

Toolkit: guided tours



Description

Running a guided tour on the day of an event is a great opportunity to let people know about the park, including its heritage, wildlife value or a new restoration project that is taking place. It can help to develop a sense of pride in the park amongst the local community and will almost certainly teach them something they didn't know before they came to the event. It is also a great opportunity to let people know about the work of the Friends group and attract new members.

Guided tours can be fun and are an excellent way to share your love of local history or wildlife. In order to be successful, they need to be planned well. While the guide does not need to be a professional, they must be confident in their subject matter and personality. With preparation, almost anyone can make a success-

How to do it

Plan the guided tour

Nominate tour leader(s) and people who will help. The ideal lead person should be personable, enjoy speaking to members of the public, be confident, have a good local knowledge of the park and be good at timekeeping!

Decide on theme and focus of the tour(s). It could cover historical elements of the park or focus on the wildlife and ecological interest.

Design the guided tour

Decide on the elements of the tour and what areas of the park you would like to visit.

Decide on the time necessary for your tour and how many times it will run throughout the day.

Plan your exact route around the park.

Develop an accompanying leaflet if necessary

Although this is not necessary, it can be useful to provide further information on the topic of the tour and the park in general. It could be printed on a home computer, photocopied at a local shop, or printed by printers if funding is available. The leaflet could include:

- park map showing the route and important features and information points;
- information about the history and key elements of the tour;
- general information about the park;
- details about the Friends group.

Prepare for the tour

Carry out research on your chosen subject topic if necessary.

Conduct a practice-run of the route.

Get any props (such as costumes) well in advance.

Promote the tour

Advertise the fact that the event features tours and what they will cover before the event. Make sure this is described in any press releases about the whole event.

Advertise start times and locations on the day of the event, giving people plenty of warning.

On the day of the tour

Make sure start times and meeting points are fully advertised and signposted within the event area. Start from somewhere central and prominent, such as a café, museum or visitor centre. It can be a good idea to start the tour from the Friends group information stall.

Start and finish tours on time, but be flexible in case of emergencies.

Make the theme of the tour apparent to everyone who comes on.

Ideas for guided tours

A guided tour of the historical features of the park. If there are several areas of interest and too much to fit into one tour, consider having several tours (e.g. one for the park and one for the house).

Latest developments within the park. If the park is to be restored or there is a new project taking place within the park, this could present an ideal opportunity to inform people of the latest developments of the park.

A wildlife-focused guided tour. This will often be dependent on the season: mid summer may not be the best time for birds due to the foliage of trees limiting views, although might be a better time for butterflies.

A horticultural-focused tour. This may well depend on the level of expertise within the Friends group or the level of horticultural interest within the park.

Must do's

Make sure the guided tour is adequately covered by insurance (which will cover the rest of the event).

Make sure that any risk assessment for the event took into account the route of the tour.

Make sure that you are in phone or radio contact with the staff and volunteers in the main event area at all times in case of emergency.

Make sure that there are no unsupervised children on the tour unless the guide has been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Make sure at least one other event organiser knows where you are going and what time you are planning to be back.

Make sure that the lead tour guide does not have any other responsibilities for the event during the day. They will need to concentrate on the tour and nothing else, so all other areas should be taken care of by other volunteers and staff.

Other event ideas to link to

Friends group stall. This can provide information about the guided tour throughout the afternoon and act as a starting and finishing point.

Workdays. If these are taking place on the day of the event, the guided tour could use them as a point of interest. A tour could also show work which has recently been undertaken in workdays.

What to do if it rains

While you should try to stick to the planned times of the tours, you may need to be flexible. It may be the case that one or all of the tours will have to be cancelled if rain is severe.

Be prepared for reduced numbers if it continues to rain. Consider whether you will have a minimum number for the tour to take place.

Consider supplying umbrellas for members of the tour if this is practical.

Modify the tour to follow a route that is undercover if this is possible (e.g. a museum within the park).

Issues to consider

Try to keep guided tours under 40 minutes. However interesting, most people will start to lose interest if it is any longer than this. Make sure that you do not try to fit too much in to the time allocated. A shorter time will also allow the guide to have a rest!

Make sure there are enough volunteers to help with the tour. This will prevent people from getting lost, improve ability to respond in an emergency and also allow more people to ask questions.

Try to repeat the tour two or three times during the afternoon. This will allow more people to take part, especially those who may not know about the tours until later in the afternoon.

Consider having a limit on numbers for the tours. Groups of more than 20 can become unmanageable and will make it difficult for some people to hear. If the tours prove to be popular, allocating tickets is one way to make sure it does not increase above capacity.

Make sure the route is fully accessible for people of all abilities, including wheelchairs and people with visual impairments. If the tour is throughout a hilly park, some people may not be able to walk at full pace or complete the tour. The progress of the tour will only be as fast as your slowest member.

It is a good idea to have parts of the tour where people can leave if they want to, so be prepared to direct them back to the meeting point or main event area. It can also be an idea to have some rest stops for people. The tour could easily pass a park café half way through.

If it is a very hot day, it can be a good idea to take some bottled water in case anyone suffers from heat exhaustion.

Consider whether you require any props. If you are leading an historical tour, this may include costumes to dress up in, books or old photographs; if you are leading a wildlife tour, you may take books with diagrams in, feathers or models. You need to consider where you will get these and what time and cost implications these will have.

What to do next

A guided tour will present a captive audience so make the most of this to promote the work of the Friends and attract new members. You could ask at the end of the tour whether people would like to sign up to get further information or join and collect contact details. It can therefore be an idea to finish the tour at the Friends group stall. This is also an opportunity to give them further information about future events.

What to do next

British Association for Local History
www.balh.co.uk

Local History Magazine
www.local-history.co.uk

Association for Heritage Interpretation
www.heritage-interpretation.org.uk

Heritage Education Trust
www.heritageeducationtrust.org.uk

Blue Badge Guides
www.blue-badge-guides.com