

# Wye Valley & Vale of Usk Group Travel Tool Kit

Your guide to attracting more and better quality group visits



[www.visitmonmouthshire.com/groupvisits](http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/groupvisits)



[www.cityofnewport.wales/en/Visit/Group-travel/Group-travel.aspx](http://www.cityofnewport.wales/en/Visit/Group-travel/Group-travel.aspx)





FRONT COVER – SHIRE HALL, MONMOUTH  
LLANTHONY PRIORY

# Introduction

Group travel is a growing market and it's hard to think of a business within the public, private or voluntary sectors that couldn't benefit from groups.

The group travel and coach tourism sector represents a useful and reliable income stream for tourism businesses. Groups of spending visitors are potentially valuable customers for hotels, attractions and destinations. They're of value to heritage attractions; meal stops; retail establishments; accommodation providers; transport providers; tourist guides; art & craft galleries and theatres. Although less high yield than the business events market, they help alleviate the problems associated with seasonality; provide income streams that are more predictable than for some other customer groups and, once booked, always turn up, irrespective of the weather. Coach travel also beats all other forms of transportation in terms of its impact on the environment.



## Who are the main players?

Tour planners come in many forms but here are the main ones:



TINTERN ABBEY

## Coach Tour Operators

There are many of these across the UK and of course overseas also. They usually develop their own tours and use their own vehicles (although some use other company's coaches). They may arrange tours (some of which may be fully inclusive) which include overnight accommodation and trips out to see and experience a variety of attractions, scenic trips and experiences. They may also run a day excursion programme, which as the name suggests, does not include any accommodation – although some operators do use hotels for meal stops, lunches and dinners without using the overnight accommodation. There are not as many coach tour operators as there once were across the UK. And there are a lot of coach companies that purely operate coach-hire and do not run their own tour programmes. Other people may hire them to run a bespoke tour and they may do school runs. *Here are some examples of active coach tour companies:*

- **Mainline Coaches** – South Wales
- **Edwards Coaches** – South Wales
- **Barnes Coaches** – Wiltshire
- **Richmond's Coaches** – Cambridgeshire
- **Lockett's Coaches** – Hampshire
- **Durham City Coaches**
- **Skinnners Coaches** – Surrey

## Tour Operators

They generally do not operate their own coach fleets but instead work with other providers. Again, they offer a mixture of tours, holidays and excursions to UK attractions and resorts and of course to overseas destinations. They will sell their tours both to members of the public and to Group Travel Operators (GTOs) and other tour planners such as coach companies. *Examples include:*

- **Saga Holidays**
- **Warner Holidays**
- **Daish's Holidays**
- **Success Tours**
- **Crusader Holidays** – Aylesbury
- **Airedale Travel**
- **Shearings Coach Holidays** – the biggest



## Group Travel Organisers [GTOs]

Group Travel Organisers (GTOs) continue to grow in number and expand across the country. A typical GTO is an individual who has a group of friends, work colleagues, associates or fellow members of a particular group – and they try to arrange day excursions and holidays (using accommodation) for their particular group. *GTOs come from a huge number of different organisations and these could include for example:*

- **The University of the Third Age (U3A)**
- **Probus Clubs**  
(Retired Professional and Business People)
- **National Trust (NT) Members**
- **Retirement Clubs**
- **Employment Clubs** – provided for the employees of a company or organisation

GTOs, like the coach and tour operators, are required to be insured and aware of the legalities and responsibilities of looking after large groups of people, as well as handling their money.

WHITE CASTLE VINEYARD



## Inbound Tour Companies

As the name implies these are companies that focus on bringing overseas customers to the UK to experience a multiplicity of experiences. They may be based overseas or they may also operate from offices in the UK. The inbound market has grown massively over the last ten years and represents a vital segment for the tourism economy - although this is quite vast, diverse and difficult to pigeon-hole as an easily identifiable and coherent set of customers. It changes in response to economic conditions and the ebb and flow of exchange rates. Asian visitors have grown massively over recent years and in particular Chinese visitors. These companies like other tour operators, arrange fully inclusive tours (FITS), tailor made packages and bespoke products. Like some tour operators, they may also call themselves a DMC or destination management company.

*Examples include:*

- **Miramar Travel** – London
- **Scancoming** – London
- **Abbey Ireland and UK**
- **AC Group**
- **Active England**
- **Anderson Travel** – London
- **ASA London – Angela Shanley Associates**
- **Anglo Chinese Executive** – Windsor
- **Around and About Bath**
- **Axis and Globe**
- **Back Roads Touring**

## Tour Wholesalers

These are companies that provide a service to coach companies and to GTOs – providing ideas for fully researched tours. Typically they will offer a range of products – holidays, mini breaks, excursions etc. – that include UK destinations, hotels and attractions. They may specialise in the over 50s market. But they also engage in the inbound tour market. *These include for example:*

- **Great Days Travel Group** – Altringham
- **Norman Allen Group Travel** – Hereford
- **Dunwood Travel** – Staffordshire
- **Albatross Travel** – Kent

# Is your business set up for groups?

Maximise the potential of your operation by developing a group offer that reflects your USPs and appeals to the travel trade.

ROMAN CAERLEON



If we assume for argument's sake that most (not all) groups tend to be mature and of an over 50s demographic, here are some questions:

NEWPORT WETLANDS



## Could your group offer include the following?

Whether you have a hotel, attraction, meal stop or a large destination facility, group customers and tour planners tend to require:

- Lounge space – somewhere to sit down and relax
- Nearby coach parking and somewhere to drop off and pick up
- Accessible toilet facilities for perhaps up to 50 people
- If more than one floor, a lift
- Someone within your business who understands groups and their needs – the contact for the tour planner concerned. (Many group enquires are lost at front of house through inexperienced and un-briefed staff.)
- A 'meet and greet' service on arrival
- If food is provided, a menu with choices that can be pre-ordered if necessary
- Do the group passengers feel as welcome in your establishment as other users?
- Somewhere for the coach driver and tour guide/escort to rest and dine
- Group rates for admission to attractions and for hotel stays
- If a hotel with no lift, has it ground floor rooms?
- Do you ask for a deposit when taking a group booking? [in case they cancel]
- Dedicated promotional material that reflects your group USPs and helps sell your product
- A group offering falling within the overall local / regional group offer and which signposts to other businesses and attractions in the area – things to see and do for groups.



# What to do to get groups

Assuming that you have in place a coherent, joined up and realistic group offer for your business there are effective ways to help you stand out from the crowd and generate sustainable group bookings.



Launch and unveil your business to the travel trade. It is vital to get on the radar of the various tour buying players – GTOs, coach and tour operators etc. There are many ways to do this:



## Use group images and messages

Ensure your marketing communications use images of typical group customers and coaches, and that promotional messages are developed specifically for groups across all relevant marketing channels. For example, website (have a group booking button for easy site negotiation); printed leaflets; e-newsletters; letters; social media posts; mail solicitations; exhibition pop up boards and so on.

RAGLAN CASTLE







## Develop dedicated databases

From the early planning stage, start to develop dedicated databases of the various tour planners, ideally with named individuals and organisation/company names – and ensure that these databases are GDPR compliant. The data underpins your group offer and without it, it will be very difficult to attract group bookings.



## Invite a number of selected tour planners (and partners) to sample your group product

This could for example be a mixture of the tour planners we have mentioned – GTOs, tour operators – and of course they should be the type of tour buyer that has the best fit with your business. Is it UK or overseas tour planners you are most interested in? You can offer a complimentary visit or short stay (if you are a hotel) **but it is important to include either a refundable deposit and/or a cancellation charge for non-attendance.**

This is something rare but vital in our experience as 'FAMS' or familiarisation trips sometimes attract the wrong sort of people. (There exists unfortunately a small minority of individuals – mainly GTOs – who are attracted by the prospect of free-stays, complimentary admission, free theatre tickets and so on. It is a nation-wide problem for the industry and one that affects all areas of the UK.) If you do decide to arrange such an activity – perhaps in conjunction with your local Council – it is best to showcase not just your own product but also a variety of other sites and places to visit in the area – as long as they are complementary to your business of course and not in direct competition.



## Construct a simple yet compelling tour itinerary for the tour planner

This would have your business as a key element but would include other elements that add something to the offering and make it more appealing to tour buyers. GTOs and tour operators rarely arrange a tour based upon just a hotel or a single attraction, it has to be a joined up tour product. This could be already in existence or perhaps your business may fit well within a particular tour schedule or itinerary suggested by another organisation? This is the basis of what you would effectively unveil to the tour planner if you do a 'FAM' or a launch event. It's important to recognise that although groups can be quite diverse in their requirements, in terms of what they want to do and see, generally they do not particularly have an interest in sites that are geared to the needs of small children, team builders, golfers, weddings, corporate customers and so on. That's not to say that in the rural areas of Monmouthshire and Newport that walking, outdoor activities, cycling etc. would not be of interest to certain more niche groups – such as walking groups and other GTOs. It's good to give customers the opportunity to at least try out and experience activities that are slightly different from the more traditional coach party trip. Wye Valley businesses have tried this in the past, when some of the attendees absented. In Southport recently group visitors enjoyed the seafront on bicycles. Horses for courses!

> [See current group travel itineraries here](#)



## Put together a Group Action Plan

Identify the actions you will undertake with relevant partners over the next 36 months. Include your proposed budget and costings of the various activities you feel comfortable and confident in delivering. *These could include:*

- a group launch or showcase for tour planners
- the development of tour itineraries
- attendance at selected group travel and coach tourism exhibitions
- a costed advertising campaign in the travel trade media
- a regular PR campaign
- a social media presence targeting travel trade
- membership of any trade associations that could assist you in gaining high quality group business e.g. [Travel World Association \(TWA\)](mailto:info@travelworldassociation.com) [info@travelworldassociation.com](mailto:info@travelworldassociation.com) [Coach Tourism Association \(CTA\)](mailto:admin@coachtourismassociation.co.uk) [admin@coachtourismassociation.co.uk](mailto:admin@coachtourismassociation.co.uk) [UKInbound](http://UKInbound.org) [events@ukinbound.org](mailto:events@ukinbound.org) [www.coachbuddy.org.uk](http://www.coachbuddy.org.uk)

# Other Ways to Get Group Bookings

## Key Account Meetings

Depending on your resources of time and the availability of personnel, visit tour companies in their offices for pre-arranged meetings where you can explain to them how compelling your group offering is – and maybe mention about a number of incentives you may also be able to provide that company in order for them to include your product in their tours, holidays, excursion programme and so on. These can be arranged by city or area to maximise your time and enable you to achieve as many as four meetings in a single day.

## Showcase Visits to your Business

As mentioned in respect of launching your group offering, this method is, along with key account meetings, the best and most cost effective way of persuading tour buyers to include your site in their respective tour plans. *A typical Showcase or FAM would include:*

- accommodation for one or two nights;
- take place during a shoulder period;
- focus on a carefully constructed and dedicated tour itinerary covering many aspects of the overall area group offering;
- include meals and refreshments;
- utilise the service of a Professional Blue Badge Tour Guide
- take in short visits to the complementary sites and attractions you wish to include;
- include photo-calls for the travel trade media [who would be invited to attend];
- incorporate at some stage a 'meet the group buyer' face to face workshop session where the main players can meet and talk business directly with the tour buyers.

---

**Contact your local authority's tourism department to ask if they're planning a regional Group Buyer Showcase event and FAM trip that your business can participate in.**

Whichever activity you plan, it is essential that you are targeting bone fide tour buyers and in respect of GTOs, that they have provided a touring history as part of a registration form they completed in order to attend the event. Again, a cancellation charge is vital. This puts off time wasters and helps ensure that you have a much more successful event. It is also useful and perhaps more achievable resource-wise [particularly hotels] for businesses to arrange single company FAM trips which include pre-arranged and repeatable elements whereby they can for instance, invite one such company per month. The same criteria of eligibility for attendees applies but this formula would not be suitable for GTOs, only for individual companies [whereas a mix of GTOs and operators would normally attend a bigger showcase event].

Incentivise your offer for coach and tour companies including inbound companies. There are three layers of incentives that can, if properly constructed, help you achieve more group spend from the visiting coaches and groups:



## The Tour Manager

When you talk to the tour manager at a particular company [maybe during a key account meeting, a FAM or at a trade show] try to encourage them to include your product by giving them a trial offer or discount. This can be the difference between getting the company to include your product in their digital and print marketing or not.

## 2

### The Coach Driver

If your group is to arrive on a coach then the coach driver (and any guide/courier) they use, can be very valuable to you. Whilst most coach drivers don't book hotel accommodation (unless they are owner-drivers) they nonetheless have the potential to act as ambassadors for attractions, retail outlets and meal stops they may visit. If they've been incentivised by you then they may well have the discretion to choose your site as opposed to competitor sites.

The retail sector (shopping sites, large meal stops, garden centres, service stations etc) have become experts in capitalising on drivers' discretion. These operations know that group visits are very big business and therefore have in place a number of enticements to secure this trade. Firstly coach drivers and their couriers/guides usually receive complimentary meals or refreshments at such establishments. But this is regarded as an expectation not as an incentive. The main incentive focuses on retail commission paid (perhaps annually) to a registered driver, based on the number of purchasing passengers he/she has brought to that business over a given year. Such a service needs to be well-thought out and deliverable and is best avoided if the business concerned has doubts about being able to deliver. Food and meals are never included in this incentive where commission is concerned. Each establishment is different and where it is seen to work effectively, it is because appropriate accounting systems are in place.

This type of incentive is usually provided by private sector businesses and is less common across the public sector. But it is certainly worth exploring as the potential benefits are considerable. Some sites also encourage group visits by asking coach drivers to mention a particular product whereby the driver gains an agreed percentage figure on leaving the attraction. These items can be anything that is desirable and repeatable. Mill Shops in the Scottish Borders have for many years enticed drivers to promote tins of shortbread and bottles of mead. It is also possible to have a variety of offers covering not just one site but a number of attractions and this could form the basis of any future 'Wye Valley & Vale of Usk Group Incentive Club' or card. But that is best looked at under the heading of 'potential for the future'. Perhaps too the idea of providing a dedicated 'Driver's Room' at attractions is worthy of consideration.



CHEPSTOW TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

## 3

### Coach Passengers

The last but not least category of the three layers of incentives would be for the group/coach passenger. If a business has a 'meet and greet' service in place then this is the opportunity for coach stops, retail outlets, attractions and other facilities to give the passengers discount vouchers to encourage spend, perhaps on certain key products. It is also best to have a suitable food and refreshment offering in place so hungry passengers are able to eat whilst on site [if that is possible] and one that understands the tight schedules that coaches – and typically oversees groups have to adhere to. Discount vouchers are already produced for some towns, e.g. Chepstow, so contact your local authority's tourism department to find out about relevant opportunities in your area.



# Attendance at Trade Shows and Workshops

LLANDEGFEDD  
VISITOR CENTRE



There exists a number of exhibitions and workshops across the country – some arranged by magazines, some by associations and others by travel trade specialists. It is important to engage fully with the various tour buyers and these set piece events are useful opportunities. One or two focus on coach and tour operators (BTTS – British Tourism and Travel Show at the NEC in Birmingham in March [www.tourismshow.co.uk](http://www.tourismshow.co.uk)); GTOS (The Group Leisure and Travel Show at Milton Keynes [www.grouptravelshow.com](http://www.grouptravelshow.com)); international tourists (World Travel Market in London [www.wtm.com](http://www.wtm.com)), Coach and tour operators and GTOs [www.stevereedtourism.co.uk](http://www.stevereedtourism.co.uk); with Group Buyer Forum Workshops North and South each year. There are other smaller and more regional events across the UK but they vary in terms of being able to offer bone fide and active group buyers. Some are very good in that respect and ask attendees for touring histories but in our experience others are sometimes more focused on numbers than quality. It goes without saying that businesses should always send knowledgeable staff with a good understanding of their group offer to these shows and that they should always follow up after each event by contacting the tour buyers they've met. Accompanying your local /regional/ national tourism organisation as a stand partner on the relevant destination stand will help keep costs down. Attendance at shows is a great way to achieve data capture for your growing tour planner databases.



## Advertising, Advertorial and Press Coverage

An important element of your group marketing will be gaining coverage in the travel trade media – although it is not the most important weapon in your armoury. (Of course they would disagree!) There are not many travel trade publications with print and digital platforms extant now. Over recent years several have closed down including high profile titles such as Coach Monthly and Travel GBI. This has left some that still do give value for money, have a reasonable and honest reach to real and active tour buyers and offer a reliable service. As a rule of thumb if you purchase advertising space with any of the competing magazines currently operating then you should always gain 'free' advertorial coverage (your story, feature and copy with pictures) – ideally on the right hand page but elsewhere if need be. Magazines are desperate for your custom and once you've bought an advert in one they will all tread a path to your door.

*So be sure to ask them salient questions:*

- How many 'tour buyers' does their magazine go out to and how often? Some are bi-monthly. Some publications make claims that they are distributed to more GTOs and tour operators than actually exist!
- Can you have advertorial with every group travel advert you place with them?
- Will your advert be included on their digital platform?
- Can they put your story out on their social media?
- What other services do they offer to help you gain new groups?
- Are their readers all active tour planners and not retired?

*Examples of magazines:*

- Group Travel World magazine – Peterborough (GTOs and coach operators)
- Group Leisure Magazine – Milton Keynes (GTOs)
- Coach Tours UK magazine – Peterborough (Coach operators)
- Travel Weekly – London (Travel agents, tour operators)
- Coach and Bus Week magazine (Coach operators)
- GTO magazine – London (GTOs)
- Route One magazine (Coach operators)

Some of these titles are adept at getting a group message over to the buyer. One or two are mainly concerned with the technical side of the industry rather than reaching the actual tour buyers, so it's best to ask for a sample copy before booking space.

## THE PICTURESQUE WYE TOUR



*Designed by Dispirito Design*

# Working with your local Destination Partnership



CHEPSTOW CASTLE

If group travel is identified as a key market for the destination or for your attraction it is also worth considering attainment of the Confederation of Passenger Transport's Coach Friendly status, which demonstrates to coach operators that you are serious about welcoming coaches and that the relevant facilities are in place. Attaining Coach Friendly status for the destination will involve working with members of your local Destination Partnership. (Contact your local authority's tourism department for advice). See requirements of Coach Friendly status.

Work up your group plans with a carefully selected group of like-minded individuals who each share a concern to generate the right sort of group business for the area and their own business. This could be informal meetings on an infrequent basis, with someone from either Monmouthshire or Newport Tourism, or from the relevant Destination Partnership, as an arbiter and coordinator. This type of group could pool its skills and resources to put together a realistic Groups Action Plan, coordinating the various activities, developing the destination for the benefit of groups, and monitoring the resulting group visits to determine return on investment.



# Useful links

## Monmouthshire Tourism

tourism@monmouthshire.gov.uk

## Newport Tourism

tourism@newport.gov.uk

**Bringing Groups to the Wye Valley & Vale of Usk – itineraries, coach parking and group travel guides**

**Confederation of Passenger Transport's Coach Friendly Status requirements**



Funded by the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and Welsh Government.

Research & copy by Steve Reed Tourism Ltd. Design by Height Studio Images reproduced courtesy of Steve Reed Tourism Ltd, Visit Monmouthshire, Newport Tourism, National Trust, Dwr Cymru, White Castle Vineyard, Chepstow Walkers are Welcome. Translation by Monmouthshire County Council

