

London Blue Badge Tourist Guide Training Course

Introduction

Blue Badge Registered Tourist Guides are trained under the auspices of The Institute of Tourist Guiding, often in conjunction with Universities or Colleges of Further Education. Most training courses for guides last at least two academic terms and some, e.g. London, may be up to nearly two years.

A wide spectrum of academic, specialist and practical training is covered as well as a core curriculum of the history, architecture and social development of the country.

FAQs

Is there an age limit to becoming a guide?

No limit. Many people come into guiding from a different career and therefore tend to be at least in their late-twenties. Many guides are considerably older. Rather than age, the prerequisite is for stamina and good health as the work of the guide can be physically demanding, with early starts to the day and sometimes, a late finish.

Do you need a university degree?

Higher or further education is not required to be a guide. Many, but not all guides have degrees. However, as the course combines knowledge with practical training you should be prepared for a considerable amount of learning. Remember though that being a guide is not all about knowledge. It is about delivery of knowledge - the "art" of guiding and about looking after your visitors.

Do you need to be able to speak another language?

You should be aware that the English speaking market is highly competitive and, therefore, those with a second or third language will be greatly advantaged.

Can I get any financial help for the course fees?

You *may* qualify for a career development loan from your local council and details will be provided if you are accepted. As The Guild of Registered Tourist Guides is a non-profit making organization it is, therefore, unable to offer direct financial help, but is actively trying to find sponsorship for hardship cases. If successful, applicants will be able to apply for financial help. Applicants who already work in the tourist industry may find it worthwhile to apply to their workplace for financial support.

Do I need to speak fluent English to do the course?

As the lectures and practical sessions are conducted in English, a good understanding of the language is essential. We are able to give only limited language support.

I live outside the European Community. Would I be able to do the course?

You need to have access to central London to be able to do the course and also hold either a visa with indefinite leave to remain or a work permit.

What characteristics make a good guide?

The people who become guides obviously vary widely. The one essential characteristic they share is that they enjoy working with people. Understanding and being sympathetic to the stresses and strains of the traveller (jet lag, nervousness of a large city, not being able to understand the language) is essential. The guide is often the first local human contact.

How much do guides earn and can I make a living from guiding full time?

Earnings depend on how much a guide works, given that most guides are freelance and work for a day fee. The work is seasonal, with long quiet periods in the winter, and fluctuates with world economics and politics. Competition can be considerable. For example, there are approximately 1000 guides on the London register, about half of whom work full time, some exclusively in languages other than English. Furthermore such items as accident and sickness insurance, personal pension as well as National Insurance and Income Tax must be taken into account. Many, particularly newly qualified guides, continue to do some part time employment as, like many new business ventures, it usually take a couple of years or more to build up a good client base.

What kind of people become guides?

Many guides have a professional background e.g. teachers, accountants, lawyers, others will have had a theatre background or come from the tourist industry. We also have home-makers and carers, taxi drivers, horticulturists, policemen - a diverse variety. Although some guides will offer specialist tours, if the intention is to earn a living then all types of work will usually need to be accepted and the corresponding research work carried out.

How can I experience the work of a Blue Badge Guide?

1. Find out about the work of a Blue Badge guide by joining one of their tours. To do this in London take a guided coach tour around London. Evan Evans, Premium Tours and Golden Tours use Blue Badge guides, (but check that the tour you are taking is not being conducted by an unqualified guide). The open top buses do NOT use Blue Badge guides.
2. Take a highlights tour of sites such as the British Museum, Somerset House (though again make sure they are conducted by Blue Badge guides rather than in-house guides), Spencer House or, during August/September, the Palace of Westminster.

Further Information

For further information about courses *in all areas, except London*, you should apply to The Institute of Tourist Guiding at office@itg.org.uk.

For Scotland see www.stga.co.uk/become_guide.aspx

Please do not contact the Guild office.

All enquiries must be by e-mail to: londontraining@blue-badge.org.uk.

The Prospectus and Application Form are available only by downloading them from the Guild web site.