

The touring work

Did you know you can connect with touring companies? There is a whole layer of the industry that books coaches every week, plans a year ahead, and never posts a job on a quote board. This is who they are and how you get in front of them.



Most owner-operators live on one-off charters — a church, a wedding, a school. Good work, but it arrives when it arrives. Tour work is the other half of the business: repeat itineraries, booked months out, with people whose entire job is finding a reliable coach and keeping it. Win one tour operator and you may have filled a season.

The short version

Tour companies are not looking for the cheapest coach. They are looking for the operator who **answers the phone, sends the certificate of insurance the same day, and does not cancel in August**. If that is you, the only thing standing between you and this work is that they have never heard your name.

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WHO ACTUALLY BOOKS COACHES

Who	What they do	What they need from you
Tour operators	Package and sell multi-day trips — casino runs, foliage tours, national parks, motorcoast holidays.	Availability far ahead, a firm price that holds, and a driver who is part of the product.
Receptive operators	Handle inbound groups arriving from overseas or out of state on someone else's itinerary.	Punctuality, clean equipment, and a driver comfortable with airport pickups and language gaps.
Group tour planners	Book on behalf of clubs, churches, alumni groups, senior communities.	Patience, help with luggage, and one point of contact who replies.
Student travel companies	Move school and band groups — DC, Williamsburg, Orlando.	Background-checked drivers, strong safety rating, overnight capability.
DMOs / CVBs	The tourist boards for a city or region. They do not book you, but they refer.	A listing they can hand to an enquiring planner.
Tour guides	Step-on guides who ride your coach and narrate. Often a one-person business.	A driver who works with them rather than around them. They recommend you to everyone.

The step-on guide is the cheapest marketing you will ever do

A step-on guide works with a dozen operators a year and is asked "who should we use?" constantly. Treat one well — hold the door, let them run the microphone, get them a coffee at the stop — and they will put your name forward for years without being asked. Nobody in this business is better connected for less money.

HOW TO GET IN FRONT OF THEM



1. Be findable

The first thing a planner does is search. Make sure a real listing comes up with your coach count, seat counts, home base, the states you run, your USDOT number and photographs of the actual equipment. A directory listing that says what you have costs you nothing and answers the question they were going to phone about.

2. Join the rooms they are already in

Where	Why it is worth it
ABA — American Bus Association	Its Marketplace event exists specifically to sit operators across a table from tour operators for scheduled appointments. Expensive, but it is the industry's front door.
NTA — National Tour Association	More tour-planner heavy than ABA. Same idea: prearranged appointments, not a trade-show booth.
Your state motorcoach association	Cheapest and often the best return. Regional planners look here first, and the members refer overflow to each other.
Your DMO / CVB	Ask to be listed as a local transportation partner. Free in many cities, and they field the calls you never see.
Station Bus Nation	A directory built for the operator, not the broker. Customers reach you directly and you keep the whole fare.

APPROACHING A TOUR COMPANY



3. Approach them properly

- ☐ Send a **one-page capability sheet**, not a paragraph: coaches, seat counts, year, amenities, home base, radius, USDOT and MC numbers, insurance limits, safety rating.
- ☐ Attach **real photographs** of your equipment, inside and out, taken clean and in daylight.
- ☐ Say what you are **good at**, and be honest about what you do not do. Turning down one bad fit buys credibility for everything else.
- ☐ Give a **direct mobile number** and answer it. Planners lose deals to voicemail and remember who picked up.
- ☐ Follow up **once**, a fortnight later. Then leave them be — they file you and call when a coach falls out.

What a capability sheet actually says

One page. Company name, USDOT and MC numbers, home base and the radius you run. Then the fleet, line by line: year, make, seat count, restroom, Wi-Fi, outlets, monitors, ADA lift. Then insurance limits and safety rating. Then a photograph of each coach. Then a name and a mobile number.

That is the entire document, and it answers every question a planner would otherwise have to ring you to ask. Keep it as a PDF on your phone so you can send it from a car park in ninety seconds.

BE READY BEFORE YOU ASK

A tour company that likes you will ask for paperwork within a day. Having it in one folder, ready to send, separates the operators who get the contract from the ones who get a polite email.

Have ready	Why they ask
Certificate of insurance, with them named as additional insured on request	Almost every contract requires it. Ask your agent how fast they can issue one — that speed is now part of your sales pitch.
USDOT and MC numbers	They will look you up before they reply. Know what your public record says.
FMCSA safety rating and inspection history	Satisfactory rating and a clean record. Some tour companies have a hard floor and will not negotiate.
Written cancellation and deposit terms	Professional operators have them in writing. It reads as experience.
Driver credentials — CDL with passenger and air-brake endorsements, medical card	Student travel work usually adds background checks on top.
Equipment sheet with seat counts, year, amenities, ADA capability	They are matching your coach to a group size and a promise already sold to customers.
A named backup plan	The first real question is often "what happens if the coach breaks?" Have an answer with a name in it.

Where the community comes in

The backup answer is easier when you are not alone. An operator with a network of other operators can say "if my coach goes down, there are four owners within an hour who will cover it, and I have covered for them." That sentence wins tour contracts. It is also, more or less, the whole reason Station Bus Nation exists.

PRICING, SEASONS AND THE MISTAKES THAT COST MONEY

Quote the whole day, not the miles	Tour work includes waiting. Price driver hours, deadhead, overnight room, tolls and parking, or you will lose money on a trip that looked good.
Hold your price for the season	Planners sell trips to the public months ahead and cannot absorb a price change. Give a rate you can live with in July.
Know your season	Autumn foliage, spring student travel, casino runs year-round. Sell into the season before it starts, not during it.
Driver hours are the real constraint	10 hours driving, 15 on duty, 8 consecutive off. A multi-day itinerary that ignores this is not a schedule, it is a fine. Read the itinerary against the clock before you sign.
Get the itinerary in writing	Every stop, every timing, every overnight. Verbal changes on the road are how disputes start.
Do not take the whole calendar from one company	Tour work is wonderful until the one company that fills your year restructures. Keep charter customers alive alongside it.
Say no to the itinerary you cannot legally run	The planner will respect it, and the one who does not is the one who would have blamed you later.

THE FIVE-STEP VERSION

- Get a real listing up with photographs, seat counts and your DOT number.
- Join your state motorcoach association this year. ABA or NTA when you can afford it.
- Build a one-page capability sheet and a folder with insurance, credentials and terms in it.
- Be good to every step-on guide who rides your coach.
- Price the whole day, read every itinerary against the hours rules, and answer the phone.

Disclaimer. This guide is general business information for motorcoach operators and is not legal, insurance, tax or regulatory advice. Federal hours-of-service limits are summarised in plain language from 49 CFR 395.5 and may change — check the current text before relying on it. Association names, membership costs and event formats are described for orientation only and are set by those organisations, not by us; confirm details directly with them. Insurance requirements, contract terms and background-check rules vary by client and by state. Station Bus Nation is a directory, is not a broker, and is not a party to any contract you sign.