

Austrian Professional Leisure Establishment Association

Profile of the tourist guide profession



Information, 4. April 2013

Tourist guides in Austria

The legal status of the self-employed tourist guide

The work of self-employed tourist guides is regulated pursuant to § 108 of the trade regulations (Gewerbeordnung). They meet strict qualification criteria that are demonstrated by passing an official exam. A tourist guide is officially recognised. Only certified tourist guides may be enter into an employment contract. Tourist guides may use a standard international job title. To pursue their profession commercially in their core area, tourist guides must be based in Austria.

The officially registered and accredited tourist guide is by law a member of the organisation of economic chambers as representatives and service centre of industry, namely the respective professional group of leisure businesses. As a country-wide umbrella organisation the professional association of leisure businesses in the Austrian chamber of commerce represents the interests of tourist guides. Through the chamber of commerce tourist guides have the option of joining the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations.

Definition and rights - delineations

It is the job of tourist guides to take visitors on guided tours to show and explain to them Austria's historic wealth and its artistic and cultural heritage, the sights of towns and the countryside (especially public places and buildings, monuments and places of remembrance, collections, museums, churches, monasteries, theatres and other entertainment venues, exhibitions, characteristic landscape features, flora and fauna, industrial and commercial sites and so on) the societal , social and political situation on a national and international level, and other cultural, sports and public events. In some cases, the tourist guide also assumes the tasks and activities of a travel tour guide such as transfers and accompanying tour groups abroad. A qualified tourist guide certified in Austria differs from the activities of other professional groups who are entitled to provide commentary to an extent according to the industrial code or other legal provisions (such as tour guides, palace, castle and building guides, hiking and mountain guides or commentary in the vehicles of commercial passenger transportation, such as cab or taxi drivers), without having to hold an official qualification.

Tourist guides from the European Economic Area may work as tourist guides in Austria if their professional qualification has been recognised as equivalent by the Federal Minister of Economics and Labour in an equivalency procedure

according to the industrial code and they are not based in Austria (free rendering of services). Except for these very few exceptions under law, only certified Austrian tourist guides (or those certified in Austria) have the right to take people on guided tours in a professional capacity. The certified tourist guide (employee exam = qualifying exam) who is not the holder of a commercial license may only work for an independent, self-employed tourist guide. In his professional capacity the tourist guide is equally responsible for Austrian visitors and visitors from abroad.

Training and qualification

To obtain a trade license as a tourist guide the candidate must pass a strict official qualifying exam, including a trader exam. This examination also includes accounting, law, a guided tour for demonstration purposes and evidence of proficiency in at least one foreign language.

Prior to the examination, a compulsory training course of at least 250 hours must be completed at an officially recognised educational institution (institutes for economic promotion of the chambers of commerce, vocational training institutes of the chambers for workers and employees). The training course conveys in-depth knowledge and expertise in general and regional history, cultural and art history, local history and folklore, politics, fundamentals of economics and social studies, accounting, business administration and law, tourist and economic geography, tourism and First Aid. This is further supplemented by field trips and excursions, practical foreign language lessons, rhetoric and behavioural strategy. The examination and trade license authorises tourist guides to work all over Austria. The guides will take special care to prepare for guided tours outside their own region or expertise and seek to cooperate with local guides. The same applies to tourist guides working outside of Austria, where they must comply with the local legal provisions. Tourist guides also regularly attend further training courses offered by their representatives (Academy for Continuing Training of Tourist Guides , WAF), read specialist literature, visit museums and exhibitions, go on educational trips and attend national and international symposiums. These activities also serve to improve and practice their foreign language skills.

The guided tours

Tourist guides are employed by Austrian and foreign travel agencies, hotels, tourist agencies, public authorities, schools, and by private individuals. Tourist guides may also offer their own events such as walks or guided tours of the countryside or guided tours to interesting and picturesque towns and villages. Tourist guides are in particular available to offer tours during official occasions such as state receptions. The same applies to tours of companies for pupils on school trips for example. Tourist guides always prepare their guided tours thoroughly. They will in particular take account of the visitors' cultural background and show consideration for their social and religious approach to history and culture. Tourist guides also endeavour to communicate to visitors an appreciation of the places they visit, free from prejudice or one-sided political and other interpretations. They are aware of the importance of their job and their interaction with visitors for tourism and the leisure industry. This

responsibility will be reflected in their conduct and appearance, in particular appropriate (correct and smart) choice of clothing, manners, choice of language and their efforts to meet their clients' needs.

When exercising their profession tourist guides are considerate of the work of other tourist guides.

It is of particular concern to tourist guides to give visitors an understanding of our country, of the people who live here and their culture. They endeavour to protect the good name and reputation of the tourism industry of our country by encouraging visitors to treat our environment, flora and fauna, sights, monuments and local customs and traditions with respect.

Other services

On request and by arrangement tourist guides, as detailed in the trade licence, can also draw up entire guided tour programmes and provide thorough expert advice. In addition, many tourist guides specialise in certain areas such as guided bicycle and riding tours.

Tourist guides are often the only, closest and most important contact persons for visitors to our country. They will therefore as much as possible also offer advice on other leisure and holiday activities; in particular they will recommend good hotels and restaurants, ticket offices and travel agencies and point visitors to shopping, entertainment and sports facilities as well as interesting cultural and social events. However, unless they hold a relevant trade licence, such services cannot be directly booked through the tourist guide.

Fees

Tourist guide fees are by arrangement.

Contract and cancellation terms

The Austrian chamber of commerce, the professional association of leisure businesses, recommends contract and cancellation terms, which come into effect by individual arrangement.

Queries^[1]:

If you have any queries, please contact the professional association of leisure and sports businesses in your federal state, who will be happy to help.

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