want the driver to be emotionally balanced. It's been said that there are three types of drivers (not necessarily bus drivers): the passive, the aggressive and the hostile. Of course, you want a driver who is passive. You would expect him to keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front, not speed, slows down when it is raining, drive with caution at night, etc.

You also want the driver to be alert when he is driving and drug free. To assure that drugs are not an issue there are laws that require companies test prospective drivers during the hiring process and then to administer random drug tests.

You want the driver's schedule to be such that it doesn't change his sleep patterns.

Commonly, drivers are expected to drive 10 hours. A driver who has a schedule of sleeping at night should stick to that. He should not be expected to drive all night. It is better to be safe and permit the driver to either share the duties with some one who could drive at night or allow him to pull the coach into a motel where he and the passengers can get a good night's sleep before proceeding on a gruelling trip of let's say 1,000 miles without rest.

Making certain that the passengers of the bus – that means you -- stays on their best behaviour is another perhaps overlooked responsibility of the driver. How you act can be a safety issue. It is not a bad thing for the driver to pleasantly remind passengers of such etiquette as remaining seated when the bus is in motion, move to the restroom by holding on to overhead racks,

handrails or headrests to assure good footing, never stand up before the bus has come to a stop, and activity that could prove to be distracting to the driver be minimized if not totally avoided.

A Company's Record

The longer a company has been in business the better chance that it will be well managed and have a good safety record. The companies that don't

have a good safety record won't be in business for any length of time.

One entity that assists you in the research of a company's record is the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov>). The organization's website includes a safety and security page that provides you with all sorts of information including a safety database, a snapshot or profile of particular companies and safety initiatives.

Moreover, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Department of Defence have regulations that tour bus companies are expected to follow. For example, the Department of Transportation requires tour bus companies to assure that their drivers are fully qualified. Companies that comply urge that their drivers have a current commercial driver's license with a passenger endorsement, undergo a thorough physical and hold a valid medical certificate.

You can find out more by visiting the U.S. Department of Transportation website at <http://www.ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/Passenger/home.asp>.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) is involved in regulating motor coach safety because these companies are often used by military personnel and the DOD wants to make certain that their troops are safe. The DOD monitors the bus industry through the Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC). This part of the DOD implements and maintains a "pre-qualification" process.

The DOD will not allow any bus company to transport military personnel until its buses have been inspected by the MTMC. The MTMC also analyze a carrier's performance, reliability and responsiveness. The MTMC has a rating system using a scale of 1 to 5. The best rating is 1 and the worst is 5. Companies rated from 1 to 3 are approved to transport military personnel. More on the MTMC can be found at their website.

Finally, nothing is perfect. Things go wrong. The best companies, however, provide a mechanism to make the wrong right. To assure that such a remedy can take place, you should find out who to contact in the company when something does go wrong. Some companies equip their drivers with cell phones that permit them to call the company to help solve a problem that the driver can't. Later, if you have a complaint or a comment you can call the designated employee who you can alert to a problem and who work with you to solve it.

The mission of a tour bus company is to provide you with a service that will make your tour as pleasant as possible.

Sources:

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/>

USA Bus Charter <http://www.usabuscharter.com>

Coach USA <http://www.coachusa.com/>

Senior Travel <http://seniortravel.about.com/>

Daisy Tours <http://www.conventionusa.com/daisy.html>

Adventure Bus Charter

<http://www.adventurebuscharter.com>

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U.S. Department of Defense Military Traffic Management

Command <http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milfo/arfacts/bitraffic.com>

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