

Planning a group trip

Everything your driver already knows, and has no polite way to tell you at six in the morning at the kerb. Read it once, a fortnight early, and the day goes the way you pictured it.



Your operator sent you this because they would rather you had it now than find out on the day. Most of it takes five minutes. A few items are federal law and cannot be bent by anybody — those are marked.

WHEN TO DO WHAT

When	What
2–3 months out	Book the coach. Peak season and Saturdays go first. Booking early also lets your numbers move as people confirm.
6 weeks out	Book restaurants and hotels. Tell them it is a motorcoach group and give the number — that changes how they seat and staff you.
2 weeks out	Send your group the boarding time, the address, and the rules on page 3. Confirm the coach details with your operator.
3 days out	Final headcount to your operator. Reconfirm every restaurant and hotel. Ask each one where a 45-foot coach can actually stop.
The night before	Send one message with boarding time and place. Remind them what cannot go under the bus.
On the day	Be there 15 minutes before your group. Keep a printed list. Ring ahead with your ETA.

The single most useful thing on this page

Ring ahead with your ETA — and ring again if it moves by more than twenty minutes. A restaurant holding tables for fifty people at one o'clock has turned other bookings away. A hotel holding twenty rooms has a front desk staffed for you. Both will bend over backwards for a group that keeps them posted, and remember for years the one that did not.

RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS — HOW NOT TO JUST TURN UP

Restaurants

Fifty people walking through a door unannounced is the fastest way to ruin a good day out. Even a place that seats two hundred cannot absorb fifty at once without notice — the kitchen fires in waves and your group ends up eating an hour apart.

- ☐ Reserve **at least two weeks** ahead for any group over twenty.
- ☐ Say the words **motorcoach group** and give the number. It is different from a party of fifty walking in.
- ☐ Ask for a **limited or set menu** — it halves the wait and most places will offer it.
- ☐ Ask **where the coach can sit** while you eat. Many car parks cannot take 45 feet.
- ☐ Collect dietary needs from your group and send them ahead, not on arrival.
- ☐ Confirm how the bill works before you sit down. One bill or fifty is a decision, not a surprise.
- ☐ Ring on the road with your ETA. Ring again if it slips.

Hotels

- ☐ Send the **rooming list** in the format they ask for, by the date they ask for.
- ☐ Confirm **coach parking** in writing — not all hotels have it, and some charge.
- ☐ Tell them your **ETA**, and update it. Late arrivals with no warning get released rooms.
- ☐ Ask about **early check-in** if you arrive before three, and where luggage waits if not.
- ☐ Confirm whether the driver's room is included. Many operators require one; ask yours.
- ☐ Get a name and a mobile number for someone who will actually answer on the day.

Your driver needs somewhere to sleep too

On overnight trips federal rules require your driver to have **8 consecutive hours off duty** before driving again. That is not a preference and he cannot waive it. Book his room when you book yours, and do not plan a 6am departure after an 11pm return.

WHAT GOES UNDER THE BUS — AND WHAT CANNOT



The bays under the coach take a great deal, and your operator will help you load them. But some things are not a house rule — they are federal law, and a driver who carries them is risking his licence and your insurance cover.

Fine	Ask first	Never — this is federal law
Suitcases and holdalls	Coolers (ask about size and whether they may come inside)	Propane tanks — grills, patio heaters, camping stoves
Folding chairs	Alcohol (depends on your operator and the state)	Petrol or diesel cans , full or empty
Sports kit and instruments	Bicycles, large equipment, coolers on wheels	Fireworks of any kind
Pushchairs and walkers	Charcoal, lighter fluid (usually refused)	Compressed gas cylinders — helium, oxygen, camping gas
Shopping and gifts	Anything unusually heavy or awkward	Flammable liquids, solvents, pool chemicals

Why the propane tank really does have to stay home

Federal regulation prohibits hazardous materials on a vehicle carrying passengers for hire, with very narrow exceptions. A propane cylinder in a baggage bay under fifty people is exactly what that rule exists to prevent. **Empty does not help** — an empty cylinder still holds vapour, and is treated the same.

If your day involves a grill, arrange for the propane to travel separately by car, or buy it at the other end. Every experienced group leader has had this conversation once. Have it two weeks early instead of at the kerb.

49 CFR 177.870 — hazardous materials on passenger-carrying vehicles

Medical oxygen a passenger needs is handled differently — tell your operator well in advance and they will arrange it properly.

ON THE COACH — WHAT TO TELL YOUR GROUP



Send these to your group before the day. Every one of them is easier read in a message on Tuesday than heard from a driver on Saturday.

Rule	Why
No smoking or vaping. Anywhere, including the toilet.	Federal law on a commercial coach, and the smoke alarm will find you.
Eating and drinking — ask your operator.	Some allow it, some do not, and some allow it with lids only. Find out and tell your group, rather than letting fifty people guess.
The toilet is for emergencies.	There is no running water and it is emptied by hand at the end. Use the rest stops. Your driver will schedule them roughly every two to three hours.
Stay seated while moving.	A coach stops harder than a car and there are no seatbelts on many.
Keep the aisle clear.	It is the emergency exit route. Bags go overhead or below.
Be back at the coach on time.	Your driver is on a legal clock that does not pause for stragglers. Fifteen minutes late at every stop is an hour by evening.
Alcohol only if agreed in advance.	Depends on your operator and the states you cross. Never up front, never open containers where prohibited.
Tell the driver about accessibility needs early.	A lift needs planning; a seat near the front does not, but he has to know.

Headcount, every single time

Count your group onto the coach and count them off at every stop. Not a rough look down the aisle — an actual count against a printed list. **Your driver is not permitted to leave without you, and he is also not able to tell whether the person missing is in the shop or gone home with a relative.** One nominated counter, one list, every stop. It is the difference between a fifteen-minute stop and an hour.

THINGS PEOPLE WISH THEY HAD KNOWN

Where the coach can actually stop	A 45-foot coach cannot use most drop-off loops, drive-throughs, or multi-storey car parks. Check with every venue, not just the first.
Tolls, parking and permits	Some cities charge coaches to enter or park. Ask your operator what is in the quote and what is not.
Driver hours are a hard limit	10 hours driving, 15 hours on duty. A very long day may legally need two drivers — ask early, not the week before.
Tipping the driver	Customary and appreciated, usually collected by the group leader. Ask your operator what is normal in your area.
Luggage weight	Bays hold a lot but not everything. One case each is a fair rule for a coach of fifty.
Wi-Fi and outlets vary	Do not promise your group something the coach may not have. Check the listing or ask.
Weather changes plans	Agree in advance who decides, and what happens to deposits if a trip is called off.
Send one message, not six	One group message with time, place, rules and your mobile number. People screenshot it.

THE FIVE THAT MATTER MOST

- Book restaurants and hotels early, and say **motorcoach group**.
- Ring ahead with your ETA, and ring again when it changes.
- No propane, petrol, fireworks or gas cylinders. This one is law.
- Count your people on and off at every single stop.
- Your driver is on a legal clock. Late stops cost you the end of the day.

Disclaimer. This guide is general information for group organisers and is not legal advice. Federal rules cited here (49 CFR 395.5, 49 CFR 177.870) are summarised in plain language and may change; the citations are given so you can check the current text yourself. Individual operators set their own policies on alcohol, eating, coolers, luggage and tipping, and those policies vary — always confirm with the company you have booked. Station Bus Nation is a directory and is not a party to your booking.