

## Rick Steves' Personal Tips for Having a Great Tour Experience

In my mind, there are tours — and there are Rick Steves tours. We don't just go sightseeing; we create a unique *esprit de corps* that turns a bus tour into a merry band of travelers, working together as a team. Here's what you can do to help create a happy tour group experience.

**Develop the art of "group awareness."** Like any team, when you and your guide keep the interests of the overall group "top of mind," it helps us function better and accomplish more than any other tour in Europe. Your guide's focus is on the good of the group as a whole, which might require you to compromise now and then. This will add up to a richer travel experience for you.

**Your time is precious. Punctuality is required.** If you're three minutes late, you're holding up 25 people — that's 75 minutes of wasted time. Synchronize your watches, check the posted schedule, and be ready on time. It's how we make sure you can enjoy every minute of your free time.

**Be engaged and respectful.** Your guide is working hard to help you have the best trip possible. Please pay attention and help create an atmosphere throughout the group that tunes in respectfully.

**Communicate with your guide.** If something is unclear or disappointing, don't stew — say something! Often, it's a simple misunderstanding. To this end, your guide will conduct a mid-tour survey (a simple piece of paper to be filled out anonymously). Please thoughtfully fill out your mid-tour survey so your guide can tweak things as necessary.

**Eat with a spirit of adventure.** When it comes to food, I hope you enjoy experimenting and getting out of your comfort zone. Your guide is there to expand your horizons and will work to bring your group unique and memorable treats for sampling. If you have dietary restrictions, communicate them to your guide and be open-minded if there are limited alternative options available.

**Stay healthy.** You'll get more out of your tour if you feel good. Follow common-sense advice like washing your hands frequently, covering your mouth when coughing and avoiding touching your face. In addition, stay hydrated, drink lots of water (tap is fine throughout most of Europe) and get rest (opt out if you're feeling tired or unwell).

**Feeling sick?** Be sure to tell your guide right away. Don't be shy. Your guide has heard it all and has dealt with problems that likely make yours look boring. During Covid times, this is essential, even for "minor" cold type symptoms.

**Feeling bugged?** Travel intensifies relationships. Friendships spring up quickly — and so can irritants. When a problem comes up, things go so much better when people deal with it sooner rather than later, respectfully, and face-to-face. Your guide (even if he or she is the guilty party!) is experienced at dealing with these things and is there to help.

**Travel is a political act.** Good people can respectfully differ on any issue. But travel is exciting, in part, because it exposes us to things that challenge our assumptions. Hanging out with people from societies that face the same problems we are grappling with — and tackling them differently — can be both fun and educational. I encourage my guides to inject some of this into each tour. I like to think that travel helps us return home as more appreciative Americans and better citizens of our planet.

**The most memorable hotels come with character.** Part of the fun of travel in a foreign country is to have a memorable hotel. The ones we choose are characteristic — which often means well-worn, quirky, filled with personality. Be flexible if things are different than you're accustomed to (think WiFi, A/C). If you have a concern, talk privately with your guide.

**You are your own porter.** Many of our hotels don't have elevators or porters—you are responsible to carry your own luggage to and from transportation to your hotel room.

**Practice theft-defense.** Pickpockets target travelers because they are easy pickings. Day packs, shoulder bags and pants pockets are the most dangerous places for valuables. You can avoid this problem by wearing a money belt.

Thanks for traveling with us and bon voyage!

~Rick