

**POCKET
BOOK**

Practical advice for new tourist guides



**Be prepared, professional and proactive.
Provide wildlife and cultural tours that
show tourists a new side of your country.**

This pocket book is based on guidance from Johnnie Kamugisha and Alfred Twinomujuni of the Uganda Safari Guides Association (USAGA) and Peter Nizette of the Responsible Tourism Partnership.

www.ugasaf.org

www.responsibletourismpartnership.org

Acknowledgements

This pocket book draws on guidance prepared for two projects: 'Local economic development through 'pro-poor' gorilla tourism in Uganda' funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, and the 'Bwindi Batwa Conservation Project' funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. First, we would like to thank all the local guides who took part in both projects for their commitment and enthusiasm. Special thanks also goes to the USAGA for providing certification for The Bwindi Specialist Guides Group that was formed as part of the Darwin Initiative project, and to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) for supporting this process. Thank you to Gemma Wilson for editing the pocket book and Emily Sadler for the design.

Published by IIED in March 2019

ISBN 978-1-78431-678-5

<http://pubsiied.org/17646IIED>



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Foreword by the USAGA

This pocket book is designed to cover basic guiding skills for those just starting out as a tourist guide. It is based on knowledge from experienced guides in the field and intended as a practical guide to planning taking visitors on trails, focusing on what guides need to know, what works well, and why.

No single training manual can cover everything that makes a great wildlife or cultural tour guide - you will always face new situations and unexpected questions. But we have tried to cover the main topics, including being an effective host, planning tours and caring for clients. Guides will also need First Aid skills, but although we highlight this need, specific training is beyond the scope of this pocket book.



Photo: Golden Bees Ltd

There are many other books and field guides available that will be a great help in developing good guiding, as well as your own study of local wildlife. In time, asking for feedback from your clients and contemporaries will also help to shape your technique.



Photo: Victoria Pinion

The key message, as anyone in the tourism industry will confirm, is that knowing facts and figures isn't enough to become a successful tourist guide. Indeed, the most essential characteristic of successful guiding is undoubtedly 'people skills'. Strong knowledge of wildlife and culture, combined with charisma and practical competence, is the winning formula!

We hope that combined with your own learning and practice, the information here will give you everything you need to be an exemplary guide and create memorable experiences for your clients.

Johnnie Kamugisha
General Secretary, USAGA



The importance of guiding

Guiding is a way to bring more tourism to your area and provide visitors with sights, sounds and experiences they cannot get at home.

When done correctly, wildlife and cultural tours show tourists a new side of your country - whether it is an animal in its natural habitat or understanding more about local culture and customs. These are memories that people keep forever and will talk about to their friends and family for many years to come.

Therefore, client satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth is the guide's most important ally. Here we will teach you ways to ensure the future success of your guiding, with tips to make you **PREPARED**, **PROFESSIONAL** and **PROACTIVE**.

The second important role of a guide is to be conscious of the effects of their activities on the natural surroundings and local communities. These are the essence of your tour and effectively your 'office' - it is where you work, and your occupation depends on its existence.

Therefore resource 'health' and the local nature and ecosystem are your responsibility and must always be left as they are found. As a guide, you are the 'go between' linking your guests to the wildlife and local culture, but you are also the leader, with clients looking to you to provide guidance for how they behave in these settings.



Photo: Victoria Pinion

Guides should be respectful but should also expect respect from clients. Do not feel pressured to agree to activities that provide short-term customer satisfaction but compromise the long-term viability of the wildlife and the ecosystem (see the box on page 11 for further information).

Four guide personalities

You may now be asking yourself what makes a good guide. Maybe you have your own ideas or have seen some different styles yourself. Here are four different guide types you may have met before - three to avoid and one you should aim for, to be an effective and successful guide.

1. Machine Style.

These people are human message repeaters! Once switched on they run on until the end. To the clients, it's obvious that the guide has given the same tour in exactly the same way many, many times.

2. Know It All Style.

These are the 'data dumpers' of the tour-guides. These guides appear to be most keen to show off their knowledge. But they can end up sounding dull and can lose track of time or drift off the main topic.

3. Cop Style.

These are staunch protectors of the site, constantly reminding visitors of rules and regulations, and this can divert attention from the presentation.

4. Host Style.

The host is by far the most successful tour guide. These guides don't see themselves like the other three. They may have done the same tour many times, but their friendly approach fosters two-way communication that keeps the tour fresh. They are knowledgeable, but not dull. They keep to time but pay attention to individual requests. And they have the confidence and diplomacy to get tourists to follow the rules. Everyone enjoys the tour, and the tour doesn't damage what visitors have paid to see.

If you become a Host, success awaits!

Over the following pages you will learn tips to follow - and what to avoid - to become a host guide.

GUIDING TIPS

PREPARED

There are a number of steps to take to ensure your clients get a good service. These principles are the foundation of any activity that involves dealing with the public. Applying them consistently creates satisfied clients, and therefore a good reputation and return business. Good service starts before your tour begins and requires **preparation** - ensure you follow these steps.

Planning for the tour

- First of all, check an updated weather forecast to ensure there are no surprises on the day.
- You'll probably need to contact clients about practicalities, so also ask about any specific needs or particular wishes for the trip.
- Check what pace your client expects - is this a relaxed or intensive trip? What kind of route can they cope with physically?
- Agree the pick-up point and length of tour.
- Advise them on clothing and equipment for the weather and itinerary.
- Make sure you have considered health and safety, such as probable temperatures and dangerous animals.
- Factor in seasonality - for example, will there be migrant birds to see?
- Plan the route around the requested experience, tailoring your checklist of expected sightings to fit your clients' requests.
- Write down your clients' names in case you forget during the day and learn a little about where your clients are from for conversation.

Equipment checklist - Always bring

- A fully stocked first aid kit
- Toilet paper, soap and spare washing water - your guests may forget
- A topographical map of the area you're visiting, and be familiar with it
- Field guidebooks (on plants, reptiles etc)
- A pair of binoculars
- Pocket notebook and pencil or pen
- Have a list of emergency numbers in case of need (UWA Wardens, Lodge Managers, Tourism Police, Senior Tourist Guide)

Your appearance



- Smartness and personal hygiene are crucial. A guide should always look smart and smell clean because first impressions set expectations. Look neat and professional. Wearing a uniform and your guiding badge marks you out as the tour guide.
- Dress appropriately, for example have the right footwear for the terrain, and don't wear bright colours for bird walks.
- Equip yourself - carry binoculars, a notebook and pencil, and wildlife identification guidebooks – making sure these are clean and well-maintained and electrical equipment is charged.
- Remember, the guide is the 'face' of the tour and is an ambassador - so show care and courtesy when dealing with food and accommodation providers as well as the clients.

Friendly, not 'friends'

Some guides fall into the trap of pretending that guests are their friends. This cannot be the case. They are valued guests whose positive recommendations can be an asset to future business, if treated professionally. You may only exchange contacts if the guest requests it, or if you explicitly ask if it is ok to keep in touch.

Keeping in touch (via facebook, email, Instagram or other social media) means a message when the host has special or new news, such as congratulations or birthday wishes. General communication, just for the sake of it, is not something a professional guide does.

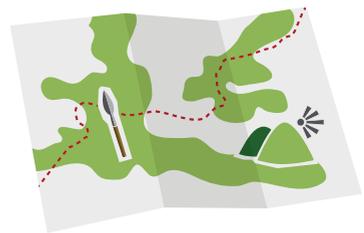
Never use contact with former clients as a way to solicit money. This is unprofessional and will damage not only your reputation, but that of other guides and tourism in the area.

PROFESSIONAL

The beginning of the tour is the first time you'll meet your clients. First impressions are very important for setting the tone of the tour and presenting yourself as professional. The right steps at the start build trust and rapport and can even minimise problems arising later on.

Meeting and greeting

- Always arrive in good time - always before the time you've agreed to meet your guests (not just on time).
- Introduce yourself to each of your guests in a relaxed but respectful manner.
- Learn your group's names. This simple yet crucial courtesy makes the whole experience far more personal.
- Check everyone is appropriately dressed and equipped for the route and weather. If they are not, what will you do? It's good to have a plan.
- Openly display your guiding badge and carry your ID card.
- Explain the route using the map and schedule you have decided on.
- Ask if anyone has a health issue you need to be aware of. But remember, people often won't say anything until they are struggling.
- Brief clients on safety issues and procedures such as security and behaviour.
- Make sure everyone has got enough drinking water.
- Talk about toilets! Will there be any? How do guests tell you they need a 'bush stop'?
- Enquire (again) whether there are any specific/particular interests.
- Check what pace is acceptable – relaxed or intensive.
- Exude enthusiasm and relax – after all guiding is what you enjoy!



Protecting the environment

As a guide, you must always be conscious of how the tour activities affect the people, places and wildlife guests want to see, and look after their long term prospects. Visitors on wildlife tours often ask the guide to take them 'even closer' for a unique photo opportunity or a better view. Similarly, visitors on cultural tours can be insensitive and forget their manners! One of the greatest challenges for a newly-trained guide is stopping clients from doing things that threaten wildlife's wellbeing or offend local people.

Sometimes, guides are understandably reluctant to risk their tip, which depends on a satisfied client. But most clients will respect the guide's honest efforts to protect wildlife from needless harm - a bird deserting its nest, or a leopard abandoning its meal, for example. The rest of the group is looking to the guide for leadership, so in fact, a guide can often make even bigger tips by NOT heeding one person's inappropriate request.



Convincing the client is easier if you have genuine knowledge of the wildlife and its needs, and explains why 'getting even closer' is harmful. You may also have to remind clients to respect local cultural expectations, and to ask permission before taking pictures of people. Remember, the guide should be providing a link between communities and tourism that builds mutual respect.

As a guide, it is your duty to advocate for the environment that essentially provides you with a living, and ensure you always leave the ecosystem as it is found. Talk to guests about current conservation issues. People tend to be more appreciative and empathetic toward wildlife when they're out in the bush.

You can take some of the pressure off yourself by creating tactful signs and printed guidelines that provide clear instructions on 'do's and don'ts' for visitors. You can hand out the guidelines or post signs along the route before the tour starts.



PROACTIVE

If you have followed the tips to be prepared and professional you will already be making a strong start. On the tour you are the leader of your group, and responsible for giving your clients a memorable experience. But that doesn't mean taking control and dictating the trip. A good guide asks for regular input from clients and creates a relaxed and enjoyable environment.

On the tour

- Check how everyone is doing as you go along. Be proactive: handle concerns or problems at an early stage, should any develop. Remember to think about water stops, toilets, etc.
- Stay long enough at sites for sightings, and be patient in explaining and pointing things out.
- But also move from point to point on your route without undue delay. You have to manage timings. If you stop longer than anticipated for an excellent sighting at one point, you may need to pick up the pace later.
- Encourage everyone to 'look sharp' and to call out anything you may not have spotted.
- Even if you're not seeing wildlife, point out other things of interest so you keep developing a rapport with the group.
- If the trail is so narrow you need to walk in single file, try to mix up the order from time to time.
- Remember any particular requests - and try to fulfill them.
- Keep the group together at all times.
- Never underestimate the client's knowledge, and don't mistake unfamiliarity for stupidity. For example, you may take coffee plantations for granted, having grown up around them, but your clients may never have seen such things.
- Never make things up or take a wild guess - if you don't know something, there are tips on the opposite page for what to do.
- The clients have paid a lot to get to you, so focus on a quality day. Your enthusiasm and dedication are very important.



If a client asks an obscure question and you don't know the answer, the worst thing you can possibly do is make something up. You'll get found out eventually, which could seriously harm your reputation and cause your client to consider whether all of the facts you provided were false.

It's when guides blatantly don't know the answer and make something up that gets them into difficulty. Instead, admit to your clients that you don't know the answer, make an informed guess if the situation allows, but commit to letting the client know you will find the answer and let them know. Once committed, you must deliver on that promise, the same day/evening, preferably in person while not interrupting their end-of-day activities - but at least with a phone call to their driver or guide.

Talking with your clients

- Remain impartial and focus on the day's programme.
- Communicate with the client/clients proactively, not just responding to questions.
- Maintain a good sense of humour.
- Know your 'patch'. Be able to talk about its history, natural resources, industries, soil and vegetation, communities, cultural events, etc.
- Be wary of sharing your views on sensitive subjects such as politics, religion and personal prejudices. You will cover these topics on a cultural tour, but information should be kept factual. Also, while it is polite to take an interest in the culture of your clients, avoid subjects that could create a negative atmosphere from clashing opinions.
- Be conscious of language. Your way of speaking may sound strange to your clients, as may theirs to you. Similarly, international clients may not be confident in the language you are using.
- Speak clearly, so everyone in the group can hear you. When you need to talk quietly so as not to disturb wildlife - repeat your comments or instructions rather than addressing everyone together.
- Don't lose your cool. Avoid sentences like "I told you that earlier". If someone can't understand you, try rephrasing rather than repeating what you said. If a client cannot pick up a sighting, then set up a telescope for them or lend your binoculars.

* BONUS POINTS *

Check lists and bullet points are handy summaries, but nothing beats local knowledge and learning by doing. We will draw on some experiences from well-seasoned guides to take your guiding to the next level.

Capturing memories

Remember, your clients are building memories that will help them care about conservation and communities. These days, making memories nearly always involves cameras! Whether or not your clients have expensive cameras, always try to act as if they do. Even those with basic point-and-shoot or smartphone cameras will come away far more satisfied if your guiding skills led them to good photos.

One top tip is to try to keep the sun behind you. It works better for both spotting and photographing wildlife. However, at sunrise and sunset your clients may actually prefer to face the sun in order to take classic sunrise/sunsets and silhouette photographs. Finally, remember to address any sensitivities about photographs of people and cultural sites with tact.



Visual aids and storytelling

What do you do when the animals or birds on your wildlife tour just don't seem to cooperate? Probably the cultural aspects of your tour will 'take centre stage'. But there are still things you can do to make the most of the wildlife.

Try to look for features of the landscape or plants that the animal/bird relies on, and use these to tell a story or give more insight into the species. It won't be quite the same, but you'd be amazed at how contented a person can feel just by visualizing. Make sure to have a few good stories to tell that relate to wildlife, and use the surrounding environment to your advantage.

There are endless things to talk about: plant lore, folk tales, local history, geology, climate and so on. Having field guidebooks can really make a difference too - showing clients pictures in your book can help make more of a fleeting or 'just missed' sighting.

Keeping it interesting

Another top tip is to stay interesting. Do you remember the types of guides (Page 7)? Don't be the machine guide or the data dumper. Avoid listing off boring facts. People don't generally want to know the average weight, life span and gestation period of every single animal - unless they are especially surprising, or they specifically ask. Instead, tell your clients what is going on - taking your cues from the current environment and the animal's behaviour.

Let's use an example: You are on a walk and you spot a group of L'hoest Monkeys feeding. You notice that one of them is feeding on a plant that the rest are not eating, and you rarely see monkeys feed on it apart from when one does not look well. You know it is a medicinal plant. Now, let's look at two different guiding style options.



OPTION 1:

Here are L'Hoest's Monkeys. In a group they are called a 'troop'. Their average life expectancy while in the forest is not known but they have lived for 24 years in captivity and the gestation period is 5 months. L'Hoest's Monkeys can weigh up to 3.5 kgs for a female or 4.7kgs for a male.

OPTION 2:

Here we see a troop of L'Hoest's Monkeys, sometimes called mountain monkeys. They are common in the montane forests in the Albertine Rift area. They feed mainly on fruits and leaves and small invertebrates, but if you can see that young male, it has been feeding on a particular plant that others are not eating. That plant is medicinal so it looks like it is treating itself. I have watched other monkeys feed on this plant before, and researchers have found out that Mountain Gorillas also treat themselves with the same plant. L'Hoest monkeys can live a long time, even 24 years in captivity, and are important for the plants too, because the seeds they take in while feeding on fruits are dispersed elsewhere when they go to the toilet.

We think you will agree Option 2 is far more interesting and engaging.

Tips for a cultural tour

Understanding local cultures can be just as interesting to people from outside your region. Sometimes even more so!

A cultural tour should follow four main principles - the material needs to be interesting, relevant, and be well organised with a theme that ties everything together. For example, 'where did local people originally come from' or 'what are the traditional religious beliefs in the area, and how do they compare with each other?'

You could start by thinking of local cultural heritage (see the box below for local and national examples from Uganda) and try to see how you can link and explain these to develop a picture of local life, history and beliefs.

Uganda has a diverse culture. Here are just a few important aspects from different parts of the country.

Northern Uganda has the complex traditional dances of the Acholi people.

Western Uganda is home to the ancient Bunyoro and Toro Kingdoms.

Southern Uganda has an important archaeological site at the Nshungyezi rocks on the banks of Akagera river.

Eastern Uganda is home to an important traditional festival where young men are circumcised to mark their passage to adulthood.

Central Uganda has culturally important tombs from the Buganda Kingdom, shrines to the spirit of the Budhagari falls, and an important archaeological site at Bigobyamugyenyi.

But local culture can be equally important. Here are some starting points:

- > Cultural sites
- > Skills and tools/ utensils (hunting, iron smelting etc)
- > Folklore and traditional stories
- > Cultural norms and values
- > Marriage customs
- > Musical instruments, dances and songs
- > Traditional clothing



Conserving cultural heritage is a huge task - and your tour can play a part in it. You may or may not have the resources to set up a cultural interpretation center, but if your tour includes traditional stories, people singing folk songs or using traditional instruments, or even demonstrations of traditional skills, then you are helping document cultural heritage and sensitise people to its relevance.

It's good for a tour guide to emphasise the value of local culture to clients. Remind them that understanding different cultures helps us understand other people's way of life, and perhaps helps us acquire new skills, while fostering respect and recognition that promotes harmony among people. Just as you should be a voice for wildlife, you are the link between local communities and tourists. Once again you are the ambassador!

Remember that cultural sites and practices, even small local or seemingly insignificant ones, are important for far more than just developing a tourism industry - they help us keep in touch with our history and are crucial to people's sense of identity.

Example – Talking about Ethnic Groups Living in the Bwindi Region

The Banyarwanda are a mixture of two different groups, the Bahutu and the Batusti. Buhutu people come from the Bantu ethnic grouping, believed to have originated from Congo. They settled on the foothills of the Virunga Mountains and are known as Bafumbira in Uganda. They are agriculturalists like the Bakiga, but lived under the Tutsi rule until colonial times, often working as herdsmen for Tutsi people.

The Tutsi people speak Kinyarwanda and have links to the Chwezi people, sharing common cultural traits such as the emphasis placed on owning cows. Traditionally they were governed by the Umwani - or king. They probably come from the Hamitic ethnic grouping, possibly having links with the Israelites of Biblical times, but they also have their own origin stories, including the story that Nkumba and his wife Nyagasani, together with their three children Kirwa, Tutsi and Nyampundu, fell into the Rwanda Hills from heaven.

Building your reputation

Trust is a very big part of the guide-client relationship. It is crucial for bringing in new customers, and for helping guides over the occasional 'hurdle' or hiccup. Happy customers tell others, even if they don't come back themselves, and that drives more business. Overall, you are building a reputation and a firm foundation for success.

- Treat every client as your most important one, and treat them all as if they were your employers - after all, they pay your wages!
- Keep a 'can do' attitude and go out of your way to help clients, whether meeting their requests or just giving directions home.
- But also keep your integrity - such as resisting pressure to get closer to wildlife. Your reputation is more important than any one client.
- Manage a client's expectations from the start. Don't promise what you might not be able to deliver. It's better to exceed expectations.
- Say what you can do, rather than just saying 'no'. For example, if asked to lead a walk on Wednesday, you might answer 'Wednesday is difficult, but I can do Tuesday or Thursday, or maybe a shorter walk on Wednesday evening'.
- Be reliable: keep your appointments and be well organised.
- Thank your clients for their business.
- Give clients a way to give you direct feedback. You might hand out a short survey, or follow up with an email. If someone wants to complain or make suggestions, it is better they tell you than the whole world.
- If you get online reviews always try to give your own response too, even if the review is excellent. There are three good reasons for this:
 1. People like to be heard and thanked for their compliments.
 2. Complaints are less likely when clients know you will respond.
 3. Everyone gets the odd complaint - other potential customers will trust you more if you handle complaints well.
- When there's a problem, take partial responsibility even if it was not really your fault. This shows you are interested in solving and preventing problems, not in blaming others.
- Always respond promptly - whether it is to a missed call, email, text or Facebook message. If you don't have an immediate answer for a question, tell the client you will get back to them (and do!).

First aid

First aid is the medical assistance guides give their clients, either until more qualified help arrives, or, in the case of minor things like cuts and blisters, until the clients no longer need help.

Knowing what to do (and what not to do) is crucial, but is beyond the scope of this pocket book. Meanwhile, it may help to make a few basic points:

- All tour guides should have some basic first aid training from a qualified trainer.
- Communication is key – guides should have a way to contact help. Having a phone and the right numbers is important.
- If phones don't work on your tour, make sure someone knows where you went, when you are expected back, and what to do if you don't arrive.
- Always ask clients about whether they have any illness or disability you need to know about before you set off – and adjust your plans accordingly.
- Make sure you and the clients are well-equipped for the tour.
- Carry a first aid kit – and always keep it replenished.
- Take care that one mishap doesn't lead to another – don't let one person go off alone, and try to stop any would-be rescuers falling victim to the same accident.

Your local Health Centre may provide training, or help you find a qualified trainer. Speak with them to find out.

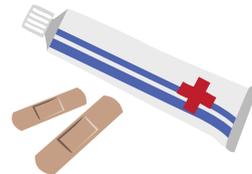
Certified training is available from these organisations, either as a general course for individuals to join, or group training that is tailored to tour guides.

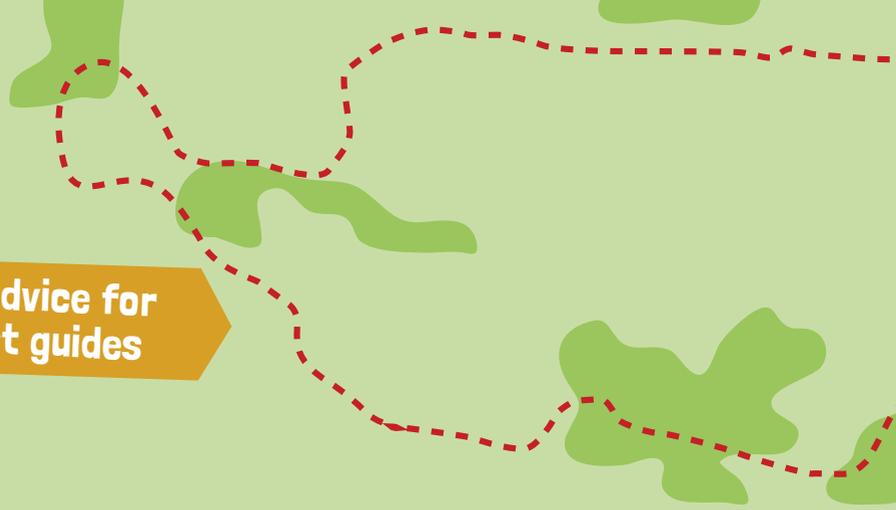
www.stjohnuganda.org/training | contact: info@stjohnuganda.org

www.redcrossug.org/services/training | contact: sgurcs@redcrossug.org

First aid training is also occasionally available through the Uganda Tourism Association.

www.ugandatourismassociation.org





Practical advice for new tourist guides

Are you ready to become a tourist guide?

Tours are a great way to bring more visitors to your area, and teach visitors about local culture and wildlife in their natural surroundings.

But knowing the facts and figures on their own isn't enough to guarantee success. This pocket book provides advice and reminders from guides with decades of experience to help you to:

- Plan and run effective tours
- Be an engaging, respectful and respected host
- Create memorable experiences for your clients
- Build a strong and trusted reputation that attracts new customers



The production of this pocket book was funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative project 'Local economic development through 'pro-poor' gorilla tourism in Uganda'. However, the content does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the UK Government. The project was coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development with the Responsible Tourism Partnership, Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation, International Gorilla Conservation Programme, and Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust.