

# How to start your own **WALKING TOUR**

By Paul Forster

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Owner of the multi award winning Harrogate Ghost Walk, author of 'Haunted Harrogate' and producer and presenter of 'Dead Air' radio show







# INTRODUCTION

This guide has been created to give you everything you need to start, shape, and succeed in running your own walking tour business—whether you're at the earliest stages of having an idea, or you're already out on the streets telling stories and looking to grow. It's a practical, honest, and detailed roadmap that takes you from concept to performance, with real-world advice drawn from experience, trial, and a lot of walking in all weathers.

I haven't just written this as a business guide—I've lived it. I run The Harrogate Ghost Walk, an independent, award-winning walking tour that I built from scratch. I didn't have a big budget, a marketing team, or a franchise model behind me. What I had was a love of storytelling, a background in performance, and a determination to create something people would remember. Over time, that idea turned into a successful, sell-out tour that's led to hundreds of five-star reviews, a published book, media coverage, and a loyal following of guests who return again and again.

Everything in this guide has been tested in the real world—from designing a route that works for families and ghost-hunters alike, to dealing with no-shows, creating interactive experiences, handling difficult guests, and building a brand on a budget. This isn't theory—it's practical advice from someone who has done the late-night tours, cleaned the A-boards in the rain, chased permissions from the council, and learned through both success and the occasional misstep.

I've written this so you don't have to start from zero. So you can learn what works, avoid what doesn't, and build a walking tour that reflects your passion, your voice, and your connection to the place you love. Wherever in the world you are, whatever kind of stories you want to tell—this guide is here to help you bring them to life, one step at a time.



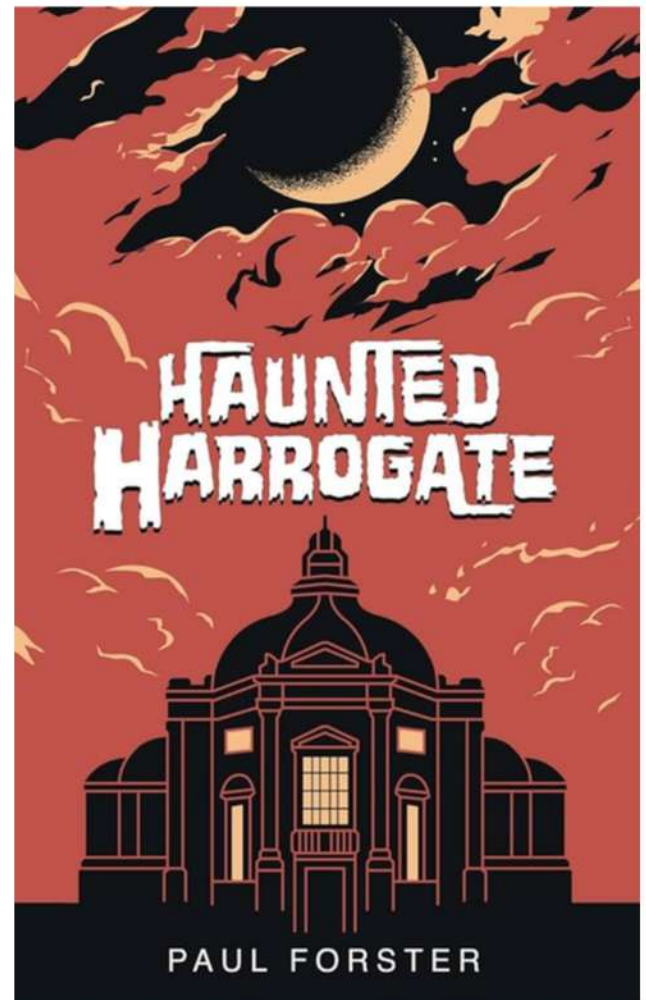


## ABOUT ME

I'm Paul Forster the founder, writer, and storyteller behind The Harrogate Ghost Walk—an award-winning walking tour that has welcomed thousands of guests, earned hundreds of five-star reviews, and built a reputation for offering something truly original, atmospheric, and entertaining. With a background in acting, writing, community engagement, and live performance, I bring together a love of storytelling and a deep connection to place in everything I do.

My ghost walk started, quite literally, with my wife telling me that I should start a ghost walk. I also have a passion for the paranormal and a desire to tell stories. I didn't want to recycle third-hand tales—I wanted to hear directly from local people and share their experiences in a way that felt authentic, exciting, and rooted in community. I reached out to newspapers, collected real accounts from hundreds of residents, and turned them into something no one else had done before: the first comprehensive book of ghost stories from Harrogate, now sold in bookshops across the region and online.

Beyond the ghost walk, I wear many hats. I juggle four jobs, including work in the arts, community development, and education. This has taught me how to manage time, balance projects, and build flexible, sustainable businesses that still have soul. I'm a passionate believer in using creativity to connect people with place, history, and each other—and in empowering others to do the same.



# Step 1

## About you

At the core of every successful walking tour is the guide—the storyteller, host, and performer who brings the experience to life. Whether you come from a creative, academic, or local background, your ability to connect with people, communicate clearly, and adapt to different groups is what truly makes a tour memorable. This section encourages you to reflect on your strengths and areas for growth as a guide. It's not about being perfect—it's about being self-aware, curious, and committed to improving every time you step out with a group.







# Step 1

## About you

At the heart of every great walking tour is the person who delivers it. The guide is more than just someone who recites facts or points out landmarks—they are the storyteller, the host, the educator, and, at times, the entertainer. It's their voice that brings history to life, their presence that sets the tone, and their passion that keeps people engaged. A tour guide might come from a variety of backgrounds: they may have formal education in history, archaeology, architecture, or the arts, or they may be a lifelong resident with a deep, intuitive knowledge of their town's stories.

Some guides have years of experience in teaching or public speaking, while others are performers—actors, musicians, or writers—who are already skilled at holding a crowd's attention. What matters most is their ability to communicate clearly, confidently, and with genuine enthusiasm.

But not every great guide starts out fully formed. Some might be deeply knowledgeable but struggle with nerves when speaking in front of a group. Others might be charismatic and warm, but need to deepen their historical research to deliver a more accurate or nuanced tour. Acting or storytelling workshops can be invaluable for guides who want to add drama and polish to their delivery.

Public speaking courses help build confidence, improve vocal projection, and teach pacing—skills that make a huge difference when guiding groups outdoors. Even experienced guides benefit from refreshing their knowledge, learning new techniques for audience engagement, and refining their style to suit different groups.

The best guides are curious and committed to personal growth, always looking for ways to improve, whether that means learning a new language to reach more visitors, studying local dialects and pronunciation for authenticity, or simply practicing better crowd management techniques.

A successful guide is part historian, part performer, and part people person. They make guests feel welcome, they adapt to different energy levels and questions, and they know how to read a crowd, shifting their pace or tone when needed.

Only you will know if you have it in you to be a walking tour guide. Learn, evolve, change and adapt. Get better every time you deliver a tour and you will see the changes for yourself.

Before you read any further, take a moment to complete this task:

**Reflect on yourself as a potential (or current) tour guide.**

Make two lists: one for your strengths, and one for your weaknesses. This exercise will help you understand where you naturally shine and where there's room for growth. Here are some prompts to guide your thinking:

**Strengths – What are you good at?**

- Are you confident speaking in front of groups?
- Do you have strong storytelling skills that make history or facts come alive?
- Are you good at making people feel welcome and included?
- Do you have deep knowledge of the places or topics you'd be guiding people through?
- Are you patient and adaptable when plans change or challenges come up?
- Can you manage a group and keep things running smoothly and on time?
- Are you good at reading the mood of a group and adjusting your style or energy?

**Weaknesses – What might you find challenging?**

- Do you struggle with public speaking or nerves in front of a crowd?
- Is it difficult for you to manage time or stick to a schedule?
- Do you find it hard to answer unexpected questions on the spot?
- Are you less confident in dealing with difficult situations or unhappy guests?
- Do you feel like you need to improve your local knowledge or storytelling techniques?
- Is it challenging to keep your energy up on long days or in tough weather?

Be honest with yourself. Self-reflection like this is one of the best ways to improve, whether you're just starting out or have been guiding for years!

Before you dive into the checklist, take a moment to reflect on yourself—not just as a guide, but as a storyteller and host. Think about your strengths and the qualities that come naturally to you. Are you someone who loves engaging with people, bringing energy and warmth to a group? Or are you more focused on deep knowledge, offering well-researched insights that make people think differently about the places they visit?

Both are valuable. But to deliver a truly memorable walking tour, it's important to understand where you already shine and where there's room to grow.

As you go through each question in the checklist, be honest with yourself. Consider your current skills in public speaking, storytelling, and crowd management. Reflect on your knowledge of your subject and whether you feel confident answering questions or adding depth to your stories.

Think about how comfortable you are presenting to different types of audiences, in various settings and weather conditions. The goal isn't to have every box perfectly ticked from the start. It's about identifying areas where you can improve, whether that's taking a public speaking course, learning new stories, or developing better audience engagement techniques. This is your chance to invest in yourself as the person who will bring your tour to life.

These questions aren't meant to intimidate, but to encourage honest reflection. The best guides aren't perfect—they are people constantly honing their craft, driven by a love for sharing stories and connecting with others.



## PRIORITISE CONNECTIONS

Focus on building genuine connections with your guests from the very start. Warm welcomes, remembering names, and showing curiosity about who they are makes people feel valued. The stronger the connection, the more engaged they'll be in your stories.

## TAKE STRATEGIC BREAKS

Use pauses intentionally during your storytelling to build suspense, give space for emotion, or allow reflection. Silence can be as powerful as words—it draws your audience in and creates anticipation for what comes next.

# 4 WAYS TO BE MORE THAN JUST A GUIDE

## TRY STORY BLOCKING

Structure your tour with clear narrative arcs. Group stories by theme or emotion to create a flow that keeps your guests interested. Move seamlessly from light-hearted moments to deeper reflections, giving variety and rhythm to the experience.

## ESTABLISH YOUR ROLE

See yourself as more than a guide—you are a storyteller, host, and performer. Embody your role with confidence and presence. Whether sharing history or spinning ghost tales, you're the bridge between the past and your audience's imagination.

## Step 2



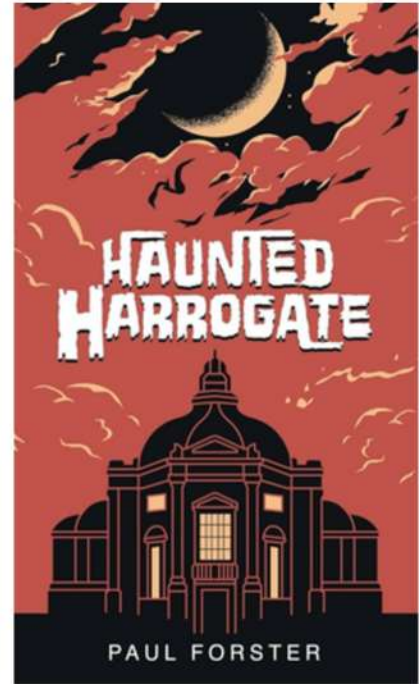
### Vision & Concept

Before you design your route or craft a single story, you need a clear vision—the emotional and creative foundation of your walking tour. Your vision is more than just a theme; it's what gives your tour its voice, purpose, and unique identity. It shapes everything: the stories you tell, the places you visit, how you engage your audience, and how you market your experience. A strong, personal vision helps you create something cohesive and memorable, while a vague or generic concept risks blending into the crowd.



# Step 2

## Define Your Vision & Concept



### Find Your Unique Angle.

Before you ever guide your first group through city streets or countryside lanes, before you design your route or craft your stories, you need to start with your vision. This isn't just a business plan or a tour theme—it's the soul of your walking tour.

A vision is what gives your tour its purpose, its voice, and its unique personality. It's the reason people will choose your tour over someone else's. It's what turns a simple stroll into a transformative experience.

When your vision springs from your authentic interests, local expertise, and personal connection to a place or theme, you bring an energy to the experience that no one else can replicate. Passion is contagious, and people feel it. Your enthusiasm, knowledge, and commitment are what make your tour not just informative, but memorable, meaningful, and even life-changing for your guests.

Without a clear vision, you risk creating a generic experience that gets lost in the crowd. With a compelling vision, your tour becomes distinctive, magnetic, and impossible to imitate.

Your vision isn't just a pretty mission statement you tuck away in a drawer. It's the living, breathing core of your tour business, influencing every choice you make. Without it, your tour may end up unfocused, bland, and forgettable. With a clear and compelling vision, you create something distinctive, memorable, and impossible to replicate.

Why Your Vision Matters:

- It's the Foundation for Everything Else
- Your vision sets the tone for every decision you make:
- What stories you tell
- Where you lead people
- How you market your tour
- What kind of guests you attract
- What experience you create

Think of your vision as your guiding compass. It points the way forward at every decision point. Every choice you make in your business—whether it's the stories you tell, the places you take people, how you present yourself online, or the kind of guests you attract—comes back to the clarity and strength of your original idea. A clear vision provides structure and direction, so your business doesn't become a mishmash of disjointed ideas. Instead, it becomes a cohesive, well-thought-out experience that feels intentional from beginning to end.

The stories you tell are shaped by your vision. If your vision is to reveal forgotten local heroes, then the stories you collect will focus on unsung figures, ordinary people who made extraordinary contributions, and narratives that have been overlooked or buried in traditional histories. If your vision is to explore the darker side of your city's past, your stories will gravitate towards eerie legends, mysterious disappearances, or tales of injustice and scandal. Without a strong vision, it's easy to fall into the trap of collecting random stories that don't really fit together, and guests can feel that lack of cohesion. A well-formed vision ensures that the stories you tell flow together to create a larger, meaningful narrative.

The route you choose for your tour is another critical decision guided by your vision. If your concept revolves around uncovering hidden spaces and secret corners, you'll want to lead people away from the main tourist thoroughfares. You'll explore back alleys, secluded courtyards, and places most people walk past without noticing. If your focus is on architecture, your stops will be selected based on their design significance, historical relevance, and the visual impact they have on your guests. Every stop on your route should make sense within the framework of your vision. When the locations you visit are carefully chosen to support your theme, they feel less like arbitrary destinations and more like chapters in a larger story.

Your marketing is also directly influenced by your vision. How you describe your tour, the tone of your social media posts, the design of your website, and even the colors in your logo should all reflect the essence of what you're offering. If your tour is playful and lighthearted, perhaps exploring quirky local folklore, your marketing should have a friendly, humorous tone that invites curiosity. If your tour deals with serious social justice themes or delves into true crime, your tone might be more respectful, thought-provoking, or dramatic. Marketing that is consistent with your vision builds trust with potential guests. They know what they're signing up for, and they're more likely to feel that your tour is exactly what they were looking for. We will go into stories, route and marketing in more detail later but they are worth mentioning now as they are part your vision and concept.



After all the brainstorming, researching, and reflecting on your personal interests and local stories, it's time to distill everything into one clear and compelling concept statement. Think of your concept statement as the mission and essence of your walking tour—boiled down into a sentence or two that captures what you're offering, why it matters, and who it's for. This isn't just a tagline or a pitch (though it can help shape those later); it's a guiding statement that keeps you focused as you develop every aspect of your tour, from storytelling to branding to marketing.

Your concept statement answers the core questions:

- What is the theme or focus of your tour?
- Whose stories are you telling?
- What unique angle or perspective are you bringing?
- Why should someone choose this experience over another?

Imagine it as the north star of your business. Whenever you're faced with decisions—choosing which stops to include, how to market your tour, or even what kind of guide to hire, or what type of guide you become—you return to your concept statement for clarity. It's the thread that ties everything together, making sure your walking tour feels cohesive and purposeful rather than a random collection of facts and locations.

### **Why Without a Clear Vision, You Risk Getting Lost:**

**If you skip this step or only give it half your energy, you may end up with a tour that's:**

- **Generic**
- **Forgettable**
- **Lacking personality**
- **Competing solely on price (rather than value or uniqueness)**

**When you have a compelling vision, your tour becomes:**

- **Distinctive: No one else offers your unique perspective or style.**
- **Magnetic: People are drawn to experiences that feel purposeful and authentic.**
- **Impossible to Imitate: Competitors may copy your route, but they can't copy your voice, energy, or connection to the stories.**

Your vision also determines what kind of guests you attract. A clear vision naturally draws the right people to your experience. If your tour is focused on LGBTQ+ history and pride, you will likely appeal to visitors who are looking for inclusive and affirming experiences. If your tour is centered on social activism and the history of protest movements, you'll appeal to guests who value learning about social justice and community change. Having a strong sense of who you are and what you stand for makes it easier to find and serve your ideal audience. These are the people who will connect with your stories on a personal level and who are more likely to recommend your tour to others.

Your vision shapes the entire guest experience. The way you tell stories, the pace of your tour, the way you interact with your group, and even the small extras you provide—all of these are guided by your overarching purpose. If you envision your tour as an intimate, reflective journey, you might choose to limit group sizes, slow down the pace, and offer opportunities for quiet contemplation. If your tour is designed to be exciting and theatrical, you may adopt a more energetic storytelling style, include dramatic pauses, and incorporate props or sound effects to heighten the atmosphere. Every part of your guest experience, from the moment they book to the moment they leave, should feel intentional and in alignment with the bigger picture.

Without a vision, it's easy to default to creating a tour that blends into the crowd. It might be historically accurate. It might even be entertaining. But if it doesn't have a clear sense of purpose, it risks being just another option in a sea of tours, and guests won't feel a compelling reason to choose yours over someone else's. A compelling vision is what makes your tour stand out. It's what makes it impossible to imitate. Competitors may try to replicate your route or your stories, but they can never copy your perspective, your personal connection, and the emotional journey you create for your guests.

Crafting a vision statement requires clarity and simplicity. It should be specific enough that anyone reading or hearing it immediately understands the essence of your tour, but broad enough that it allows room for creativity and evolution. Use descriptive language that captures the experience, not just the content. People are choosing an experience, not a lecture or a list of stops.

For example:

"An alternative walking tour exploring the untold stories of Knaresborough's women who shaped history—from herbalists and healers to suffragettes and secret rebels."

In this statement, you immediately know what the tour is about: women's history in Knaresborough, focusing on untold and overlooked stories. The description hints at a sense of mystery and rebellion, and it suggests a fresh, alternative perspective. It tells the prospective guest what they'll experience: a narrative that goes beyond the mainstream, focusing on women's impact across different eras.

Here is my statement for The Harrogate Ghost Walk:

"An unforgettable ghost walk that connects everyone to the darker side of Harrogate's past through storytelling that is entertaining, terrifying, and steeped in local history."

This gives tells you exactly what it is (ghost walk) who its for (everyone) a sense of the tone (the darker side), the setting (Harrogate's past), the style (entertaining and terrifying) and the bonus of (local history).

As you craft your own concept statement, remember: clarity, focus, and emotional resonance are key. Make it inviting, intriguing, and reflective of the experience you're creating.



# Tap Into Your Personal Passions

Ask yourself: What subjects could I talk about for hours? What do I already spend time learning about or doing for fun?



## 1. Ghost Walk

A love of ghost stories becomes a haunted history tour.

## 2. City Tour

An obsession with street art becomes a mural tour featuring local artists.



## 3. Wildlife Walk

A fascination with local wildlife leads to an urban nature walk.



## 4. Building Tour

An interest in architecture could guide people through a town's historic buildings.



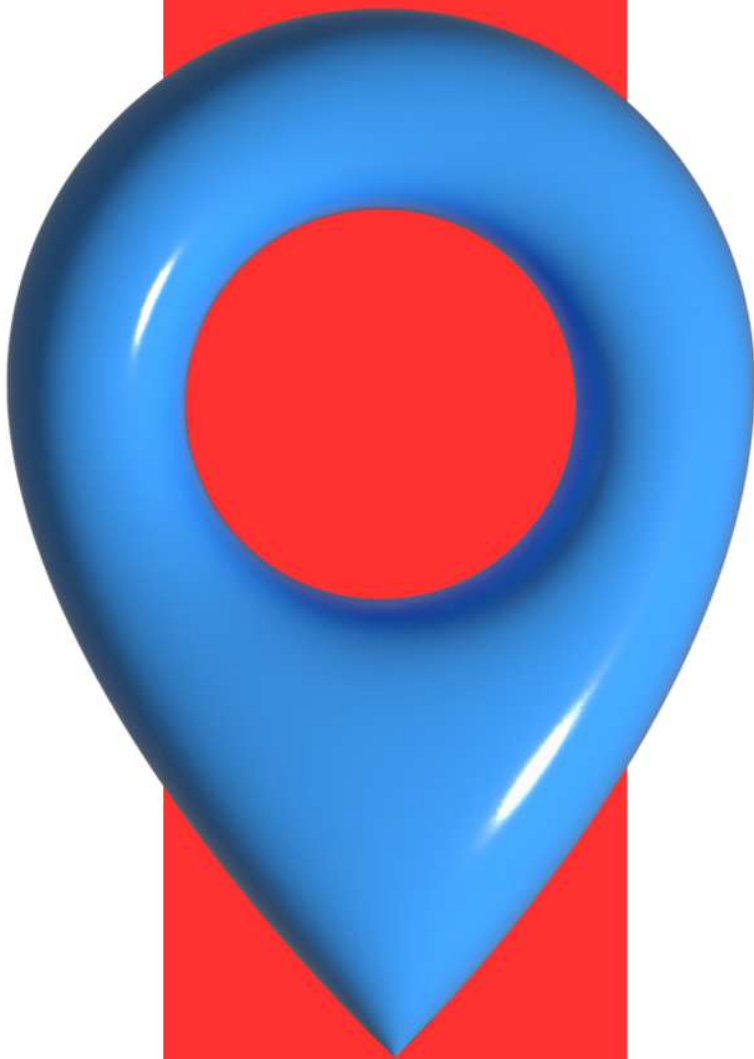
## 5. Untold Stories

A passion for untold stories of trailblazing women becomes a Women Who Changed History Tour

Why this matters:

If you're genuinely interested in your tour theme, you'll bring energy and enthusiasm that people will feel. Passion makes you credible, engaging, and enjoyable to be around.

# Step 3



## Location

Every town or city has a story—but not all of those stories are immediately visible. By exploring your town with fresh eyes—talking to locals, visiting overlooked spaces, digging through archives—you begin to see your location not as a backdrop, but as a living character in its own right. Your role is to bring that character to life.

Whether your tour celebrates smugglers and pirates, unsung women, rebellious poets, or the ghosts that still linger, focusing on what makes your place unique is what transforms a walk into something unforgettable.



# Step 3

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

### Consider Your Town or Location's Character

Every place has a story. Sometimes that story is obvious, celebrated in statues and plaques and guided tours that have been running for years. But more often than not, a town or city's most interesting stories are just beneath the surface, waiting to be uncovered, rediscovered, or retold in a fresh, personal way. If you want to create a walking tour that feels alive and compelling, one of the first things you need to do is spend time thinking about the true character of your location.

Ask yourself this: what makes your town, city, or region unique? What is it about this place that sets it apart from anywhere else in the world? It doesn't have to be famous to be meaningful. It doesn't have to be trendy or glamorous. Maybe your town has a rich history of industry or trade. Maybe it was a quiet stronghold for political movements or has an artistic heritage that's been forgotten over time. Perhaps there's a community whose stories have never been properly told or honored. When you start to see your location not just as a backdrop, but as a character in its own right, the possibilities for storytelling expand in exciting ways.

Think about what lies hidden beneath the surface of the place where you live or where you want to guide people. What are the layers of history or culture that most visitors—and even locals—walk past every day without noticing? Are there stories that have been silenced or ignored because they didn't fit neatly into the grand narrative that's usually told? These are the kinds of stories that can transform a tour from something expected and routine into something revelatory. A good guide doesn't just point out landmarks. A good guide reveals a different way of seeing a place, one that lingers in people's minds long after the tour is over.





## Consider:

- **What's unique about your town, city, or region?**
- **What's hidden beneath the surface that visitors (and even locals!) might not know?**
- **Are there untold stories you can bring to life?**

You might live in a town with industrial roots—rows of old brick factories, soot-darkened stonework, and streets that once echoed with the sounds of looms or shipbuilding. On the surface, those old buildings might look abandoned or forgotten.

But if you dig a little deeper, you might discover stories of working-class communities who fought for labor rights or innovations that changed the face of industry. A walking tour here could focus on the history of these industries, but also on the resilience and ingenuity of the people who lived and worked in their shadows. You could share stories of strikes and protests, breakthroughs in technology, or even personal tales of family legacies passed down from generation to generation.

Or maybe you're in a coastal village where the sea has always been a central figure in its history. At first glance, it's a quaint place with a charming harbor and rows of fishing boats bobbing in the water. But scratch the surface, and you might uncover tales of smugglers and pirates who used the twisting coves and hidden caves to evade customs officials.

In an urban neighborhood with a rich LGBTQ+ legacy, you might create a Pride history tour that highlights the contributions of queer artists, activists, and community leaders. These stories may not be marked by plaques or statues, but they are written into the fabric of the neighborhood. The club where protests took place, the bar where a beloved poet read their work for the first time, or the park where people gathered in defiance and celebration—these locations become powerful symbols of courage, identity, and pride when their stories are told. Tours like these don't just educate; they offer representation, belonging, and recognition, making them deeply meaningful for participants.

The character of your location is what will set your tour apart from the dozens, maybe even hundreds, of other experiences competing for people's attention. Visitors don't just want to be entertained; they want to feel a connection to a place. They want to understand what makes it tick. They want to walk away with stories that they can't find in a guidebook or online blog post. When you understand the character of your town, you become more than a guide—you become a storyteller who gives voice to the places and people who shaped it.

This is why it's worth spending time exploring your area with fresh eyes. Walk through neighborhoods you haven't visited in years. Sit in the cafés and pubs where locals gather. Visit museums, yes, but also knock on the door of the local historical society, and talk to people whose families have been there for generations. Listen to their memories and collect their stories. Read old newspapers, explore archives, look at old photographs. You'll start to see a different version of your town emerge—one that's layered, textured, and full of surprises.

Your tour doesn't have to tell the whole story of your location. In fact, it's better if it doesn't. Focus on one aspect of its character and tell that story well. Whether it's the story of a neighborhood's LGBTQ+ pioneers, the industrial workers who built its wealth, or the smugglers who defied the law and lived by their wits, your job is to uncover what makes this place come alive in the imagination.

When you know the character of your town or city, you don't just give people a tour. You give them a sense of place, an understanding of its heartbeat, and a deeper connection to its past and present. That's the kind of experience that stays with them long after they've gone home.

## Inspiration:

- **A town with industrial roots may inspire a tour about working-class history, factories, and community.**
- **A seaside village might suit a smugglers and pirates themed tour.**
- **An urban neighborhood with a rich LGBTQ+ legacy can offer an inclusive Pride walk.**

When it comes to designing your walking tour, the possibilities are as wide as your imagination. While ghost walks and historical tours are tried and true favorites, there's an entire world of themes waiting to be explored. The key is to find a concept that excites you, resonates with your community, and offers something fresh to your audience. You can blend ideas, add your personal twist, or focus on something uniquely relevant to your area. Below is an exploration of popular themes and examples of how you can bring them to life.

### Local Legends & Folklore

Local myths, hauntings, and mysterious creatures have universal appeal. People love hearing stories that make them glance over their shoulder or look at familiar places in a new, eerie light. Explore the supernatural side of your town by delving into old ghost stories, folklore about witches, or legends of mythical beings unique to your region.

- **What You Could Do:** Lead your guests through graveyards, darkened lanes, or ancient woods. Invite them to participate by sharing their own experiences or by using ghost-hunting tools like EMF detectors.
- **Example Tour:** "The Witches of Yorkshire Walk" — Explore chilling tales of witch trials, mysterious deaths, and superstitions in the region, all while weaving in local history and folklore.

### Architectural History

Architecture tells the story of a place better than almost anything else. Through buildings, you can explore economic booms and busts, changing tastes, political movements, and even social reform.

- **What You Could Do:** Offer guided walks through historic districts, focusing on different architectural styles or building uses over time. Highlight forgotten buildings and discuss the people who lived and worked there.
- **Example Tour:** "Knaresborough Through Stone and Story: 500 Years of Architecture" — Walk guests through the town's rich architectural heritage, from medieval castles to Victorian terraces.

### Street Art & Murals

Street art tours give insight into the modern creative heartbeat of a city. They appeal to younger audiences and those interested in urban culture. Street art can reflect political messages, local identity, or just be fun and whimsical.

- **What You Could Do:** Take guests to hidden alleyways, massive murals, and even active graffiti spots. Discuss the artists' stories, their influences, and the social issues behind the art.
- **Example Tour:** "Hidden Canvases: The Street Art of Leeds" — Showcase the vibrant murals and guerrilla art that have transformed Leeds into an open-air gallery.

### Literary Walks

For book lovers, literary tours can feel like stepping into a storybook. Walk in the footsteps of famous authors, visit locations that inspired classic novels, and explore local literary history.

- **What You Could Do:** Visit locations tied to writers' lives or books, read excerpts in the places that inspired them, or even offer costumed reenactments of key scenes.
- **Example Tour:** "In the Footsteps of the Brontës: Literature and Landscape" — A tour through the Yorkshire moors, bringing the Brontë sisters' iconic novels to life.

### Foodie or Craft Beverage Tours

Food and drink tours appeal to the senses and provide immediate gratification—who doesn't enjoy a tasty sample along the way? These tours can focus on local delicacies, pub culture, craft breweries, or street food.

- **What You Could Do:** Collaborate with local vendors and include tastings, behind-the-scenes access to kitchens or breweries, and stories about traditional dishes.
- **Example Tour:** "Sips and Stories: A Walking Tour of Local Brews and Bites" — Explore local breweries and bakeries, sample their offerings, and hear stories of how these crafts evolved over time.

### Eco & Nature Walks

Urban and rural nature walks appeal to those looking for tranquility, education, and a connection to the environment. They're also perfect for raising awareness about conservation and ecology.

- **What You Could Do:** Lead walks through parks, riversides, or wildlife reserves, focusing on native flora, fauna, and environmental issues. Include mindfulness or nature journaling exercises.
- **Example Tour:** "Wild Knaresborough: Nature, Myths, and Mindfulness" — A relaxing, informative walk blending local wildlife, folklore, and simple mindfulness practices.

### LGBTQ+ History Tours

Celebrate and explore the rich histories of LGBTQ+ communities. These tours not only offer education but also create safe, inclusive spaces for storytelling and connection.

- **What You Could Do:** Highlight key locations of LGBTQ+ activism, iconic venues, and the lives of local queer heroes. Incorporate oral histories and personal anecdotes.
- **Example Tour:** "Pride and Protest: LGBTQ+ Stories of Resistance" — Share powerful narratives of protest, pride, and community in locations significant to the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

### Women's History Tours

Women's contributions are often underrepresented in mainstream history tours. A tour that highlights their impact can provide a new perspective and foster deeper appreciation for local history.

- **What You Could Do:** Explore stories of women who made history in politics, science, social reform, or the arts. Visit key locations like suffragette meeting spots or homes of notable female figures.
- **Example Tour:** "Rebel Women: The Untold Heroines of Harrogate" — Discover the lives and legacies of women who shaped the town, from healers and educators to activists and entrepreneurs.

### Industrial Heritage

Many towns and cities have roots in industry—whether mining, railways, or factories. Industrial heritage tours tell stories of innovation, labor struggles, and the communities that grew around them.

- **What You Could Do:** Visit old mills, factories, railway yards, and working-class neighborhoods. Share stories about the laborers, strikes, and economic changes that shaped your area.
- **Example Tour:** "Smoke and Steel: Stories of Northern Industry" — A journey through the remnants of Northern England's industrial past, highlighting both triumph and hardship.

### Blending Themes: Make It Your Own

Don't feel confined to just one idea. Some of the most memorable tours combine multiple elements. A women's history walk might also explore industrial heritage, or a literary tour could tie in local myths and legends. The more uniquely "you" it feels, the more it will stand out.



## **Tips for Narrowing Down Your Concept: Finding Your Unique Angle**

When you're first developing a concept for your walking tour, it's tempting to want to cover everything. Local history, folklore, famous figures, ghost stories—why not include it all? But in reality, the most successful tours are the ones with a clear, focused concept.

The key is to start broad and then gradually refine your idea into something niche, specific, and uniquely yours. For example, you might begin with the broad idea of "local history" but quickly realise there's a fascinating untold story about women activists in your town's past. Suddenly, you have a focused theme that offers depth and a fresh perspective, something that will stand out in a crowded market of general history tours.

Testing your ideas early on is one of the most helpful steps in this process. Talk to friends, family, and anyone who knows your area well. Ask them what kinds of tours they'd want to go on and what they think about your concept. Social media can be a great tool for this too—put out a poll or post asking for opinions. You might be surprised by the enthusiasm for a theme you hadn't fully considered. Keep an eye out for overlapping interests that could be combined into a more dynamic tour.

Maybe your area has a strong LGBTQ+ history and a thriving street art scene. Why not blend the two into something like "Pride Walls: Queer Street Art Stories," combining activism, community history, and modern art into a single compelling experience? The more specific and unique your concept, the easier it will be to attract the right audience and offer something no one else does.

In the end, narrowing down your concept is about finding the sweet spot where your passion intersects with a story your audience wants to hear. A focused theme allows you to dive deeper, tell richer stories, and create a more immersive experience for your guests. It also makes your marketing clearer and more effective—people will know exactly what they're signing up for and why it's different from any other tour out there.

Don't be afraid to start broad and experiment, but trust that the magic happens when you hone in on a concept that excites you and offers something fresh, personal, and unforgettable.

## Competitor Research & Building Respectful Relationships with Other Tour Operators

When you're starting your own walking tour business, it's natural to look around and see what others are doing. Researching your competitors is an essential step in understanding the landscape of your area—what tours already exist, where there might be gaps in the market, and how you can offer something unique. But there's a fine line between healthy research and stepping on someone else's toes. The walking tour world, especially in smaller towns or niche markets, is often built on personal relationships, trust, and community. How you interact with fellow guides and operators can either open doors to collaboration or close them permanently.

### Do Your Homework: Competitor Research Done Right

Competitor research isn't about copying what others are doing—it's about understanding the environment so you can offer something different. Start by attending other tours (when appropriate), reading online reviews, and exploring what's on offer. Look at the types of tours available: Are they historical? Ghost walks? Food-focused? Is there an underserved niche or theme you could explore that no one else is offering? Pay attention to their branding, customer engagement, pricing structures, and the kinds of guests they attract. This will give you valuable insights into what works in your area—and where you can carve out your own space without overlapping too much. But be mindful: don't use their ideas as a template for your own tour. Take inspiration from their professionalism, presentation, or storytelling skills, but don't replicate their themes, routes, or concepts.

Tour guides often operate on an unwritten code of conduct, particularly in smaller towns or tightly-knit communities. Respecting someone else's "patch" means being mindful of their routes, locations, and timing. If another guide runs a tour in a particular area at a specific time, try not to schedule your tour in direct competition or lead groups through the same spaces during their tour. Guests can be distracted by overlapping groups, and it can create unnecessary tension between operators.

I'm fortunate to share Harrogate with the brilliant Harry Satloka, who runs *Free Walking Tour Harrogate*. Harry has been guiding visitors around the town for over a decade (at the time of writing), and his tours are fantastic—insightful, entertaining, and full of passion for Harrogate's history. Harry and I are not just fellow guides; we're friends. We often share a pint, swap ideas, and support one another. In fact, I've even scripted a mention of his walking tours into my ghost walk, so he always gets a shoutout.

Our tours complement each other perfectly. We cover different themes, attract different audiences, and run at different times of day. His tour is a deep dive into Harrogate's rich history, while mine takes guests to the darker, more mysterious corners of the town. Our A-boards sit side by side in the town centre, offering visitors a choice of experiences that showcase Harrogate's heritage in completely different—but equally engaging—ways. It's a great example of how tour operators can work together, rather than compete, to enrich the town's tourism offer and build a supportive, thriving community.

While I was writing this guide, my friend and fellow magician, Rob Shersby, gave me a call. He wanted to let me know he was planning to set up a ghost walk in his hometown of Wakefield and wanted to make sure I was okay with it. It was a thoughtful gesture, and a testament to Rob's character and professionalism. Of course, there's absolutely no issue—Wakefield and Harrogate are miles apart, and there's plenty of room for both of us to do what we love without any concerns about stepping on each other's toes.

I'm genuinely excited to see what he creates. I've no doubt it'll be fantastic. It's always a pleasure to see passionate people expanding the world of walking tours and storytelling, and to be part of a supportive community that encourages each other's success.

If you are planning to use a shared space or popular stop, it's worth having a conversation with other guides about how you can all work around each other. Mutual respect and open communication go a long way in preventing conflicts and fostering a collaborative spirit. Don't Steal Ideas: Create Your Own Stories. It's one thing to be inspired by another guide's energy or storytelling style; it's another to take their research, narrative structure, or themes and present them as your own. This industry runs on passion, knowledge, and hard-earned credibility.

Many guides spend years researching, interviewing, and developing their stories—sometimes even writing books or producing their own research material. To lift these stories without credit isn't just unprofessional—it's disrespectful and damaging to the community. Instead, focus on developing your own voice and expertise. If you do want to explore similar themes (such as ghost tours or women's history), find new locations, dig deeper into untold stories, and bring a fresh perspective to the narrative. Audiences are drawn to authenticity, and your personal connection to the stories you tell will make them far more compelling than borrowed material ever could.



*Images courtesy of Free Walking Tour Harrogate*



# Step 4

## Becoming the Detective

Research is where your walking tour truly begins to breathe. It's not enough to choose a theme or route—you need to dig deep into the stories that will shape your experience. Whether you're crafting a ghost walk, a social history tour, or a celebration of local creativity, this is where you become a detective, historian, and storyteller all in one. Solid, authentic research allows you to move beyond surface-level facts and into narratives that are personal, surprising, and emotionally resonant. My own ghost walk was built not from books, but from real stories told by local people, creating a sense of connection that no recycled legend ever could.



# Step 4

## Research & Content Development

### Becoming the Detective

This is where your walking tour starts to come alive. It's one thing to know you want to run a ghost walk, a social history tour, or a street art trail—but without the substance of rich, well-researched content, it's just a stroll with some facts thrown in. Your research is the beating heart of your tour. The stories you uncover, the details you bring to light, and the emotions you stir all begin here. This is where your walking tour gains its soul.

In this stage, you are more than just a guide—you become a detective, a historian, and a storyteller all rolled into one. Your job is to peel back the layers of your chosen place and reveal the stories that lie beneath. And whether your tour is a deep dive into social activism, a collection of eerie ghost tales, or a celebration of local art and culture, it all starts with research. Not just any research, but solid, detailed, thoughtful work that grounds your stories in truth, even when you're flirting with folklore.

The most successful tours aren't just information dumps; they are journeys. A well-researched, carefully developed tour lets your guests connect emotionally to places they may have walked past a hundred times without ever noticing.

You give them new eyes, new perspectives, and stories they'll want to retell. It's your research that makes that possible. It's what breathes life into your stories, turning names, dates, and places into something that makes people stop and say, "I never knew that!"

If you want to tell authentic, engaging stories, you need to go straight to the source. Don't be satisfied with the same tired narratives everyone else tells. Dig deeper. This is where you start to play detective—tracking down leads, following clues, and unearthing details that bring the past to life in vivid color.

Begin in the archives and libraries. These are treasure troves of forgotten knowledge.

Spend time with old newspapers, diaries, court records, and council meeting minutes. There's something thrilling about leafing through a yellowed page and stumbling upon a name or incident that sparks a story. Look at maps from different eras and watch how your town has changed. That quiet alleyway where you want to tell a ghost story might once have been the scene of a notorious crime. Photographs, letters, property records—these all tell the story of a place in ways that modern sources often overlook.

Local historical societies and museums are another goldmine. Don't just wander the exhibits; talk to the people who run them. Curators and volunteers often have a wealth of knowledge that doesn't make it onto the display boards. Ask them about the stories that don't get told—the ones that didn't make the cut for the official history books. Many museums have oral history collections, old audio recordings, and obscure documents tucked away in their archives. Ask if you can access them, or if they can point you in the direction of someone who can.

## **Listening to the Locals:**

One of the most powerful sources of information you'll ever have is the people who live in your community. Talk to the people who have been there for decades. Offer to buy them a coffee or take them for a walk around their old neighborhood. They will remember things you won't find in any book. Ask them about local events, urban myths, legends, and community heroes. You might hear about the ghost that haunts the corner shop, or the scandalous goings-on at a now-forgotten hotel. Listen carefully not just to their stories, but to the way they tell them—the phrases they use, the emotions that rise when they speak. This will give your storytelling authenticity and heart. When locals trust you with their stories, respect that trust. Be accurate in how you retell their words, and if appropriate, give them credit. You are helping to preserve their memories and share them with others in a meaningful way.

## **Walking the Route:**

Research doesn't all happen in archives and over coffee. You also need to get out and walk your potential routes—many times, and at different times of day. Places change as the light changes, as crowds come and go, and as the atmosphere shifts from the hustle of the morning to the quiet of the evening. Pay attention to the details. What do you hear? The hum of traffic? The call of birds? The murmurs of people as they pass? What do you smell? Fresh bread from a bakery? Damp stone after rain? These sensory details add depth to your stories.

Photograph everything. Make notes on architectural details you hadn't noticed before. Who carved that symbol above the door? What's the story behind that street name? Hidden corners, quiet spaces, and forgotten alleys can become perfect stops on your tour. You'll also notice practical things—how far apart your stops are, how noisy the area is, where people can stand safely. These details matter.

## **Fact-Checking:**

It's easy to get carried away when you find a juicy story—but remember, credibility matters. Fact-check everything. If you're dealing with sensitive subjects, such as activism, marginalized communities, or historic injustices, it's even more important to get things right. Seek multiple sources, not just Wikipedia. Look for confirmation in newspapers, official documents, and expert opinions.

If you're sharing ghost stories or folklore, it's okay to leave space for the legend, but be clear with your guests about what's history and what's myth. People love a good tale, but they also appreciate knowing where fact ends and fiction begins. That trust makes you a better storyteller.

## **Bringing It All Together:**

Once you've gathered your research, you'll start to see stories take shape. You'll recognise themes, recurring figures, and places that tie everything together. This is when your walking tour begins to become something special—something people will remember. You're not just telling them facts. You're taking them on a journey, showing them a world they didn't know was there.

Research is the work that happens behind the scenes, but it's what makes the magic happen in front of your audience. So take your time. Be curious. Be thorough. And above all, be passionate. Because when you've done your research well, you'll feel it in the way people react when you tell your stories. Their eyes widen, they lean in, they gasp, they laugh, and they walk away seeing their town—or yours—in a whole new light.

And it all starts here, with you, doing the work to bring those stories back to life.



## **Finding the Stories: Creating a Walking Tour from Real Local Voices**

When I first set out to create my ghost walk, I knew one thing for certain—I didn't want to rely on the same tired stories that had been passed around from one book to another, often diluted by time and repetition. I wanted something more authentic, more personal, and firmly rooted in the community I was inviting people to explore. I didn't want third-hand tales recycled from an old paperback gathering dust on a library shelf. I wanted to hear from real people who had experienced something strange, something they couldn't quite explain, right here in Harrogate. And so, I set out to find them.

My approach was simple but incredibly effective. I reached out to the local press. I contacted local papers and news outlets and told them what I was planning. I was putting together a ghost walk like no other, and I wanted to hear from anyone who had ever experienced something paranormal in Harrogate. I didn't know what to expect—maybe a few stories, a handful of anecdotes. But what I received was something far greater.

The response was overwhelming. Hundreds of emails, letters, and phone calls came flooding in. People told me stories they had never shared with anyone else before. Quiet encounters, unsettling moments, family legends, and personal experiences that had haunted them for years. These were raw, genuine accounts, and they brought a completely new dimension to my tour.

Collecting these stories wasn't just about gathering material for the walk. It became an act of community storytelling. People were excited to be part of something. They wanted their stories told. Many of those whose stories I included in the tour came along to experience it for themselves—and I made sure to offer them a free ticket as a thank you. Their presence on the walks brought a unique authenticity, as they sometimes added details or shared more of their experience directly with the group. Not only did this approach provide me with a wealth of original content, but it also served as a brilliant way to advertise the tour. The local press articles and interviews raised awareness, created a buzz, and brought people in who wanted to hear the stories their neighbours and friends had shared.

As the research piled up, it became clear I wasn't just gathering stories for a tour—I was compiling something much larger. I realised I had enough material for a book. This was something that had never been done before: a comprehensive collection of ghost stories from Harrogate, gathered directly from the people who had experienced them. It was an exciting opportunity to create something truly unique.

I was fortunate enough to be put in touch with a local publisher, and after discussions, I secured a publishing deal. What followed was the publication of the first comprehensive book of ghost stories about Harrogate, a project I'm incredibly proud of. The book is now sold in major retailers like Waterstones, Catslegate Books in Knaresborough, Imagined Things in Harrogate, and Kemp's General Store in Malton.

It's also available on Amazon for those further afield. And of course, I offer signed copies on my ghost walks, which has turned out to be a fantastic upsell. After all, who wouldn't want to take home a signed book that captures the very stories they've just heard on the tour? It adds another layer to the experience and helps keep the memory of the walk alive long after the night ends.



*An incredibly proud moment; my son and I in Waterstones with my book.*



*Finding your book on display in a shop is exciting.*



*On display in a rainy shop window.*



*Available at Kemps General Store, Malton.*





*Performing mindreading at a wedding and three guests had bought my book that day.*



*My book on sale in Knaresborough at Castlegate Books.*

Because of my background as a writer, I found it relatively easy to shape these stories into something engaging and well-paced, both for the book and for live storytelling on the tours.

However, if writing isn't your strength, there are ways to bring your ideas to life without doing it all yourself. You could hire a professional writer—there are many freelance platforms like Fiverr where you can find affordable help—but I'd always encourage you to look closer to home first. Collaborating with a local writer not only supports your community but could also bring in fresh insights and connections. Better yet, co-authoring a book with someone who shares your passion can be an incredibly rewarding experience.

What started as a simple idea to gather stories turned into a much bigger project—one that deepened my connection to the town, expanded my tour offerings, and gave me an additional product that adds value to my business. And it all came from asking a simple question to the people around me: Have you ever experienced something you couldn't explain? If you're starting your own ghost walk or historical tour, I can't recommend this method enough. Listen to the people who live in the places you're exploring. Their stories are where the real magic happens.

I mention my book on every tour and mention it throughout the tour, it has become a staple return to gag, "If you want to hear more about this story, buy the book..." People end up finishing the joke for me but I have sold a lot of books because of it. You can up sell other items such as artwork, t-shirts or other merchandise, get creative. We will cover upselling later on.





# Step 5

## Crafting your Stories

To create a walking tour that truly resonates, you need more than facts—you need feeling, inclusivity, and immersion. Emotionally rich stories grounded in personal experiences help guests connect on a human level, while including underrepresented voices makes your tour more meaningful and relevant. Use vivid sensory language, props, and real-world details to bring your stories to life, and involve your audience wherever possible—through choices, puzzles, or even tastes and sounds tied to the tale. Whether it's a haunted bell, a historic artifact, or a simple question posed between stops, these interactive moments transform your tour from a lecture into an experience that stays with people long after the walk is over.

# Step 5

## Crafting your stories

If you want people to truly connect with your walking tour, you need to offer them more than dates, statistics, and dry historical facts. While accuracy and research are important, what makes a story stick is the emotional impact it has on your audience. It's the human element that people relate to—the personal struggles, triumphs, fears, and hopes of those who lived through the events you're describing. Emotion is what transforms a walking tour from a history lesson into an experience your guests will remember, reflect on, and talk about long after they've gone home.

Think about the kinds of stories that stay with you after you've heard them. They're rarely lists of facts or timelines. They're stories where someone faced an impossible challenge and triumphed—or where injustice was so heartbreaking, it stirred you to anger or compassion. People naturally empathise with other people. If you can place your audience in the shoes of someone who lived through an event, whether in the distant past or just a generation ago, you create a powerful emotional bridge. It allows your guests to feel the story, not just hear it. When you're selecting stories to include in your tour, look for those moments where something was at stake.

Where there was risk, loss, courage, or mystery. Those are the stories that breathe life into your route. For example, if you're telling the history of a labor strike in your town, resist the temptation to simply rattle off dates and economic statistics. Instead, focus on one person's story—a worker who led the strike, risking their livelihood and family's security for the chance at better conditions. Maybe they faced threats, were blacklisted from future work, or became a local hero whose name few remember today. Bring their personal journey to the forefront. Talk about what drove them, what they sacrificed, and how it shaped the community.

The same principle applies to ghost stories, folklore, or local legends. Don't just say, "This house is haunted." Tell your guests about the person who once lived there—their life, their death, and why their presence might still linger. Give them a name. Talk about who they loved, what they lost, and why they matter. Even the spookiest story becomes more compelling when there's an emotional thread running through it.

Emotion also helps people remember what you've shared. When you evoke a strong feeling—whether it's awe, fear, laughter, or sorrow—you anchor that story in your listener's memory. They don't just recall the facts; they recall how it made them feel, and that feeling brings them back to the moment they stood on that street, listening to you tell the tale.

This is why it's so important to craft your stories with care. Research the people behind the events. Understand their motives, their dreams, their heartbreaks. And then bring that to your audience in a way that is respectful, authentic, and powerful. When you can do that, you're not just guiding people from one location to the next. You're guiding them through a shared human experience. That's where the magic of a truly memorable walking tour happens.

# Incorporate Diverse & Underrepresented Voices

If you're creating a walking tour that aims to be truly meaningful and relevant, it's essential to consider whose stories you are telling—and, just as importantly, whose stories you might be leaving out. So much of the history we're taught, and that often gets passed down through mainstream storytelling, focuses on the same familiar figures: powerful men, prominent leaders, wealthy landowners. But history is far richer—and far more inclusive—than those well-trodden narratives suggest. When you make a conscious effort to include diverse and underrepresented voices in your tour, you not only offer a more complete and truthful account of the past, but you also create space for people to see themselves in the places and stories you're sharing.

Start by thinking about whose stories have traditionally been marginalised or erased. Women's contributions to history are often overlooked, despite their central role in shaping communities, economies, and social movements. The working class—those who built the cities, industries, and institutions we celebrate—are frequently reduced to footnotes. Immigrant communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and indigenous peoples have also been left out of the dominant narrative, despite having rich histories that deserve recognition and respect. By consciously choosing to center these stories, you create tours that are more inclusive, more engaging, and often far more surprising for your guests.

But telling these stories comes with responsibility. If you're sharing histories from communities that are still very much alive today—whether that's a group of recent immigrants, LGBTQ+ activists, or indigenous communities—it's important to approach their stories with respect and sensitivity. Seek permission when appropriate, especially if the stories are personal or could be considered sacred.

Reach out to community leaders, historians, or elders. Let them know what you're doing, and invite them to share their insights. A conversation with someone who has lived experience will always be more powerful and authentic than relying solely on books or second-hand accounts.

It's also important to acknowledge that there are often multiple perspectives on the same event. What one community sees as a moment of triumph, another might experience as a time of deep loss. As a guide and storyteller, your role is not to smooth over those complexities but to highlight them. If there's a statue in your town commemorating a celebrated hero, take a moment to ask: who else was involved in this story? Who was impacted by this person's actions? Who might have been left out of the official account? Offering this kind of critical context doesn't diminish the significance of historical figures; it enriches the narrative and encourages your audience to think more deeply about the history they've inherited.

Incorporating underrepresented voices isn't just a moral imperative—it's also good storytelling. It makes your tour stand out because it brings fresh perspectives, untold stories, and human experiences that audiences aren't expecting. When you share the story of the immigrant woman who opened the town's first café, or the LGBTQ+ activists who campaigned for change on those very streets, or the indigenous leaders whose stewardship of the land predates every building in sight, you give your audience a chance to connect to history in a deeper, more personal way.

This approach brings your tour alive. It challenges assumptions. It invites conversation and reflection. And it ensures that the stories you tell do justice to the diversity and richness of the place you're sharing. It's about broadening the lens through which we view history—and once you start doing that, you'll never want to go back.



A great walking tour doesn't just tell people about the past—it helps them see it, hear it, and feel it. One of the most powerful ways to bring your stories to life is by engaging the senses and painting vivid mental images that transport your audience to another time. The goal isn't just to inform, but to immerse your guests in an experience that feels as real and tangible as the ground they're walking on. When you think visually and tap into sensory details, you awaken people's imaginations and create a deeper, more lasting connection to your stories.

Start by helping people picture the world as it was. If you're standing in front of a modern shop, tell them about the building's previous life. Describe the cobblestone streets, the flicker of gas lamps, the clatter of horses' hooves, or the chatter of market traders hawking their wares. Don't just say, "This used to be a pub." Help them see the heavy oak doors, the dimly lit interior filled with pipe smoke, the sound of tankards slamming on the bar as sailors sang bawdy songs in the corner. The more vivid the imagery, the easier it is for your guests to step back in time alongside you.

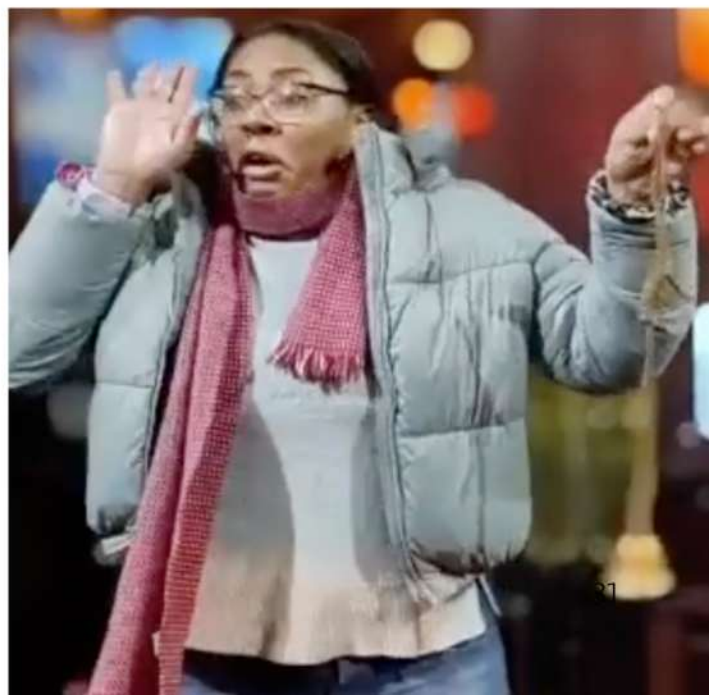
But don't stop with visuals. Engage the other senses too. Smells, sounds, textures, and even tastes can anchor a moment in someone's memory. Maybe you're standing near the site of an old brewery. Imagine saying, "If you'd stood here a century ago, the smell of hops would've been so strong it clung to your clothes for hours." Or perhaps you're outside a long-demolished tannery: "The stink of curing hides was so foul in this street that mothers hurried their children past with handkerchiefs pressed to their faces." These details transform flat descriptions into living moments.

Where possible, bring props, images, or artifacts to support your stories. An old photograph of a street as it was, held up against the modern landscape, can be a powerful way to show how much has changed—and how much hasn't. Maps, sketches, and historic documents add depth and credibility to your narrative. If you're telling ghost stories, perhaps you carry an old lantern to set the mood, or a simple prop that ties into the tale. I often bring along items that add a tactile element to the walk. Guests love the chance to hold something that connects them to the past, even if it's just a replica.

*Right, one of my many 'haunted bells' rings and scares the life out of a guest. This moment made a great social media video.*

At the end of my ghost walk, we take things one step further by attempting to communicate with the spirit world. It's a moment that transforms the evening from a storytelling experience into something far more immersive and unforgettable. I introduce a small bell, said to be haunted, and invite the group to join me in asking any nearby spirits to ring it. When the bell sounds—whether by ghostly hands or unexplained forces—the reactions are priceless. There's a mixture of nervous laughter, genuine surprise, and the kind of wide-eyed amazement that makes for fantastic social media content. More importantly, it leaves my guests with a lasting memory, something that sets my tour apart and keeps people talking about it long after the night ends.

While I'm currently the only ghost walk operating in Harrogate, I'm always conscious of the competition just down the road in York—a city packed with world-class walking tours and long-standing ghost walks. Standing out in this crowded field requires offering something different, something personal and interactive. That final moment with the bell isn't just a gimmick; it's an experience that elevates my walk beyond a series of stories. It creates a shared, spine-tingling connection that guests remember—and tell others about. That's the kind of moment that turns a good tour into an unforgettable one. The more they can feel the world you're describing, the more they'll remember, and the more they'll talk about it afterwards. And in the end, that's what a great walking tour does—it creates moments that linger long after the walk is over.



# Make it Interactive: Transforming Your Guests from Listeners into Participants

One of the most powerful ways to make your walking tour memorable is to get your guests involved. When people participate, they engage on a deeper level—they're not just standing there passively listening; they're invested, alert, and emotionally connected. Interactivity draws people into the story, makes them feel like part of the experience, and creates lasting memories. An interactive tour isn't just entertaining—it's immersive. Whether through conversation, sensory experiences, problem-solving, or performance, interactive elements help people connect more deeply with the places and stories you're sharing.

## Create Moments of Participation

Participation can be as simple or as elaborate as you like, but the key is to find moments where guests can physically or mentally engage with what's happening. One of the most effective methods is to involve food or drink, especially if it ties directly into the stories you're telling. Imagine guiding your group down a winding street and stopping outside an old herbalist's shop from the Victorian era. As you tell the story of the herbalist who was believed to have healing powers—or maybe darker abilities—you produce a small flask of herbal tea based on an old recipe. As you pour samples and pass them around, you invite your guests to literally taste history. That kind of experience stays with them far longer than facts and dates.

You can also incorporate simple props or artifacts that your guests can handle. Reproduction coins, old keys, small tools, or even photographs can make a story come alive. For example, if you're telling a story about a 19th-century stonemason, you might pass around a mason's hammer or a chisel while you describe the craft. There's something about the weight of an object in your hand that grounds a story in reality. It moves the experience from the realm of imagination to something tangible.

## Involve Guests in Problem-Solving or Mysteries

One of the simplest and most effective ways to deepen engagement is by introducing mystery and choice into your tour. People love puzzles, and they love feeling like they're part of solving something. As you walk between stops, you can pose an open question that they can think about. For example, if you're telling a ghost story, you might say, "There's a theory about why this spirit lingers. Some say it's unfinished business. Others believe it's something far darker. As we walk to the next stop, I want you to think about which explanation you believe—and I'll tell you more when we arrive."

Alternatively, you can give your guests choices along the way. When you reach a junction or a square with multiple stories attached to it, you could offer them a decision. "We're standing in front of two very different tales. One is about a rebellion that changed the course of this town's history. The other is a tragic love story with an ending you won't expect. Which one would you like to hear?" Giving people this power makes them feel part of the experience. They're not just spectators—they're shaping the journey.

You could even create a light scavenger hunt or mystery for them to solve as they walk. Perhaps a building holds a clue carved into its stonework, or a date above a doorway hints at a larger story. Guide your guests to look more closely at their surroundings as they walk, offering little pieces of a puzzle that come together by the end of the tour. It's a brilliant way to keep their attention as you move from one point to another.



## Vote on Interpretations of Historical Events

History is rarely simple. For every event, there are different versions, different perspectives, and often conflicting interpretations. Bringing these complexities into your tour can lead to fascinating discussions and a more engaging experience for your guests. You can present multiple sides of a story and ask your audience to weigh in on what they think really happened.

For instance, you might recount a local legend about a prominent figure who was either a hero or a villain depending on who's telling the story. After presenting the facts—and perhaps the rumors—you could ask the group to vote. “Was he a freedom fighter or a ruthless opportunist? You decide.” Not only does this spark discussion among your guests, but it encourages them to think critically about the stories we inherit and how they're shaped by perspective. This kind of engagement turns history into something personal, a conversation rather than a lecture.



## Bringing It All Together

Ultimately, interaction turns a walking tour from something guests watch into something they experience. It's about making them part of the story—through their senses, their voices, and their participation. When people feel like they're involved, they engage more deeply, they remember more vividly, and they leave feeling like they were part of something special.

An interactive tour is also a flexible tour. You can gauge your group's energy and decide how much interaction they're up for. Some nights will be lively and full of eager participants; other times, people may prefer to hang back and listen. Part of your skill as a guide will be knowing when to push for interaction and when to let the story carry the weight.

In the end, whether it's passing around an artifact, solving a mystery, voting on the truth of a legend, or joining in a dramatic moment, these interactive elements will breathe life into your stories. They turn passive guests into active participants and create moments people won't just remember—they'll talk about them, laugh about them, and share them with others for years to come. And that's when you know your tour isn't just good. It's unforgettable.

## Incorporate Performance Elements

One of the best ways to draw people in is to treat your tour like a performance. Storytelling is an art, and adding elements of theater makes your audience feel like they're part of something special. You don't have to be a trained actor to bring drama into your delivery—though if you enjoy it, you can certainly add more theatricality.

Dramatic storytelling can include shifting your tone, using silence at the right moment, or adding physical movement to emphasize a point. Imagine telling a ghost story and lowering your voice to a whisper at a critical moment, drawing the audience in as they lean forward to catch every word.

You might also include roleplay or reenactments. Invite a guest to hold a prop or read a line. It doesn't have to be polished; in fact, the spontaneous nature of audience participation often creates the best moments.

If you have access to local actors or musicians, consider partnering with them to stage short scenes or add music to your stops. A fiddle player performing a haunting tune at a graveyard, or an actor stepping out from a doorway to deliver a monologue, can transform a good tour into an unforgettable one.

Call-and-response techniques can also add energy. If you're guiding families or children, chants or songs related to your stories can make the experience lively and fun. Encourage them to join in at specific moments, or to repeat a line that brings the story to life.



# Develop Clear Themes

One of the biggest mistakes people make when designing a walking tour is treating it like a history lecture. They string together a series of facts and places, offering interesting information here and there, but without a unifying thread to hold it all together. The result? Guests may enjoy certain parts, but the experience lacks cohesion. People leave feeling like they've collected bits and pieces rather than having taken part in a meaningful journey. A successful walking tour doesn't feel like a series of stops; it feels like a story. And that story needs a clear, central theme.

Think of your theme as the spine that supports the entire experience. It's what ties your stories together and makes your tour feel intentional, rather than random. The theme doesn't have to be complicated, but it does have to be consistent. Maybe your tour is built around the idea of rebellion, and every story you tell highlights people or moments where someone defied authority, challenged norms, or fought for change.

Or perhaps your theme is transformation, and your stories focus on how places and people have evolved over time—buildings repurposed, communities reborn, legends reinterpreted. The theme gives the tour momentum. It allows each story to build on the last, drawing guests deeper into the experience.

When you develop your theme, you give your tour an emotional journey. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end—not just geographically, but narratively. You're not just taking people from point A to point B; you're leading them through a process of discovery. Maybe you open by introducing your theme in a broad way—"Tonight, we'll uncover stories of resilience in Harrogate's past."

As you move from stop to stop, each story builds on that theme: a local healer who continued her work despite persecution, a ghost who lingers because their story was never told, a community that rebuilt itself after disaster.

And by the time you end, you've not only shared fascinating facts but also created a journey with emotional resonance. You might close with a story that inspires reflection or hope—something that ties the experience together and leaves your guests thinking differently about the places they've walked through.

A clear theme also helps you as a guide. It gives you direction when choosing which stories to tell and which ones to leave out. It keeps you from veering off into unrelated tangents, helping you maintain flow and focus. And it makes your marketing sharper too—people are far more likely to book a tour that promises a gripping journey through Harrogate's tales of mystery and transformation than a generic historic town walk.

So, as you're designing your tour, ask yourself: What's the bigger idea that connects everything I want to share? What do I want people to feel by the end? Choose your theme thoughtfully and let it guide your storytelling, and you'll create a tour that's not just informative, but deeply memorable. A tour that leaves people feeling they've experienced something cohesive, purposeful, and meaningful—something that stays with them long after they've gone home.

# Presentation Skills

Delivering an engaging walking tour requires much more than sharing facts and dates. What truly transforms a tour into an experience people remember—and talk about—is your ability to tell stories in a way that captivates, moves, and entertains. You need to be a storyteller.

Storytelling will be at the heart of what you do. It's not about reciting information; it's about bringing history, legends, and local lore to life in the minds of your guests. Whether you're telling a ghost story by candlelight or explaining the social movements that shaped a town, the delivery makes all the difference.

## **Do you have the right skills, personality and character?**

When you lead a tour, you're stepping into a role that's more than simply guiding people from point A to point B. You are the narrator of their experience, the thread that connects every stop and story. You are the bridge between the past and the present, translating events that happened decades or centuries ago into something that resonates today. If you struggle with public speaking, have a naturally quiet voice or are not a strong communicator then don't worry, you can learn to improve all of these elements.

You don't need formal acting training to do this well (though many guides find public speaking classes or drama workshops useful). What you do need is presence. When you speak, people should feel compelled to listen—not because you're the loudest voice in the street, but because you carry an energy that draws them in. You become the storyteller, the host, and occasionally even a character within your own narrative. On my ghost walks, there are moments when I slip into a role: lowering my voice to a whisper as if I'm reliving a tale from long ago, or stepping back and describing a shadowy figure I "once saw" in the distance. These small shifts create an immersive experience, where guests forget they're on a walking tour and start feeling they're part of something more.

## **Mastering Delivery: Pacing, Volume, and Tone**

Great storytelling has rhythm. It isn't a steady stream of words delivered in the same tone at the same speed. It's dynamic and varied, with careful attention to pacing. When you reach a moment of suspense or drama, slow down. Let your words hang in the air. Allow the silence to create anticipation. A carefully placed pause can be one of the most powerful tools in your repertoire—it gives people time to process what you've said and draws them in, eager for what's next. Then, in lighter moments, pick up the pace. Move quickly through humorous anecdotes or smaller details to keep energy levels high and prevent your audience from losing focus.

Volume is about more than just making sure people can hear you (though that's crucial). It's about how you fill a space. You need to project your voice clearly and confidently without shouting. If you're in a busy square, you may need to increase your volume and speak with more clarity. In a quiet alley or courtyard, you can lower your voice, speaking softly to make people lean in and listen more closely. This contrast is part of what keeps your delivery interesting and engaging. If you have a large group, consider using a small portable amplifier or microphone. Don't be afraid of using tools that help you maintain your energy and keep everyone included.

Tone and emotion are where your stories come alive. Your tone should shift with the content of the story. If you're telling a tragic tale—perhaps about a lost love or an act of injustice—allow your voice to reflect that gravity. Slow down, soften your tone, and allow a little sadness or reverence to enter your delivery. If you're sharing something funny, your tone should be lighter, more animated. Let your enthusiasm shine through when you talk about an extraordinary person or a moment of triumph. And in ghost stories? Drop your voice to a hushed tone, let it drift into silence at just the right moment, and watch as your audience leans in, hanging on your every word.

## Engage Emotionally—And Authentically

The best storytelling is emotional storytelling. That doesn't mean you need to over-act or put on a theatrical performance (unless that's your style), but it does mean letting your own reactions show. Enthusiasm is infectious—when you're excited about a story, your audience will be too. If you show curiosity, wonder, or even sadness, people will mirror those feelings. Your emotional authenticity helps them feel connected, both to you and to the story you're telling.

Remember: storytelling is an art. Like any skill, it gets better with practice. Rehearse your stories out loud. Record yourself and listen back. Adjust your pacing, tone, and pauses until you find the rhythm that feels natural and engaging. And always pay attention to your audience. Are they leaning in, smiling, reacting? Or do they look restless and distracted? Your guests will teach you what works and what doesn't if you're open to learning from them.

Final Thought: Storytelling Is What Sets You Apart

In the end, honing your storytelling isn't an extra—it's the heart of your tour. You can have the best locations and the most fascinating facts, but if you can't deliver them in a way that moves your audience, they won't leave with the memory you want to create. Think of yourself not just as a guide, but as the storyteller who makes the past present again, who makes the unseen seen, and who turns a simple walk through town into an experience that people will treasure long after the tour is over.

When you're guiding a tour, your body speaks just as loudly as your voice—sometimes even more so. Body language is one of your most powerful tools as a storyteller because it reinforces your words, adds emotion, and helps create a dynamic presence that draws people in. Alongside eye contact, your physical presence can captivate a group, hold their attention, and make them feel like they're part of something truly special. The trick is learning to use your body and eyes with intention and purpose, not just out of habit or nervousness.

Body Language: Make Every Movement Matter

When you tell a story, your gestures can illustrate what words alone cannot. If you're describing a massive medieval door, spread your arms wide. If you're conjuring the image of a narrow, twisting alley where something spooky happened, let your hands mimic the motion, tracing the invisible lines of the street in the air. These gestures help paint mental pictures for your guests, making the scenes feel more vivid and real. They act as visual anchors, reinforcing what you're saying and keeping people focused on you.

No two guides are the same—and nor should they be. Your personal style as a guide is what sets you apart, shapes the atmosphere of your tour, and defines the way guests experience your stories. Some guides are quiet and reflective, leading guests gently through spaces with a calm, meditative presence. Others are lively and charismatic, making guests laugh, gasp, and hang on every word. There's no right or wrong way to be—what matters is that your style feels authentic to you and helps your guests connect with the stories you tell.

For me, performance has always been second nature. I trained as an actor and have been performing since I was seven years old. Being in front of an audience, holding their attention, and creating an atmosphere where people are completely immersed comes naturally. I love being centre stage. But when I guide my ghost walks and storytelling tours, I'm not the star of the show—the stories are. I'm the conduit that brings them to life. My goal has always been to make the stories the focus, to make them feel real and immediate. If you read my reviews, you'll see how often guests comment on my storytelling, on how I bring things to life—that's exactly what I wanted. That's the point. I'm there to disappear into the story, to guide them through it so they come away remembering the experience, not just the person who led them.



As you develop your tours, take time to think about your own personality, your strengths, and your natural presence. Are you someone who thrives on high energy and humour? Then maybe your tours are fast-paced, full of lively banter and interactive moments. Are you more reflective, with a quieter confidence? Then perhaps your tours are slower, more thoughtful, designed to create a mood of quiet curiosity or reverence.

For example, imagine a guide who has a background in education. Their style might be more structured, with a focus on sharing clear, informative content. They might incorporate visuals or props, engage guests with questions, and provide thoughtful pauses for discussion. Their tours might feel like walking lectures, but in a good way—deep, insightful, and satisfying.

Or think of someone who has a background in improv comedy. Their tours might be unpredictable, full of audience interaction and off-the-cuff humour. They'd be quick to adapt, making jokes about things happening in the moment, and their guests would feel like they were on an adventure where anything could happen.

The key is to find a style that feels right for you and works with the stories you want to tell. Whether you're a polished performer, a knowledgeable historian, or a passionate local sharing personal tales, own it. Lean into it. Your authenticity will make your guests feel comfortable and help them connect not only with the places you visit but with you as their storyteller.

Your stories are important—but how you tell them, and who you are when you tell them, makes all the difference.

At its heart, being a great guide isn't just about leading people from one stop to another—it's about crafting an experience that stays with them long after the tour ends. Whether you're delivering historical facts, spine-tingling ghost stories, or hidden cultural gems, your role is to be a storyteller, a performer, and a host.

You're creating a shared journey, offering your audience something they can connect to emotionally, intellectually, and even physically. The stories are the soul of your tour, but you are the one who gives them life. Your energy, presence, and passion are the difference between a tour people forget and one they rave about to everyone they know.

Remember, authenticity is key. Play to your strengths—if you're naturally energetic and animated, let that shine through. If you're reflective and calming, use that to create an atmosphere of intimacy and depth. Embrace your personal style and use it to enhance your stories rather than overshadow them.

Be aware of your pacing, your tone, and your body language. Make eye contact, listen to your audience, and adapt in the moment. And most importantly, never forget that this is their experience as much as it is your performance. Engage them, involve them, and make them feel like they're part of something special.

## Top Tips

- **Know your stories inside out and practice until they flow naturally.**
- **Pace yourself, allow time for silence, reflection, and interaction.**
- **Be welcoming and approachable—people remember how you made them feel.**
- **Stay flexible, read the group and adapt when needed.**
- **Maintain your passion, your enthusiasm is contagious.**

**A good guide gives people information. A great guide gives them an unforgettable experience. Aim for that, and you'll have guests coming back time and again, eager to hear the next story only you can tell.**

But it's not just about what you do with your hands. The way you move your whole body matters. Movement has energy, and you can use it to guide attention, emphasize key moments, or build atmosphere. Step closer to your group when sharing an intimate or tense moment in your story, lowering your voice as if letting them in on a secret. Then step back and open up your posture when the moment calls for relief or a big reveal. Just be mindful not to pace aimlessly—random movement can be distracting and give off nervous energy. Instead, move with intention, marking moments in your story with small shifts that feel deliberate and meaningful.

### **Eye Contact: Connect with Your Audience**

Eye contact is one of the simplest and most effective ways to create a connection. When you look at someone as you speak, you instantly bring them into the moment. They feel seen, included, and acknowledged. And when they feel included, they stay engaged.

As you tell your stories, take the time to slowly scan your group. Don't fix your gaze on one person for too long, and avoid just staring into the middle distance—it can make you seem disconnected or unsure. Instead, let your eyes gently move around, giving brief moments of contact to as many people as possible. In smaller groups, you can be more personal, holding their gaze for a second or two while you make a point. In larger groups, aim to engage the different sections of your audience, making sure no one feels left out on the edges.

Eye contact also helps you gauge how your group is responding. Are they leaning in, hanging on your words? Or are they looking distracted or restless? Use what you see to adjust your pace, tone, or energy.

### **Putting It Together: A Physical Presence That Commands Attention**

When your body language and eye contact work together, you create a presence that commands attention without effort. You move and gesture to make your stories come alive, and your eye contact draws people into the experience. You don't have to overdo it—just small, confident gestures and genuine engagement can make a huge difference.

People remember how you made them feel as much as what you said. When you use your whole body to tell a story, you create a performance that stays with them. Your presence makes you more than a guide—it makes you a storyteller they'll remember.





## Step 6



### The three P's

When planning your walking tour route, it's essential to think beyond storytelling and consider the practicalities. Choose a path that flows well, avoids backtracking, and suits your audience's physical ability, while also ensuring it's safe and accessible. Always check whether you need permissions for the areas you'll be using—particularly if you plan to stop outside private properties, operate in pedestrian zones, or display signage like A-boards. It's also critical to have Public Liability Insurance (PLI) in place before you start; this protects both you and your guests in the event of accidents or unexpected incidents. Responsible route planning and the right permissions show professionalism, build trust, and safeguard your business.



# Step 6

## Planning, Permissions & PLI

### Where You Go Matters as Much as What You Say

When planning a walking tour, the route is as crucial as the stories you tell along it. Where you start, where you stop, and how you move between locations can make or break the experience. A thoughtfully designed route isn't just a string of locations—it's part of the performance. It sets the pace, the tone, and shapes how people experience the stories you bring to life.

I start my ghost walk from a central, easy-to-find location, which helps everyone arrive on time and eliminates unnecessary stress. We start between a hotel and a museum, so it is relatively easy to find on Google Maps, or by asking a local. Most people will have seen my display boards which also provide the full meeting location.

From there, I've planned a route that winds through both the familiar and the forgotten parts of town. One of the best things about the route I use is that it takes people off the beaten track. We go down streets that most tourists wouldn't wander, and even local people often say they've never really looked at these places before. I make a point of drawing their attention to things they've probably passed a hundred times without noticing. A circular route works well for this kind of tour—it brings people back to where they started, making it easy for them to orient themselves afterwards, and it feels like a story that's come full circle. It also helps from a practical standpoint; people know where they'll end up and can plan accordingly.

I also point out other haunted locations as we walk, but I don't tell their full stories on the tour. Instead, I give them a tease and cheekily tell them to buy my book if they want to know more. People laugh, but a surprising number do exactly that afterwards. It's a great way to create a sense of intrigue and add another layer to the experience.



When I first started, I had just one route. Over time, I added a second, and now I'm considering a third. Offering multiple routes has been one of the best decisions I've made. People come back, and I often hear, "We did your first route last year and loved it—now we're back for more." Variety keeps things fresh and gives guests a reason to return, especially locals who might otherwise think they've seen it all.

Accessibility is a major consideration when planning any route. You need to think about dropped curbs, pedestrian crossings, and whether there are opportunities to rest along the way. My tour lasts around 1.5 hours—longer than I originally planned—but the stories are engaging enough that people stay hooked until the end. Still, I'm aware that it's a long time on your feet, and there are only two proper places to sit along my route.

If I were starting again, I might look for more stops where people could rest, but I balance this by pacing the walk sensibly and using the time between locations to keep people's energy up with a bit of light banter and humor. Not during the stories, mind—those I treat with a bit more seriousness—but before we get into a tale and in the spaces between stops, I keep the mood light. I always say, people want to like you, so give them every reason to. A laugh and a bit of banter go a long way in building that connection.

Another important consideration is road noise. There's one particular stop on my tour where we're right by a road, and I joke about the boy racers zooming past and shouting. Nine times out of ten, it happens on cue, and the group gets a laugh out of it. But when it's time to tell the story, I make sure to speak up and project so everyone can hear, no matter what distractions are going on around us.

Safety is always front of mind. I've planned the route to use as many pedestrian crossings as possible, and I start every tour with a short safety talk. I remind the kids to stay with their adults, encourage anyone to ask me to slow down if I'm walking too fast, and tell them to let me know if they can't hear. I also ask people to hold their questions until we're walking between stops—though I'm always open to a quiet word as we go. Some of the best ghost stories I've heard have come from guests sharing their own experiences on the way to the next location. People love to talk when you make space for them to do so.

One final tip about how you position yourself: people want to see what you're talking about. They want to take photos. So stand with the building, monument, or whatever point of interest behind you or to your side, giving them a clear view. If you're standing in front of a landmark and blocking it, you'll hear about it—usually with cameras poised and nowhere to point them! Sight lines matter. Think about where your group is standing and what they're looking at. Help them engage with the setting visually as well as through your storytelling.

A successful route isn't just about geography. It's about pacing, comfort, safety, engagement, and atmosphere. Plan it well, and it becomes the invisible thread that ties everything else together. Let's delve into the details and explore how to best plan your route.



## Route Length and Duration: Finding the Sweet Spot for Your Audience

One of the most important decisions you'll make when designing your walking tour is how long it should last. Get it right, and your guests will walk away feeling like they've had an engaging, satisfying experience that left them wanting more. Get it wrong, and they may leave early, bored, tired, or even frustrated. The length and pacing of your tour should reflect your theme, your audience, and your own energy as a guide. There's no one-size-fits-all answer, but there are guidelines that will help you find the sweet spot for your route.

For most walking tours, a 1 to 2-hour duration strikes the perfect balance between depth and stamina. This time frame gives you enough room to tell rich, immersive stories and guide people through a meaningful experience without testing their patience—or their feet. However, the ideal length depends largely on your audience. Families with younger children generally appreciate shorter tours, typically around 60 to 75 minutes. Kids have shorter attention spans and lower tolerance for standing still while adults talk at them. If you're planning a family-friendly route, it's essential to keep things snappy, interactive, and well-paced. Think of it as a fast-moving adventure, with plenty of opportunities for participation, and not too many long pauses where they have to stand still and listen.

On the other hand, history buffs, architecture enthusiasts, or niche audiences often come with the expectation of a deeper dive. They're more than happy to spend 90 to 120 minutes exploring complex topics, examining details, and engaging in thoughtful discussion. They tend to be more patient listeners and often ask questions, so you'll want to factor in time for that interaction. These tours can be longer because the audience is prepared for—and actively seeking—a more detailed and layered experience.

Once you've settled on your tour's length, you'll need to plan the number of stops. A good rule of thumb is 5 to 8 key stops for an average walking tour. Fewer than five and it can feel rushed, or worse, thin on content. More than eight, and you risk overwhelming your guests with too much information or dragging the experience out longer than their legs can comfortably handle. Each stop should offer something distinct—not just another fact, but a new theme, a shift in tone, or a sensory moment that keeps the energy flowing. For example, you might start with a story of local rebellion, shift to a tale of ghostly mystery at the next stop, and then offer a humorous anecdote as you move along.

Think about how you use the time between stops as well. This is where the pacing comes in. You might only have 5 or 10 minutes between locations, but that's a great opportunity for light conversation, small talk, or answering individual questions. You could even plant a teaser for the next stop, keeping their curiosity piqued. These transitions are just as important as the stops themselves—they keep people engaged, give them time to process what they've just heard, and allow them to physically and mentally reset before the next story begins.



### Harrogate Ghost Walk

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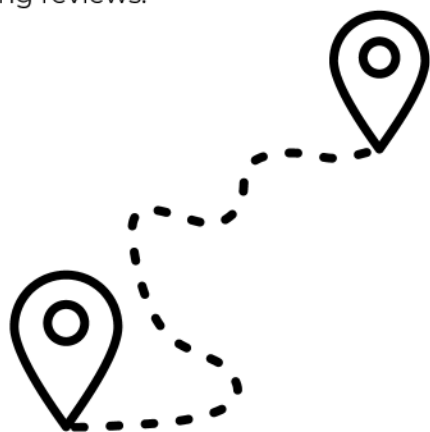
#1 of 17 Tours & Activities in [Harrogate](#)



When designing your route, take into account the physical demands of the tour as well. Are there lots of hills, steps, or uneven surfaces? If so, shorter tours or more frequent breaks may be necessary. Even a relatively flat town can wear people out if you're moving too quickly or standing too long without a chance to rest. If your route includes benches or places where people can sit, make a point of using them. If not, be mindful of your guests' comfort. Let them know in advance how long they'll be walking, whether there are opportunities to sit, and encourage them to wear comfortable shoes and bring water if necessary.

Your own energy is another consideration. A two-hour tour might not sound like much on paper, but when you're performing—projecting your voice, telling stories, managing a group, answering questions—it's physically and mentally demanding. You need to ensure the length of your tour is sustainable for you, not just your guests. You don't want to be flagging by the final stop, when you should be delivering a memorable finale that leaves people buzzing.

In the end, a well-paced, thoughtfully timed tour ensures guests stay engaged from beginning to end. Whether you're guiding a one-hour family-friendly ghost walk or a deep-dive historical exploration that spans two hours, the length of your tour should serve the story you're telling, the audience you're entertaining, and the experience you want to create. Take the time to plan it carefully, and your guests will thank you for it—both with their smiles at the end of the walk and, ideally, glowing reviews.



When planning your walking tour, one of the most practical yet often overlooked considerations is the distance between stops. It's not just about where you go; it's about how you get there—and how your guests experience the journey along the way. If your route is poorly paced, with long, aimless stretches or too many backtracks, your audience will start to feel it in their feet... and their enthusiasm. On the other hand, when you optimize the walking distances between stops, your tour feels seamless, purposeful, and enjoyable from start to finish.

Spacing your stops evenly is key to maintaining the energy and focus of your group. If you cluster three stops close together and then have a long, dull walk to the next location, you'll lose momentum. Guests will start to chat among themselves, get distracted by their phones, or worse—tune out entirely. On the flip side, if you have long gaps between every stop, they may start to feel restless or wonder when they'll hear the next story. Ideally, you want to create a rhythm to your tour—walk, stop, story, walk, stop, story—so guests know what to expect and stay engaged. Think of it like pacing a good novel. There should be no dragging chapters or sudden jumps.

One of the biggest mistakes new tour guides make is backtracking unnecessarily. Sometimes it happens because a route wasn't carefully planned, other times because a guide feels they have to include a particular site, even if it doesn't fit smoothly into the overall journey. The problem is, backtracking can break the flow of the experience. Guests will often notice when they're covering the same ground, and it can make the tour feel inefficient or disorganized. If you absolutely must return to a location, make sure there's a compelling narrative reason for it. Maybe you're tying the end of your story back to the beginning, bringing them full circle in a way that's thematically satisfying. If there's no clear reason to double back, find another way.

Your route should flow logically. This doesn't necessarily mean it has to follow a strict geographic line—though that can help—but it should make sense within the story you're telling. A ghost walk, for example, might lead people through winding alleyways, dead-ends, and hidden courtyards to create an atmosphere of mystery and suspense. A historical tour might follow a timeline, moving from the oldest part of the town to the newest.

A street art tour could trace the evolution of different artists, styles, or political movements through the murals they left behind. Whatever the theme, your path should feel intentional, not random. And as you're optimising your route, remember to factor in the terrain. Hills, uneven cobblestones, and stairs can be exhausting, especially if you're leading an older group or families with small children. A tour that looks perfect on a map might be physically challenging in reality. Try walking your planned route at different times of day to get a feel for how it flows when streets are busy, when shops are open, or when the atmosphere changes.

A smooth, well-paced walking route gives your guests the feeling that they're being guided through a carefully crafted experience, where every step has purpose and every stop builds anticipation for what's next. It helps maintain their energy, their focus, and their enjoyment. And when people feel they've been led through a story that made sense—geographically and thematically—they're far more likely to leave with a sense of satisfaction, and far more likely to recommend you to others.



The places you choose to stop on your walking tour are more than just backdrops; they're stages where your stories come to life. Carefully selecting your locations is what gives your tour its visual drama, atmosphere, and sense of discovery. Think of each stop as a scene in a play—each one should serve the story, captivate the audience, and leave a lasting impression. The right location can elevate a good story into something unforgettable, while a bland or ill-suited spot can drain the energy from even your best material.

High-impact locations are those that immediately grab attention. They stimulate the senses and evoke a feeling—whether it's awe, curiosity, or even a little fear if you're leading a ghost walk.

These are the places that make people instinctively reach for their cameras, where they'll want to take photos and remember the moment. It might be an alleyway with crumbling bricks and flickering lanterns that sets a spooky tone, or an ornate facade of a building that makes people stop and marvel at its craftsmanship. Scenic viewpoints also work beautifully—there's something about standing at a height, overlooking a city or a landscape, that stirs a sense of connection and wonder.

But it's not just about how a place looks. The power of a stop lies in its ability to connect directly to the story you're telling. A grand landmark might seem like an obvious choice, but if it doesn't tie into your theme or narrative, it's just window dressing. Don't be afraid to guide your group away from the tourist crowds and into the quiet spaces most people overlook. A hidden courtyard, a tucked-away lane, or a weathered doorway with a compelling tale often holds more magic than a famous square where you have to compete with noise and distraction. I've found that guests appreciate the feeling of discovering something secret, something they wouldn't have found on their own. It makes the experience feel exclusive and personal, like they've been let in on a special piece of history.

There's also a practical advantage to choosing these lesser-known spots. Crowded tourist hubs are often noisy, chaotic, and can make it difficult to hold your audience's attention—never mind their ability to hear you clearly. A quieter, more atmospheric location lets your storytelling breathe. You can set the pace, control the mood, and create the kind of immersive experience that your guests came for in the first place.

When selecting your stops, walk the route at different times of day. How does the location feel in the morning compared to dusk? How does the lighting affect the mood? What's the soundscape like—are you drowned out by traffic or construction, or can your group comfortably settle in and focus on you?

These details matter far more than you might expect. Your guests aren't just listening to you—they're experiencing the place. Give them somewhere that adds to the story, not one that makes them wish they could move on.

In the end, high-impact locations are where your stories find their home. They give your guests the chance to feel something, to see and experience the world you're describing. These are the moments they'll take with them, the ones they'll remember and talk about when they share their experience with friends. Choosing your locations thoughtfully and with intention is what will make your tour stand out—not just as a walk, but as an experience that lingers.

Making your tour accessible isn't just good practice—it's essential. A thoughtful route that considers everyone's needs makes your experience welcoming, inclusive, and professional. Choose paths that are as flat and even as possible, avoiding unnecessary stairs or steep hills. If parts of your route include uneven cobblestones, narrow lanes, or inclines, let your guests know in advance so they can plan accordingly.

It's also important to think about comfort along the way. Include rest points where guests can sit for a moment, especially if your tour runs longer than an hour. If there aren't benches or obvious places to stop, make sure you pace your walk so people have time to catch their breath. Try to plan your route near public toilets, cafes, or other facilities—guests may need a break, and it's much easier when there are options close by.

Being upfront about accessibility shows respect for your audience and ensures everyone feels welcome on your tour. A little planning goes a long way in creating an experience that works for everyone.

When you're designing your walking tour, it's easy to get caught up in the creative side—choosing the stories you'll tell, mapping out the sites, and imagining how it will all come together. But a tour that works on paper doesn't always work in practice. There's a layer of logistical planning that's essential if you want your tour to run smoothly, no matter the group, the weather, or the time of year. You need to think beyond the storytelling and put yourself in your guests' shoes: How will the route feel? What will the surroundings be like? Will they be able to see and hear you? Will they be comfortable?

One of the most important factors to consider is the time of day you're offering your tours. This has a huge impact on the kind of experience you'll create, the type of audience you'll attract, and the practical realities of navigating your route. For example, daytime tours tend to attract families with children, seniors, and educational groups. In the bright light of day, you can show off architectural details, public art, and natural features like gardens or historic parks in their best light. It's also easier for guests to find you, move safely through the route, and take clear photos. Daytime walks tend to be more relaxed and are generally a good fit for broader, more accessible themes.



On the other hand, evening tours create a completely different atmosphere. Dusk and darkness add mood and mystery, which is perfect for ghost walks, mystery tours, or romantic twilight strolls. Shadows lengthen, street lamps flicker on, and familiar places take on a new life after dark. But planning an evening tour comes with extra considerations: Is the route well-lit? Will your guests be able to see where they're walking? If not, you might need to bring lanterns or torches—both for safety and to add an extra bit of theatrical flair. Evening tours often appeal to adults, tourists looking for an after-dinner activity, and groups in search of a memorable night out.

There's also something special about early morning tours, although they aren't as common. These work beautifully if you're catering to photographers, bird watchers, or anyone seeking a quieter, reflective experience. Early mornings can offer soft light, empty streets, and a peacefulness you don't get at other times of day. But you'll need to consider who is likely to book a tour at that hour and how you'll make it worth their while. The time of day doesn't just affect the mood and visuals of your tour—it affects practical logistics like foot traffic, background noise, and even safety.

Busy roads at rush hour can drown you out. A peaceful alley in the morning might be intimidating after dark. Think carefully about the reality of your locations at different times, and plan accordingly.

In short, practical planning is about balancing your creative vision with the on-the-ground realities. Time of day is one of those small details that makes a big difference in shaping the experience your guests will have. Get it right, and you won't just lead them through a town—you'll lead them through an experience they'll never forget.

Weather is one of those unpredictable factors that can make or break a walking tour, yet many guides overlook it when designing their route. In the two years I have been running my tours it has rained on me only four times. That's pretty lucky. You might have the perfect stories and a seamless itinerary, but if your guests are sweltering in the heat, soaked by a sudden downpour, or shivering through a biting wind, it's unlikely they'll enjoy the experience.

Comfort is key to engagement—if people are uncomfortable, they won't be able to focus on your storytelling, no matter how brilliant it is. When you're planning your route, think carefully about seasonal conditions and how the environment changes throughout the year. During the summer months, seek out shaded areas where guests can gather without standing in direct sun. Look for trees, awnings, or building overhangs to provide relief from the heat. If your route is mostly exposed, be proactive: remind guests ahead of time to bring water, wear hats, and apply sunscreen. You could even consider carrying a few hand fans to offer or sell on hot days—not only as a thoughtful gesture but also as a simple upsell that adds to your guest experience.

In rainy or unpredictable weather, shelter becomes your best friend. Identify spots along your route where you and your group can take cover if the heavens open. Arched doorways, arcades, large trees, or covered passages can buy you time during a sudden downpour. Some guides carry a few foldable umbrellas or disposable ponchos to offer guests—again, these can be sold as a convenience or offered free as part of a premium experience. It's a small investment that makes a big difference in guest comfort.

Also consider windy or cold weather, particularly in the off-season. A route that's pleasant in the summer can be bitterly exposed in winter. Choose stops that provide some shielding from the wind or adjust your route depending on the season. Even just acknowledging the weather and showing empathy can help your guests feel more at ease—"I promise the ghost at our next stop makes up for this wind!"

Finally, always communicate clearly in advance about the weather conditions your guests can expect. Let them know if your tour runs rain or shine, and what they should bring to be prepared. Many guests appreciate the heads-up and will come better equipped to enjoy the tour.

Planning for weather conditions shows professionalism, care, and consideration. It reassures your guests that you've thought of everything, and it enhances their overall experience—whatever the weather decides to do.



## Delightful Evening Walk with Ghosts

Aug 2022

An excellent presentation. Our host was not only warm and charming but fully audible even to those standing on the outer fringe of our rather large group.

However, good walker though I am, at 75, I found he walked just a tad too fast for my comfort. And, whilst his eagerness to publicise his book and obtain social media endorsements from us was understandable, even touching, I think he should wind back on this, just a little. After all, we had all paid our £9.00 and were surely entitled to enjoy our time with him without beginning to feel an increasing burden of responsibility to keep him in employment! Otherwise, I would have given the Ghost Walk full marks.

This review taken from my Trip Advisor account is a perfect example of how important it is to balance the pace and accessibility of your tour for a variety of guests. The feedback is generally very positive—they mention the tour was well-presented, that I was warm and charming (as always), and that my voice carried even to those standing at the edge of a large group. These are all things I take pride in. However, they also raise two important points that offered me an opportunity to reflect and improve.

First, they mention that the walking pace was a little too brisk for their comfort, despite them considering themselves a good walker at 75. This reminded me that while I'm familiar with the route and probably take its demands for granted, not everyone is as physically comfortable keeping up with a quicker pace—especially in the evening, when tiredness can set in more easily. Since reading this review, I've made a conscious effort to slow things down just a little, and to regularly check in with the group as we go. I remind everyone at the start of the tour to let me know if they need me to slow down or if they're struggling with the pace. It's something I now build into my safety and welcome talk at the beginning, setting the tone for an experience that's accommodating and inclusive.

The second point raised in the review was about me promoting my book and social media at the end of the tour. While I completely understand that some people may feel it's unnecessary, I also believe it's a natural and valuable part of running a small, independent business like mine. As a sole trader, self-promotion is essential—not just for the success of my tours but for future events, books, and experiences that my audience often wants to know about. In fact, since that feedback, I've leaned into this aspect a little more (with a playful approach), and it's been met with great reactions. Guests frequently tell me they enjoy hearing about the book, and many leave reviews or return for future tours because they feel connected to the wider community I've built.

I remember this particular guest well. She also raised concerns during the tour about the small hill we climb as part of the route. This is something I'm always upfront about—both on my website and at the start of the tour. In her case, I even personally called her after she booked because she'd mentioned having difficulty with hills. We discussed the route in detail, and she assured me it wouldn't be an issue. On the day, however, it seems it was more of a challenge than expected.

The truth is, no matter how much effort you put into preparation and communication, you can't always please everyone. I take every piece of feedback seriously, and I reflect on it. But I also know there's a balance to be struck. I aim to deliver a unique and memorable experience, and part of that includes sharing what else I offer—whether it's a book, another tour, or the chance to follow along on social media. For many guests, that adds to the sense of community and ongoing connection beyond the tour itself.

At the end of the day, while I always strive to accommodate and welcome everyone, it's impossible to tailor the experience to meet every individual expectation completely. What I can do is remain transparent, thoughtful, and professional in everything I offer—and stand by the integrity of the experience I've created.

## Do a Walking Survey of Your Area

Researching in books or online can only take you so far—you need to experience the streets, buildings, and spaces in person to fully understand their atmosphere and potential. A walking survey helps you find the hidden gems that don't appear on maps, lets you see your surroundings from the perspective of your future guests, and gives you the opportunity to test how your stories and route flow together in the real world.

Try walking your planned route at different times of the day. Mornings might be peaceful and quiet, ideal for reflective history tours or nature walks. Late afternoons could bring more crowds and noise, better suited for lively or interactive tours. Evening or twilight walks often add a sense of mystery and atmosphere, perfect for ghost walks or darker histories. Pay attention to how these changes in light, sound, and activity affect the feel of each stop. A narrow alley that seems unremarkable during the day can feel atmospheric and eerie at dusk. As you walk, look closely at the details around you. Street names often have fascinating histories—perhaps they reference a long-forgotten person or event. Architectural details, like gargoyles, old signage, or faded advertisements painted on brick walls, can be jumping-off points for unexpected stories. Don't overlook memorials and public art, either. A sculpture or plaque might tell a story that fits perfectly into your tour's theme or reveal an opportunity to share a lesser-known tale.

Use your phone or a notebook to make observations as you go. Take photographs of buildings or objects that catch your eye. Note the smells that linger from nearby bakeries or breweries, the sounds of birdsong in a quiet square, or the clatter of footsteps on cobblestones. These sensory details are incredibly useful when crafting your narratives later. They help paint a vivid picture for your guests and bring them into the moment. And as you explore, keep an eye out for hidden corners, shortcuts, or tucked-away courtyards—spaces where you can pause the group for an intimate story away from traffic or distractions.

## Cross-Reference & Fact-Check

Once you've gathered your stories, researched your sites, and started crafting your narratives, it's vital to make sure your facts are accurate and your stories are responsibly told. This is particularly important if you're dealing with sensitive topics, such as the histories of marginalised communities, activism, or historical injustices. You have a responsibility to handle these subjects with care and respect, ensuring your stories are truthful and well-informed.

Don't rely solely on easily accessible sources like Wikipedia. While it can be a good starting point, it's often incomplete or inaccurate. Instead, dig deeper. Visit local archives, libraries, and museums. Consult books by reputable historians. Speak to local experts or academics who have specialized knowledge about your subject matter. When possible, look for primary sources: original documents, letters, newspapers, and photographs from the time you're discussing. These sources add credibility and richness to your tour.

It's also important to balance fact with folklore. Many tours—especially ghost walks and legends-based routes—thrive on stories that blur the line between history and myth. That's fine, and often part of the fun, but it's crucial to make it clear to your guests where the history ends and the legend begins. Honesty builds trust with your audience. You can say, "Some believe..." or "According to legend..." to signal that the story may not be historically verified. Guests will appreciate knowing they're hearing a mixture of fact and folklore, rather than being misled. Cross-referencing and fact-checking aren't just about accuracy—they're about respect. When you're telling stories about real people and events, especially those involving injustice or trauma, taking the time to verify your information ensures you're honoring those histories properly. Your credibility as a guide depends on it, and your audience will feel more confident knowing they're in knowledgeable, respectful hands.



## Permissions, Licenses, and Insurance in your location.

One of the most important, and often overlooked, steps in setting up a walking tour is making sure you have the right permissions, licenses, and insurance in place. It's easy to get swept up in the creative side—crafting your stories, planning your route, and designing your marketing—but before you set foot on your first tour, you need to be sure you're operating legally, safely, and respectfully within your local area.

The first question you need to ask is whether you require a license to operate as a tour guide in your town or city. This varies depending on location. Some places, like London, offer official qualifications such as the Blue Badge, which is highly respected and often a requirement for certain types of work—particularly inside historical sites or leading tours for major travel operators. However, in many towns across the UK, including Harrogate, there's currently no legal requirement to have a formal guiding qualification or badge in order to run your own independent walking tours. That said, having relevant training or a recognised qualification can be a big boost to your credibility and open up opportunities you wouldn't otherwise have.

What's more important in most areas is understanding whether you need permission from your local authority to operate on public streets. Some councils, especially in busy tourist destinations, require street traders or performers to have a license if they're using public spaces for commercial gain. In Harrogate, I contacted the council directly to ask whether I needed any kind of permit or license to operate a walking tour. I never received a reply. After doing my own research and speaking to other business owners, it became clear there was no licensing scheme in place for walking tours, so I proceeded. However, this may not be the case everywhere, so it's always wise to check—whether that means phoning your local council, sending an email, or visiting in person. Don't assume silence equals permission; document your efforts to make contact, in case you ever need to show you acted in good faith.

Regardless of whether a license is required, Public Liability Insurance (PLI) is an absolute must. No exceptions. If you are taking groups of people around a town or city, even for a short walk, you have a duty of care to protect them—and yourself. PLI covers you in the event that a guest is injured on your tour or if you accidentally cause damage to property. It's there to provide peace of mind and is often a requirement if you want to work with schools, corporate groups, or partner with venues. It also demonstrates that you take your role as a responsible guide seriously. Policies are generally affordable and easy to obtain, with many specialist insurers offering packages tailored specifically to tour guides and event hosts.

If you plan to welcome children on your walking tours—whether they're part of family groups, school outings, or youth organisations—it's essential to have the relevant background checks in place to ensure everyone feels safe and protected. In the UK, this means obtaining a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, which confirms that you have no criminal history that would make you unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults. While it isn't always a legal requirement for public tours, having an up-to-date DBS check can provide peace of mind to parents, teachers, and guardians, as well as demonstrate your commitment to safeguarding. In other countries, these checks go by different names—Police Certificates, Working with Children Checks in Australia, or Criminal Record Checks in the United States and Canada—but they serve the same purpose: to protect children and vulnerable individuals, and to protect you as the tour operator. Not only does having the appropriate clearances fulfil a legal and ethical responsibility, but it also reassures clients that you take their safety seriously. It's a simple step that can go a long way in building trust and professionalism in your business.

# Step 7

## Your Audience

Understanding your audience is one of the most important foundations of building a successful walking tour. Knowing who your guests are—their age, interests, background, expectations, and physical ability—allows you to tailor your stories, pacing, delivery style, and even the route itself. A group of families with young children will have very different needs and energy levels than a group of retired history enthusiasts or a lively hen party. By identifying your key demographics and learning how to adapt to their preferences, you can ensure your tour remains engaging, inclusive, and memorable for everyone who joins you, no matter who they are or where they come from.

# Step 7

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

### Understand Who Your Audience Will Be

Before you can guide anyone through cobbled streets, winding alleys, or sweeping landscapes, you need to know exactly who you're walking with.

Understanding your audience is one of the most important steps in building a successful walking tour business. Why? Because not every tour is for everyone, and that's a good thing. The more clearly you understand the people you're serving, the better you can design an experience that feels tailor-made for them.

Think of your walking tour as a conversation. It's not a lecture where you're reciting facts from a podium—it's an experience you're sharing with a group of people who have their own expectations, interests, and curiosities. And like any good conversation, it works best when you know a little about who's standing in front of you.

Are you leading curious tourists eager to soak in the highlights of your town in just a couple of hours? Are you guiding lifelong locals who believe they've heard it all—and are waiting to be surprised? Maybe your group is made up of school children with wide eyes and endless questions, or university students who want more depth, more facts, more debate. Perhaps you're walking with history buffs who revel in the details, or families with young kids who need to be entertained at every turn.

And then there are the niche audiences: the history enthusiasts who want their stories heard, the architecture students who notice the cornices you might otherwise ignore, the paranormal investigators who crave a good ghost story—and maybe something more.

Different groups come with different desires, energy levels, and expectations. Some want fun. Some want facts. Some want feelings. Some want all three in just the right measure. Knowing who you're walking with shapes everything: the stories you tell, the places you go, how long you stop in one place, the tone of your voice, the pacing of your walk, and the tools you bring with you.

This chapter is about helping you figure out who your ideal audience is, how to find them, and how to deliver an experience they'll never forget.

Because when you truly understand your audience—when you know who they are, what they love, what they need—you create something much more powerful than a simple tour.

You create an experience that feels personal. And that's the kind of tour people talk about long after they've gone home.

Let's meet your future walkers.





# TOURISTS

## The Curious Visitors Looking for Connection

Tourists, for example, often want a sense of quick immersion. They may be in town for a weekend or even just a single afternoon, and they're looking for an experience that delivers a taste of the local flavor. They want something they can tell their friends about back home, something that captures the spirit of the place they're visiting. For them, it's often about the highlights—the big stories, the stunning views, the iconic landmarks. But even in a short time, tourists appreciate a guide who can give them insights they wouldn't get from a guidebook. They want to leave feeling like they've discovered a secret or experienced something authentic. Your job with this audience is to create an accessible, engaging introduction that makes the unfamiliar feel familiar and exciting.

Tourists are often the lifeblood of a walking tour business, bringing with them a sense of curiosity, adventure, and the desire to make the most of their visit. They might be in town for a single day or stretched out across a long weekend, but what they have in common is limited time—and they want to use it wisely. Tourists are usually searching for an experience that offers a quick, immersive introduction to a place.

They want to feel like they've discovered something real, something authentic, a story they can tell when they get back home. For many, a walking tour is more than just an activity—it's a way to connect with a place on a deeper level, to step beyond the guidebooks and into the heart of the local culture. They're not just looking for facts; they want color and texture, stories that make the place come alive. What's the local legend? Where's the best view? Why does this neighborhood matter?

They want an experience that makes them feel like insiders, even if only for a little while. And because tourists often arrive without much background knowledge, it's important to strike a balance: give them the highlights and the hidden gems, make the history accessible without watering it down, and leave them with a sense that they truly know the place, even after a short time.





# LOCALS

## The Familiar Faces Searching for New Perspectives

Locals, on the other hand, require something different. They may have walked these streets hundreds of times before. They've heard the standard stories, they know the famous landmarks, and they've read the tourist brochures. What they're looking for is depth. They crave the hidden layers of their own town's history—stories that aren't usually told, details that are easily missed, and insights that change the way they see familiar places. If you're guiding locals, your tour needs to offer them something new. They want to feel like insiders, like they're part of an exclusive club that knows the real history behind the polished narrative. They'll appreciate a guide who has done the research, uncovered forgotten tales, and can connect the dots in ways they haven't seen before.

Locals are an often-overlooked but incredibly rewarding audience for walking tours. These are the people who pass by the old buildings every day, who've strolled the same streets since childhood, and who think they've heard every story their town has to offer. But here's the secret: locals are hungry for new perspectives on the places they call home. They crave deeper insights, untold stories, and hidden histories that challenge what they thought they knew. A great walking tour for locals doesn't just retell the familiar; it uncovers the layers beneath. It reveals the forgotten names behind street signs, the hidden meanings in public spaces, and the quieter narratives that never made it into history books.

Locals often appreciate tours that explore the lesser-known chapters of their community's story, offering them a sense of pride, surprise, and belonging. And when you win over locals, you gain not just repeat customers, but enthusiastic advocates who recommend your tour to visitors, schools, community groups, and even their own friends and family. They are your potential biggest supporters, and when they discover something new on your tour, they'll never look at their hometown the same way again.



# SPECIALIST

## The Enthusiasts Who Crave Depth and Detail

Niche groups are often some of the most rewarding and intellectually stimulating audiences you'll encounter, but they also come with the highest expectations. These are people who live and breathe their chosen field of interest. They attend conferences, read academic journals, participate in online communities, and often have hands-on experience or personal connections to the subjects they care about. When they show up for your tour, they aren't looking for a casual overview or a surface-level introduction. They want depth, nuance, and rigor.

They want to be challenged with new interpretations, lesser-known stories, and provocative questions that make them think differently about a subject they may have spent years studying. If your tour is aimed at LGBTQ+ history enthusiasts, for example, they will expect you to move beyond the well-worn narratives and offer a more comprehensive view—one that includes marginalized voices, intersectional perspectives, and an honest acknowledgment of the struggles and triumphs that shape queer histories.

If you're guiding architecture students, they'll be looking for a deep dive into structural innovation, material choices, the influence of political and economic forces on architectural trends, and perhaps even discussions around urban planning and preservation. For these groups, it's not enough to be enthusiastic; you must be informed, prepared, and respectful of their expertise. They are coming to learn from you as a fellow traveler in their area of interest, not just a storyteller but a partner in discovery.

When you meet their expectations—when you offer a tour that feels like a masterclass—they'll remember you, recommend you, and return for more. These guests are often your most engaged participants, asking thoughtful questions, sparking discussion, and helping to elevate the tour into something much greater than a guided walk. They push you to be your best, and in doing so, they help you create an experience that stands out for its quality, depth, and authenticity.





# FAMILIES

## Looking for Entertainment, a Slower Pace and Value for Money

Children and families are a unique and rewarding audience for walking tours, but they come with their own set of expectations and challenges. Designing and delivering a tour for families requires a different approach than one aimed at adult visitors or specialist groups. Families are often looking for experiences that are educational, entertaining, and inclusive—something that engages both children and adults without leaving either behind.

Parents want their children to have fun and learn something new, but they also want to enjoy themselves in the process. A successful family walking tour finds the sweet spot where all ages feel welcome, engaged, and excited to participate.

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Families are often looking for experiences that are educational, entertaining, and inclusive—something that engages both children and adults without leaving either behind. Parents want their children to have fun and learn something new, but they also want to enjoy themselves in the process. A successful family walking tour finds the sweet spot where all ages feel welcome, engaged, and excited to participate.

Children, in particular, need tours that are paced appropriately and filled with interactive elements. Their attention spans are often shorter than adults, and they're not going to be captivated by long speeches or dense historical facts. They need storytelling that's vivid, exciting, and easy to follow. They love a sense of adventure and mystery, especially when they feel like they are part of the story.

That might mean turning them into little detectives searching for clues between stops or inviting them to imagine what life was like hundreds of years ago as they stand in front of an old building. Physical engagement works wonders—ask them to act out scenes, mimic sounds, or take part in simple role-playing games. The more senses you can involve, the better.

I run a popular family-friendly ghost walk, complete with fancy dress, which sells out year after year. It's a lively, interactive experience where families don their best spooky costumes (just take a look at the photos!) and fully immerse themselves in the fun. The atmosphere is light-hearted rather than frightening, with plenty of jokes, audience participation, and playful storytelling designed to engage children and adults alike.

As a magician—one of the many hats I wear—I also weave themed magic tricks into the tour. These illusions are designed to be spooky, mysterious, and unusual, adding an extra layer of excitement beyond the storytelling. The magic is always a highlight, giving younger audiences something visually captivating and hands-on, which keeps them hooked from start to finish.

After all, today's kids are used to high-energy, multimedia entertainment, so I make it my mission to deliver an experience that feels dynamic and memorable—even if I am just a storyteller in a top hat spinning ghostly tales! It's more than just a walk; it's an event families look forward to every year.

For families, it's important to build a tour that accommodates practical needs as well. Routes should be accessible for pushchairs and manageable for little legs, with plenty of opportunities to pause and rest.

Consider incorporating stops where families can sit for a moment, have a snack, or use nearby facilities. Keep in mind that while children might be the focal point of your storytelling, the adults are your audience too. Offering facts and insights that appeal to grown-ups ensures that everyone feels included and invested in the experience.



Flexibility is key when working with families. Children can be unpredictable—some may be shy, others excitable, and many will surprise you with the questions they ask. As a guide, you need to create an environment where they feel comfortable engaging without letting the tour spiral out of control. Give children space to participate, but gently keep the group moving forward. Remember, you're not just leading a tour; you're hosting an experience where families are making memories together.

When you approach children and family walking tours with creativity, patience, and a sense of play, you open up a world of possibilities. These tours can be some of the most joyful and fulfilling experiences to lead. Children who have fun on your tour will talk about it for days, and parents will appreciate the thought and care you put into making an experience enjoyable for the whole family. And a family that's had a great time is more likely to recommend your tour to friends, leave glowing reviews, and come back for more.

Ultimately, guiding family groups isn't just about simplifying your content—it's about adapting your storytelling to be imaginative, interactive, and inclusive, ensuring that every member of the family walks away smiling.







# PRIVATE

In addition to my scheduled tours, I also offer private walking tours tailored specifically to individual groups, and these come at a higher price point for several good reasons. Private tours are bespoke experiences—crafted to meet the unique preferences, interests, and expectations of each client. Unlike my regular public walks, which run on set days and times with a predetermined route and content, private tours often take place outside of my normal working schedule. They require additional planning, flexibility, and a much more personalized approach to delivery. Private guests are not simply joining an event; they are commissioning a custom experience—and with that comes a different level of service and attention to detail.

One of the key differences with private bookings is the level of choice offered to the client. They have the freedom to dictate how long the tour lasts—whether it's a concise one-hour walk or a deep-dive experience lasting several hours. They can request a completely different route, incorporating sites or stories not featured on my usual tours. Some clients even ask for exclusive access to particular themes, like a tour focusing solely on Harrogate's Victorian spiritualists, or a route that highlights lesser-known tales of scandal and intrigue. In addition to the bespoke storytelling, private tours can include unique extras not available on public walks.

These might include a private Victorian séance experience, complete with period-appropriate theatrics, or a personal magic show, seamlessly woven into the storytelling. As a professional magician, I'm able to offer something few walking tours can: moments of wonder and illusion that bring the supernatural themes to life in a captivating and interactive way.

It's important to remember that private clients expect more because they are paying more—and rightfully so. They are investing in an exclusive, high-touch experience that feels uniquely theirs. That means managing these clients requires a professional, polished approach from the first point of contact to the final farewell. Communication needs to be clear and responsive, setting expectations about the bespoke nature of their experience while also being flexible enough to accommodate last-minute requests or adjustments. I always take time to understand what they are looking for, whether it's a quiet, reflective experience or something lively and theatrical. During the tour itself, I make sure they feel taken care of at every step, from pacing the walk according to their comfort to offering personal anecdotes that make the experience feel intimate and special.

Pricing for private tours reflects not only the additional time and customisation involved, but also the higher level of attention, preparation, and performance required to deliver an experience that feels premium and unforgettable. These tours are about offering exclusivity, bespoke storytelling, and that extra touch of magic—both figuratively and literally—that turns a private booking into an extraordinary event. There is a whole section about pricing later.

## **Understand who you will be talking to**

Understanding the kind of experience your audience wants is just as important as knowing who they are. Are they looking for something fun and light-hearted? Maybe they're on holiday, wanting an experience that feels playful, full of laughs and surprising anecdotes. Or are they looking for something more educational and thought-provoking, something that invites them to ask questions and engage with the material on a deeper level?

Perhaps your guests are seeking a spooky experience that sends shivers down their spines as they wander through darkened alleyways. Or maybe they want something inspiring, an exploration of how people in the past overcame challenges and changed the world. Every audience wants something different, and understanding their emotional expectations is key to designing an experience they will love.

Age plays a role as well. If your audience is primarily families with young children, you need to think about pacing. Shorter walking distances, more interactive elements, and an engaging storytelling style that keeps younger attention spans in mind are crucial. Safety and accessibility will also be top priorities. If your guests are older adults, you'll need to be mindful of comfort—are there places to sit along the route? Are the walking surfaces even? Does the tour move at a reasonable pace? If your audience is made up of young adults or students, you might want to incorporate more technology or social media opportunities, encouraging them to share their experiences online in real-time.

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**Tourists often want quick immersion and local colour.**

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**Locals may crave deeper insights or hidden stories they haven't heard before.**

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**Niche groups (e.g. history enthusiasts, architecture students) want specialised, high-value content.**

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By understanding your audience's expectations, you can fine-tune the length of your tour, the complexity of the stories you tell, and the style in which you tell them. You can create experiences that feel custom-made rather than off-the-shelf. A group of academic historians might be eager for longer, detailed explanations with plenty of time for questions, while a group of casual tourists might prefer a more fast-paced tour with a light, entertaining tone.

Remember, your tour doesn't have to be for everyone. In fact, it shouldn't be. A tour that tries to appeal to everyone often ends up feeling watered down and generic. When you clearly define your audience, you give yourself permission to focus. You create an experience that speaks directly to the people you want to reach. And when you do that, you not only meet their expectations—you exceed them.

Getting this right means you'll develop a reputation. If you run a serious, history-rich tour that appeals to scholars and lifelong learners, you'll become known as the guide who goes deeper. If your tour is funny, quirky, and perfect for first-time tourists who want a good time, you'll be the one they recommend to their friends. You can't be everything to everyone, but you can be exactly the right guide for the audience you choose to serve.

Take the time to understand who your audience will be, and you'll find yourself designing a tour that people remember, rave about, and recommend. You'll create something that feels as though it was made just for them—because it was.

Understanding your audience isn't just about knowing who they are before they arrive—it's about reading them in the moment and learning to adapt your delivery as you go. Every group is different. One evening you might have a lively crowd that laughs at every joke, asks endless questions, and seems eager to join in at every opportunity. The next night, you might find yourself in front of a group that stands silently, arms folded, staring blankly as you speak.

It's easy in those moments to assume they're not engaged or that they aren't enjoying themselves, but that's rarely the case. Some people are simply quieter listeners; they might be absorbing every word, thinking deeply, or just being shy about showing their enthusiasm. You have to resist the temptation to make assumptions and instead trust in your material, your delivery, and your ability to connect by the end of the experience.

At the same time, there will be groups that are the opposite—enthusiastic to the point of being overwhelming. Some guests will interrupt with questions before you've finished your sentence, others will want to share their own stories, and some might try to dominate the conversation. It's your job to welcome participation without losing control of the tour. Encourage questions, but gently steer the conversation so no one person monopolises the time. Keep an eye on the group dynamic and find moments to include everyone, even those who are more reserved. You want people to feel like they can participate, but within a framework that keeps the experience enjoyable for the entire group.



One simple trick for keeping people engaged is to make use of the time between stops. The walking sections of the tour can often be the duller part if you're not intentional about them. Don't let that time slip away unnoticed. Use it to make small talk, ask guests where they're from, or throw out a fun fact or teaser about what's coming next.

If you have a longer walk between locations, you can set a task or a question for people to think about, or even challenge them to spot something along the way—a particular architectural detail, for example, or an unusual gravestone if you're on a ghost tour.

These little moments of interaction help bridge the gaps and keep people connected to the experience, even when they're simply walking from point A to point B.

Being a great guide isn't about delivering the same performance every time—it's about reading your audience, adjusting your energy, and finding ways to make every group feel like they're getting a personalised experience. It's about knowing when to step up the drama, when to pull back and let a moment breathe, and how to keep people feeling involved from the first word to the last step. That adaptability, more than anything else, is what turns a good tour into a great one.

In the next section, we'll take an in-depth look at the various types of private clients that my tours have attracted over the years. From small, intimate groups to large corporate bookings, private tours offer a unique opportunity to tailor the experience to the specific interests and needs of your guests. Whether you're running ghost walks, historical tours, or food trails, private clients can become an essential part of your business—offering not only additional income but also the chance to create more personalised, memorable experiences. It's important to remember that every location has its own unique audience.

While I'll be sharing examples based on my personal experience here in Harrogate, the types of clients you attract may differ depending on where in the world you're located, the stories you tell, and the niche you carve out. However, the principles behind understanding and working with private groups remain universal. Whether you're guiding school children through historic landmarks, leading a hen party on a spooky evening adventure, or offering team-building tours for corporate groups, learning how to identify and engage these audiences is key to growing and sustaining a successful walking tour business. Let's explore the possibilities.

*My son giving my ghost walk the thumbs up!*



Working with private clients can be one of the most rewarding—and profitable—sides of running a walking tour business. Unlike public tours, private bookings give you the opportunity to deliver a highly personalised experience, tailored to the interests, needs, and expectations of a specific group. However, with this flexibility comes additional responsibility. To ensure a smooth, professional experience that leaves clients raving about your tour, there are some key principles to follow.

### **1. Communication is Everything**

Clear, timely, and professional communication is the foundation of a successful private tour. From the first enquiry to the final thank-you message, make sure your clients feel informed and valued.

- Clarify expectations early on. Ask detailed questions about what they want from the tour—their interests, group size, mobility needs, and preferred times or routes.
- Confirm all logistics in writing. Where you'll meet, how long the tour will last, what's included, and your cancellation policy. Don't leave anything to chance.
- Keep in touch. Send a reminder a few days before, and follow up after the tour to thank them (and ask for a review!).

### **2. Be Flexible (Within Reason)**

Private clients often expect a level of customization they wouldn't get on a public tour. That's one of the perks they're paying for.

- Adapt your stories, stops, and pace to suit their interests and energy levels.
- Be prepared for last-minute changes or requests—but set clear boundaries on what is and isn't possible.
- Know your limits and protect your time. Flexibility shouldn't mean letting the client run the show if it compromises your service or professionalism.

### **3. Provide a Premium Experience**

Private clients are often paying a premium price. They expect a premium service in return.

- Offer exclusive touches, like personalized stories, bonus stops, or small gifts (a signed book, for example).
- Consider adding extras such as a private Victorian séance, a magical demonstration, or a stop at a historic pub for drinks. These little extras can create unforgettable moments.
- Maintain high energy and attention throughout—your private clients should feel like they are getting 100% of your focus and enthusiasm.

### **4. Know Your Audience**

Take the time to understand who they are and what they're looking for. A group of corporate executives on a team-building event has very different needs than a hen party looking for spooky fun.

- Tailor your tone: Professional and polished for business clients; informal and fun for families or social groups.
- Adjust the content and complexity of your storytelling. For example, historians or academics may want a deep dive into local history, while families with kids need engaging, interactive stories.

## **5. Set Boundaries and Stay Professional**

Private tours can sometimes blur the line between professional and casual interactions, especially if clients are friendly or enthusiastic.

- Be warm and personable, but maintain professionalism at all times.
- Stick to agreed times and terms—don't let the tour run over unnecessarily unless it's part of your service.
- Know how to manage difficult guests gracefully, and always stay in control of the group dynamic.

## **6. Charge What You're Worth**

Private tours should be priced higher than public tours because they require more preparation, flexibility, and attention.

- Consider factors like time, customisation, group size, and any extras you provide.
- Be upfront about your fees and any additional charges for bespoke options.
- Don't undervalue your expertise or the uniqueness of your tour—private clients are paying for a personalized experience, and they understand (and expect) that comes at a premium.
- We will go into pricing later on.

## **7. Build Relationships for Repeat Business**

- Private clients can become some of your best repeat customers, whether they return for another tour themselves or recommend you to friends, family, or colleagues.
- Send a personalised follow-up message after the tour to thank them.
- Offer special deals for returning clients or referrals.
- Stay connected via social media or newsletters if they're interested—keep your tour top of mind for future events.

Working with private clients is an opportunity to elevate your walking tour business, offering personalised experiences that stand apart from public tours. These bespoke bookings allow you to craft something uniquely suited to the group in front of you, whether that's an intimate family tour, a lively hen party, or a polished corporate event. Private clients often expect more—more attention, more customisation, and a more tailored experience—and by delivering on those expectations with professionalism, flexibility, and thoughtful touches, you can create unforgettable moments that leave lasting impressions. These tours also give you room to showcase your creativity and deepen your storytelling, often leading to stronger connections with your guests and valuable word-of-mouth recommendations.

At the heart of private tours is the relationship you build with your clients. Clear communication, respect, and a genuine passion for what you do will set you apart and encourage repeat business. Private clients can become your most loyal supporters, returning for future tours, sharing glowing reviews, and bringing others along with them. It's an area of your business that can grow organically through trust, reputation, and consistently high-quality experiences. If you approach private tours with the same care and attention you give your stories, they can become a cornerstone of your success and a rewarding part of your journey as a tour guide.



### Potential Private Tour Clients

When it comes to private tours, there's a wide range of groups who are often seeking something a little different from the usual fare. Over the years, I've had the pleasure of hosting a variety of private clients, each with their own reasons for booking something bespoke. Here's a breakdown of some of the most common types of private groups I have come across who have booked tours, as well as those you may want to approach if you're offering something similar:

## Scouts, Brownies etc

These groups often book walking tours as part of their programme to earn specific badges, such as local history, storytelling, or even ghost lore. They're typically looking for something educational but engaging—and they love the opportunity to get involved. Adding interactive elements, like a simple ghost hunt, a task, or a storytelling challenge, makes it more fun and ticks the boxes for the scout leaders.



## Venues and Hospitality Providers

Many hotels, B&Bs, and event venues are always on the lookout for alternative activities they can offer their guests. A ghost walk, historical tour, or private séance is a great option for them, adding value to their visitor packages. Venues often like the exclusivity of being able to say they've got something special lined up for their guests that other places can't offer.

## Staff Socials & Team-Building Events

Businesses are constantly searching for team-building activities that go beyond the usual after-work drinks or trust falls in a conference room. A walking tour or bespoke tour offers them something different—fun and out of the ordinary. It's a brilliant ice-breaker and often leads to lots of laughs, shared stories, and conversations long after the event is over.





## Social and Interest Groups

Groups like the Freemasons, Round Table, Rotary Clubs, Women's Institutes, walking groups, or historical societies are often on the lookout for speakers or experiences to fill their event calendars. These groups appreciate well-researched, engaging content and often enjoy the social aspect of gathering afterwards in a pub or private dining room.

## Hen Parties and Stag Groups

While they often get stereotyped, these groups can be fantastic fun. I've provided several hen parties with private ghost walks and séances, which add a unique twist to the usual night out. Themed events—whether spooky, magical, or historical—give them an experience that's both memorable and different from the usual clubbing scene.



## Birthday Parties & Special Occasions

Birthday parties and special occasions are perfect for private ghost walks or bespoke tours. Whether it's a spooky birthday, a magical evening, or a historical adventure tailored to someone's interests, these events offer a fun, unique alternative to the usual celebration. Add a séance or some eerie magic, and it's a night they'll never forget.



## How to Reach Potential Private Clients

In my experience, almost all my private tour bookings have come through word-of-mouth recommendations, repeat customers, or people who've joined a public tour and later booked a private one. I don't do paid advertising, and yet I've managed to build a steady stream of bookings. That said, there are plenty of ways to actively reach out to potential clients if you're looking to grow this side of your business.

The simplest and often most effective way is personal outreach. Contact local scout groups, businesses, and social clubs directly. Send a polite email or letter introducing yourself and explaining what you offer. Keep it short, professional, and friendly. Offer them a special introductory rate or invite them to a sample tour so they can experience it for themselves. If you're contacting venues or hotels, offer to give their staff a complimentary tour so they can recommend it with confidence to their guests.

You can also grow your audience by becoming known in local networks. Attend community events, join business networking groups, and introduce yourself as someone who provides unique and engaging tours. Once you build these relationships, people will start thinking of you as the go-to person for something a bit different. If you're interested in doing paid advertising to expand your reach, there are several options that can work well for walking tours

Facebook Ads, in particular, are highly targeted and cost-effective. You can focus your ads on specific demographics—age, location, interests, even groups like history enthusiasts or ghost story fans. The key with paid ads is timing. Posting or running ads in the evening, typically between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., tends to get the most engagement because that's when people are scrolling through social media after work or dinner. Fridays are excellent for promoting weekend tours, and Sundays are ideal for catching people planning the week ahead.

For free options, social media is your best friend. Posting on Facebook and Instagram works well if you do it consistently. Share great photos from your tours, testimonials from happy guests, and teaser stories that give people a taste of what they'll experience. If you're aiming for private clients, occasionally do a post highlighting your bespoke tours—mentioning that they're perfect for team-building events, hen parties, or special occasions. These posts tend to perform best when they go live late afternoon or early evening, and they can be boosted by encouraging followers to tag friends who might be interested.

A regular email newsletter can also be a great tool. If you've had previous guests, invite them to sign up and keep them in the loop about upcoming tours or exclusive private bookings. Often, people don't realise you offer private tours until you tell them—so make it clear that bespoke experiences are available.

In the end, whether it's through personal connection, social media engagement, or paid advertising, the key is making it easy for people to see the value in a private experience. Make them feel like they're getting something unique, tailored, and extra special—because they are!



## **Making Your Walking Tour Accessible to Diverse Needs**

Creating an accessible tour isn't just about physical routes and wheelchair access—it's about making every aspect of your experience welcoming, inclusive, and considerate of the diverse needs of your audience. Whether your guests are neurodivergent, visually or hearing impaired, or simply non-native English speakers, there are many thoughtful adjustments you can make to ensure everyone feels included, safe, and able to enjoy the stories you tell. Inclusivity not only broadens your audience—it also shows respect and professionalism, and ultimately leads to a more rewarding experience for everyone involved.

### **Neurodivergent Guests**

Neurodivergent individuals—such as those with autism, ADHD, sensory sensitivities, or anxiety—may find typical tour formats overwhelming or difficult to follow. Consider offering sensory-friendly versions of your tour that are slower-paced, quieter, and predictable in structure.

- Communicate clearly in advance: Offer detailed pre-visit information on your website or booking confirmation, including a basic itinerary, estimated timings, potential loud noises, or changes in lighting and space (e.g. entering a dark alley or passing traffic).
- Minimise sensory overload: Avoid loud, sudden sounds or overly crowded locations. Keep group sizes smaller or offer “quiet” tours with no amplification or additional effects.
- Use routine and structure: Start and finish at the same place, and let guests know exactly what to expect at each stop. This predictability can be very reassuring.
- Offer private or low-sensory tours: Some guests may benefit from a quieter, private tour experience where they can ask questions or take breaks as needed.

### **Guests with Hearing Impairments**

Guests with hearing impairments might struggle in noisy environments or large groups. While hearing aids and lip-reading can help, there are other ways to make your tour more accessible:

- Use written transcripts or printed summaries of your stories. Offer these as optional handouts or downloads when booking.
- Use visual aids (photos, maps, props) to help convey the story without relying solely on spoken word.
- Speak clearly and face your audience when possible. Make sure your mouth is visible and not obscured by props, microphones, or poor lighting.
- Offer captioned videos or audio guides for self-paced tours, or transcripts for any pre-recorded content you use during the walk.
- Consider learning some basic BSL or offering tours with a local interpreter for special occasions or community partnerships.

## Making Your Walking Tour Accessible to Diverse Needs

### Guests with Visual Impairments

Visually impaired guests may not be able to see the sites you're pointing out—but that doesn't mean they can't enjoy your stories.

- Describe everything clearly and vividly: Go beyond “Look at this building,” and instead say, “This red-brick Georgian townhouse has a steep slate roof, narrow arched windows, and an iron fence that rattles when the wind passes through it.”
- Use textures and sounds where possible: Let guests touch props, handle historic replicas, or listen to audio clips to enhance the experience.
- Offer audio-only tours or pre-recorded versions of your content they can enjoy on their own time.
- Partner with local organisations that support people with sight loss to help design accessible routes and offer feedback.
- 

### Guests Who Don't Speak English Fluently

For tourists or residents with limited English, understanding fast-paced spoken tours can be a challenge. Make your tours friendlier for English language learners with the following tips:

- Speak clearly and at a measured pace, especially when telling complex stories or using regional dialects or slang.
- Avoid idioms or overly complex vocabulary unless you explain them—use straightforward, story-focused language.
- Use visual aids, gestures, and physical storytelling to help convey meaning non-verbally.
- Offer translated summaries or tour sheets in popular local languages (e.g., Spanish, French, Mandarin). Services like Google Translate, DeepL, or professional translation apps can help get you started.

### Shorter & Sensory-Friendly Alternatives

Not every guest wants—or can manage—a 90-minute walking tour with 10 stops. Offering flexible versions of your tour opens your business to more people.

- Create a shorter route (30–45 minutes) with fewer stops but the same quality of storytelling.
- Offer seated options (e.g., a storytelling session in a local café, with photos and props).
- Schedule sensory-friendly tours during quieter hours (mornings or weekdays) with a calm, predictable pace and clear communication.

### Final Thought

Accessibility is not just a box to tick—it's a mindset. When you design your walking tour with inclusion in mind, you're opening up your stories to more people, deepening your impact, and ensuring that guests from all walks of life feel welcomed and valued. Even small adjustments can make a big difference, and over time, you'll find that the more inclusive your tour becomes, the more it thrives.

## Customer Service

Delivering a walking tour isn't just about telling great stories or leading people along a carefully crafted route—it's also about creating an outstanding customer experience from the moment someone books until long after the tour ends. Exceptional customer service is the backbone of a sustainable tour business. It builds trust, encourages positive reviews, fosters word-of-mouth recommendations, and inspires guests to return for more. It's what transforms a casual visitor into a loyal supporter of your work.

### **Handling Difficult Guests: Stay Calm, Stay Professional**

No matter how well-prepared you are, you'll occasionally encounter difficult guests. It could be someone who challenges your facts loudly in front of the group, a guest who monopolises your time with constant interruptions, or someone with an attitude that disrupts the experience for others. The key to handling these situations is remaining calm and professional. Always listen respectfully to their concerns, but don't let them derail the group's experience. If someone insists on debating historical accuracy during the tour, acknowledge their point politely but steer the focus back to your storytelling. "That's an interesting perspective—we can chat more about it after the tour if you'd like. Now, as I was saying..." sets a clear boundary without being confrontational. If a guest becomes truly disruptive, you may need to take them aside and have a quiet word. Your priority is to protect the enjoyment of the whole group.

### **Managing Late Arrivals and No-Shows**

Late arrivals are a common challenge, and it's important to set expectations from the start. Be clear on your website, booking confirmations, and in your pre-tour emails about when and where guests need to arrive. I often advise people to come 10-15 minutes early. Once the tour starts, it's up to you whether to allow latecomers to join in—some guides prefer to wait five extra minutes, while others begin promptly to respect those who arrived on time. If a latecomer shows up partway through the tour, welcome them quietly and smoothly without drawing attention away from the group. For no-shows, a clear cancellation policy helps. If guests don't show up and haven't contacted you in advance, you're under no obligation to offer refunds (unless you choose to). However, flexibility can go a long way in building goodwill. If someone had a genuine reason and contacts you afterward, offering them a chance to reschedule at no extra cost can leave them with a positive impression despite their missed tour.

### **Responding to Negative Feedback: Stay Gracious, Stay Constructive**

No matter how great your tour is, you'll eventually receive critical feedback. It's inevitable—but it's also an opportunity. When you receive a negative review, respond promptly, professionally, and graciously. Thank them for their feedback, acknowledge any valid concerns, and explain how you'll use their comments to improve. Avoid sounding defensive, even if you feel the criticism is unfair. For example, when I received a four-star review from a guest who felt the route was too hilly despite being informed about it ahead of time, I responded positively. I acknowledged her comments, reiterated that we had discussed the route in advance, and explained how I make every effort to accommodate different needs. I also invited her to join us again in the future. Publicly addressing feedback like this shows prospective guests that you care about your customers and are committed to delivering a great experience.



## **Customer Service**

### **Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Atmosphere**

An excellent guest experience starts with making people feel welcome. Be warm and approachable from the very first moment. Greet your guests by name if possible, make eye contact, and take a genuine interest in who they are. Creating an inclusive atmosphere also means being aware of the different backgrounds, ages, and abilities of your group. Speak clearly, use accessible language, and be prepared to adjust your pace or delivery to meet the needs of your audience.

For example, families with young children may need more interactive elements to keep them engaged, while older guests may appreciate slower pacing or rest stops. If you create an environment where everyone feels valued and included, your guests will not only enjoy the tour more—they'll also be more likely to recommend you to others.

### **Building Long-Term Relationships and Repeat Guests**

The end of a tour doesn't have to be the end of your relationship with your guests. Building long-term connections creates loyal supporters who return for new tours and bring their friends along next time. Offer returning guest discounts or loyalty cards for multiple bookings. Invite people to follow you on social media or sign up for an email newsletter where they can stay informed about upcoming tours and special events.

After the tour, a simple thank-you email goes a long way—especially if you include a reminder to leave a review or a link to buy your book (if you have one).

If you see familiar faces returning, acknowledge them! Welcome them back personally and make them feel special for choosing to spend their time with you again. These small gestures can turn casual customers into passionate advocates for your tour business.

### **Customer Service Is Your Reputation**

Great customer service isn't just about problem-solving—it's about building relationships, fostering goodwill, and ensuring every guest feels valued. When you deliver excellent service before, during, and after your tour, you create experiences that people will rave about. And in a business like walking tours, where word-of-mouth and personal recommendations are gold, that kind of reputation is priceless.

## Step 8

**BUILD**

**YOUR**

**BRAND**

### Your Brand

In this section, we'll explore how to develop your walking tour's brand—from choosing a memorable name and designing a logo, to selecting colours, fonts, and imagery that reflect the personality of your tour. Branding is more than just aesthetics; it's how people recognise you, remember you, and decide whether they want to book. Whether you're building a ghost walk, historical tour, or street art experience, a strong, consistent brand helps you stand out from the crowd and creates trust with your audience. We'll look at DIY approaches as well as professional options, with practical tips to keep your brand flexible, authentic, and in line with your vision.

# Step 8

## Develop your Brand

### **Choosing a Name for Your Walking Tour: Clarity Over Cleverness**

One of the first—and most important—decisions you'll make when starting your walking tour business is choosing a name. It might seem like a small thing, but the right name does a lot of heavy lifting. It tells potential guests what to expect, helps your business get found online, and sets the tone for your brand. A clever name can be fun, but if it's too vague or abstract, you risk losing attention (and bookings). In most cases, simple and descriptive wins.

When I created Harrogate Ghost Walk, I didn't try to be too clever or mysterious. I wanted a name that did exactly what it said on the tin. If someone types "ghost walk Harrogate" into Google, guess who shows up? That's no accident. It's a strategic choice that helps with both search engine visibility and clarity. The name clearly tells you three things: what it is (a ghost walk), where it is (Harrogate), and what to expect (a walking tour with spooky stories). There's no confusion, no a

### **The Power of Clarity for SEO**

When it comes to SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), your name is one of your most powerful tools. Think like your customer. What are they likely to search for? Probably not poetic metaphors or quirky phrases—they're looking for "historical walking tour in Bristol" or "LGBTQ+ walking tour in Brighton." If your tour name includes those keywords, you're already ahead of your competitors who chose something more creative but less searchable.

- Use your location in the name—especially if it's a destination people travel to.
  - Use a clear descriptor of the tour type: ghost walk, food tour, history tour, mural trail, etc.
  - Avoid puns or abstract names unless you have a strong brand to back it up.
- mbiguity—just a direct connection to what the audience is already looking for.

**“Your name doesn’t have to be clever.  
It has to be clear.”**

The easier it is for people to find and understand your tour, the more likely they are to book. Think like a customer. Keep it short, specific, and searchable. If in doubt, test a few names with friends, or see what comes up when you Google similar phrases. And remember—your name is just the beginning. It gets people through the door, but it's your stories, your delivery, and your passion that will keep them coming back.

I'm not going to go on any more about naming your tour, it comes down to personal choice, good luck!



## Branding and Logo

### Creating a Logo and Visual Identity for Your Walking Tour

A logo is more than just a symbol—it's the face of your walking tour business. Alongside your tour name, it's often the first thing people see on your website, social media, posters, or A-boards. A good logo makes your tour instantly recognisable and communicates something about your style, tone, and theme. Whether you're running a ghost walk, food tour, or historical journey, your visual identity should reflect the spirit of your stories. Thankfully, creating a logo is more accessible than ever—even if you have zero design experience.

Before you think about fonts or colours, start with your tour's identity. Is your tour spooky and mysterious? Lighthearted and family-friendly? Serious and educational? Your logo should echo that mood. Think about what imagery might be associated with your tour—lanterns for ghost walks, a feather quill for literary trails, a fork and pint glass for foodie tours, or a building silhouette for architecture walks.

For example, my own Harrogate Ghost Walk logo uses gothic-inspired typography, monochrome colour, and a sense of atmosphere that immediately communicates “this is a spooky experience.” I kept it clean, bold, and easy to read from a distance—important for things like A-boards and social media icons.



I experimented with several logo ideas when I first started, creating them all myself. In the end, I settled on a bold and striking colour palette of red, black, and white—classic, eye-catching, and perfect for evoking a sense of gothic drama. As for the font, I've always gravitated towards styles that feel spooky, old-fashioned, or reminiscent of Victorian theatre posters. If it captures that eerie, historical feel, I'm happy.



Interestingly, if you take a look at my social media, website, or A-boards, you'll notice I don't actually use a fixed logo. Instead, I rely on consistent fonts, colours, and tone to create a recognisable brand identity. This approach gives me freedom—I'm not locked into a single design, and I can adapt or evolve the visuals depending on the season, the event, or my mood. I'm sure I'm breaking every branding rule in the book by doing it this way, but it works for me. This is my business, and I've built it to be flexible, responsive, and creatively fluid. Branding should reflect the personality behind the tour—and mine happens to value adaptability over rigid consistency.

# Branding and Logo

## Ways to Create Your Logo

### 1. Use AI-Powered Tools (Great for Beginners or Fast Results)

There are now AI-based platforms that let you create a logo in minutes. You type in your business name, pick your theme and style, and let the system generate options.

- Looka, Canva Pro, Hatchful (by Shopify), and Tailor Brands are all good starting points.
- You can customise colours, fonts, and icons to make it feel more “you.”
- Great if you need something fast and affordable.

### 2. Design It Yourself (If You’re Creative)

If you have design experience, programs like Adobe Illustrator, Affinity Designer, or even Canva (free version) can help you create a polished logo.

- Canva offers templates and icons you can tweak.
- Be mindful of licensing if you’re using free icons—check usage rights.

### 3. Hire a Designer (Ideal for Professional Polish)

If you want a logo that feels bespoke and expertly crafted, hiring a designer is a great investment.

- Use Fiverr, Upwork, or PeoplePerHour for freelance designers at different price points.
- Or hire a local designer—supporting someone in your community is always a plus and gives you the chance to explain your vision in person.
- Expect to pay anywhere from £50–£300+ depending on the complexity and designer experience.

## Choosing Colours, Fonts, and Style

Colours:

Colours have emotional power. Choose colours that support your tour’s atmosphere:

- Black, grey, burgundy for ghost or mystery tours
- Earth tones for nature or heritage trails
- Bright, bold colours for family, food, or art tours

Stick to 2–3 core colours so your materials look consistent across platforms (website, flyers, boards, etc.).

Fonts:

Pick one or two fonts—one for headings (e.g. your tour name), and one for body text.

Make sure your fonts are legible on both screen and print.

- Classic serif fonts give a historic or literary vibe.
- Gothic fonts suggest mystery and spookiness.
- Modern sans-serif fonts feel clean, accessible, and friendly.

Imagery:

If your logo includes an image or icon, make sure it connects with your theme:

- Ghost or lantern icons for a ghost walk
- Historical buildings for a heritage tour
- Food/drink utensils for culinary tours
- Keep it simple and scalable—it should look good as a social media icon, on a flyer, or even printed on a t-shirt.

# Professional Photography & Visual Branding

When it comes to selling your walking tour, storytelling begins long before your guests arrive. Your brand's visual identity—from the photos you share online to what you wear on the day—sets the tone and tells people what kind of experience they're in for. Clean, engaging visuals build trust, spark curiosity, and help your tour stand out in a crowded market. You don't need a huge budget or a design degree to build a strong, recognisable visual brand—but you do need to be intentional.

## The Power of Good Photography

A few great promotional photos can do more for your tour than pages of well-written text. People want to see what your experience is like before they commit to booking. They're drawn to mood, atmosphere, and a sense of story—all things you can convey with the right images. Over the years I have used a mixture of my own photographs and paid professionals. Do what you want and what you can afford.

## How to Get Great Photos Without Spending a Fortune:

- DIY with a good smartphone: Today's phones can take stunning images. Shoot in natural light, early evening for ghost walks, or golden hour for scenic tours. Use editing apps like Lightroom or Snapseed to enhance them.
- Ask a friend with photography skills: Many hobbyist photographers are happy to help for free or for a ticket and a thank-you credit.
- Collaborate with a local photographer: Offer a free private tour in exchange for professional shots. Many creatives are looking for portfolio work, especially in smaller towns.
- Capture people in action: Ask guests for permission to photograph them enjoying the tour (or bring a couple of friends to act as models). Natural, candid shots of people listening, laughing, or exploring are far more powerful than empty streets.

## Top Tips:

- Use a mix of wide shots (showing the route) and close-ups (of props, buildings, or expressions).
- Avoid group photos where everyone's staring stiffly at the camera—go for authentic moments.
- Save seasonal images (e.g. spooky Halloween night, snow-dusted streets, autumn leaves) to refresh your marketing throughout the year.



## **What to Wear: Dressing for Impact**

You are the face of your tour, and your outfit should reflect the tone and personality of your experience. What you wear not only helps guests identify you on the day—it becomes part of your brand.

Consider:

- Consistency: Wearing the same signature hat, coat, or colour scheme can make you instantly recognisable in photos and public spaces.
- Theme-appropriate clothing: For ghost walks, something gothic, Victorian, or mysterious adds atmosphere. For history tours, a tweed jacket or satchel might suit. For street art tours, something more urban or creative.
- Comfort & practicality: You'll be on your feet, possibly in unpredictable weather—choose clothes that feel like you, but are also functional.

## **What I Wear:**

As the guide of Harrogate Ghost Walk, I always wear a traditional 19<sup>th</sup> Century three piece tailcoat suit, black cloak with red lining, a walking cane and top hat—striking, slightly theatrical, and in keeping with the vibe of the stories I tell and the history our town. It's become part of the experience. Guests recognise me, comment on it, and it features heavily in my photos and reviews. It wasn't just a costume choice—it became part of the brand.

## **Branded Materials & Print Design**

Visual branding doesn't stop with your outfit. Printed materials, signage, and small details can create a cohesive, professional feel across all touchpoints with your audience.

What You Might Create:

- Lanyards or name badges: Great for guest reassurance, especially on large group or multi-guide tours.
- Flyers or rack cards: Distribute at local venues, hotels, visitor centres, cafés, and shops. Include your tour name, key info, and booking QR code.
- Posters or A-boards: Position these in high footfall areas. Design matters—your board might be the only marketing some people see before deciding to join your tour.
- Props with branding: For example, your bell, lantern, or clipboard could include your logo or colour scheme, helping reinforce your identity in photos.
- Merchandise (optional): T-shirts, tote bags, or even enamel pins with your logo or tagline can be fun upsells and marketing tools if demand is there.

Your walking tour brand is more than your logo. It's in the colours you wear, the way you appear in photographs, the look of your posters, and the experience people remember. A strong, consistent visual identity builds professionalism, sets expectations, and makes you memorable. You don't have to spend a fortune—just be thoughtful and creative, and let your personality and passion come through in everything you create.

Invest in a handful of good photos. Wear something guests will remember. Keep your visuals clean, bold, and themed. These small touches can be the difference between someone scrolling past your event and someone clicking “Book now.”

# Website Design

## Building a Website for Your Walking Tour: A Step-by-Step Guide

In today's world, your website is often the first impression people have of your tour. It's where potential guests go to find out who you are, what your tour is about, when it runs, and how they can book a ticket. A professional, clear, and easy-to-navigate website builds trust instantly and increases bookings. If your site looks clunky, out of date, or hard to use on mobile, many people will click away—no matter how amazing your tour might be in person.

I built my own website for [Harrogate Ghost Walk](#) using Wix, a user-friendly platform that doesn't require coding skills and gives you control over every aspect of your design. For anyone starting out, Wix is a fantastic option because it combines drag-and-drop simplicity with great design templates and built-in tools like SEO, contact forms, and mobile optimisation. You can upgrade to a paid version to remove ads and connect your custom domain (which I strongly recommend).

### Free vs. Paid Website Platforms

There are many platforms out there. Here are a few popular ones and their pros/cons:

Wix (My choice):

- Very user-friendly, great templates
- Free version available (with ads)
- Paid plans allow domain connection, no ads, and SEO tools
- Great for small businesses and creatives

Squarespace:

- Sleek, modern design
- Excellent support and analytics
- Slightly steeper learning curve than Wix
- Better for people looking for high-end design aesthetics

WordPress (with Elementor or other builders):

- Highly customisable, but not beginner-friendly
- Needs hosting and plugins
- Perfect if you want to scale your site or add lots of functionality later
- Often used by web designers—best for those with technical skill or a bigger budget

Your website is your digital storefront—whether people find you via social media, word of mouth, or a chalkboard on the high street, most will check your site before they book. Keep it simple, warm, informative, and easy to navigate. Let your passion and personality shine through, and make sure the path to booking a ticket is clear and effortless. A well-built website can turn interest into action, and curious browsers into loyal guests.

If you do not have the skills or time to build your own site then pay someone to do it. You will find some affordable people online.

# Website Design

## Building a Website for Your Walking Tour: A brief Guide

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### What Pages Should Your Website Include?

Every tour website should include a few essential pages. Keep it simple, but make sure visitors can find all the information they need quickly and clearly.

#### 1. Homepage:

This is your storefront. It should quickly tell visitors what kind of tour you offer and why it's unique. Use striking images, bold headlines, and a clear call to action like "Book Your Tour" or "See Upcoming Dates."

#### 2. About Page:

Tell your story. Why did you start your tour? What makes you passionate about your subject? People love to connect with the guide behind the experience—this is your chance to build trust and personality.

#### 3. Tour Information / Booking Page:

Detail the when, where, how long, what to expect, and how much. Include a calendar or embedded ticketing system (like TicketSource, which I use). Keep the layout clean and mobile-friendly.

#### 4. FAQs:

Anticipate common questions. What happens in bad weather? Is the tour suitable for kids? Where do we meet? Can I bring a dog? Reducing friction means more bookings.

#### 5. Reviews & Testimonials:

Social proof is vital. Copy and paste glowing reviews from TripAdvisor, Google, or Facebook. Better yet, link directly to those platforms so people can see you're legit.

#### 6. Contact Page:

Include a contact form, email address, and links to your social media. This page is especially useful for private tour enquiries.



# Website Design

## Optional Extras:

- Blog or News Section: Great for SEO and updates (e.g., Halloween specials).
- Merchandise or Bookstore: If you've written a book like I have, offer it for sale or signed copies.
- Media / Press: If you've been featured in articles or interviews, showcase that here to boost credibility.

## Writing Compelling Website Copy

When writing for your website, clarity and tone are everything. You're not just giving information—you're selling an experience.

- Use an informal, welcoming tone. Speak as you would to your audience on the tour.
- Keep it focused. Break up long text with subheadings, bullet points, and images.
- Highlight what's unique about your tour. What makes you different from others in your town or region?
- Add urgency where appropriate. "Tours fill quickly—book your spot now!" helps nudge people into action.
- Include sensory language. Help people imagine what they'll see, hear, and feel on your tour.

For example, on my homepage, I include phrases like "Step into the shadows of Harrogate's history..." and "True tales of ghosts, murders, and mystery unfold by lamplight" to evoke a sense of atmosphere and intrigue.

## SEO Basics to Help People Find You

SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) means setting up your website so people can find it on Google. Here's how to give yourself the best chance:

- Use keywords people are searching for: "Ghost walk Harrogate", "walking tour in [Your Town]", "family friendly history tour", etc.
- Include those phrases in page titles, headlines, and image alt text.
- Update regularly (blog posts or news updates can help).
- Claim your Google Business listing and link it to your website—this helps with local searches.
- Encourage reviews on Google and TripAdvisor, and link to them from your website.

If someone types "Harrogate ghost walk" into Google, I want my website to be the first thing they see—and thanks to regular updates, keyword-friendly content, and consistent reviews, it often is.

# Step 8

## Tickets and Sales

Pricing your walking tour and choosing how to sell tickets are two of the most important decisions you'll make when setting up your business. The right ticket price should reflect the value of your experience, while remaining accessible to your target audience and competitive within your local market. It's not just about making money—it's about building trust and encouraging people to book without hesitation. Likewise, your ticketing system should be simple, reliable, and easy for both you and your guests to use. From setting price points to managing bookings and no-shows, getting this part right helps ensure your tours run smoothly, professionally, and profitably.



# Step 8

## Ticket Prices and Sales

Pricing your walking tour tickets is one of the most important decisions you'll make as a tour operator. It's about finding the balance between what your time and expertise are worth, what your audience is willing to pay, and what makes sense for your location and market. Price too high, and you risk putting off potential guests. Price too low, and you may undervalue your work or struggle to make the business sustainable. For me, getting this balance right has been about a combination of local insight, personal values, and understanding the expectations of my guests.

Currently, I sell tickets for my ghost walk at £8 per adult and £5 per child (under the age of 13). Compared to the prices of neighbouring York's walking tours—where most adult tickets are £12 and children's tickets are £7 (for those under 16)—mine are relatively inexpensive. But there's a good reason for that. York is a city with significantly higher footfall, far more competition, and a larger, more international tourist market. Visitors there often expect to pay premium prices because the market supports it. There's also a higher demand, with people queuing up for experiences, and guides have to stand out in a crowded field where pricing is part of the perceived value.

Harrogate, while beautiful and popular, doesn't have the same volume of tourists. And although it's often seen as an affluent or "posh" town, the reality is we're not all wealthy locals sipping champagne. I want my walks to be accessible—not just physically, but financially. I price my tickets at a point where I believe they offer real value, and where the decision to buy a ticket feels easy, almost automatic. At £8 for an adult and £5 for a child, people tend to think less about whether they can afford it. It's a small enough sum that most people will spend without hesitation. I often joke that it's the price of a pint of lager in Harrogate these days. For the cost of a drink, guests get 1.5 hours of storytelling, local history, and entertainment. It's an easy decision for most, and that's exactly how I want it to feel.

If I charged £10 or more, as many tours in York do, I might attract fewer locals or budget-conscious visitors. That's not to say higher prices are wrong—it's about understanding your audience and your location. If you're in a high-traffic tourist city with an established tour market, higher prices may be expected and entirely appropriate. But if you're working in a smaller town or rural area, or you want to encourage repeat visits and a broader audience, keeping your prices affordable can make your tours more inclusive and welcoming.

Price sends a signal about what kind of experience guests can expect. Too cheap, and people may question the quality. Too expensive without clear added value, and they may look elsewhere. Make sure your price aligns with the experience you offer—whether it's an entertaining ghost walk, a deep-dive historical tour, or a luxury private experience. Ticket pricing is as much about psychology as it is about economics. You want to make it as easy as possible for people to say "yes" to booking with you.



In Harrogate, I keep my prices modest because I want my tours to feel accessible, friendly, and great value—without making people pause to consider whether it's worth the spend. But wherever you are in the world, whether you're walking the historic streets of Paris or guiding nature trails in a quiet village, understanding your market, your costs, and your audience will help you find the sweet spot. Pricing is not just a number—it's part of your story, your brand, and your invitation to potential guests.

Look at what other tours in your area are charging. Are you in a tourist-heavy city where visitors expect to pay a premium? Or are you in a smaller town where people may be more price-sensitive? If you're one of several tour operators, pricing yourself too low could undercut the market, but being significantly higher without offering more value could also deter bookings.

## **KNOW YOUR LOCAL MARKET**

## **COST OF LIVING & EXPECTATION**

Understand the financial realities of your area. What do people typically spend on leisure activities? If you live in an area with a high cost of living, higher prices may be justified. In more rural areas or towns with fewer tourists, lower prices might be necessary to fill spots.

Don't forget that your time is valuable. You're not just walking people around; you're delivering a researched, rehearsed, and engaging performance. Factor in the hours spent preparing, marketing, and managing bookings, along with expenses like insurance, equipment, and advertising. Make sure your price reflects the true value of your work.

## **FACTOR IN YOUR TIME & COSTS**

## **OFFER DIFFERENT PRICING OPTIONS**

Consider pricing tiers. You might offer standard group tours at an affordable rate but charge a premium for private or bespoke tours. This way, you make your tours accessible while still offering options for those who want a more tailored experience.

## **Ticket Sales**

Choosing the right ticketing platform is an important part of running a walking tour business. Not only does it help you manage bookings, but it also gives your guests an easy, professional way to buy tickets—whether they're planning weeks in advance or joining last minute. A good ticketing system simplifies your admin, helps keep track of who's coming, and can make check-in a breeze on the day. There are plenty of options out there, and while one size doesn't fit all, it's important to choose one that suits your workflow and makes things simple—for you and your customers.

I personally use TicketSource. For me, it's all about ease of use. Setting up events is quick and straightforward, and their user interface is intuitive and clean. Yes, there may be cheaper alternatives out there—I'm aware of that—but I find the small additional fee worth it for the hassle-free experience.

As a sole trader managing multiple things at once, simplicity and reliability are far more valuable to me than saving a few pennies per ticket. TicketSource also has an app that allows me to scan tickets on the night. It helps me keep track of who's arrived, spot any no-shows immediately, and gives the whole operation a smooth, professional feel. There's nothing quite like starting your tour knowing exactly who's there without shuffling through a printed list.

A cancellation policy is essential, regardless of which platform you choose. No-shows happen—regularly. On my tours, it's common to have anywhere between 2 and 6 people book and pay, only to never turn up. There are always reasons, and I get that. Life happens. But the fact remains: they've paid, and they didn't come.

I've provided clear terms in my cancellation policy (which you can download from the resources section of this guide—just make sure to add your own details or tweak it to suit your tour). If someone chooses not to show up and doesn't cancel within the window, I keep the money. That's the deal, and it's clear upfront. I've never had anyone challenge it. And if they did, I'd point them to TicketSource. So far, it hasn't been an issue.

## What to Look for in a Ticketing Platform

When you're choosing where to sell your tickets, there are several things to consider. It's not just about cost—although that matters—but about usability, flexibility, and what makes your life easier as a tour operator. Here's a list of key things to keep in mind:

- **Ease of Setup and Use:** If you're spending hours setting up events or troubleshooting the system, it's not worth the headache. Look for a platform with an intuitive interface and minimal setup time.
- **Customer Experience:** The booking process should be simple and smooth for your customers. A clunky checkout process will turn people away before they even finish booking.
- **Hidden Fees and Charges:** Some platforms seem cheap up front but add on hidden processing fees, VAT, or service charges that either you or your customers have to absorb. Make sure you're clear on their fee structure.
- **Ticket Scanning and Guest Lists:** Does the platform provide an app or easy check-in system? This can be really helpful on the night of the tour, especially for larger groups.
- **Cancellation and Refund Management:** How easy is it to set your cancellation policy? Will the system handle refunds for you, or do you have to manage them manually?
- **VAT and Tax Handling:** Depending on where you are, you'll need to consider VAT (or your local equivalent). Some ticketing services build this into their platform, while others leave it to you to sort out.
- **Buying Credits vs. Pay-As-You-Go:** Some platforms ask you to buy credits upfront for future bookings, while others work on a per-ticket basis. Make sure you understand how they charge and what's best for your cash flow.
- **Integration with Your Website and Social Media:** Can you easily add a "Book Now" button to your website or Facebook page? The smoother the process, the more likely people are to commit.

## Different Options You Might Explore

Aside from TicketSource, there are other popular platforms you might consider, depending on your needs and location:

- **Eventbrite:** A widely-used option with global reach. Easy to set up, but often criticised for high fees and a complicated user interface for ticket buyers.
- **FareHarbor:** Popular with tour operators worldwide. Offers more advanced tools but can be overkill for smaller, simpler operations.
- **Brown Paper Tickets:** Known for low fees and a no-frills approach, but customer service and reliability can vary.
- **Tito:** A great option if you're looking for a clean interface and excellent customer service. More common for conferences, but can work for bespoke tours.
- **TryBooking:** Affordable and user-friendly, with tools for managing multiple event types.

At the end of the day, choosing where to sell your tickets comes down to personal choice and what makes the most sense for your business. You want a platform that's easy for you to manage, straightforward for your guests, and offers fair pricing. Whether you prioritize cost, simplicity, or extra features, the goal is the same: make booking your tour as seamless and stress-free as the walk itself.



## Step 9



### Marketing

Marketing is how you connect your tour with the people who will love it. It's not just about selling tickets—it's about telling your story in a way that grabs attention and makes people curious to know more. Whether you rely on word of mouth, social media, posters, or partnerships with local businesses, effective marketing helps you reach the right audience at the right time. In the sections that follow, we'll explore practical ways to promote your tour, build your reputation, and keep people coming back for more.

If you're planning to promote your tours with physical signage—such as chalkboards or A-frames—you may need permission from your local authority to place them on public land. In Harrogate, I contacted the council to ask about placing signs in the town centre. Again, no reply. After carefully considering the placement and potential impact, I set up two chalkboards in high footfall areas at opposite ends of the town. They're secured to lamp posts, placed thoughtfully so they don't block pathways or doorways, and are clearly designed to be non-obstructive.

While I haven't had any problems so far, other than replacing them due to criminal damage, I make sure to keep them tidy, safe, and respectful of the space they occupy. Some councils are stricter than others on this, so it's important to be informed and ready to adjust your approach if needed. We'll cover more on using chalkboards and street advertising in detail later.

It's also important to think about permissions when it comes to your tour route, particularly if you're planning to stop outside residential homes or active businesses. While public roads and footpaths are, by nature, public, it's always good manners—and good business—to be considerate of the people who live and work in the spaces where you're stopping. If part of your route involves standing outside someone's home, particularly in the evening, take the time to knock on their door, introduce yourself, and explain what you're doing.

Offering them a free tour is a nice gesture and can help smooth any potential concerns. I did exactly that when I was designing my ghost walk—approaching the owners of businesses I'd be passing during their opening hours and speaking to two residents whose homes were on quieter parts of the route. Most of my stops aren't directly outside people's houses, but when you can't avoid it, the least you can do is show respect. I also make sure we keep the noise down, especially during late evening tours. A little consideration goes a long way in building goodwill.

Managing relationships with the community is vital. You don't want to gain a reputation as the noisy group that blocks the street or disturbs the peace. Be visible, be approachable, and act responsibly. The last thing you want is a complaint that gets you unwanted attention from the council or the police.

In short, covering your bases with permissions, licenses, insurance, and local courtesy is about more than just ticking boxes. It's about building trust—with your clients, your community, and your partners. It ensures your tour runs smoothly, safely, and without interruption. And most importantly, it allows you to focus on what you do best—bringing the stories of your town to life.



*Clean, secure and presentable*



*My second A board*



## Advertising with A-Boards in your location.

One of the most effective and affordable ways I advertise my ghost walks is through A-boards. They're low-tech, old-school, and wonderfully simple—but they work. They're a constant presence out on the street, catching the eye of people who are already in the area and looking for something to do. They require a little maintenance and creativity, but for the return you get, they're well worth it.

I started with one A-board, which I bought brand new for around £150. You can often find them cheaper; I picked up my second one second-hand through Facebook Marketplace for about half that price. You'll typically find them ranging anywhere from £75 to £150 depending on the size and quality. If you're just starting out and watching costs, second-hand boards are a great option. A bit of cleaning, sanding, and a lick of paint and they're as good as new.

When it came to the design, I knew exactly what I wanted my boards to look like. I have a background in design, so I created the artwork myself using Adobe InDesign. But there are plenty of user-friendly alternatives if design isn't your thing—programs like Canva are intuitive, free to use at a basic level, and offer templates that can help you get a professional-looking design without any prior experience. I designed my boards to clearly state the name of the tour, the time, meeting point, and, most importantly, a space where I could easily change the date of the next walk.

Once I had my design sorted, I paid a local sign writer to paint it onto the first board. This cost around £200, but it was beautifully done and has lasted years. I wanted it to look professional and eye-catching—something that stopped people in their tracks. And it worked.

After a while, I decided to save a bit of money and make my second board myself. Again, I designed it on InDesign, but you could easily use Canva or even Microsoft Publisher for something simple. I kept the design as a black-and-white outline, which I then had printed to scale by a local printer. Once printed, I taped the design onto the board, and using a pencil, traced over the lines to leave a faint imprint on the wood. I

It was a slow, careful process, but it gave me an outline to work with. I then coloured it in using chalk pens, which I bought cheaply from Amazon. After finishing the design, I sealed the whole thing with a clear lacquer to protect it from the elements. Despite the DIY nature of it, it's held up well, and it's been rewarding to know I made it myself.



*An alternative to chalkboards*



*My very first chalkboard*



*My most recent chalkboard*





*Proudly standing with my new display*



*It was destroyed overnight*



*Three A boards have been destroyed*

But there are always challenges. A-boards are exposed to both the weather and the occasional idiot. I've had to replace two boards after they were vandalised—both were broken into pieces (bottom left)

At one point, I experimented with a clear A-board (top left), where I could slot in printed posters. The flexibility was fantastic: I could easily switch out the poster depending on the event—say, a special Halloween ghost walk or a Victorian séance. Unfortunately, it lasted a single night. By the next morning, it had been completely smashed, the poster torn to shreds. I never used that style again.

There are a few key points to keep in mind when using A-boards. If you're not confident in your artistic skills, it's worth paying a professional to design and paint your boards. You only need to invest once, and it should last you for years. Also, be strategic about where you place them. I have two boards at opposite ends of town in high footfall areas, secured safely to lamp posts. They're placed carefully so they don't block footpaths or doorways. In Harrogate, I contacted the council to ask about permission to place them out, and despite never hearing back, I've taken care to be respectful in their placement, and they've remained in place without issue.

As for advertising beyond A-boards, I keep it simple for my regular ghost walk. I don't run paid ads and rely solely on those two boards, word of mouth, Google reviews, and the hundreds of five-star TripAdvisor reviews I've built up over the years. I've also won an award, and that kind of social proof goes a long way.

People trust the opinions of other customers far more than they trust a flashy ad. For my speciality events—like my Victorian séance experiences—I do sometimes run Facebook ads. But I'll be honest, I'm no expert in online marketing. I use it when I have a specific event to promote, and while it can be effective, it's something you need to spend time learning if you want to do it well. There are courses out there for that if you're interested, but I focus my time on what I do best—delivering unforgettable tours.

In the end, A-boards are simple, effective, and incredibly low-cost advertising. They're there when you can't be, quietly promoting your business to passers-by, and they're often the first thing that draws a new customer in. Keep them clean, update them regularly, and make them stand out—and they'll serve you well.



## Using Technology to Enhance Your Walking Tour (Optional, But Powerful)

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While a great walking tour relies on storytelling, atmosphere, and personal connection, technology can be an incredible tool to enhance the experience—without overshadowing the magic of live guiding. The key is using it strategically. You don't want people staring at their phones instead of being immersed in your stories, but when used well, technology can add depth, convenience, and even extend the experience beyond the tour itself.

Some guests love to dig deeper, and technology allows you to offer bonus content without slowing the pace of the tour. QR codes are a simple but effective way to do this. Placing a QR code on a sign at your meeting point, or handing out a small printed card at the start, allows guests to scan it with their phones and access additional material—historic photographs of the locations you're discussing, maps of the area from different time periods, or even short audio clips or video reenactments related to your stories.

This works particularly well for ghost walks or historical tours, where you might want to show what a building once looked like before it was demolished or tell a fuller version of a story than time allows during the tour. QR codes can also direct guests to your website, upcoming events, or even a link to purchase your book if you have one.

Social media is another powerful way to integrate technology into your tour without disrupting the live experience. Encouraging guests to take and share photos using a specific hashtag helps spread the word organically.

Some guides go a step further by offering a photo challenge—for example, asking guests to snap a picture of a hidden detail along the route and share it with the hashtag. If you're running a ghost tour, you might ask guests to take photos at a supposedly haunted location and later check them for "evidence" of paranormal activity. This playfulness turns a simple tour into an interactive, shareable experience that can generate buzz and bring in new guests.



Another way to incorporate technology is by offering an audio guide or app for self-guided experiences. Some people prefer to explore at their own pace, or they may take your live tour and later want to revisit parts of it on their own. A recorded version of your tour, available via an app like VoiceMap or izi.TRAVEL, allows you to extend your reach to audiences who may never be able to attend in person. It also provides an opportunity for passive income—once recorded, an audio tour can be sold or downloaded multiple times without additional effort on your part.

Ultimately, technology should support and enhance the experience, not replace the human connection that makes a great walking tour special. Used wisely, it can add value, create engagement beyond the tour itself, and make it easier for guests to stay connected with you long after the walk is over. Whether it's through QR codes, social media, or self-guided options, a little digital integration can go a long way in making your tour stand out.

### **Using Social Media on Your Tours: How Much is Enough?**

Let's talk honestly about social media. It's an incredibly powerful tool for promoting walking tours, building a following, and keeping your audience engaged. It's free, it's far-reaching, and for many businesses, it's a cornerstone of success. But here's the truth: I'm not a social media expert, and I don't pretend to be one. Like a lot of people running small businesses, I wear multiple hats (four jobs, to be exact), each of which expects me to have some sort of online presence. And while I understand the value of regular posting, engaging content, and clever hashtags, I just don't have the time or mental space to do it all. Not consistently, anyway.

When it comes to my ghost walks and events, I tend to use social media in a fairly straightforward, no-fuss way. I post when I have tours coming up, I record a short video either before or after the walk, and I take the occasional photo along the route. It's authentic, it's immediate, and it works for me. Could I do more? Absolutely. Would it help my business grow? Quite possibly. But the truth is, in Harrogate—where I'm currently the only ghost walk on offer—I don't feel the same pressure to be constantly "on" as someone might if they were running tours in a city like London or York, where competition is fierce and having a strong, consistent social media presence can be the difference between standing out or fading into the crowd.

Put simply, I do what I can, and no more. And I haven't noticed it hurting my business. My tours sell out through word-of-mouth, returning guests, and strong TripAdvisor reviews. That said, I'm not blind to the fact that social media can make a big difference. It's an incredible tool for reaching people who may never have heard of you otherwise. It's free advertising that can build excitement around your events, create a sense of community, and provide social proof that your tours are worth attending. If you're just starting out, or if you're in a more competitive area, you might need to make it a bigger focus than I have.

Take TikTok, for example. I have an account. I haven't really used it. I know there are tours that do brilliantly on that platform, especially ones that focus on high-energy delivery, quick facts, or eerie ghost content. But for me, it is not a priority right now. That's the thing with social media: you have to find what works for you and your business. You can go all in, post daily, and make content creation part of your routine. Or you can post occasionally, focusing your time and energy where you think it's best spent.

The key is balance. Social media should support your tours, not take them over. If it starts feeling like a burden or a chore, it might take the joy out of why you're doing this in the first place. Do as much or as little as you want, but be intentional about it. If you're not going to post regularly, make sure what you do post gives a clear sense of your tour's atmosphere and why people should join. A single, well-thought-out video that captures your energy and gives potential guests a feel for what they'll experience can do more good than ten rushed posts. In the end, your walking tour isn't built on social media—it's built on storytelling, experience, and connection. Social media is just one of the many tools you can use to share that. Use it in a way that makes sense for you, your business, and your life. And most importantly, don't let it take over.



## Audio Equipment: Be Heard, Be Clear

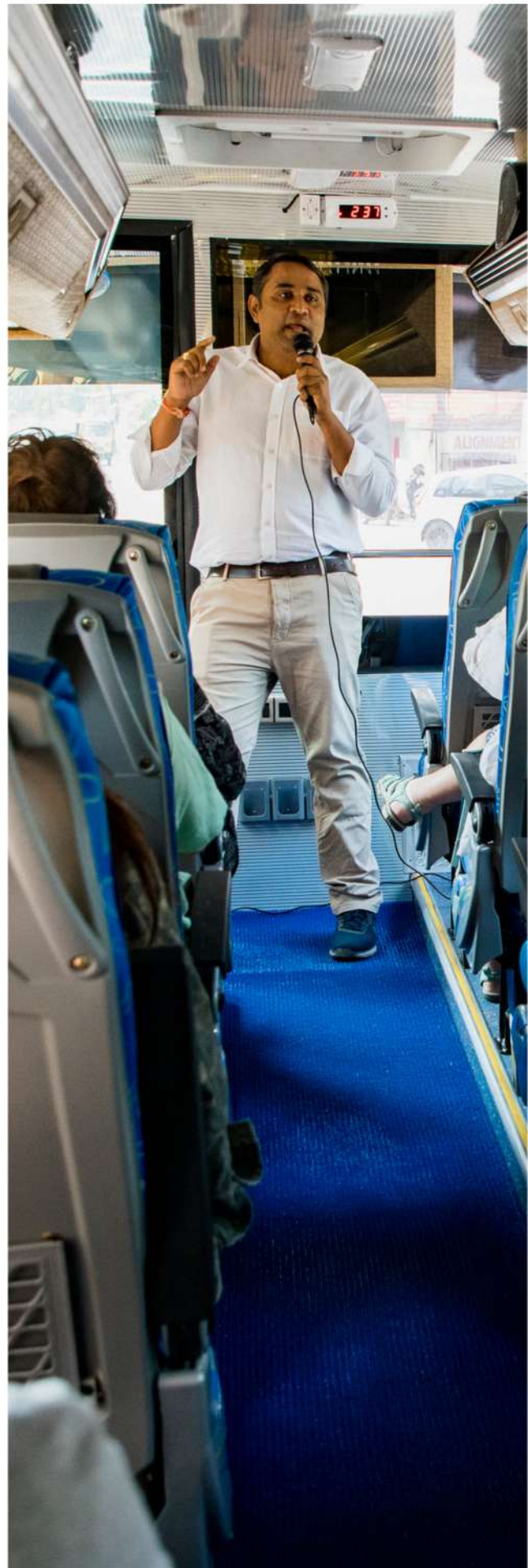
As a guide, you're not just leading people from place to place—you're delivering a live, interactive performance. And like any good performer, having the right tools can make all the difference. The right equipment ensures your guests can hear you clearly, follow along comfortably, and feel like they're part of a smooth, professional operation. A few well-chosen tools can elevate your tour from good to unforgettable, while also making your job easier and less stressful.

One of the most crucial investments you might want to make as a guide is in reliable audio equipment. Even if you have a strong, well-trained voice, you can't compete with the roar of passing traffic, a windy evening, or the sheer size of a large group.

A portable speaker and microphone system ensures everyone hears you clearly from start to finish. Look for hands-free systems with headset microphones that allow you to move freely, gesture, and engage with your group without juggling equipment. The best models are lightweight, weather-resistant, and rechargeable, meaning you can focus on the experience instead of worrying about battery life or rain clouds.

In particularly noisy environments—think busy cities or bustling festival weekends—some guides are now using silent disco-style headphones. This creates a unique experience where each guest wears a wireless headset, tuning into your voice without distraction from background noise.

It works especially well for night tours, where you want to maintain an eerie atmosphere, or in locations where sound ordinances limit the use of loudspeakers. While it's not for every guide or every tour, it's an option worth exploring if you want to offer something distinctive or if your route includes very crowded areas.





# Visual Aids & Printed Materials

Visual aids and printed materials can significantly enrich your walking tour, providing guests with extra layers of context, deepening their connection to the places they're visiting, and offering them something tangible to take away. Whether you're working with historic images, maps, or modern technology, the right visual tools help make the past more vivid and the experience more interactive. Not every guest learns or connects in the same way—some are visual learners who will appreciate having something to look at while you speak, while others enjoy taking something home to remember the tour by.

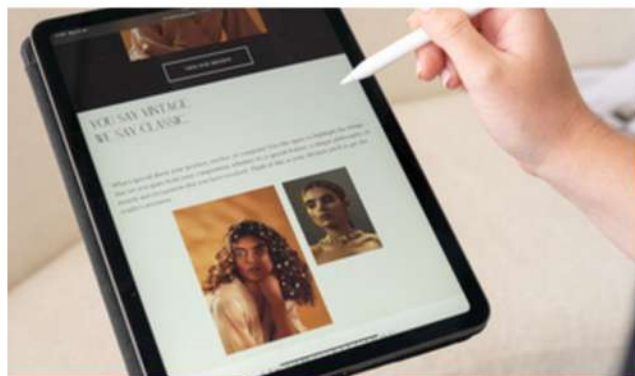


## PRINTED OR LAMINATED PHOTOS, MAPS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Bringing along printed or laminated visuals is one of the simplest yet most effective ways to add depth to your storytelling. Imagine standing in front of a modern building and holding up a photo of what stood there a century ago—a grand hotel, a bustling marketplace, or a grimy factory.

It's a moment of revelation for your group. You can show portraits of historical figures you're discussing or photos of artifacts that tie into your story. Laminated prints are durable and weather-resistant, making them ideal for all conditions.

This approach works beautifully on historical walking tours, where guests want to understand how a town has evolved over time. It's also effective on ghost walks, where you might show eerie photos or vintage maps of buildings rumored to be haunted.



## TABLETS FOR IMAGES, VIDEOS, OR AUDIO CLIPS

For a more modern twist, tablets can be an excellent alternative to printed materials. You can swipe through images of key locations, play historical footage, or even share audio clips of old recordings or atmospheric sounds that match the story you're telling.

For instance, during a music history tour, you could play a clip of a song recorded in a nearby studio, giving the group a real sense of place. On literary tours, you might show rare book covers or manuscripts connected to the author's life.

Digital aids work especially well in urban street art tours, where you can show a mural's creation process through time-lapse videos or include interviews with the artists themselves. Just be mindful of screen glare in bright sunlight and always ensure your device is charged and protected from weather.





## HANDOUTS OR BOOKLETS

Providing guests with handouts or booklets can be a lovely added touch, especially for tours rich in historical detail or for groups that appreciate something to refer back to after the walk. These materials can include key stories, background information you didn't have time to cover in full, or a map with additional points of interest.

For example, on a heritage trail focused on women's history, you might include mini-biographies of the women you mention on the tour, along with dates and locations for further exploration. Foodie tours could offer recipe cards from the dishes discussed or sampled along the way.



## MODERN TECHNOLOGY

For guides who want to take their storytelling to the next level, alternative technology like mini projectors can create incredibly immersive and memorable experiences. Compact, portable, and increasingly affordable, these devices allow you to project images or videos directly onto walls, buildings, or even the street itself—bringing the past vividly back to life in the very places where history unfolded.

This kind of visual storytelling adds an atmospheric, almost cinematic quality to a tour, and helps bridge the gap between the audience's imagination and the reality of the locations you're exploring.

One standout example of this in action is the famous Jack the Ripper walking tours in London (pictured above).

Some of these tours use mini projectors to display actual crime scene photographs directly onto the locations where those gruesome events took place in 1888. Seeing these historical images projected onto the same walls or cobblestone alleys where the events occurred has a powerful, haunting effect.



# Step10

## Reviews

Reviews are the lifeblood of a successful walking tour business. They provide social proof, build trust with potential guests, and dramatically improve your visibility on platforms like Google and TripAdvisor. A glowing review doesn't just validate your work—it acts as a powerful endorsement that encourages others to book. Most people read reviews before making a decision, especially when choosing experiences in unfamiliar places. That's why it's so important to consistently ask for feedback at the end of your tour, respond graciously to comments (both good and bad), and make it easy for guests to leave their thoughts. The more positive reviews you collect, the more your reputation grows—and with it, your bookings.

### **The Power of Reviews: Building Trust Through Social Proof**

In the world of walking tours, word of mouth is one of the most powerful marketing tools you have—and in the digital age, that word of mouth lives online in the form of reviews. When someone searches for things to do in your town, the first thing they often look at is your reviews. Before they click “Book Now,” they want to know: Can I trust this guide? Will this experience be worth my time and money?

Positive reviews build trust, boost bookings, and improve your visibility on search engines. They’re not just vanity metrics—they’re social proof, and they act as endorsements from past guests. A well-reviewed tour stands out in a crowded marketplace. Even just a handful of glowing testimonials can separate you from competitors or encourage hesitant guests to take a chance.

### **TripAdvisor: The Gold Standard for Tour Reviews**

TripAdvisor is the most widely used travel review platform in the world. Many tourists plan entire itineraries based on TripAdvisor rankings alone. Setting up your tour here is essential.

To list your walking tour:

1. Go to TripAdvisor's “List Your Business”.
2. Choose “Attractions” and follow the prompts to add your business.
3. Upload high-quality images, fill out your business description, and ensure all details are correct (duration, meeting point, pricing, etc.).

Once you’re live, encourage every guest to leave a review—politely, at the end of your tour. You can also follow up with a thank-you email including a direct link to your TripAdvisor page.

Tip: Respond to every review, even the glowing ones. A warm thank-you shows that you care. And if someone leaves a negative comment, reply professionally and calmly. Future guests will be watching how you handle it.

### **Google Reviews: Local SEO’s Best Friend**

Google Reviews are just as important as TripAdvisor, especially for locals searching “walking tour near me.” A Google Business profile also gives you control over how your business appears in Google Maps and Search.

To set it up:

1. Go to Google Business Profile.
2. Add your tour as a service-based business (you don’t need a storefront).
3. Include your phone number, email, website, hours, and a few high-resolution photos.

Once verified, you’ll have a custom Google Review link you can share via email or social media. Having strong Google Reviews helps with visibility and credibility, particularly for local audiences.

## Link Your Reviews to Your Website

Your website is your digital headquarters—make it easy for potential guests to see what others are saying.

- Create a Reviews/Testimonial page that highlights TripAdvisor and Google Reviews.
- Embed a live TripAdvisor widget (available in your TripAdvisor Management Centre).
- Use pull quotes from glowing reviews on your homepage or booking page.
- Link directly to your review profiles with buttons like “Read Our Reviews on Google” or “Rated ★★★★★ on TripAdvisor.”

## How to Ask for Reviews (Without Sounding Desperate)

Asking for a review shouldn't feel awkward. Make it a natural part of your wrap-up:

“If you've enjoyed tonight's walk, I'd be so grateful if you left a quick review—it really helps others find us. You'll find us on TripAdvisor and Google, or just scan the code on this sign.”

You can also:

- Include QR codes on your A-board or printed handouts.
- Follow up via email or text with a thank-you and review link.
- Offer a small incentive for feedback (e.g., a discount code for your next tour or entry into a monthly prize draw).

My review pitch at the end of the tour goes something like this:

*“Most of you probably found me through the hundreds of five-star reviews on TripAdvisor—thank you for trusting them! If you've enjoyed tonight's ghost walk, I'd be incredibly grateful if you left a quick review yourself. And if you didn't enjoy the walk... well, this was the Ripley Ghost Walk.”*

It's a line that never fails to get a laugh—especially since there's no such thing as the Ripley Ghost Walk, so no one's feelings are hurt. The joke lands, people leave smiling, and I've planted the reminder that a five-star review is the norm.

Ending on a high note not only encourages positive feedback, it also gives your guests a final dose of the humour and personality that sets my tour apart.

I respond to every single TripAdvisor review that is left. If they have taken the time to leave a review, the least I can do is respond to them. It doesn't take long and TripAdvisor loves it.

A steady stream of authentic reviews builds momentum. They shape your reputation, improve your search rankings, and—most importantly—help future guests feel confident in their decision to book with you. Treat every tour like it could lead to your next glowing review, because it just might.



### THINGS TO DO

#### Harrogate Ghost Walk

5.0 ●●●●● (206 reviews)

Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England

60 mentions of [harrogate ghost walk](#)

“...Harrogate [Ghost Walk](#) is sensational...”





### Incredible Ghost Walk

Feb 2022

I've been on a few ghost walks around the uk but The Harrogate Ghost Walk is the best I've been on. The host, a local magician and mindreader trained as an actor, and it shows. His storytelling skills are great and he improvises and engages with the audience a lot. There are some great stories about different types of ghosts and you learn a lot about the local history too.

We had a laugh with him and some people were sharing their stories too which was great to hear. The walk is excellent value for money, £8 for adults and only £5 for kids, our walk lasted around 2 hours and took in as one very atmospheric locations are Harrogate.

I would highly recommend the ghost walk to anyone visiting Harrogate. Even if you're not into ghosts, the stories and locations were enough to keep anyone happy. I won't spoil the surprise but at the end of the walk the host does something amazing and everyone was blown away.

Excellent value, amazing storytelling and such a great host and experience. A must for families too as there were loads of kids there. Highly recommend.



### Brilliant Evening

Jun 2025 • Family

Having been on a few ghost walks in various towns, wasn't sure what to expect- some are good, some less so!

What an excellent evening. Great stories, which just kept on coming , all delivered with fun and presence. Paul is passionate about the subject and Harrogate, and this comes through in his tales and his delivery, all with a sprinkling of cheek.

Highly recommend.



### April 2025 Route B

Apr 2025 • Family

We were visiting Harrogate and saw the advertisement board in the square. We've been on a few ghost walks now as we love a bit of history and spookiness!

Paul was a great host, very informative, funny and an overall great storyteller!

I particularly found it interesting that ghosts stick to the paths they knew when they were alive so that's why they take strange routes!

Thank you Paul :)



### Prepare for a scare on this hauntingly brilliant evening!

Mar 2022 • Couples

A fantastic storyteller and performer, Paul grips his audience with imagination and humour. As the creator of Harrogate's first and only ghostwalk, Paul's skilful and persistent research has led to the creation of a memorable (and evolving) experience - suitable for young and old. Using iconic (and lesser known) Harrogate landmarks, Paul takes his audience on a journey of the spooky and spectacular. Prepare for a scare on this hauntingly brilliant evening!

## **Dealing with Negative Reviews: Protecting Your Reputation with Professionalism**

No matter how engaging your stories are, how carefully you plan your route, or how many glowing five-star reviews you collect, eventually a negative review will appear. It's inevitable—and, in some ways, it's even helpful. Why? Because a few well-handled criticisms show future guests that your reviews are real, that you care, and that you respond with grace when things don't go perfectly.

### **Don't Panic—Read It Carefully**

Your first instinct might be frustration or defensiveness, especially if you feel the review is unfair. But take a deep breath, step back, and read it carefully. Is there something valid in the criticism? Could you have communicated more clearly? Did the guest misunderstand an element of the tour? Not all negative reviews come from malice—sometimes it's just misaligned expectations.

For example, I once received a four-star review (one of only a three), where the guest noted that I walked a little fast for her comfort. She also emailed me in advance about the route, she was concerned about any hills. The route, walking speed and terrain were clearly explained in my booking confirmation, my safety talk, and even in a personal call before the tour. I responded to the review positively, acknowledging her concerns while gently reminding readers of the communication steps taken beforehand. Future guests saw not just the complaint—but my professionalism in addressing it.

In her review, the same guest also took issue with the way I promoted my book. It's worth noting that in over two and a half years of running this ghost walk, she is the only person who has ever commented negatively on this. In fact, the overwhelming majority of guests find it genuinely funny and part of the charm of the experience.

My “book pitch,” if you can even call it that, is deliberately light-hearted. It lasts less than a few seconds and is wrapped in humour. I make a cheeky reference to the stories I've left untold and suggest, with a grin, that they're all in the book—which just so happens to be available for sale. Most guests laugh, some buy a copy, and many take photos of the cover to look it up later. I never pressure anyone, and I certainly don't overplay it. If anything, it's become a signature moment that ties the evening together and gives guests something extra to take home—if they want it.

One person out of thousands of guests taking issue with a moment that others consistently praise is not a signal to change; it's a reminder that you can't please everyone. You just have to remain authentic, stay kind in your responses, and trust that the full body of your work—and your audience's feedback—speaks far louder than one dissenting voice.



**Delightful Evening Walk with Ghosts**

**Aug 2022**

An excellent presentation. Our host was not only warm and charming but fully audible even to those standing on the outer fringe of our rather large group.

However, good walker though I am, at 75, I found he walked just a tad too fast for my comfort. And, whilst his eagerness to publicise his book and obtain social media endorsements from us was understandable, even touching, I think he should wind back on this, just a little. After all, we had all paid our £9.00 and were surely entitled to enjoy our time with him without beginning to feel an increasing burden of responsibility to keep him in employment! Otherwise, I would have given the Ghost Walk full marks.

## **How to Respond (TripAdvisor, Google, Social Media)**

Across all platforms—TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, or even social media comments—your tone is everything. Be polite, calm, and constructive.

Here's a useful response formula:

1. Thank them for taking the time to leave feedback.
2. Acknowledge their concern without being defensive.
3. Clarify any misinformation with facts, kindly.
4. Show that you care and explain how feedback helps you improve.

### **Example response:**

"Thank you for your feedback. I'm sorry to hear that the walk didn't quite meet your expectations. We do include notes about the route's terrain in our booking information and always welcome questions ahead of time. I hope you still enjoyed parts of the evening and appreciate you sharing your thoughts—it helps us improve."

This kind of measured reply shows prospective guests that you're respectful, responsible, and committed to quality.

### **Don't Argue in Public**

Even if a review is harsh, misleading, or exaggerated, never argue back in a public forum. You won't win. Instead, remain calm, state the facts, and move on. Most people can tell the difference between a reasonable complaint and someone being unfair. If the review violates platform guidelines (e.g., contains offensive language or irrelevant content), report it—TripAdvisor and Google will sometimes remove inappropriate reviews.

### **When to Take it Offline**

If the issue seems serious or ongoing, invite the reviewer to contact you directly:

"We'd love the chance to discuss this with you further—please feel free to reach out via our website or email so we can try to make things right."

This shows you're open to conversation and resolution without airing everything publicly.

### **Keep Perspective**

One negative review among dozens (or hundreds) of five-star ratings won't sink your business. In fact, it can highlight the authenticity of your overall reputation. People expect to see the occasional less-than-perfect review. What they pay attention to is how you respond.

### **Final Tip**

Use critical reviews as learning tools. If several guests mention similar issues—maybe unclear directions, sound problems, or timing—it's a sign to tweak something. Negative feedback, when handled well, isn't a setback. It's a gift that helps you grow.



Running a walking tour business may look like a dream job from the outside—and in many ways, it is—but behind the storytelling, laughter, and atmospheric lantern-lit routes lies a whole world of planning, promotion, communication, and physical performance. If you're not careful, it can take over your time, your energy, and your weekends.

I speak from experience. I juggle four very different jobs—each one requiring its own headspace, skills, and time commitment. Fortunately, I've built flexibility into how and when I run my walking tours. I publicly advertise The Harrogate Ghost Walk as taking place on the first and last Friday of every month, with a note to "check the website for any changes or additional dates." This gives me the freedom to move things around when needed and still appear consistent and reliable to my audience. It also allows me to add extra dates during peak seasons like school holidays, summer breaks, Halloween, or other special events. The best part? I can change a tour date if another work commitment comes up—without disrupting the rhythm of the business.

In all the years I've run my tours, I've only ever cancelled once due to illness. That's because I've learned to plan ahead, pace myself, and not overcommit—even when demand is high. It's tempting to say yes to every opportunity, especially if you love performing, or your tour is growing in popularity. But burnout is real, and if you're tired or running on empty, it will show in your delivery.

### **Tips for Managing Your Time Without Burning Out**

**Set a predictable rhythm** – Whether it's once a week, twice a month, or seasonally, having a consistent schedule helps manage your own workload and sets clear expectations for your audience. You can always add more tours when energy and demand align.

**Leave room for life** – Your time isn't just about the tour itself. Factor in the hours you'll need to write stories, answer emails, manage bookings, maintain your social media, clean your A-boards, update your website, prepare props, and walk the route. These unseen hours matter—and they add up.

**Use scheduling tools** – Platforms like TicketSource or Calendly make it easier to automate and track bookings. Social media planners like Meta Business Suite or Buffer help you queue posts in advance, so you don't feel chained to your phone every day.

**Block out recovery time** – Walking, projecting your voice, performing, and managing guests is demanding. Don't schedule late-night tours followed by early meetings the next morning. Give yourself time to recharge physically and mentally.

**Learn to say "not this time"** – Just because you could add another tour doesn't mean you should. Your performance is the product—and tired guides deliver tired tours. Guard your energy as carefully as your route map.

### **Making Flexibility Work for You**

One of the greatest benefits of being a sole trader is autonomy. You set your calendar. You decide your availability. But flexibility doesn't mean chaos. By giving your tour a consistent public framework (like "first and last Friday of the month"), you build trust and regularity into your brand. People begin to associate certain times of the month with your event, while still leaving you room to shift things behind the scenes.

This balance allows you to work your tour around your life, rather than your life around your tour. It gives you freedom to pursue other passions, take on freelance work, or simply rest when needed—without losing momentum or confusing your audience.

When you run a walking tour, you are the product. Your energy, your health, your creativity—all of it feeds into the guest experience. That's why time management isn't just a business issue—it's a self-care issue. Protect your time. Honour your limits. And remember, a sustainable tour is one that leaves you just as energised and inspired as your guests.

As you reach the end of this guide, take a moment to reflect on just how much ground we've covered. From uncovering your tour's vision and crafting emotionally engaging stories, to designing accessible routes, managing your time, and navigating the practicalities of ticketing, branding, and promotion—you now have the blueprint to create a walking tour that is meaningful, memorable, and uniquely yours.

This isn't a checklist you'll tick off once and forget. It's a living toolkit. Use it, revisit it, adapt it. Let it grow with you as your tour evolves, and don't be afraid to learn by doing. Some lessons you'll only truly grasp after your first rainy tour with five guests and one working torch—but that's all part of the adventure. You will make mistakes, but you'll also build confidence, find your voice, and carve out a space in your community that no one else can fill.

So wherever you are in the world, and whatever kind of story you want to tell, I hope this guide has given you the encouragement and the tools to start. Your stories matter. Your place matters. And you are exactly the right person to bring them to life.

Now go out there, walk the streets, meet your audience—and bring your tour to life.

Good luck.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss ideas then please get in touch via **[info@paulforster.co.uk](mailto:info@paulforster.co.uk)**



**The End**

