

COMMITTEE SECRETARY

Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation
House of Representatives,
PO BOX 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a freelance French speaking tour guide based in Melbourne. I am a member of the Professional Tour Guide Association of Australia, and currently hold the position as Secretary of that organisation. I am writing in my capacity as an individual to make a submission to your Inquiry.

1. It is generally recognised that an important part of a high quality tour experience is the presence of an appropriately qualified, and competent tour guide . The services of such a professional will enhance and enrich the visitors experience, will ensure proper organisation and management of the tour and will provide such customer service as to ensure all visitors are comfortable safe and properly entertained and occupied.

RECOMMENDATION That tour guides be recognised as a separate and important employment category separate from a general classification of "hospitality and tourism" and that their rights, responsibilities and roles be clearly defined
Within the category of tour guide there should be sub categories such as guide with foreign language; guide with specialist knowledge; guide with driver qualifications; university graduate; scope of experience (local, state, national, international)

2. That no unqualified person be allowed to give commentary. On some tours I have taken out of Melbourne, I have heard appalling commentaries.

Inaccurate information - Did you know for instance that Ferdinand Von Mueller accompanied Mathew Flinders on his voyage around Australia and collected a million plant specimens ?
Did you know there are 1,800 species of Eucalypts ? etc

Wall to wall talking - if you ask anyone their worst commentary experience, it is nearly always the guide who never lets up. I have heard some commentaries run continuously with the most trivial irrelevant and boring information

3. It is well known that guides from overseas who are tour escorts, give their commentary in their language. This would not be tolerated in any other country and not only takes our jobs but results in a very inferior product.

RECOMMENDATION That all foreign guides be forbidden by law to deliver commentary on Australian content;

Where an appropriately qualified guide is not available a translator should be employed;

4. The "do everything" coach captain on large tours. Many tours operate with the coach captain doing everything from maintaining the toilets, preparing morning tea, delivering the commentary driving and acting as tour manager. These tours go out of Melbourne from Swanston Street to the Great Ocean Road and Phillip Island for example, every day. I have accompanied French speaking passengers on these tours and I believe they are a very inferior product.

The quality of these tours is low, not because of lack of competence or goodwill of the Coach captain. Simply no one person has the time or emotional energy to do everything at once. Furthermore there are serious concerns about road safety. If someone is driving, doing the commentary, managing a microphone at the same time this is a potentially dangerous situation. We are forbidden by law to talk on the mobile phone while driving. There is little difference between this and delivering a commentary while driving at the same time.

On public tours where I have accompanied French speaking passengers on a public tour with the driver doing everything, they have been surprised that this is allowed. Some very experienced travellers have said this is the only country where they have seen this happen.

RECOMMENDATION

That in tours with more than, say, 11 passengers, it is mandatory for a guide to be employed.

RECOMMENDATION

That research be conducted on the response time, safety etc of someone driving and delivering commentary at the same time; or a review of literature which may have already addressed this issue;

5. Encouragement of quality people into the industry will only occur if there is good remuneration and a career path and some security of tenure; The main reasons for this are
Seasonality

Fragility of continuity of employment due to external events

Reluctance of operators to recognise worth of quality work in ensuring high experience outcomes for tourists visiting this country;

RECOMMENDATION

That employees in tourism be encouraged to add as many skills to their skill set as possible to increase their employment opportunities both in and out of the tourist season. May I refer to this as The "Kate Model" ? On a recent family holiday in Tasmania I took a cruise on the Gordon River that left from Strachan. Kate was there to collect tickets and later walked around the ship in customer service role to explain procedures for lunch etc At a later time during a shore visit to see the forest she provided an excellent commentary. Later still on the return trip to Strachan who should be piloting the cruise ship but Kate. She was also training for her licence to pilot the cruise ship. This probably meant the company was able to employ her full time in a variety of roles, as opposed to several different casual people to do a specific task.

The company also owned a small theatre with a play was staged every evening about an escape from Sarah Island. Many of the actors were on the cruise giving commentary and role playing during the course of the tour. the roles were tour guide, actor and customer service.

RECOMMENDATION

That guidelines for minimum employment conditions be set out for guides. Such guidelines should include,

- hourly rates;
- minimum call out rates; loadings for extra skills such as foreign language; specialist knowledge; driver skills; etc
- payment on completion of a job;
- payment of appropriate taxi or other fares to and from airports;
- casual employment as opposed to contract employment to ensure cover by the workers compensation system applicable;

I also seek leave to add to this submission at a later date.

Yours Sincerely

Rosemary young