



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING TRAINING

Is there an age limit to becoming a guide?

Many people come into guiding from another career and therefore tend to be in their late-twenties, thirties or forties. Some guides are considerably older. So, rather than a particular age, the prerequisites for guiding are stamina, good health and an outgoing personality, as guiding is often physically demanding, with early starts to the day and sometimes late finishes, and requires a high level of focused engagement with both clients and practicalities.

Do you need a university degree?

Higher or further education is not required to be a guide. While many guide trainees do have a degree, it is important to understand that the training course is not a degree course; it is essentially practical, combining the teaching of core knowledge with regular and intensive practical training in how to guide. Being a guide is not all about knowledge; it is as much about the delivery of knowledge - the "art" of guiding - and about looking after and entertaining your clients.

Do you need to be able to speak a second language?

No, you do not need to speak a second language to be trained as a guide, but you should be aware that the English speaking market is the most competitive, and often those candidates with a second or third language have an advantage over those who speak English only. In general, less than a quarter of applicants offered a place on the course speak only English.

Can I get any financial help for the course fees?

The British Guild of Tourist Guides is registered as a UK Learning Provider, enabling students to apply for a Career Development Loan, subject to meeting certain conditions. Details are available at www.gov.uk/career-development-loans/overview Some banks also offer loans for further education or vocational training. For candidates who are under 30 years of age, it may be possible to apply for a bursary for part of the fee from the charity Go Make it Happen www.gomakeithappen.co.uk

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

Yes. All the lectures and practical sessions are conducted in English.

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

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

What characteristics make a good guide?

People who become guides vary widely in their background, interests and temperament. However, the one essential characteristic they share is pleasure in 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, personal problems) are essential. A guide is often the first significant human contact a newly arrived tourist will make. In addition, good personal organisation, time management, flexibility, a good sense of humour, and coolness under pressure are all valuable assets.

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

Earnings depend upon how much a guide works and the market(s) they work in. Most guides are freelance. The work is seasonal, with quiet periods in the winter, and it fluctuates with world economics and politics. Competition can be considerable: for example, there are approximately 1000 guides on the London register alone, about half of whom work full-time, some exclusively in languages other than English. Such items as accident and sickness insurance, a personal pension, National Insurance and

Income Tax must be taken into account when calculating your likely earnings as a guide. Many guides, particularly those newly qualified continue to undertake some part-time employment, as it usually takes a while to generate a good client base. Tourist guides will charge a range of fees depending on the type of work being undertaken. For example, for 'mainstream' guiding work in English in 2014-15, London Blue Badge Guides negotiated fees ranging from £145 to £165 per half day and £235 to £265 per full day. Driver guides and those guiding in a foreign language generally charge a higher fee.

What kind of people become guides?

Many guides have a professional background, such as in teaching, accountancy, law, journalism, heritage, fine art or medicine. There are also many guides who come from various branches of the tourist industry or who have a theatre background. In addition there are homemakers, taxi drivers, horticulturists, policemen, postmen, firemen, civil servants... The list is almost endless and always unpredictable.

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

The best way to find out about the work of a Blue Badge Guide is to join one of their tours! To do this, take a guided coach tour around London, many of which include visits to London sites such as Westminster Abbey, The Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral. Evan Evans, Premium Tours and Golden Tours often use Blue Badge Guides, but first check that a Blue Badge Guide is taking the tour. Open-top buses in London do not generally use Blue Badge Guides on their 'live' tours. In addition, there are regular tours by Blue Badge Guides of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford (<http://www.toursof2012sites.com>), Spencer House, Palace of Westminster (August, September, during recesses and on Saturdays), and at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club at Wimbledon, year round.

Further Information

For information about courses *outside 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

Further enquiries about London Guide Training should be made by e-mail to the Course Administrator at BBGLondontraining@blue-badge.org.uk

Please do not contact the British Guild of Tourist Guides office for further information.