

Welcome to the Provider Island

I'm Gordon Burgett and since I'm in charge of the Visual Travel Tours tour preparation, we will touch hands early in the process, mainly when you send your initial query. So let me share some easy-to-follow steps that will make the process quicker and the acceptance of your project much easier (and faster).

Incidentally, since I read the initial queries and must give you the "go-ahead" to send in your tour, it's only fair that you know where I'm coming from. I have 1700+ freelance articles in print (more than 2/3 of those are in travel) and one of my 36 published books is a top-selling travel writing book, the *Travel Writer's Guide*. Sorry to boast a bit, but you must know that I've successfully done many times what I'm requesting of you, the top-flight execution of an exciting idea. I don't care if you've been in print 5,000 times or this is your first toe in the water, all you have to do is wow me with a place I'd like to tour, convince me you can put that wow in words and photos, then do it.

Our demands are a lot like the magazines and newspapers I sold to, but the rewards are better. The flat fee of \$150 we pay when we accept your tour submission (see [PAYMENT TO TOUR PROVIDERS](#)) will keep you off the bread line, but the 10% or more royalty can get you caviar almost forever (see [BONUS ROYALTIES](#)). We also encourage you to modify what you send us and sell it to others, widely, for more bread and caviar. (See [ADDITIONAL BENEFITS TO TOUR PROVIDERS](#) and [MAKING EVEN MORE MONEY FROM YOUR TOUR](#)).

Gordon Burgett, Executive Editor, VTT

• 1st Time Users

- [Read All Materials](#)

• Providers

- [To Submit Tours](#)
- [To Promote Your Tour](#)



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Kinds of Tours We Buy

Before focusing on tour ideas, what must all of the tours we buy include?

- They must be accurate, current, honest, and doable by a tourist.
- They also must convey a sense of place (of where the tourist is and why at each step).
- A great tour infuses a sense of joy or at least enlightenment at sharing its words and photos.
- Tours we buy have the above, plus a “wow!” factor throughout, reinforced by great visuals that are appealing, well integrated, eye-catching, and clear.

Travelers can get general overviews and stock photos from the Chambers of Commerce, the Web, or the sites themselves. We go a step beyond. We simply don't buy overviews. We are unique because we offer guided tours, a kind of hand-in-hand tours, from place to place so the VTT Tour buyer can see it before they arrive, experience it when they are there, and relive it later.

We want you to organize that trip, research and photo it, then take us and our buyers on it, breaking it into about five chapters, using directions or landmark features to go from A to B to C, and much more, weaving the key facts, the history, the sense of the place, and special insights at each place and along the way. You can inject yourself a bit too: if you recommend a restaurant, what's best to eat there? If we're atop the peak, what's the best photo angle? Mostly, though, give us the best tour imaginable.

Want to see two actual model VTT Tours?

When the public previews VTT Tours for sale, they will see and hear the introduction (about one minute) to help them decide if they would like to add that program to their trip preparation or travel collection.

But we want you to get a more complete sense of what we are eager to buy so we have opened up the first three segments of two California tours so you can see how the final product will appear. From [Browse Tours](#), if you select either California tour, its introduction will load and play automatically. Anytime you are logged onto Provider Island you can also see the second or third sections (after the introduction is over). Just click on “Play Demonstration Video” next to the section title and it will load and play. (On these samples, don't click on more than one at a time or they will play simultaneously, in which case you must start again!)

Here are the sample model VTT Tours:

[Sausalito, San Francisco's Favorite Getaway](#)
[Purisima, California's Most Interesting Mission](#)

What to write about?

- We will sell more tours (read more royalties) to exciting places that travelers already visit and love. Why? Because they will urge family and friends to buy them!
- Still, we also want equally as captivating lesser-known places, particularly if they are on well-traveled highways or near other, main attractions (like Sausalito, just across the Bay by ferry from San Francisco, and the Purisima Mission, in Lompoc, near the key freeway linking L.A. and San Francisco).
- Tours can be locations one travels to, a specific site or series of sites at the location, a travel event (where the travel itself is the key element, like cruises, cycling jaunts, or car rallies), or a journey on which one visits many sites (like a 100-mile section of a key freeway with five or six extraordinary, nearby stops along the way, or many interesting facts and stories about the scenery enjoyed from a train or car).
- The higher the difficulty factor of the tour, the lower, usually, will be its purchasing power; that is, more will buy a walking tour up an easily-reached, eye-popping 1,000-foot peak in Virginia or California than one about scaling Mt. Everest in Nepal.
- Unless the site or attraction is extensive (like the Disneylands or the Grand Canyon), more will be interested in a one-day in-out tour than several days or a week.

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Formats:

Tour Length:
30 minutes or
25-45 min range

What's First?

Read through the site,
then query our editor.
Tell us about yourself
and the tour concept.

Go-Ahead

If approved, send:
Script
Photos
Descriptions
Pronunciation Guide
5 Promotional Tips
A Map
Your Bio
Your Photo

For details see
Submission FORM

- At the outset we are seeking top world destinations (112 of them) and other key cities in the United States (63 more), and we are paying a 2% - 3% bonus, respectively, for them for the first 50 we buy in each category. Incidentally, we are also paying a 1% bonus on the first 100 tours we buy of any category. (See [BONUS ROYALTIES](#) for the specific cities.)
- We are also very interested in tours with a nature core, be it hiking in the national forests, a short trek near and on the Appalachian Trail, scaling peaks, bird-watching, fishing in the hinterlands or on the coasts, cross-country skiing, a day of snorkeling, seeing the hidden lakes near Yosemite...
- And don't forget the battlefields, great museums, a night exploring the Riverwalk in San Antonio, exciting neighborhoods in New York City or Seattle, major churches, unique libraries, a stroll through Harvard, Hannibal, Santa Cruz, Galena, Seattle's Skid Row and environs, Branson...
- The bigger the city, the more pocket tours it contains. Chicago, for example, can be broken into six or eight distinct regions or neighborhoods, each with a tour begging to be created. There's the eating tours of Chicago, by ethnic restaurants, best cuisine combos, or hopping spots later on; the architectural tour; a city parks and beaches walk; a revisit to the 1896 World's Columbian Exposition (where Ferris built his first giant wheel); the lakeshore museums; the Al Capone tour, and many more interest combinations.
- If we already have a tour, will we buy another of the same place? You bet, if it's as good or better than what we are selling—and as long as both sell, we'll just let them fight it out! In the beginning, though, we are more interested in breadth than duplication.
- What if you have a great idea and it hasn't been mentioned or hinted at? Don't be shy: query us. At worst, we will say no, not for us. But if it makes sense, would interest lots of buyers, and you sell it well in the query, now is the time for innovation—and completion!
- Start with a place you love, know, and want others to share, send a query about that, and let's get it on the market. Then write down the 20 places you most want to see in the world (particularly if you've already seen them) and get started running up your royalty checks...

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Tour Overview

Our goal is to purchase 2,000 quality tours. The all-inclusive visual VTT Tour tour will be sold on disc for \$19.95; specific downloadable mobile device formats each sell digitally for \$15.95. We also sell a text/photo format for \$12.95 to view on your mobile device or for print.

You will provide us with (a) a full script of the audio component of the tour, in final edited form, (b) two to three digital .jpg photos per minute of text, (c) a pronunciation guide of foreign or uncommon words to assist the narrator, if needed, and (d) the other elements required to help sell the tour: two tour descriptions, five tips, your biography and photo, five excellent digital photos of the site to be used for promotional purposes, and perhaps a map.

All of the prices and formats are at www.visualtraveltours.com. VTT may offer promotional/seasonal discounts, and of course we reserve the right to change prices. Royalties are calculated on the payment received at the time of sale, and will also be paid at the same rate for versions of the tour translated into other languages.

Length of tours: 30 minutes is the standard but 25-45 minutes is the acceptable range. (Longer tours, say 90 minutes visiting different sections of a large city or site, should be packaged as three distinct tours. Each must be self-contained, however, and approved at the querying process.)

A 30-minute tour will include a script that takes 30 minutes to read. It is not measured by the time it takes the listener to walk and observe the area described. We assume they will turn off the listening/viewing device to travel from point to point, unless you provide audio-visual text to fill in that time and you tell the listener that is what you are doing—and that only when the person can walk (or ride as a passenger) safely while listening and viewing.

The tour should begin with a one-minute introduction that is an overview of the tour, including 12 photos. (This is probably the most profitable bit of writing you will do because the buyers will see it free—and buy the rest of your tour if it's honestly intriguing.) The tour should be broken into chapters of roughly 5 to 10 minutes to allow the listener to select chapters to hear in their preferred order—five sections or chapters are ideal. This also helps us display the related photos quicker; think of your script as different tracks on a CD.

Safety:

While we will make the usual legal disclaimer on the package or product regarding safety and caution, please also include all prudent cautions that you feel are needed about the safety and well-being of your clients! This is particularly important on walking or driving tours where there is danger of vehicles or uneven terrain. The user's safety and well-being must be an important consideration in every directive you include in your script.

Incidentals:

At the querying process, if the tour is given a go-ahead, the potential provider will be sent a link to an online form, the **Provider Profile**, to complete before their first tour is accepted, mostly so we know how to contact you and where to send your royalties, as well as to fulfill our legal obligations (which includes reporting payments and royalties to the I.R.S. Sorry.)

When we use the term “final, submitted tour” that means your tour as you submit it to us for acceptance, having queried; received a “go-ahead”; prepared the script, photos, and additional elements required for acceptance, and submitted your total packet according to the [SUBMISSION FORM](#).

Payment to Tour Providers

“What’s in this for me?” is a valid starting question.

We will pay you at two levels, both directly from us to you.

(1) At the most immediate level, we will pay you \$150 when your tour is accepted for production.

(2) The second level of payment concerns royalties. We will deposit royalties of 10% of your tour’s sold price into your personal VTT account the moment each tour is bought. (After purchase, we’ll show you how to monitor your account’s holdings at any time.) You will receive those accumulated holdings three times a year, sent within a week from January 15, May 15, and September 15. (In the rare case a tour is returned for refund, the royalties already deposited or paid from that tour will be deducted from the then current account total.) For example, if your tour sells for \$15.95 and we sell 100, that’s \$159.50 in earned royalties. If we sell the same quantity every four months, that’s about \$480 a year above the initial payment of \$150, and if that continues for five years, \$2,400. But we want to sell many thousands of your tours, not hundreds, for a long time. It’s a great earn-while-you-sleep sinecure!

(3) Some tours will be selected for translation into other languages. The provider will continue to earn 10% royalties on those tours, calculated and paid as indicated in (2).

(4) At times VTT will also offer bonus royalties of 1% to 3% for specific tours. If the provider meets the requirements for those bonuses (see [BONUS ROYALTIES](#)), the income earned will also be calculated and paid as indicated in (2).

(5) Providers will receive a complimentary copy of their tour in final sales form.

(6) There is a third, indirect way to earn from your tour, or others’. VTT is pleased to offer the provider additional copies of their own tours or those of any other provider, in sales form, at a discount of 30% of the list price. You directly sell the tours and you earn about a third more!

Please also see [ADDITIONAL BENEFITS TO TOUR PROVIDERS](#).

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Upon Tour Acceptance:

\$150 per tour

Plus
On-going
Royalties of 10% plus
1 to 5%
Bonus
Royalties

30% off on copies of your tour
you re-sell

AND
[click here for
ADDITIONAL BENEFITS](#)

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Bonus Royalties

There will be times when VTT highlights specific site locations by offering a bonus percentage royalty to those who query, then complete an accepted tour within the stipulations listed. As you can imagine, we have lots of key spots we want to cover at the outset. But the completion window for these bonuses might be short.

These are presently divided into four groups:

- the first 100 tours we buy are each worth a permanent bonus of 1% in addition to the base 10%
- the first 50 tours bought from the **TOP WORLD CITY DESTINATIONS** are worth a permanent bonus of 3% in addition to the base 10%, and
- the first 50 tours bought from the **MAJOR U.S. CITIES** (not in the first list) are worth a bonus royalty of 2%.
- **Parks**, such as Yosemite, and **Tourist Destinations**, such as Branson are always popular. So we are offering another 2% bonus for the first 20 tours bought from those lists.

It works like this:

- You query first.
- With a “go-ahead” (approval to submit) from the query, you have three months for completion of that query. No extensions, and all the requirements for regular tour submissions prevail.
- For some cities we may give a go-ahead to more than one provider. All that are completed in the bonus time period will receive the bonus royalty.
- If you submit a tour after the bonus deadline, you will still receive the base 10% royalty.

Can a person receive more than one bonus? It’s possible right now. If your final, submitted tour for any of the cities above (none are on both lists) was accepted, you would receive 2% or 3% if you were among the first 50 in that category and completed it within three-months from getting the “go-ahead,” and if that completion was also among the first 100 tours we bought, you’d receive another 1%. Good luck

**Here are the TOP WORLD CITY DESTINATIONS
for which we will pay a 3% bonus royalty for the first 50 tours accepted.**

Abu Dhabi	Hamburg	Montreal
Antwerp	Heidelberg	Moscow
Atlanta	Helsinki	Munich
Bangkok	Hong Kong	Naples
Berlin	Houston	New Delhi
Boston	Innsbruck	Oahu/Honolulu
Budapest	Istanbul	Oslo
Buenos Aires	Jerusalem	Reykjavik
Cairo	Krakow	São Paulo
Cancún	La Havana	Seattle
Cape Town	Las Vegas	Seoul
Copenhagen	Lisbon	Seville
Dresden	London	Shanghai
Florence	Luxembourg City	Singapore
Fôz do Iguacú	Marseille	Stockholm
Geneva	Mecca	Taipei
Glasgow (GB)	Melbourne	Vienna
Gothenburg	Mexico City	Warsa
Granada	Miami	
Guangzhou	Monaco	

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We Pay Upon Tour Acceptance:

\$150 per tour

Plus
On-going
Royalties of 10% plus
1 to 5%
Bonus
Royalties

30% off on copies of your tour to
re-sell

AND
click here for
ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

**Here are the MAJOR U.S. CITIES (not in the previous list)
worth a 2% bonus royalty for the first 50 tours accepted.**

Albuquerque	Kansas City, MO	Portland, OR
Atlanta	Lexington, KY	Raleigh, NC
Austin	Lincoln, NE	Reno, NV
Baltimore	Long Beach, CA	Sacramento
Buffalo	Madison, WI	San Antonio
Charlotte, NC	Memphis	San Jose, CA
Cincinnati	Mesa, AZ	St. Louis, MO
Cleveland	Milwaukee	St. Paul, MN
Colorado Springs	Minneapolis	St. Petersburg, FL
Columbus, OH	Nashville	Tampa, FL
Dallas	New Orleans	Tucson
Denver	Oklahoma City	Tulsa
Detroit	Omaha	Virginia City, VA
Fort Worth	Phoenix	
Indianapolis	Pittsburgh, PA	

**National Parks, Parkways, Recreation Areas, and Seashore
worth a 2% bonus royalty for the first 20 tours accepted.**

Acadia NP	Grand Teton NP
Blue Ridge Parkway	Great Smoky Mountains NP
Cape Cod NS	Lake Mead NRA
Cuyahoga Valley NP	Olympic NP
Delaware Water Gap NRA	Rocky Mountain NP
Everglades NP	Sequoia NP
Gateway NRA	Yellowstone NP
George Washington Parkway	Yosemite NP
Glacier Bay NP	Zion NP

**MOST VISITED U.S. TOURIST ATTRACTIONS
worth a 2% bonus royalty for the first 20 tours accepted**

American Museum of Natural History, New York City	Navy Pier, Chicago
Atlantic City Boardwalk, NJ	Niagara Falls, NY
Busch Gardens Africa, Tampa Bay, FL	San Antonio Riverwalk
Disneyland Park, Anaheim, CA	SeaWorld, Orlando, FL
Faneuil Hall Marketplace, Boston	SeaWorld, San Diego, CA
Las Vegas Strip	Temple Square, Salt Lake City, Utah
Metropolitan Museum, New York City	Times Square, New York City
National Mall and Memorial Parks, Washington, DC	Universal Studios, Hollywood, CA
	Waikiki Beach, Oahu, Hawaii

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Additional Benefits to Tour Providers

In writing, the difference between surviving and prospering is taking the same knowledge—in this case, the facts, quotes, and anecdotes you gather for your tour—and reworking them, with your photos, for related markets. The best and fastest way to do that is to gather lots of legitimate, interesting information at the outset (as you must do for your VTT tour) and then augment and repackage that from different slants and angles. Those secondary sales have a delightful greenness to them that might bring in far more income than the tour itself! (Having said that, we're concurrently working 24/7 to make your tour wildly successful and profitable.)

INDIRECT BENEFITS from having created an accepted tour for VTT:

(1) Since we will purchase first print and audio rights of the tour when accepted, we encourage you to significantly rewrite the information gathered and sell it in other formats as often and as widely as possible to non-competing markets. For example, newspaper articles are often bought on a simultaneous submission basis for \$75-350 or so, plus photos, while general and specialty magazines often pay into the thousands of dollars per article. (My book, the *Travel Writer's Guide*, shows how professionals sell regularly to those markets, as I did for most of my 1700+ freelance articles in print.)

(2) You can use much of your tour material, significantly rewritten, to produce booklets or even books about the areas researched, which can be self-published and widely promoted. Are there books already? They won't stay current forever. (For a different, very profitable slant, see my new book, *Niche Publishing*)

(3) If you live in the area reported, you can offer local tours at which you can sell your VTT tour (plus your own booklets or books). These can bring in from \$100-1000+ for the tours, plus the additional product profits.

(4) Add to that speaking about the area to visiting organizations, associations, or corporations (on site or at their meetings or conventions), where again you can sell your VTT tour and additional products. There's another \$100-\$1000+, plus product profits, to your coffers.

(5) Photos are like those cats with nine lives, they can be sold again and again on a one-time rights basis. Check Rohn Engh's most recent edition of *Sell and Resell Your Photos*.

(6) You can also enhance the likelihood of your tour being sold more often and longer by simply checking at the site(s) you are writing about to see if they sell similar products or have a selling venue functioning, then share that with us. Our sales staff will make the distribution contact but you can help by getting the outlet's name, address, and phone (or email address) and sharing that with us. (Please, though, don't try to set up this distribution in our name. That is more likely to scare them away. It's best made when the product is packaged and is part of our professional selling campaign. Rest assured, we won't dawdle trying to increase your royalties!)

(7) Finally, your qualifications (as a VTT tour producer, tour guide, article writer, photographer, and speaker) make you an ideal and valuable independent media contact person. It's as simple as contacting all media (TV, radio, web, newspaper, and local book publishers) and giving them the necessary contact data, after showing how you qualify to speak for the site or topic. This brings valuable attention to your other, profitable endeavors and products and further establishes your expertise about the site or topic. It's a key step in empire building, with you the emperor or empress. (For specifics about empire building, see my newsletter at www.gordonburgett.com/nl.htm.)

Want some additional ideas on how to generate more income from your tours and the add-on activities above? See [MAKING EVEN MORE MONEY FROM YOUR TOUR...](#)

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Sell your tour well
beyond our website

Learn how to repackage
your material for other
markets

Submission Process

It's a four-step process from idea to getting the accepted tour posted on our website to getting much-earned money into your pocket or purse. (See Highlights in the sidebar.)

Let's explore those four steps more fully, to answer - in anticipation - questions that might arise.

(1) We need to know what you propose to sell us before you invest significant time, effort, and skill only to find out that we are glutted with tours of the Lost City or that we don't think others will buy it, so we won't either. So it all starts with a short but important query letter. (See [QUERY LETTER](#) for details and a [SAMPLE QUERY](#).)

(2) We are eager to buy first-rate tours and are certain that the best ones come from you. But we also need to maintain a sensible buying and preparation flow, and that takes place at the query step.

If we send you an email saying "yes," you are half way to the gold. Go ahead and research, visit, photo, write, verify, edit—all of the things professional journalists do—and when you are certain it's as good as you can make it, go to (3). We haven't the staff to walk you through the writing or photography. We are busy reading queries, reviewing final submissions, and preparing your products to sell so we must assume that if you get a "go-ahead," you have the moxie (or helping friends) to create the tour.

(3) That's as clear as we can make it—when you have your "go-ahead" tour in excellent shape, get it to us. Don't rush (the site isn't going to disappear) but don't dawdle either (the royalty clock doesn't tick until the tour's on the market).

Remember that the final, submitted tour consists of a compelling script (see [SCRIPT](#) and [SAMPLE SCRIPT](#)), enough knock-out photos to match the text (see [PHOTOS](#)), perhaps a Pronunciation Guide (see [PRONUNCIATION GUIDE](#)), your bio and personal photo (see [PROVIDER BIOGRAPHY AND PHOTO](#)), a 25- and 100-word description of the tour (see [TOUR DESCRIPTIONS](#)), five tips (see [TIPS](#)), and a map (see [MAPS](#)). The submission form (see [SUBMISSION FORM](#)) is where all the elements of the tour just described are uploaded to us for approval.

In a week or two after getting the final tour packet, we will tell you whether the tour is accepted or not. If it isn't, we will tell you why, and (rarely) we might tell you what can be done to make it acceptable. Digital items received will simply be deleted if they aren't accepted, so keep your original files as submitted.

Let's think more positively! You send us the final, submitted tour, we love it as is, and we get back to you the moment it is approved by each of our involved editors—we're shooting for a week or two. At that point, it will go into final product development. When completed, the tour will be posted as a selling product at www.visualtraveltours.com. Start the money machine! You will be sent your \$150 when your tour is accepted, and the royalties will be sent three times a year thereafter.

So (4), is simply a huge amount of pecuniary common sense: Help yourself earn royalties by directing everybody you know to the website and your name—family, friends, acquaintances, anybody else who should know about your super new tour! Then stock up on your tours in disk format and directly sell them, earning a 30% discount on each sale—plus your royalty! (See [MAKING EVEN MORE MONEY FROM YOUR TOUR](#).)

That's it, but to make this process as clear as possible we have provided a [SAMPLE QUERY](#) and a [SAMPLE SCRIPT](#) to show how these documents might look when you submit them.

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(1) Send us a query letter to see if we are interested in the tour you propose in the format in which it will be submitted.

(2) If you receive a go-ahead (we say "yes, send it!"), prepare your submission as proposed.

(3) Submit your final tour packet to us for acceptance.

(4) When we inform you that it was accepted, consider (and please implement) all of the ways you can to help us promote your tour(s).

Query Letter

If you are already selling your writing, you know the querying process. It's how professionals sell regularly and reliably to magazines and book publishers. Except that here, rather than the usual one-page snail mail letter, we ask you to answer these seven points with the same directness, brevity, and clarity you would use in your tour's script.

Please reply by the numbers—and include **only one tour per query letter**. Send this by email, *without attachments*, to Gordon@VisualTravelTours.com. (We don't accept attachments and please do not phone in queries--they will be refused.)

- (1) who you are (name, your email address, and website if you have one);
- (2) what dynamic, engrossing, professionally-written tour you would like to send us that others should know about;
- (3) the approximate date we might expect your submission to arrive;
- (4) why you chose that site to write about (what's special there that will make our buyers rush to the order form); this is the heart of the query—if I'm not honestly sold here, well...
- (5) when you last visited that site (or will visit it), how you know about it, and anything that gives you special knowledge or preparation to write that tour, and
- (6) tell me how you will divide this tour up into 5-6 sections in the 30 or so minutes. The geographic or choice logic, so there is some flow to the viewing and doing. **This is the most important part:** give me at least two sentences about specific things we will do or see in each segment, and make them sections linked as they would be if this were a personal tour.
- (7) other (travel) writing you have had published—title, publication, date of each. Be honest here because we'll likely check—but if you are new to this genre or to writing, query anyway.

You might want to look at the first three segments of the two tours earlier mentioned on Provider Island, particularly the one about Purisima Mission, to see the linking of the photos and the text.

(For more related information, see [SAMPLE QUERY LETTER](#).)

That's it, one emailed query letter. (If we want to know more, we'll email back.) We will reply in a week or two. (Don't query to ask if it arrived, please, unless you haven't heard in three weeks. Then do check in because it may never have reached us—but not before.)

You will hear back from us—if we hear from you.

We will presume that the query is a display of your best writing. We aren't interested in photos at this stage, however extraordinary they are. Don't send them with the query.

If we say “yes,” return to [SUBMISSION PROCESS](#) and proceed...

If we say “no,” that's it for this tour or site, but not for you unless your query was utterly unintelligible or a clear indication that you can't grasp what we need. Don't send a second query about the same site trying to help us see the error of our ways! Just find another site to write about, probably one with more appeal to buyers, and sell that site to us. It may well take another query, or several, for us to get on the same wave length. (In magazine travel, one positive response to five queries is quite good for beginners, and one in three is about as good as it ever gets for seasoned veterans. But often enough first queries do get a “go-ahead.” Be tenacious.) Good spelling and grammar also help. Alas, nothing works better than a super location clearly explained that you can't wait for others to see and know about!

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ABOUT QUERY LETTERS

A query letter needn't be more extensive than the one at [SAMPLE QUERY](#), which is roughly a snail mail letter page long. But it must answer the questions posed, particularly 2-7, so the editor can see what motivates you, how well you write, your organization, and what you bring to the table. Two full pages is usually long enough!

The purpose of the query is different for you and the editor, since go-aheads are not guarantees that your completed tour will be bought, rather that it will be read and given serious consideration for purchase.

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We will presume that the query is a display of your best writing.

Tell us what's special, how you know about it, and why it will make our customers rush to the order form.

You don't want to invest a lot of time, energy, and money researching and developing your words and photos, plus the additional pesky items requested, without knowing that the editor will give your full tour package a solid chance of being published. The "go-ahead" from the editor assures that your submission (as posed) is wanted, can be marketed, and will be fully reviewed. Moreover, even if it falls a bit short in one or another category, you will likely be given a chance to rectify that shortcoming, to get the tour accepted and sold.

The editor wants the same thing that you do, to purchase a first-rate tour to add to the growing product list. And if it comes in on time in ready-to-produce fashion, with sharp text, superb photos, and lots of "wow's," that's tantamount to a sale.

Yet some ideas won't work, some sites are too remote to generate sales, some queries are so poorly written or the topic is so poorly presented... The query is the gate where the editor can save you all that time, energy, and expense because the probability of an acceptable tour being produced seems too low. So the editor will reject some, perhaps many, tour proposals there. Or give a resounding go-ahead if it's just what we think will sell!

How many of the go-aheads will then be accepted when finally submitted? Most of them, usually, just as is, with a much smaller number accepted when weaknesses are modified. But some will not be accepted because in final form the tour doesn't measure up to the expectations created by the query letter, and it would either take too much additional work to make it salable or, however much work is invested, it simply will not sell—and nobody knew that until the final product was reviewed.

The query is the magic gate-opener. An excellent follow-up tour is the felicitous second step of fast, happy, prosperous sales. It all starts with a query letter that works. It ends with a tour that at least matches every promise it makes! (That also opens the door for many more tours...)

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Please [contact us](#) if you have any questions.

Scripts

What do we want in your script? Precisely what you'd find in any first-rate travel article—solid facts, legitimate quotes (where needed), and plenty of anecdotes (accurate stories or accounts that bring the site or topic alive). All supported with lots of superb digital photography to illustrate what's said and to draw the actual and vicarious travelers to the scene and to inform, delight, and amuse them while they're there.)

That comes from tight, active prose that carries the listener to another world. Tell them where they are headed, what they are seeing, how it might have been seen 100 or 1000 years ago, what is original, where or how they can touch that history again (physically, through music or drama, through the customs or clothes still in use today...)

We love insider stories in each script, preferably in each chapter. Interesting and important things outsiders wouldn't know. **Famous names, infamous events, if the site has been in recent movies, changes planned, legitimate stuff that give the listener/viewer take-home gems.**

You get the idea. Help your listener relive what he or she is touring—in words readily understandable! (Please save the polysyllabic jawbreakers and foreign tongue-twisters for another editor!)

The best lengths are paragraphs from 35-45 words, with about 55-60 the maximum. If you are changing the angle in a paragraph, create a new paragraph with a new photo, please. Also, no grocery lists of descriptive terms, like a Victorian novel. Who talks like that? More than two well chosen adjectives, get on with it or we will (1) fall asleep or (2) forget the noun or verb and be completely lost. Short, sharp sentences.

If you want to sell me a second VTT Tour, avoid two things that I will have to change when I edit your first: (1) semicolons; don't use them much, if at all, or (2) hyphens, which are fine (like in two-eyed worm) but aren't when used as em dashes (long dashes), where here you must use two hyphens, no spaces before or after. Trust me.

When you list three or more items, put in the comma before the final preposition. I don't care what your (unpublished) rhetoric teacher told you. Like in the cat, dog, and flea. Bless you.

Also, if appropriate and when possible, help them laugh to lighten their steps: funny anecdotes, ironic occurrences, clever turns-of-phrase used locally, whatever is truthful yet fun that helps one better imbue or ingest what they are seeing. For example, we recall a tour guide in Heidelberg at the famous Schloss (castle) reliving Mark Twain's visit to the site by saying that while the great American writer had no ear for foreign tongues he was up to the challenge at Heidelberg because there he regularly got to shout the only word he mastered in Low German, *beer!* (They needn't be thigh-slappers. They just have to be true—or even rumored to be true, if the rumor at least has some toehold on authenticity.) It also helps if the tour-takers know who Mark Twain is...

Here's the best rule of thumb: at any step in the tour the listener should say, "This is great! Tell me more!" Nothing encyclopedic, no boring historical date-by-date tromps. Weave the senses together—the sounds, sights, smells, sense of being—with the history and lore. Make the place come alive!

Let's say it another way: we will reject any tour that doesn't trigger the word "wow!" at least a dozen times. And we're meticulous about truth and authenticity, to the point that we may ask you to prove that what you are sharing is accurate.

If you're a pro, what we've just said are simply reminders. If you're still new to travel writing, do the above and soon enough you too will be a grizzled old pro. And if that's not reminder enough, just listen to the five-star tours we offer to see how each provider blends great places and fascinating stories with humor, awe, history, intrigue, and purpose.

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We love insider stories in each script, preferably in each chapter.

At any step in the tour the listener should say, "This is great! Tell me more!"

The 1st minute:
An overview summary of the entire tour: what they will hear/see, the magic there, and so on, just as top writers do in their article lead though this is a much extended lead!

The beginning of your tour, has some great photos and intriguing text in it as well.

Also, if you're doing your own audio, here you introduce yourself, plus insert your photo.

Four to six Chapters.

3-5 word tour title including name of the place.

3-5 word chapter titles

Pronunciation guide for underlined words

It may go without saying, but be sure to give plenty of logistical directions so that the listener can keep pace with your commentary. For example, if you move from one area to another, you might say, “Now pause your device until you reach _____ i.e. the end of the block”. Otherwise, the listener will be out of sync with the narration, and will need to rewind or restart the segment (depending on the capability of the mobile device) in order to find the proper place.

One last point: a quick way to get a tour rejected is to try to sell anything through it, including other tours you have produced for us or that you offer at your website! (That information can appear in your short biographical blurb.) If you mention a hotel, mention three; a restaurant—tell how three excel, and so on. If you have questions about this—or any other point—just contact us.

Mostly, have fun—share that and your wonderment with your listeners!

Some Details

When you prepare your script, to be sent as an attachment as part of the final, submitted tour, here’s what we are looking for in the final copy, beyond great content tightly woven.

(See a one-page sample at [SCRIPT SAMPLE](#).)

(1) After the one-minute introduction, each tour should be broken into about five sections for each 30 minutes (let’s call them chapters), so where the tour format allows, the tourist can visit or reassemble them at their own leisure, taking Chapter 1, 3, 2, and not 4, and 5. (I know, what fools!) That also helps us do the best production and editing. Think of different tracks on a CD, but all with a common theme.

(2) Each chapter needs a short title too, (3 to 5 words) rather than just Chapter 1, ... If your tour features the spectacular Fôz de Iguacú, near where Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay meet, say, you might have these chapters: (1) Reaching the Park, (2) The Hotel, (3) Exploring by Foot, (4) A Helicopter Tour, and (5) The Magnificence by Boat. (We need the titles short to fit on small screens.) These titles will be listed on the Detail Tour Page, giving the customer an overview of the points of interest.

(3) At a maximum of 6 words, the tour title must include the place name. Then using the Script Input Form, just type out your text **using a new text box each time the narration pertains to a new image**. Use as many text boxes as needed, and save the text (and images) at the end of each chapter. Each text box allows you to format the font, cut/paste, and perform other functions.

(4) Upload the photos (see [PHOTOS](#)), for each corresponding sentence or paragraph, by clicking the Browse button.

(5) If there are hard-to-pronounce words in the text (like Fôz de Iguacú), please provide a phonetic pronunciation guide (see [PRONUNCIATION GUIDE](#)) to help the reader pronounce it correctly. Also, please tell us what language the word comes from, if not English and you know. This includes local regionalisms. (An example: DesPlaines, Illinois, is pronounced Des like “desk” without the k, then PLAINES like planes.) Please underline all of the words in the text when they are explained in your Pronunciation Guide the first time each is used. (But don’t underline anything else!) If you’d like more information related to this, see [PRONUNCIATION GUIDE](#), courtesy of PanRight Productions.

(6) Write the text in regular case (as this is), only using CAPITAL LETTERS where they are naturally used in English. It is very hard on the narrator if regular text is capitalized. Also avoid bold face or italics for the same reason.

(7) VERY IMPORTANT! We need you to pay particular attention to the first minute of your script. We are going to let others see/hear the first minute at the tour description webpage (a snippet of your whole tour), so they will be automatically lured into buying the remaining

28 or so minutes! So we ask two very important favors: [1] the first minute be an overview summary of the entire tour: what they will hear/see, the magic there, and so on, just as top writers do in their article lead, though this is a much extended lead!, and [2] be sure that this overview/introduction has approximately 12 great photos and intriguing text in it as well. Front pack it with key elements, then get right into it.

If you are doing your own audio section, there is one other item to include either in the first minute introduction or as you open the first chapter: a line introducing yourself. Something like “This is [Betsy Ballou] and I’ll be your VTT Tour tour guide to [Inhambupe].” Then just segue you’re your regular material. (And unless you object, we will also ask you to insert your photo—or we will from the bio page—at that point so they can tie your mellifluous voice to your engaging face!)

(8) That’s it! Seems like a lot of hoops but the few modifications all make sense and help

you make many more cents more quickly with a better, more accurate tour.

CONSIDERATIONS for DRIVING TOURS

It's obvious that for a walking tour you would walk it first to know which places merit stopping and visiting, with appropriate commentary at each place (and perhaps while walking to, from, or between them.) In other words, you'd pace out a 30- or so minute tour.

But driving tours aren't that easy, our early providers tell us. So let's share some advice they offer:

- (1) Before you first drive the tour, use your map to lay out the best route and to pinpoint each place where you will stop. Also, record the driving time (at a comfortable, legal speed) between all stops.
- (2) Note which places have parking adjacent or nearby, which have at least a road shoulder with the place in sight, and which can only be seen while passing by or at a distance.
- (3) If your tour is divided, say, into six sections, at the end of each you must tell the user where the next section begins (the place and the location), with the approximate driving time and what they should do about parking and viewing on foot, parking on the shoulder, or simply seeing the place as the car slows down (if possible).
- (4) If there is a long stretch without stopping, you can use that time to tell what they are seeing along the way and how that fits into the history, terrain, legends, or whatever is of particular interest in the area.
- (5) You might also speak during the driving to prepare the user about a coming attraction even though there is no way to stop and see it, so as they pass they know what they are looking at. Be sure to tell them what side of the vehicle it will be on! Good photos of these places will compensate some for their inability to see it close up.
- (6) Whenever you want the viewer to pause their recorder, just say, "Let's pause now until we are at the _____ at _____, i.e., in the parking lot east of the Stowe Mansion at Route 6 and Lee Street in Lumpatown.
- (7) The hardest thing to do on driving tours is get the photos in sync with what you are sharing with the viewer. Careful pre-planning before you lay out the tour is the best solution. The clues above should help you create a great tour!

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Photos

What makes our tours unique is that they are visual, with a script. So we need photos (taken with a digital camera and saved as .jpgs)—lots of them make a better product!

If you have very little experience with photography, see if there's a good travel photography class being given where you buy your camera, at the local camera store, through a local community college, or as part of a larger school's extended ed or adult ed programs. There are many good beginner photography books at the library or bookstore too.

But mostly it's common sense, with the aid of today's exceptional cameras. Here are some starter guidelines:

Your core shots will walk us visually on a tour. That is, we must see something related to the site or topic, so that can range from two to three shots per minute. It is wise to take another 20 extra general shots that capture the grander scene. Include those as needed.

Get more than one shot of the best photo locations: the whole church, the altar, burning candles, hands of a saint's statue, so you can offer two or three top shots, with less text in each paragraph.

(A hike into the bowels of the Grand Canyon? Great tour. Keep that camera going, and also get extra shots at the top, the bottom, and anything of particular interest en route. Meet the burro train coming up the path? 10-15 good shots from different angles (or as many as you can get from a path!) A bootless hiker bandaging a blistering foot? Several shots. Different kinds of packs? Several shots of each. Mentioning the best kind of headgear? Several shots of each kind. Different flora and fauna? Fire away. You get the idea.

We want a rich visual experience, so if you are talking about something not photographable, like a dead hero of the site, try to show us something related, like his/her musket, attire, or the cover of their book. We also need some broad shots of the locale. Please help us here to produce a tight, well integrated visual and auditory experience! If, for example, you have five photos of an elephant and one of a burro but you speak 50 seconds about burros and ten about elephants, even shrinking the size of the elephants won't fool the viewers! We need some visual/oral balance.

The best is to have a legitimate shot for every 20 seconds or so! This will all be solved when burros and elephants mate. (But a warning: if you send us too many, we must reject the extras, so pace the photos with the text, please, and send us the very best!)

* **VERY IMPORTANT:** we are buying the whole package, which means that the photos and script must both be top-notch—and there must be enough good, usable photos to match the words.

* The quality of the shots has to be top-flight too. If in doubt, take more! Why? Because the viewer of your tour must be able to see each shot clearly. People standing in front of (and hiding) the totem pole? Wait until they move, or kindly ask them for 15 seconds... The grotto is too dark? Use the flash. The vulture too far away? Zoom rather than break your neck climbing to the cliff. Check the shots if you're in doubt, and if you still aren't sure, take several more from different angles.

* You will likely need extra cards to insert in your camera (to hold the shots) and extra replacement batteries. Move the photos on your camera to your computer before you leave, and start with a clean memory. (If you have a laptop accessible, you can do the same on site, exporting the shots on your card to its hard drive. Double-check that they are there, then erase the camera card and start again.) Recharge your batteries when the camera is idle (like overnight in your room).

* Photos must also be accurate at the time the tour is prepared. Please don't slip shots from an earlier visit with buildings or vegetation no longer visible (unless they are for historical comparison). Or general shots of other places—not any old jungle will work!

* If you take "public" photos in areas that are publicly accessible, there are different people in the shots ("random tourists"), and they are not doing anything shameful or illegal, there is no need for photo releases. It's also permissible to photograph private places from a public position (shooting into a church yard, for example, from a public sidewalk or street). If there's a question, just ask if it's OK to photograph. (Sorry but we don't pay or reimburse any expenses, including if they request payment to photograph.)

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The photos make our tours unique.

Photos should be relevant to the script.

Number each Photo when naming them.

Send 2-3 images per minute

Maximum of 90 photos per tour.

Maximum of 25 photos per chapter.

72 dpi resolution, maximum of 250 kb, 720 x 480 or 640 x 480 pixels.

* If you use someone else's photography, with their permission of course, you may mention their credit line in your narration.

Integrating and Submitting the Photos

After you have written the rough draft of your script, you will know where the best photos should be inserted. As you post each image, you'll enter the associated script. So go through your photos and note the appropriate number of each photo that matches each section of the script.

Once that's done, we need a final but very important favor, to get even more sales for you. We will display five great photos you select from your tour on the tour title page. Will you pick out your five best, then list them in the left to right way you'd rather have them displayed? (A tip: if a person is prominent in the photo, please place the shot so they look inward, or toward the center.) Sending these five photos is really simple to do. On the submission page you will use when you send in your tour, it will ask for these five photos. It will let you browse your files, so go to where your photos are hiding, then just move them one by one into the five places on the form, in the way you want them, left to right, and that's it!



Tech stuff about resolution

This is straight from the trained, skilled technical angel who must convert the photography you send into tour magic

(1) We accept digital photography, 72 dpi resolution, a maximum of 250 kb , 720 x 480 or 640 x 480 pixels, no more than 800 pixels wide . In some photo management programs this size is referred to Web-Large. In Photoshop, you can use "Image Size" to convert the photo to the proper resolution, and then convert to the proper width. [Contact us](#) if you need assistance in converting your photos to this standard. Any larger sizes will result in longer uploads, and may cause your system or connection to timeout which means that your entries **will not be saved**.

(2) As mentioned before, that may limit the number of shots you can get on your card, so an additional card (or cards) might be prudent—or frequently saving your shots to a nearby computer.

(3) While setting up your camera, if the option is fine or standard, choose fine, or best, whichever seems to be the highest quality.

(4) The aspect ratio should be 4:3, if your camera has that option.

(5) Regarding other options, that is dependent upon the light conditions and camera. But if you don't know how to use more in-depth features, then auto settings for light conditions are preferable.

(6) Use the White Balance AWB or automatic unless you understand and/or wish to use other options.

(7) It's best not to use digital zoom unless absolutely necessary—though it's far better than stepping off a cliff to get a shot!

(8) Get lots of wide shots of an area, please. These translate well into our formats.

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Audio

For the audio component (reading of the script) you have two choices after we give you a “go-ahead” to your query: either (1) we will have the script you send us read professionally and recorded at our expense, or (2) you may produce the audio file, at your expense—a faithful rendition of the printed script—and upload it to us as part of your submitted tour. These files, one per chapter, must be in final, edited, top-quality form. Audio acceptance will be based on the total tour’s quality, professionalism, and immediate usability. In both cases, please see [TOUR DETAILS](#) for information on other components required for acceptance of your tour.

A caution--and a cure. If you simply write the script, then record it, and send that in, we want to accept it (and will if it's 100% accurate and ready to go) but we must reject it if there are copy errors or unacceptable elements in the script. That's because we can't make corrections.

So if you are going to do the audio yourself, send us the complete [SUBMISSION FORM](#), with the script and photos, with a note in the comment section telling us you want to provide the audio. We will look at the script first and see if there is anything that we might reject later. If so, we'll point it out. If not, we'll give you a go-ahead on the audio. Still, we must ultimately see all the components in final form before we can accept the tour. It's your choice but this provides a good safeguard before you record or incur those expenses.

[Here are some guidelines from our lovely audio director:](#)

If you are providing the audio track, or a fully produced VTT Tour, starting with professionally-produced sound is best. Here's what we want:

- a. no noticeable background noise, hiss, or hum (keep the signal path “clean” throughout the recording performance through digitalization),
- b. no noticeable clicks, pops, or hums, such as popping “p’s”; use a pop shield,
- c. use the best microphone possible, not a \$39 USB mic recorded into a computer; cheap mics make the voice sound harsh,
- d. get the highest possible gain without distortion,
- e. good delivery and diction are a must; let your own personality and flair shine through,
- f. the rate should be 150 to 200 words per minute,
- g. maintain good mic technique: keep the audio level consistent throughout the taping, and
- h. create a high quality audio file, aif or .wav at 44.1 kHz, 16 bit, which will be compressed to either mp3 or acc VTT Tour.
- i. If you do not understand the above, or your home equipment is not adequate to produce professional results, please let us create the audio or consult a professional, local studio in your area which specializes in or has special rates for voice-over recording work.

If you produce the audio track, check our specs

Pronunciation Guide

You will likely have words in your script that an unknowing reader (not privileged to your inside information) will likely mispronounce while producing the audio part of your tour. So this list will show that person how the word should be pronounced. That's it—without classical phonetic symbols which few of us know.

In your script, underline each foreign word that will be included in your Pronunciation Guide, but only underline it the first time it is used.

As I mentioned earlier, you are invited to send us a simple audio file or VTT Tour that includes all of the odd words we won't know how locals say, each clearly pronounced, with a clear syllable stress. Speak up! The word gods will smile—and those hearing the VTT Tour won't laugh

if we pronounce the word our way and, for lack of any guide, we inject the foulest word in the language into an otherwise innocuous and innocent word! If you could give us the words in the order in which they appear, it makes our job a lot easier—and your royalties quicker.

Or write out the guide. Let's show you with some words used in different scripts. The hardest word is Fôz de Iguaçú, the grand gathering of spectacular waterfalls in South America. It's Portuguese and who knows what it might be? So here's how you'd explain it to the reader:

Fôz de Iguaçú / Portuguese:

Fôz, the "o" sounds like "au" in pause, ending with a hard "z" (or like pause with an "f" for the "p")

de, sounds just like "gee"

Iguaçú, sounds like e (in bee) gwa (rhymes with la) sue (accent on sue)

tules / Chumash (or other American Indian tongue)

tules, sounds like two lays (accent on tu)

Chumash / Chumash?

Chumash, sounds like chew mash (the "a" like "o" in odd) (accent on chu)

Lompoc / maybe Chumash, a city in California

Lompoc, Lom sounds like Tom, poc like pock in pockmark (accent on Lom)

Simply give the narrator a working sound for the syllables that differ from English, plus where the accent falls. If you know the language, that may help the narrator too. This is particularly important for the names of locations and people, plus key words knowledgeable visitors to the tour site should pronounce correctly.

Give the narrator a working sound for the syllables that differ from English, plus where the accent falls.

Tour Descriptions

We need two descriptions, (1) one to display on the tour description page of 100 words or less and (2) another on the much more spaced-limited tour summary page, a brief description of 25 words maximum. Keeping your description to 25 words maximum may be the hardest part of the writing, especially when you know that every additional word may be that very word that snags an additional 200 tour buyers! But that's all we have space for—and every word counts.

So write the long one first, after you've had time to see which parts of your tour are the most important things others want to know about.

For example, when describing Sausalito, CA, this was my final offering. I started out with a description 155 words long, couldn't seem to get it under 118, then did a radical pruning to 93 words. I restored six of those gilded words so here it is at 99.

Sausalito sits 30 minutes by ferry from San Francisco near the northern base of the Golden Gate Bridge, the destination of hundreds cycling over the "gate to the sea." Long a getaway for the rich, its centuries of whaling and boat construction have today created a shopping, dining, and boardwalking mecca. The city features a great visitor's museum, three-acre model miniature ocean, rebuilt speakeasies, clinging mansions, a fort soon to be a top-level resort, a kid's touch-me outdoor Discovery Museum, houseboats, hotels, a beach, bordellos as restaurants, batteries for cannons, marinas, fish eateries, coves, kayaks, paths, and unforgettable views.

Surely nothing less would do for the old bootlegger's haven. So how can I do it in just 25 words? The shorter description is just a teaser, really—but an honest teaser, so I must zero in. I ask myself, what can tourfolk do there that was unusual or particularly desirable. This is what I came up with, 25 words long, after lots and lots of word moving and trimming.

Across from San Francisco, visiting this festive destination by ferry, car, bus, or cycle brings back centuries of whaling, sailing, great food, and swashbuckling history.

Want to see those 25-word examples? Check the Catalog listing:
http://visualtraveltours.com/tours_summary.html

Why don't we do this for you? Because you know what's important and what others want to see, and we can only guess. For more examples, see the descriptions of other tours as they are posted at our [website](#).

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Describe Your Tour

In 100 words for
the catalog page

In 25 words for the summary
list that customers browse

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Tips

The five tips we request as part of your complete tour packet will be used twice to draw buyers to your tour! Once, on the detail page for your tour, as a bit of a teaser to get them to want to know more. We offer a wide assortment of travel tips, hoping that among them your tips will encourage readers to directly link to your tour information and the purchase page.

Let's share five examples here from a tour to Sausalito from San Francisco:

Bring extra clothes on the Sausalito ferry. The famed San Francisco fog isn't a myth, and the Bay crossing, while only 30 minutes, can be nippy. And a sun hat too in case I'm wrong.

Sausalito is a great cycling destination, starting in San Francisco, through the Golden Gate Park, across the bridge, and down the hill past the Visitor's Center. You can return with the bike by ferry! But be careful: they ticket cyclists in Sausalito!

Check the ferry boats to see if they give transfers to Fisherman's Wharf when you return to San Francisco from Sausalito. If you push the transfer button, you get to ride the fancy bus!

Got an extra day in San Francisco? Take one of the same Sausalito ferry boats to Tiburon, for a couple of hours of walking, shopping, and eating, then over to Angel Island, to see the old forts and/or hike the island. Cycles permitted too, free.

Caledonia Street in Sausalito, a block uphill from Bridgeway from the seaside Police Department, is a fun street with excellent restaurants, a first-rate movie house, and the library-city hall in an old school building!



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Create 5 Tips to draw buyers to your Tour

Two things to observe:

(1) These tips aren't necessarily from the script itself, but rather are about the tour at large. Yet they are all directly related to the tour.

(2) Each has the key words included for the reader to find your tour. Thus the reader, wanting to know more, can either find the tour title or can search for the words at the VTT opening page.

A final note. Each of your tips must make sense on its own since it will be used independently of the tour to which it refers and to the other four tips you are submitting.

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Provider Biography and Photo

Your Biography Not much to say about a 60-word (maximum) biography that isn't rather obvious.

We need it so the website reader, in search of fun, challenging (or at least exciting) tours, knows whose voice and judgment they will be relying on if they buy your words and/or venture to the site. So telling why and how you know about the site, the area, or the topic makes lots of sense (and cents). They also may not care that you were interim mayor of Podunk or raise weasels.

One common error is that biographies of this nature are too often written on the presumption that the reader already knows you, by reputation I guess. Probably safer to err on the side that they want to know you and this is an opportunity to tell them why.

We encourage you to include your email address or phone if you want or are open to personal responses. But we may delete text if it sells products or competing services. Just contact us if there's any question here.

Gordon has published more than 1700 freelance articles and 36 books, plus offered 2000+ paid spoken presentations nationwide. His book, *The Travel Writer's Guide*, was twice a Writer's Digest Book Club top choice. His most recent books are *Niche Publishing* and *Your Living Family Tree*. For more details, see www.gordonburgett.com. Gordon lives about 20 miles north of Sausalito.

Here's my example, a 58-word biography including a full sentence linking me to the tour location, which helps the reader again zero in on what this particular VTT Tour is about should the bio get somehow separated from the text and photos.

Note: honesty must prevail in the bio. Please don't list dreams as accomplishments, count straight, stay as close to answering why they should hear and see your tour as you can. And quit at or before 60 words.

The bio for my next tour will mention this one, and later it will say that "Gordon has created _ (a number) tours for VTT." But we must all do our best the first time out.

Finally, if we doubt anything in your bio, we may ask for verification. Because if we doubt it, so will potential buyers. Please don't make us ask!

Your Photo

A recent digital photo (.jpg) of you centered in the shot, head only or head and shoulders. Buyers want to see what you look like, so look at least like a person able and eager to share a great tour with them. Meaning: eyes open, look as wholesome as possible, alert, dressed in something, and clean. That's about it. The less distractions in the background, the better. A clear white background is usually best. If your complexion is very light and you are blonde, wear darker colors so we can see where you begin. And if you're darker in tone, lighter clothes. No hats, please, unless they are congenital or nailed on your head.

We'll use the same photo for future tours unless you prefer a change—or we do!

Since you will be posting this jpg file when you complete the User Profile after query acceptance, you needn't submit it again with the final Tour Package Submission.

 print THIS PAGE

BIO

Visitors want to know you, in 60 words

YOUR PHOTO

A good head-shot in a .jpg format

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Map

We are concerned about two things: (1) that those interested in the tour know where the site is located and how to reach it, and (2) that those on the tour have a sense of the local layout and how to get to each point of interest.

Regional Maps

A few words in the tour description can usually get the listener/viewer mentally and/or physically to the location. For example, in the Sausalito tour description (see [TOUR DESCRIPTIONS](#)) it says it all with the mention of three places almost universally known, San Francisco, Golden Gate Bridge, and (well, not as well known) Sausalito itself.

In this case, that's enough. So if you can do the same (probably in a few more words), no regional map is needed—or we will find a larger area map in our files. Another guide as to whether a special map will be required: if your tour location can be found using an Internet map service like Mapquest or Google, then a regional map is not needed.

Site Maps

If a good map is distributed free or inexpensively at the site, (a) please scan and upload it with your tour submission, and we will see if it can be reproduced digitally, or (b) we will simply tell on the tour description that a good local map of the site itself is available at _____ (please tell us where). For example, in Sausalito there are three good maps I mention early in the article, two free and the other, for \$2. I tell the users to get a copy at the first stop, the museum and visitor's center near the ferry landing and the parking.

Neighborhood Maps

If your tour is a series of stops around a neighborhood, where points of interest can be located with addresses, then simply [listtheaddressesandwewillcreateacustommapreadyfordownloadbyyourcustomers](#).

 print THIS PAGE

Decide what is best for your tour:

A map of the region, site, or neighborhood

Regional
Describe in words how to locate the tour area

Site
Send us a map

Neighborhood
List the address of each point of interest or chapter

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Sample Query Letter

Dear Tour Editor:

(1) I'm Gordon Burgett, email at Gordon@gordonburgett.com, website at www.gordonburgett.com

(A note: notice here I combined #2 and #6. You can do the same, but be sure to give me lots of information about the sections!)

(2) Sausalito has been the first-choice weekend or vacation destination of San Franciscans for a century, and tourists to the city have joined the throng 12 months of the year! It's right across the Bay to the north—just follow the Golden Gate Bridge and there it is a mile to the right, with what seems like 1,000 sailboats crowding its string of non-stop marinas! Better yet, it's a fun trip on one of its two ferry boats, a bus line linking the two downtowns over the Golden Gate, and the chosen target of cyclists eager to cross the Golden Gate (free) and spend the day in the city (and perhaps return by ferry). Add to that great sea restaurants, lots of classy shops, miles of boardwalk along the largest bay in the Pacific Americas, a special microclimate in the backdrop mountains, and several particularly interesting focal points and we have a dandy five-part, 30-minute visual VTT Tour. The first segment (1) would start at the small, gingerbread Sausalito Visitor Center and History Exhibit in the center of the shopping area yards from where the ferry boats dock and the best parking is found. It's a super little museum with pictured displays that tell about the city's 235 years of whaling, bordellos, the mansions of the rich, houseboats, Prohibition booze, movie stars and writers; (2) what's too see and do in the downtown and along the seafront: stores, eateries, parks, William Randolph Hearst, Jack London, the madam mayor; (3) a climb into the "Banana Belt," the second and third tier, to see mansions clinging and views of Alcatraz, Belvedere, and the endless bobbing boats; (4) continuing east along the bay, open marinas, some 450 houseboats, a beach, fish restaurants, and two gems: the site of the massive World War II "Marinship" where record-setting shipbuilding provided the Pacific fleet with a new Liberty Ship or tanker every three weeks and the massive, free Bay Model, a three-acre warehouse model of the San Pablo Bay, and (5) a play land tucked under the Golden Gate Bridge originally called Fort Baker but now the site of an extraordinary Bay Area Discovery Museum, a hands-on playground for kids of all ages, a new resort just being built at the Fort called Cavallo Point, and open-to-wander grounds, a marina, batteries for sea cannons, fishing...

(3) I could have this to you in one month from the time you give this query an OK.

(4) I live about 20 miles north of the site and, like all locals, headed to Sausalito the first free available weekend! I continue to revisit it, with my wife and friends, repeatedly--it's an ideal spot to meet tourist friends, they crossing the Bay by ferry, with us to drive later to Fort Baker (it's only a mile or so away but a climb after hours of strolling the downtown!) There's a lot to see in and around San Francisco: this is one of the top three sites, and the best for a one-day visit.

(5) It's one thing to see the site as a visitor, but I'd go back a couple of more times to get more details and "inside stuff" from the friendly Visitor Center ladies (one, a former mayor with the park at the City Hall named for her)—it really is a small community playing host to thousands. I need more photos too, so that's a matter of visiting when the famed San Francisco fog isn't also visiting!

(6) I have 1700+ freelance articles in print (plus 36 books, including the [Travel Writer's Guide](#), a Writer's Digest Book Club top choice several times. About 80% of those 1,700+ articles are travel-based. I've sold from 300-400 travel photos to accompany the articles too. Much of the list that you request is available at my website, and I can provide you with a copy of several California-based articles, if interested. (I kept only about 10% of the published articles. Who knew I'd ever need them? Mostly I kept the pay stubs!)

If this tour interests you, please contact me at your earliest convenience. Respectfully,
Gordon Burgett

 print THIS PAGE

Tell Us
as a sample of your best
writing

Who?

What?

Why?

Where?

When?

How?

Visited?

Published?

Sample Script

This example is Chapter 5 of “Sausalito, San Francisco’s Favorite Get-Away.” Note the Chapter title, the layout with a ragged right, no hyphenation, underlined words that will be sounded out in the [PRONUNCIATION LIST](#), and the sort of walking along continuity explaining what the viewer is seeing as it is approached.

Fort Baker, Discovery Museum & New Resort

(56) Now you go through downtown, turn left at *Second Street*, and follow the Fort Baker signs. If the kids have been mumbling about the hill climbing, stores, and freezing water, they are in for a huge treat, particularly if they are between about two and 12. They can run themselves ragged at the Bay Area Discovery Museum!

(57) The giant canyon sits about a mile west of downtown Sausalito at the famed old Fort Baker, hugging the northern foot of the massive Golden Gate Bridge. In fact, if you cross the Bridge into Marin County and pull off at the viewing site, the fort is in the valley straight downhill to the east.

(58) There are two key places to visit when you reach the valley flatlands. One is the decommissioned Fort Baker that, as this is written, is in the throes of massive reconstruction into a first-class resort hotel called Cavallo Point. More on that in a minute.

(59) Kids (and parents or grandparents) in the know will head straight to the nest of buildings and object-filled grounds beyond the fort, to an extraordinary display of hands-on, feel-and-use exhibits that immediately thrust the kids into exploring tree roots to squeeze through, sunken ships, wooden whales, ship bells to bang, a vine fort and stick huts, a puppet show, tunnels and caves, a pair of bird nests with two-pound stone eggs to move around, kid-sized bugs and plants, a water trough for tykes to sail rubber fish and crabs down... all without much supervision and no urgency to quit digging with the giant scoopers or stop finding the remnants in the shipwreck (kindly planted each morning by the unobtrusive staff).

(60) The implied directive is to pound, hammer, dig, run, climb, build, and (if one’s not careful) learn ...

(61) There’s no order to best seeing the Bay Area Discovery Museum. About half is outside, the rest is in ten buildings that hide sand and wind machines, a giant wooden railroad, tide and current displays, trampolines, ceramics and “build with nature” enticements, toys, tops to spin, stuffed critters, do-it displays, signs, and endless places to walk under, hide in, and—many restrooms!

(62) The bookstore is superbly stocked with similar nature-based children’s learning objects. And there’s a modest but well-priced eatery.

(63) Alas, it's not free if you're over 1—\$8 per kid or 62+, \$10, 18+—nor is it open on Monday. You may also want to sync your visit with the many shows and musical guest performances offered.

(64) Fort Baker's environs are open for wandering by the public, with ample free parking. A walk on the cliffs along the Bay is full of spectacular views: a thousand sailboats, Alcatraz, the entire San Francisco skyline, ocean liners and massive top-heavy cargo craft sliding under the bridge.

(65) You can fish from the cliffs or the V-shaped harbor at Fort Baker (mostly you catch crabs), walk along the wharf, or stand on the 100-year-old batteries built to protect the Bay (though a shot was never fired from them). You can even see a protected habitat of a rare butterfly found only there for a few weeks a year!

(66) What is most obvious here is that the old Fort Baker has now become a spiffy resort site, Cavallo Point, with the dozen or so historic fort buildings (including the original chapel), with new ones in the background, all gathered around the spacious parade grounds.

(67) It has 142 guest suites; the Murray Circle restaurant is public-accessible; there are 12 treatment rooms for massage and facials, and the resort offers three kinds of special programs: culinary (cooking classes), creative (nature photography), and healing (yoga), plus lots of hiking, mountain biking, and meditation. If you want to integrate a stay at Cavallo Point into your visit of Sausalito, check [their website](#) for details.

(68) Sausalito is a fun, healthy, educational, unforgettable day away from San Francisco, a place that reputedly has its own charms!

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Sample Tour: Preparation and Submission

You're thinking of submitting a tour? Great! We're looking for an initial 2,000 tours, and we are eager to have you aboard now—and with more super tours in the future. (See [TOUR DETAILS](#) and [KINDS OF TOURS WE BUY](#).)

To help you prepare your visual tour, let's draw examples from a tour I just completed called "Sausalito, by the Golden Gate Bridge." (Want to also see an excellent sample from a script about St. Augustine in Florida? [Click here](#).)

1. **Zero in on a place you know well**, want others to know, and are eager to share worldwide. See [QUERY](#), plan your first steps (seven, in fact), then send a digital query letter that get the VTT doors open and you on the money trail. The query isn't long but it's extremely important: it's a one-time door that I want you to come successfully through. (You can see the kind of query I would have written at [SAMPLE QUERY](#). You might make yours a bit longer so I get a better sense of why people will want to hear and see your tour.)

I chose Sausalito because, in part, I had lived nearby and have been there a half-dozen times. My wife has lived in Marin County for many years and it's one of her favorite places to bring friends. But I had heard about it many times before we met when visiting San Francisco, and knew that it was a top tourist site to see. My problem? Seasickness, so the ferry ride to and fro kept me away. Until I rode the ferry several times from Larkspur to the Giant's ballpark, much farther, and found out that the Bay is windy but no danger to those afflicted by *mareo*. Since I moved to Marin County, I found out about the #10 bus to and from Sausalito and San Francisco, plus the cycling link over the Golden Gate Bridge—two more reasons to make it a trip destination! Now it's my #1 suggestion to see for newcomers. I suggest that you too start with a favorite place you know that others will eagerly read about. (Later, let's talk about a site you can or will visit just once.)

Most visitors to San Francisco see the in-town stuff first—Fisherman's Wharf, Chinatown, the Exploratorium, perhaps the zoo or the Golden Gate Park. But they are curious about the other towns on the Bay too. The most accessible and best to see is Sausalito, so it was a no-brainer for me to focus there. The only problem is that there's a lot to see in a few hours, so focusing on the downtown area made the most sense, then expanding to the Bay Model and Fort Baker (the Discovery Museum and Cavallo Point) was logical. But if the object is to delight the kids? If they are 3-12, the Discovery Museum is first; if older, the Bay Model, and browse the downtown quickly.

2. **Visit the site to divide the tour into four or five segments, walk it, and determine the best photos you will need.** First, gather and peruse the free (or inexpensive) literature available there, including site maps. Divide the tour into four or five segments or sections, then walk the sections in a logical, linked way, as a tourist should so they can see the most in the least distance and can walk from place to place comfortably and safely. At the same time, note which photos will best illustrate the points you will make. A 30-minute tour will work best with a maximum of 75 top-quality photos, or about two to three per minute. (Ask the authorities if you can photograph everything in view, and, if not, if special permission could be granted since you plan to write a travel feature about the locale.)

NOTE: It's one or two visits faster for you if you come at the project with the intent to produce a super visual tour and to create the framework that needs. So sitting for a few minutes and sectioning up the site map, then taking photo notes on the first walk-through gives you a sound structure to bring alive in 3-4,000 words and 60-90 good photos. Bring your camera too on that first walk and if something shouts to be shot, do it!

3. **At the site, create a list of experts you can consult and books you should read.** The person taking the visual tour will expect unique insights, special stories, things shared that bring the locale alive in a unique way. Those "special stories" almost always come from one

 print THIS PAGE

Select place

Divide into chapters

List the experts

Do your research

Shoot photos

Write script and test it

Prep photos

Prep audio (optional)

Complete Submission Form

Upload attachments

of three sources: (1) on-site tour providers or experts, (2) books or articles about the location, or (3) outside references that mention the site—unless you are lucky enough to live nearby and have tapped into local news or knowledge. That’s what you will want to read about or those are the folks you will call, email, or write for more specifics, if needed, later.

I was particularly lucky at Sausalito because there are two excellent walking maps available (two free, one, \$2) plus a very well designed, visual exhibit in a small center downtown.

4. Study the literature you gathered, plus more in the library, and create a sound research base to share through your visual tour. You will want to integrate historical and other information into the program rather than simply submit a dull chronology with photos. The tour must establish the journalists’ tried-and-true “5w’s and h”: who, what, why, where, when, and how. The reader-viewers must properly feel that what you are sharing is accurate, has relevance, and is worth knowing. Said in reverse, it must be more than your reactions to seeing old or different things. It’s best to find a common thread that gives the visual tour meaning; that clearly answers the “why” and “how” in the reader-viewers’ minds.

My biggest concern was fitting all the information into 30 minutes, and making the tour intelligible since it involved five segments, three “in town,” the other two on the extremities. That’s where the research first and the walk-through were particularly helpful because it showed me the best route to follow and the best photos that would capture the core of each section. I discovered that it was virtually impossible to see the mansions on the hillside since they are behind fences, bushes, and privacy walls, but the rest was accessible and photographable. So I modified the time spent at each, and it worked!

5. Return to the site to ask those in the know any unanswered questions, write down any additional facts you need (often from signs or explanations at particular locales), and take the photos. If you shoot your photos in geographical sequence (as one would see them while hearing or reading the tour), just note what you are shooting. If they are taken out of sequence, take much more care to identify each, to insert them properly later. If your camera has a preview feature, check occasionally to see that the shots are clear. The beauty of digital photography is that you can cancel duds or take a hundred (or 300) too many shots. Within reason, generously overshoot! (See [PHOTOS](#).)

Shoot photos from two or three angles, if possible. An issue in and near San Francisco is the fog and days without sun, both a hassle in Sausalito. You can make up for some of that with camera adjustments (opening the lenses more) but if the Golden Gate Bridge or distant San Francisco are simply missing, no lens magic will work. By good fortune, all three of the days I was there it was sunny!

6. Write the final visual tour piece. Do it like professionals do, just sit down and write from start to finish. Then insert what was left out, check all facts, make all corrections, and prune the prose so it is quick, clear, and captivating. Last chance to correct the spelling and punctuation. **Read it again, out loud,** and finalize the copy. Then do it one more time, now with a watch to see if it fits well into the 25-45-minute range we accept. This is when you add more copy or tighten up (or cut) what you have.

If possible, while there double-check the factual accuracy and directions. Better yet, if a friend is with you at the site, they might have questions using your tour that didn’t occur to you. The only time to make those changes is before we create the audio and photo masterpiece!

It takes me a third of the time to fast write the whole piece than it does to touch the last editing key. In other words, I let the prose flow, almost as if I’m talking to the viewer and sharing a grand adventure. But then I go over every line, every fact, every point, and I make them all work. Do I have a photo that illustrates the place or point made? Those must be synced so the visual and oral segments make sense simultaneously. Be sure to get the name and phone number of those angels at the site who know the facts, then if you left something out or see a spot to add another interesting point, they are just a call (or email) away. Alas, even angels make errors so you’ll want to double-check everything. My goal is a clean script ready to submit that will earn me a bundle in royalties!

7. Make a copy of the script that you submit, in the rare case that it ends up in e-mailing heaven. Also, if there are hard-to-pronounce words in your script, please underline them and send a pronunciation guide (see [PRONUNCIATIONGUIDE](#)).

Sausalito and lots of other words in my script are Spanish, so I'd note that the reader must be able to pronounce Spanish words. (But if it's Bulgarian or Urdu, write out the sounds, please—or your tour takers will hear a language never before spoken!) Anything hard to pronounce goes on my Pronunciation Guide.

8. Match your photos to your copy.

9. If you create your own audio files, note their location so that you can upload it via the Tour Submission Form.

10. Everything should be sent digitally via the Tour Submission Form. Each attached document, i.e. your Map or Pronunciation Guide, should be properly labeled as a footer on each page with your name, address, phone, and Tour location (see the example below). That way we know who to pay. Why on each item or page? Because they will then go to different VTT specialists and must be reunited later. Better than seeing your words in somebody else's tour!

Example of the footer:

Betty Smith, 123 4th St., Cornerville, Maine 22222, 891-234-5678, GRAND CANYON

11. Finally, we need five additional items that are critical to the sale of your tour. (see [Catalog](#))

(1) Send two descriptions, 25 and 100 words maximum (see [TOUR DESCRIPTIONS](#)) that tell why a person, couple, or family would want to buy your offering. Focus on the key benefits it will bring, what's unique, what's unforgettable—all in tight, ready-to-go prose that will make the purchase irresistible. (We love to pay you royalties! But we need your help to do that.)

(2) We need five tips you would give anybody taking your tour or visiting the site. Just list them like those in TIPS. We also have a sister website at www.traveltipsandtours.com that will bring tons of viewers to your visual tour description, but we need five tips to help get them there. You'll notice that the site of the tour is included in every tip—or how would they know to buy your gem?

(3) We may need a map, so note where site maps can be found locally, and if they are small, scan and upload one if available, or give us the addresses so that we can create a custom map, i.e. of a route through a neighborhood. (See [MAPS](#).) Ask locally if the map you are sending is copyrighted, please. Also tell us how a tourist can reach your site: the crossroads and city or town. Which local or regional public buses stop there?

(4) We need pieces of you too! Like a current biography and a recent .jpg photo, please. (See [PROVIDER BIOGRAPHY AND PHOTO](#).) Those go on the tour title page and are important in selling your tour and you as an expert on that region.

(5) All of the components of the final, submitted tour packet (what we will reassemble to accept or reject the submission) are listed on the [Submission Form](#). The acceptance clock starts when everything arrives! (See [SUBMISSION PROCESS](#).)

I hear you saying, "Lots of pesky stuff! These people have nerve! They should be glad a winner like me is even condescending to visit the site, pass judgment, and take a few snapshots. All for a miserly \$150 and the chance at five figures in royalties. Imagine!" Pretty much what I said for \$100 and no royalties when I was a dripping wet beginner years back, but I put two lasses through college on those wee payments, and here you can do better... Now that that's out of your system, let's get you on board so others can enjoy your castle or cruise too! Time to get that query together...

HOW DOES IT DIFFER IF YOU WILL BE AT THE SITE JUST ONE TIME?

Hardly at all, except that you will likely need a full day to do it properly, plus a lot of knowledge gathered before you arrive. I would first do the research thoroughly, probably gathering enough material to write the tour without even seeing the site. I'd isolate the key

questions I must answer there, and ask those when I arrived (very early), after looking at the local material. Then I'd take a quick walk of the area to be covered, noting the best photo sites. I'd use the local map of the location to break my tour into segments. Finally, and this would probably take half of a full day, off I'd go to get the facts and impressions, plus take the photos to support them. (You will likely need an extra battery or a second card for your camera.) Finally, I'd ask again any remaining questions of those in charge—and if they will share any interesting stories that will help bring the tour alive. (You may have to call them or others later to get the stories.) The rest I'd do from home. I'd keep thorough notes and add prose to tie the notes together or to keep vivid any special things I'd want to insert. If possible, I'd let somebody else look at my final draft—maybe a Chamber of Commerce rep or someone from a tourist attraction or venue that I'm writing about, so I don't inadvertently goof up.

A visual tour in one day is a tough assignment for a veteran, much less a novice, which is why I suggest starting with a site you know well. After you've completed a tour or two, such a fully-charged day would be a fun challenge. Easier if the sun is out, somebody with solid answers is present, and rain is far away!

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Congratulations and welcome to the Tour Providers Family!

We are delighted to include your tour on our website. Soon travelers will be downloading your tour and enjoying their experience—and your royalty checks will be pouring in.

We want you to have as much visibility for your tour as possible and to assist you in maximizing your royalties. Our own marketing efforts will get your tour to your desired audience, of course, but there are other things you can do to complement our efforts.

For that reason, we've prepared a tour providers marketing guide with tips and suggestions on how to promote yourself and your tour.

We hope you find this package useful. Do as much or as little as you are comfortable with; every little bit helps. As you experience one success, move on to another idea. Please share your experiences with us. Later, we too will share these success stories so you can all share and benefit from each other.



With all good wishes from
The Team at VisualTravelTours.com

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Dealing With The Media

Many of you are professional journalists so this will come easy. You know how you like to hear about news and what people can do to make your life easier when you are writing a story. Now that you're on the other side of the fence, simply behave the way your favorite publicist does.



For those of you new to the publicity game, the principles for dealing with the press are no different than dealing with an important client/customer.

Courtesy, follow up, graciousness, thoughtfulness, and excellent customer service will help your publicity efforts go far.

To begin, identify the best markets through which to share your good news, like newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV shows, particularly in your city and others nearby. Read or watch them carefully to determine if there is someone in particular who might write about your tour. A travel writer is a good place to start, of course, or a business reporter. Don't forget the features editor. Make note of their email address, often published after the article or in the credits.

For example, is your tour about Galena, Illinois; Tryon, North Carolina, or San Diego, California? How often do residents of those towns, or others within 50 or so miles, have family or friends visit but know nothing around which to build a quick, local tour? Many would jump at the chance to inform themselves so they can sensibly entertain the others!

Next, send them a brief email with your press release attached. If you have ordered copies of your tour on disks, you may wish to mail or deliver a complimentary copy to the reception desk of the publication, along with a hard copy of the release and a cover letter or note.

If you don't hear back, follow up with the journalist in a few days. When you do connect, begin to build a relationship. In the future you may have a second tour you would like to promote or an award to announce, and if you have a rapport with the person they are more likely to be receptive.

Be extremely conscientious about journalists' deadlines, particularly when more information or photos are needed or calls should be returned. Nothing will harm your chances for publicity faster than not respecting these deadlines.

Always thank journalists for editorials, credits, and their support.

 print THIS PAGE

- Identify best markets
- Send a brief email with your press release
- Build relationships
- Respect deadlines
- Thank journalists

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Promoting Your Way to More Royalties



In addition to publicity, there are many other things you can do to bring attention to your tour, which will help you earn more royalties than ever before. Here are some of our ideas, limited only by your time and creativity. Remember to let us know about your successes so we can use them to promote your tour and share them with others.

Celebrate

Throw a launch party for yourself—or have a friend throw one for you: “A premiere of

your tour.” Invite friends, business associates, and the press to come and celebrate the availability of your tour on VTT. Theme the event to your tour’s topic. For example, if your tour is about historic homes, hold the event at an historic home and serve refreshments typically served in the time the home was built. Be prepared to make a brief presentation about your tour and have flyers on hand for guests to take away. You’ll want to be sure they know how to access your tour when they get home. You might also want to have a demonstration of how easy it is to download a tour by having a computer with speakers on hand.

The Traveling Show



A travel show (probably at a convention) is a great way to promote your tour. You can be certain that those in attendance are your target audience. Check with your local auto club office, shopping mall, or convention center to see if one is planned in your area. Consider renting a booth and having your packaged tours available for sale. Display your

packaged tours or an attractive poster with flyers that people can take away. Your local office supply store can be extremely helpful in producing affordable promotional materials.

Author Author

Yes, you’re an author and you may want to sell the disk version at local bookstores. Ask the manager if she would arrange a signing or lecture for you. You could speak about your tour and give some highlights and little known facts. Then be prepared to autograph copies.



You’re the Expert

And you are! You have a tour available for sale at www.VisualTravelTours.com. Investigate your local chamber of commerce, travel clubs, and women and men’s clubs; they are always looking for interesting speakers for their meetings. Offer yourself as the expert on your site’s locale and

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Your marketing campaign is limited only by your time and creativity.

Remember to let us know about your successes so we can use them to promote your tour

deliver a fun and informative presentation. Be sure not to include all the details in your tour! Leave the audience wanting more, so they will buy a copy—but make the presentation worth their while. If you're not accustomed to public speaking, now is the time to learn. Check with your local community college or the local chapter of Toastmasters for classes and workshops on developing skills for public speaking. Be sure to have flyers available for attendees to take along, so they can download your tour at home.

Tourist Trap

One of your best partners in promoting your tours can be your local Conference and Visitor Bureau. Their mission is to attract visitors to your community. Contact them, let them know about your tour, and explore ways in which you can partner with their events and activities. They have their



pulse on the travelers to your market and know best how to reach them. You will probably need to become a member, but this is a relatively small price to pay for what could be a great source of valuable information and opportunities.

Distributing Your Packaged Tour

Of course you will want to have your packaged tour available at as many locations where your customers (tourists) will shop. Here are a few suggestions:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Hotel gift shops | Museum shops |
| Bookstores, in the local section | Local attraction gift shops |
| Tourist office | Gas |
| stations Souvenir and card shops | Local |
| wineries Restaurants | Cruise |
| bookstore | |

Think of unusual distribution channels as well. What about a local event planner who organizes conferences and parties for visiting business groups? Your package tour could be a wonderful party favor for these visitors. Or a hotel may be looking for an in-room amenity for their preferred guests.

Your “minute of fame” Nothing makes you feel more like a star on the red carpet than winning an award. There are three major awards in the audio industry



which you may wish to explore.
 ? Audie Award® by the Audio Publishers Association
<http://www.audiopub.org>
 ? Dalton Pen

<http://www.daltonpen.com/default2.asp>
 ? Audiofile Earphone <http://www.audiofilemagazine.com/about.html>

You might also explore awards offered in your own community by local business

organizations, your Tourist Board, or Chamber of Commerce.

The Pros Know Professional organizations and publications are always a good source for keeping abreast of the trends in the industry and for picking up tips on promoting your tour and advancing your career. Here are two resources to check out.

Audio Publishers Association (see <http://audiopub.org>)

AudioFile Magazine: (see <http://www.audiofilemagazine.com/about.html>)

Give a helping hand If you are not in need of your royalty check and are hoping



to generate some publicity for yourself and your favorite charity, consider donating all or part of your royalties to a non-profit organization. Decide what the percentage might be, perhaps from 20% to 100%. Determine what period of time the donation would cover—a month, a year? Next check with the organization to be sure they agree to accept your offer. Together, you might determine ways of letting the organization's supporters know how they can purchase your tour and raise funds for the charity. Write a press release about the partnership and when the donation is made, make a giant prop check and present it the organization and send the photo to the newspapers.

Another way to tie in with a charity is to determine if anyone in your city is planning a fund- raising event based around your theme. For example, you may have created a tour of your favorite part of Italy, Tuscany. Your local opera group has planned a fund raiser called Toscana. Arrange to have your packaged tours available for sale at the event, and donate a portion of the proceeds to the organization. Or offer a free packaged tour as a raffle prize. Host a table at the event and prepare a display of your packaged tours or an attractive poster with flyers people can take home. Again, your local Office Max, Kinko's, or Staples can be extremely helpful in producing affordable promotional materials.

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Please [contact us](#) if you have any questions.

How to Write a Press Release

What to Put in the Release

The easiest and also the universal, professional way of organizing your news is to categorize it into "The Five W's": **Who, What, Why, Where, and When.** When you answer those questions, you've told the story. But remember that journalists are busy. Respect the demands made on them by providing brief, to-the-point facts.



Basic Structure

A press release—like all news stories in the media—is structured like an inverted triangle. Information appears in the order of its importance: the most important news is at the top (or beginning) of the story; the least important is at the bottom, or the end. That way, if the reader hasn't time to look at the whole release, they will have seen the most important facts. In other words, the first paragraph of a release should contain all of the Five W's. If your story is complicated and the paragraph seems to be getting too long, break it up into two, with the less important W's in the second paragraph. The rest of the release is where you flesh out the supporting facts, providing as many interesting details as possible, relevant background information about you, the tour provider, and quotes from the people who have used your tour.

The Headline

- This is where you try to grab the reader's interest first.
- Find the briefest way to tell the essence of your story.
- Use active, exciting verbs, proper nouns, and if at all possible mention the name of your tour.

Format

- Your name, email address, phone, and fax number are placed in the upper right of the page.
- The date when the information can be made public, underneath the contact, in upper case type. Usually, the story is "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE," which means to publish it now.
- The headline, in upper case type, is centered on the page, four spaces down.
- All but the first paragraph of your article are indented.
- The first paragraph begins with the place of origin, your home town, in upper case type, followed by an "em dash," without spaces before or after.
- Avoid semicolons, single space between sentences, and if you use a dash, instead use an "em dash" (see insert, symbols, special characters) without a space before or after: those are the three most common errors of beginning journalists.
- If the story continues to a following page, the word, "- more -" is centered beneath the last sentence, between hyphens.
- To signify the end of the story, "###" is centered under the last sentence.

 print THIS PAGE

Here are some tips to help you write the most effective press release for your tour.

It's followed by a sample press release, with notations in red

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