



**How to Own and Operate
An Outdoor Guide Service**

by

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Disclaimer

This book is for educational purposes only. The general opinions and commentary that are expressed in this book are in no way intended to be legal advice or be a substitute for legal advice. The information provided in the book *How to Own and Operate an Outdoor Guide Service* represents some, but not all, of the practices and issues you should consider in operating a guide service specializing in adventure sports or other types of outdoor recreation; the material included in this book may not be applicable to every business and/or may not be extensive enough for other businesses.

The author has tried to identify appropriate areas of concern that impact the general field of outdoor recreation or adventure sports, but some information concerning legal matters in the Risk Management section may have been missed or may be misinterpreted; interpretations of the law are inherently subjective. Also, the law is in a constant state of flux, differs from state to state, and may change by the time you read this book.

If you have questions regarding anything that may be of legal consequence, contact a lawyer that is licensed to practice in the state where you will be operating your business.

Introduction

For everyone who thinks that becoming an outdoor guide is their dream job, then this is for you. It is a job. And it is work. But it is very rewarding and you will meet and interact with mostly happy people. There are many steps to take to begin a guide service, and as a former guide and outfitter for over eight years, I am qualified to provide the information that you will need to begin a guiding service. How often you work will be up to you, and the kind of services that you provide will be completely within your power. You may be able to make a living, and when happy tourists proclaim their tour experience with you the best part of their vacation, all the hard work will be worth it.

I worked as a guide for a 4x4 tour company at Grand Canyon for three summers, and I owned and operated a guide service and outfitting store in Escalante, Utah, with my partner/husband for almost seven years. It was a great experience. I met people from all over the world, I made a living, I hiked in some of the most beautiful places in the United States, and I learned enough over the course of ten years to hold the equivalent of a Ph.D. in small business management and hospitality.

The information presented in this book will not cover every aspect of guiding or every kind of tour or guided activity possible, and it might cover too many topics if you are looking to simply offer informative walks around a historic district in a city (although many parts of this book will be of use for anyone looking to start a tour company). My focus will be overland tour

services, including 4x4, hiking, or specialty tours operated on state and federal lands.

I have had a grand experience, and I still enjoy outdoor activities today. Don't hesitate to look elsewhere for advice and guidance on this topic; consult an attorney for several issues that are addressed within this book, as many are items that only an attorney practicing in that particular state can advise and expound upon.

This book is not a substitute for legal, financial, or business advice in any way. Go out and find the answers you seek from all kinds of people, including licensed professionals. In that regard, you will have done all you can to offer people the best experience possible on your tours.

Good luck and happy guiding—

Julia Cozby

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Chapter One: Is Owning a Guide Service For You?

The First Steps

I started in the guiding profession working for a 4x4 tour company based at Grand Canyon National Park. I learned how to change a tire, drive a large truck on bad roads, and communicate with many people from all over the world in a casual hospitality service setting. And, I worked A LOT. Grand Canyon National Park is a busy place, and there was always a tour lined up. The upshot of this experience is, well, experience. If you are an avid outdoorsperson, but have never been a guide before, I cannot recommend enough working for a summer for an established guide service before you attempt to start your own guiding business—or at least going out on a few guided trips in the same vein as what you would like to offer.

There is no doubt that to be a good guide, you must be a “people person.” You must enjoy talking with strangers and be able to interact with them. If you are a loner, a really shy person, or not that interested in what other people have to say, this business is not for you. Working for an established guide service will acquaint you with the business, which is a hospitality business, and you should be able to decide whether or not this is really the business that you want to start.

You will also have to acquire a city business license if you will be operating from a town, and you will have to set up a business structure, i.e., sole proprietorship, limited liability company, or corporation. Do your homework, talk with an attorney and/or

accountant, and choose the right structure for your business needs and tax considerations. This book is not about the legal structure of a small business. There are thousands of good books and web sites that discuss starting a small business, so find a good one and get busy. This book is about the steps you need to take to start up and manage an overland guided tour operation.

Different Kinds of Overland Tours

4x4 Tours. These tours are usually driving tours with minimal walking, perhaps a rough road and wildlife viewing adventure through a forest, or maybe stops at view points at scenic vistas with commentary about history, science, and nature. You might offer two or three different routes with different kinds of scenery and points of interest. They might be 2 to 4 hours in length, from the time guests are picked up to when they are dropped off. You can possibly take along small children and elderly people, as this kind of tour requires little walking.

Hiking Tours. These tours require a moderate to more lengthy time to execute, hiking routes along established trails or known routes to a point of interest, or just to enjoy the scenery during the duration of the hike. They might be 3 to 8 hours in length, or many days in length if you are going to backpack with your guests, from the time guests are picked up to when they are dropped off. Your guests will have to have a certain level of fitness and perhaps size requirements in order to fully enjoy this kind of tour. Children may need to be a bit older to enjoy the hiking. You might be able to offer a beginner level hike or

walk to offset the more strenuous hikes that will be offered—meaning more customers.

Specialty Tours. These are tours where you are going to a particular place to do a particular activity, like a photography class, a yoga or meditation class, or a painting class. These tours should not have a great physical component. People taking art and photography tours aren't going to want to spend time walking when they could be creating art, and perhaps the yoga tour clients would rather get into yoga than a hike. In any of these offerings, the class or activity is the draw, the selling point; therefore, hiking or driving to the area where the activity will take place should not be a bigger part or take too long on this kind of tour. This kind of tour might be 2 to 4 hours in length, from the time guests are picked up to when they are dropped off. You can possibly take along small children and elderly people, as this kind of tour requires little walking.

Hiker Shuttles. Some areas that are known for outdoor recreation are in need of a hiker taxi, or shuttle service. Backpackers may want to do a loop hike, leaving their car at a place where they hike out to start their hike somewhere farther away. This isn't necessarily a full-on tour, but this is a service that can also be offered by a tour company.

First Aid Training. Be aware that first aid training will be a prerequisite for gaining employment with a guide service. As a business owner and guide, getting first aid certification should be a priority for you. It will probably also be a prerequisite for acquiring your permit with the land management agency where

you want to start your service, so start searching out places where you can take a wilderness first aid class (usually a three-day course), or a wilderness first responder class (usually an eight-day course). These courses are not necessarily reasonably priced; be aware that you will have to pay for this training and it will be an up-front business expense. Also check with the agency for minimum first aid requirements for your permit application.

Chapter Two: Picking the Place

The first step in starting your guide service is picking the place where you will offer your services. This is not as easy as you think. Where you choose to work will directly affect the amount of business you have, and ultimately, your quality of life. If you want to offer guided hikes in Iowa, that's fine. Just realize you may not be as busy as if you ran a guide service at Yosemite National Park in California. Also, just because you like hiking in a place doesn't mean that it is a marketable hike in terms of running a guide service. There are several questions you need to ask about the place where you will guide paying guests:

1. Is it a popular place to hike, camp, and see amazing scenery? Is it an undiscovered gem, or overrun by tourists? Or, does it have a good tourist economy, AND nice places off the beaten path that could be good guided destinations?
2. What other guide services are operating in the area? What kind of tours are they doing? Are there already too many guide services, and if so, what can you offer that may be different? Could you also provide hiker shuttle services?
3. Are the areas where you want to lead tours places people will want to see?
4. Is there already an expectation of experience in mind for your customer, i.e., is the area a national park, monument, forest, or other historic and scenic wonder (the reputation of

the place is a good thing that could be helpful in your marketing efforts).

5. Is there a place where you can reasonably live and have a base of operation in the area where you would like to work? Are you moving to a town or state you've never lived in before to start up your business? Can you handle living in a remote place?

6. Are the hikes or tours you will offer manageable, transportation-wise? Meaning, can you offer an excursion where access is reasonably easy, proceed with the hike or camp trip, and get back to the place to drop off your customers in a time frame that works for you? Or can you charge enough for your services that won't discourage business, but will cover the cost of a long transport into the area?

7. Are you okay with hiking on the same trail, camping in the same spot, or driving the same road, time after time, day after day?

If you can answer the questions above positively, then you are ready to scout out your areas and routes as part of the application to the agency that oversees permitting for guide services.

So You Picked Your Place—Now What?

You decided where you'd like to operate a guide service. You've moved to the area, or are planning to meet people somewhere and do the tours by making regular visits to the area to conduct

your tours. You have a few routes and adventures in mind. You can even offer hiker shuttle services. You have purchased a vehicle and you're ready to roll.

One thing you cannot do is just start hauling tourists out on public land and showing them the sights. If you are planning on conducting tours on a national monument, national park, or national forest, or even a state park, you will need to acquire a permit from the land management agency to conduct commercial operations. This is important for marketing purposes as well, as all management agencies list official guide services on their web sites.

Also, other outfitters will call you out and call in the law enforcement for the agency if you are operating on their turf without a permit. And believe me, they will know. If you put up a web site and begin marketing before you have a permit in hand, the agency itself will know. Usually, outfitters are not allowed to market their services until a permit has been issued. This can be a sticky rule, but the land management agency has their reasons, and if you begin your marketing before your permit is in hand, it can jeopardize your permit application.

Chapter Three: The Permitting Process

In the years I owned a guide service, I had to work with the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the United States Forest Service. All agencies have one thing in common: the process by which you become a permitted guide service is different for each agency, and each park, region, monument, forest or state also has their own set of guidelines.

The first thing you must do is contact that agency's outdoor recreation planner or commercial permitting officer, either via telephone or by scheduling a meeting. Go in and tell them what it is you would like to do, and ask them what the first step in acquiring the permit would be. Most of the time, the outdoor recreation planner will be very helpful and answer all of your questions. The permitting process should be taken very seriously, as this is the key to legal and lawful operations of your services on public lands.

Don't argue or become offended by the agency's list of rules and requirements regarding commercial guide service permits. There is nothing you can do to change this process as those steps and rules are made by people in regional offices and in Washington, D.C. Just listen, take notes, and ask questions. It is helpful to look at the federal agency with whom you will be working as your partner, and they will usually be very appreciative that they have another warm body out on their lands keeping an eye on things. Once you have the basic information regarding the application process, you can go back

to planning the tours you will offer and return your permit application to the agency just as they would like to see it.

Be aware that some agencies have deadlines for permit application submission, or that they have a preset number of permits that they can issue in any given season or year. Some agencies do not even accept permit applications and commercial guiding is highly controlled by permit holders that have been in the area for years. This is why it is so important to go in and talk with the agency that manages the land where you think you may want to do tours; they may not allow them at all, and you may have to look elsewhere. Don't waste time scouting out areas for tours until you talk with the outdoor recreation planner first.

Some good questions to ask in your meeting would be:

- What kind of insurance requirements does my service need for a permit?
- Does the agency currently accept permit applications for guided tour activities?
- Is previous experience guiding necessary for approval of my application?
- What kind of first aid certification would I need?
- Are there rules for signage on vehicles?

- How would your agency like to see the final application package presented—bound or unbound? Printed or hand-written?
- Is there an application processing fee, and how should that be paid?
- When can I expect my permit to be issued once the application is submitted?
- Are there certain types of tours that are not allowed?
- Are there certain places where tours are not allowed?
- If I submit a tour route, must I only hike on those routes for the tours, or is my permit a blanket permit that allows me to hike anywhere I would like in the park/forest/monument?
- How many people can be taken out on a tour at one time?
- Do I need a separate permit to offer hiker shuttle services? Or can I also ask for that activity to be included on my permit?

Other questions will arise as you go through your meeting with the officer or planner. Oftentimes, the agency will have a commercial outfitter's guide book and application package, so many of the questions you may have could be answered in that package. Ask as many questions as you can, and be sure to get contact information so you can ask other questions as they arise when you put together the permit application package.

But, before you can put your application together and submit it, you have to decide what kind of tours you will be offering, exactly where you will be taking your guests, and how you will execute the tours.

Chapter Four: Planning Your Tours

Now comes the part that will define your work days and how often you will work: the kinds of tours you will be offering. It will also be a large part of your permit application for some agencies.

Do you want to offer extended overnight outings? Backpacking trips? Day hiking adventures? Off-road 4x4 tours? Photography outings? Yoga classes in natural settings? Hiker shuttle services? Yes, all of these kinds of outdoor activities are ways that outfitters and guides are making money. What do YOU want to do? And, what kind of outings or offerings could be sold that could allow you to make a living as a guide?

A solid tour company will have at least three to five different tours to offer. If your tour is specialized, like a backpacking loop hike or photography or yoga classes, you may be able to stick with one route or one kind of tour and make a living. But when it comes to people on vacation and marketing on a broader scale, the more routes and kind of tours you have to offer for different skill levels, the better.

Depending on the requirements for your application with the land management agency, you may have to provide maps with your routes overlaid on the map. Use a GPS unit and Terrain Navigator to get this done as easily and quickly as possible. If you don't know how to do this, find someone who does and pay them. Accurate maps with routes are critical must-haves for

some agencies when reviewing your permit application. You should definitely learn how to use a GPS unit, no matter what.

Hiking and Driving Tours. Go and hike or drive your routes just as if you were taking other people with you. Make note of total drive times and hiking times. Take notes on the kind of ecosystem, wildlife, geology, archaeology, and other items of interest that tourists may ask questions about. If you can't answer those questions, learn what you need to know that you need to be able to talk with your customers and answer their questions.

Write a two or three paragraph narrative describing the outing and the items of interest that you will share with the tourists. If it is a specialty tour, describe in detail the class or activity that you will be leading. Include how you will be sensitive to the environment by limiting the number of people you take out on tour (our maximum was eight), remaining on existing trails and roads, and leaving things as you found them. This narrative will accompany your map with your marked route—and, may provide a great excerpt for marketing materials (more about marketing later). Estimate what kind of fitness level that a tourist might need for this tour, if it was a hiking or trekking tour, with descriptions like beginner, moderate, or strenuous.

Backpacking and Overnight Camping Tours. If you are going to provide a backpacking tour, explain in detail where you will be camping, how you and your guests will take care of human waste and trash, and how you will feed them.

If you are able to hike and camp anywhere at any time according to the rules of a permit, you will be a lucky guide because that kind of freedom is rare for a commercial guiding permit. Having planned routes and camping areas that you know and have visited many times over is much better, and usually the only way a permit will be issued. It helps with your expectation of the time you want to work, keeps mishaps to a minimum, and helps you be a better guide to your patrons. It gets boring after the 20th time you hike or drive it--but the people you take out will keep the experience fresh for you. Just keep that in mind.

Hiker Shuttle Services. If you are in an area where backpackers might want to have a car shuttle service, you should consider offering a back country taxi service as well. We charged per mile, driving and back, for our service. To figure an amount to charge the customer, we simply used what the IRS allows per mile as a write off, then doubled that amount, then multiplied it by the miles we would have to drive to and from our home base. Logistically, we would drive our own vehicle, following the hiker driving their own car, to the parking area where they would be ending their hike. Then we took the hiker back to the place where they were starting their hike and dropped them off. We always charged the shuttle customers BEFORE we left.

For insurance and liability reasons, we NEVER drove the customer's vehicle. When people call you and ask for shuttle services, be sure to explain this mode of operation to them to make sure their vehicle can be driven to the area where they

will be hiking out. A small car cannot necessarily be driven on some harder, rougher, back country dirt tracks. If you choose to drive a customer's car, that is certainly your call as a business owner. We opted not to do that. The road conditions where we operated were just so horrible that we didn't want any kind of liability arising from damaging a customer's car due to conditions out of our control. It just made more sense to let the customer drive it, park it, then take them back to their starting point. Once they were dropped off, our work was done, and our responsibility was done.

First aid and safety. Keep safety in mind when planning your trips. You can't very well respond to an emergency if you haven't created a safety plan for your service. How will you call in an ambulance or search and rescue? Does the area where you will take tours have cell phone service? Does your tour vehicle have a fire extinguisher, a good first aid kit, a shovel, a spare tire or two, a jack, and extra water in a larger container? Can you use a CB radio to call in help if needed? Do you have someone at your home base that can come and pick up your tourists if the truck breaks down? You need to have a safety plan written out and ready to submit with your permit application.

Some agencies may not require a safety plan; no matter. You need to do it so you and your tourists can better respond to anything that may come up over the course of a tour. Be sure to include your first aid class certification with your safety plan if you have to submit one with your permit application.

Human waste. Are you planning overnight trips and need to provide information regarding how you will handle human waste? Go ahead and laugh, but almost all land management agencies have guidelines on how you and your tourists will “go in the woods,” so to speak. Be ready to answer that question. We liked the ReStop 2 bag system, as you could use it, pack it out, and throw it in a garbage can after the trip was over. Chemical toilets are an option. Of course, you will have to find an RV tank station to clean the toilet after each trip.

Food. Are you cooking or providing food for your tourists? If you are planning to offer overnight trips, you will be. This is where the local health department comes into your business. You will mostly likely need (or need to hire a person to go along on tours that has) a food manager’s certificate. Getting a food manager certification requires a day-long class that teaches you how not to handle food in a way that may kill someone (and yes, spoiled food can kill someone).

This certificate may also be a requirement for your federal or state land management agency in the permit application process. If you are providing prepackaged lunches on your trips, or food made elsewhere that you pick up on the morning of your tour, or going out for only two to three hours, you won’t need the food manager’s class--for everything else, you will. Call your county health department or find them on the internet and find out where and when the classes are offered.

Insurance. You will have to purchase an insurance policy for guiding and outdoor activities, for cooking for clients, and for

driving your customers in your commercial vehicle, which is also called livery insurance. Each land management agency will have different requirements for your coverage amounts. Be sure you know that dollar amount before calling an insurance agent. This too will be a business expense that has to be paid before you ever make a dollar offering tours. Some agencies may require that you list them as an “additional insured.” Your agent should have that on your policy summary sheet along with your coverage amounts.

Be sure to tell your agent if you are cooking food and driving your tourists to the trail head. Those activities will also need to be covered with a product/commercial liability policy and a livery insurance policy. Your agent may not be able to offer all of these policies, so be ready to ask for references for the driving and the cooking activities for a separate policy if needed. A great place to start in your search for insurance is World Wide Outfitters and Guides, <http://www.insureguides.com/> Also, do an internet search for guide and outfitter insurance in your state. Someone will certainly pop up in search engine results that is local.

Chapter Five: Putting Your Application Together

Now you have all the things that may be required in your permit application:

1. Maps with the routes of your tours clearly marked (if they are required)
2. Written descriptions of each tour, its length of time, and a narrative regarding the sights you will see and how you communicate that information to your customers. Also include information on how you will conduct the tours in a way that is respectful to the area and its resources, i.e., a limited number of tourists on each tour, staying on roads and trails, packing out waste, leaving cultural resources just as you found them, leaving flowers and artifacts where you find them, etc.
3. Your first aid certification
4. Your food manager's certification (if applicable)
5. Your safety plan, including items that you will keep in your tour vehicle, how you address different kinds of emergencies, and how you will deal with human waste
6. Copies of your insurance policy summary sheets for all of your insurance policies
7. The application provided by the agency, fully filled out and signed.
8. A check for the permit application fee (if applicable)

9. Anything else the application requires that is not on this list (i.e., business plan)

Be sure to submit your application and its attached materials by the deadline given, if there is one. Submit it in person to the outdoor recreation planner, if possible. Now comes the hard part—waiting for your permit.

We had to wait for a permit for over a year when we dealt with the Bureau of Land Management for the first time. It was difficult and a financial hardship, as we did not have a backup plan, or options for other employment in the remote town where we chose to offer tours. When we applied to do tours and worked with the National Park Service, our permit application was reviewed, accepted, and the permit was issued to us within three weeks. As I said before, each agency will treat the commercial guide service permitting process differently.

Be sure to ask what kind of time frame you can expect to know about your permit when you submit your application. Not all the answers you get will be what actually happens in the course of this process, and it is entirely possible your application will be rejected out of hand due to other factors that have nothing to do with your qualifications or how complete your application package is. Once again, be prepared to wait--and possibly, be disappointed.

Remember, the people at the agency with whom you will be working do not create the rules; they just work there. Don't take your disappointment and anger out on them. Ask how

better to fill in the application and what steps, if any, you can take next time so you can succeed in your quest for a guiding permit.

Chapter Six: Operating Your Guide Service

Oh joy!! Your permit has arrived in the mail and you are an official outfitter that can offer commercial guide services.

Now what?

Choosing routes, tour options, and getting your insurance and permit will be relatively easy compared to all of the things you need to know to run successful tourism business in a small town adjacent to a national park or scenic wonder. This is where the hard work begins.

Risk Management

DISCLAIMER: If you have questions about any of the following items and issues listed in the Risk Management section below, consult with your insurance agent and/or an attorney. This section is not meant as a substitute for professional legal advice and is for educational purposes only. Anything that may arise in the course of your business operations that may have been addressed in this section should be discussed with an attorney licensed to practice in the state where your tours are operated.

There are many risks that you will need to consider thoroughly before you begin operation of your guide service. By the very nature of providing activity in the great outdoors, you take risks that could damage you financially, as well as emotionally and physically.

Every guide service will have different issues and factors that you need to consider in relation to risk management. *Call an attorney* if you have questions about anything listed below. During the entire time we owned and operated our guide service, we never had a claim filed against our insurance policy, we were never sued, we never lost or injured a client, and never had a client have a heart attack or other medical issue on a tour, except maybe a scratched knee. Other guides and outfitters have not been as lucky as we have. Things can and do happen on guided tours.

Emergencies & Breakdowns. Have a plan in place if you run into trouble out on a tour, especially if you are going to be guiding in a remote area. Your permit application may have asked you to write a section on how to deal with emergencies, whether they be a medical situation for you or your guests, or something like a vehicle breaking down. Do you have another vehicle as backup that can be driven out? Have you met and talked with the local towing company? Do you have cell phone coverage, or will a CB radio be a better form of communication with ambulance services and tow truck drivers? Think ahead, consider your location and tour type, and plan accordingly.

Employees. You may not want to hire employees right away. You may want to work alone and build up the business first. And that's a good thing. Employees are a liability in a business that has liability issues built in by the very nature of the activity. If you must hire someone to help, be sure to follow all your state and federal laws regarding employment practices, be

prepared to handle the payroll taxes and other things in regard to paying an employee, provide training for them, get references, and do a background check. I don't know how many stories I heard about guides that bounced from tour company to tour company that had anger issues, bad safety practices, or couldn't stop themselves from hitting on female guests and employees. I also recall another outfitter getting people to guide their trips for free with the promise of full time employment in the future, which never panned out for the "intern" guide. How would you like being a paying guest for that guide service? Obviously, this is not the way to hire employees. If you can make a living working on your own or with your spouse or partner, keep it that way for as long as possible.

Taking Children On Tours. I would just say here (and I talk about kids on tours more below) that if the child is at least ten years old there is a level of maturity both physically and emotionally that is suitable for more physical activities. In a tourist market, though, you can't be too choosy when you are starting up. Take into consideration the level of activity and the kind of tour when allowing children to participate. You may also want to make it a policy not to take children on trips unless their legal guardian or parent is also going. If it's a 4x4 tour, as long as the child does not legally need a car seat, they could probably go out on the tour. Just be aware that you cannot control a child's behavior, and if it gets out of hand, you will have to let the parents know so your other customers don't have a bad experience. We had the age definition for children and child's prices for our tours at 10-17 years of age. Children any younger

than ten were not allowed—that was our choice, considering the kind of hiking trips we were offering.

Don't Allow Dogs. I knew some guides that took their dogs out on guided hikes with their customers. I knew guides that allowed clients to bring their dogs along on hikes. This is such an incredible liability for a commercial guiding enterprise on public lands. Leave your pet at home—and don't allow customers to bring their pets, either. You could get your permit revoked, and your insurance might not cover any claim arising from a tour that had a dog along. This is very serious, and many land management agencies have their own rules about dogs apart from commercial activities. Everyone has their own comfort level, and some instances may allow for a client bringing a dog (a private hiker shuttle, perhaps), but in most cases, especially if you are taking different groups out on one outing, a “no pets” policy is best.

Language To Avoid on Your Web Site and in Marketing Materials. This is something we never considered before we began a guide service, but you wouldn't believe how many lawsuits have arisen from poorly chosen language in a guide's marketing materials. Never use the word “safe” or “safety,” never imply that your service is the “safest,” and just never use any part of the word “safe” or anything that could imply safety or ease on a tour, like “risk-free,” “easy,” or “secure” anywhere in your marketing. Ever. Yep, this is all for real. Like I said, ask your attorney about appropriate language for sales and marketing, and make sure those words are never used on your

web site, brochures, or even over the phone when taking a reservation from a customer.

Pre-screening Your Guests. Your web site should state very clearly how difficult or stressful an activity offered can be. If you have size limitations for a certain activity, as in, a guest cannot be morbidly obese to go out on a slot canyon tour, you should state on your web site the maximum size that the slot canyon area on the hike will accommodate. Most people will not sign up for something they cannot do, but every now and then you will have people that overestimate their abilities. You have to be able to tell them “no, you cannot go,” when you meet them in person if you feel that they cannot possibly endure for the entire hike, or easily fit through a small space. In that case, let them go peacefully and do not keep their deposit; return it in full if you are making the call that they cannot go out on the hike. You don’t want a scene in front of your other guests. If you take a reservation over the phone, be sure to explain the activity in great detail and affirm that all people in the caller’s group are up to the experience.

Liability Waivers. Some insurance companies, or perhaps your attorney, will want your guests to sign a liability waiver before you take them out on a tour. Some will consider the activity (usually a 4x4 tour) and not require a waiver. Your insurance agent will let you know if they want one, depending on the activity and kind of guide service you will be providing. After explaining the risks involved and showing the waiver to your guest, should they choose not to go on the tour, don't beg them

to stay. Don't argue with a guest that feels they cannot do the activities that your tour provides. Just let them go out the door. If you have a policy regarding deposit money, deal with that issue as it arises, and use your own judgment in deciding whether or not you will refund their deposit.

Injuries and Deaths on a Tour. We never had to deal with either of these scenarios when we owned our guide service, but a few people we know did have to deal with the death of a client on their watch and they were sued out of business. Not all guide services that have had a death on their tours were sued for negligence due to other factors surrounding the death—insurance money is paid, and it's back to business as usual. If something catastrophic does occur on a tour, as soon as you get back to your home base, don't charge the other patrons that were on the trip. The local police or land agency law enforcement officers may want to interview them and you. It's going to be rough. Don't make it worse by charging them for the tour.

Call your insurance agent and an attorney as soon as possible. That's all I can tell you about this scenario—but there is so much more to know than what I have offered here. If you will be engaging in a high-risk guiding activity like ropes and climbing, ice climbing, water sports or longer, most stressful excursions like a multi-day backpacking trip, do not hesitate to call an attorney and ask as many questions as you can about how to handle this scenario should it occur. I hope it never happens to you.

If you are concerned about these issues, you may want to purchase this DVD about risk management for outfitters and guides. It was put together by an attorney and it covers quite a range of topics:

https://www.americaoutdoors.org/america_outdoors/risk_management/

How are you collecting payment? With all the options available today, you should have a smart phone or tablet and sign up for a card swiper with www.Squareup.com , www.PayPal.com , or whoever else is offering that kind of smart phone/device card swiping service. Back when I was a guide, in order to accept credit cards, I had to pay exorbitant credit card processing fees to even enter a card number over an internet site. When I opened an outfitting store, I had to pay another fee to purchase a \$700 card swiping machine so I could physically accept a credit card as payment. Most people on vacation pay for everything with a credit card. Don't limit their options with a "cash only" payment policy; cater to your customers, make it easy for them to pay you for your services.

Today, all of those ridiculous fees, bulky card swipers, and crazy ten-page applications are a thing of the past with smart phone and tablet technology. Learn it and use it to make payment easy for your clients. If you are located in an area with limited cell phone coverage, or wired-only internet, you will have to enter the credit card information online, and that may limit your choices in companies that process credit card transactions, but it will still be easier than it was ten years ago. You can even

offer a discount for customers if they choose prepayment via PayPal online—I would have done that if the service was available for more widespread use when I was a guide.

It is also customary to not collect full payment until after the tour is finished. At that time, you can also, hopefully, collect a gratuity. As a service provider, you have every expectation of receiving a tip for a job well done; be sure to include a tip or gratuity line in your card service processing invoice so customers can also tip you more easily.

Where will you first meet people that sign up for your tours?

Do you have a store front? Are you meeting them at the trail head? Are you meeting them at a partnering business like a motel, restaurant or coffee shop? Make that clear in the reservation confirmation email that you send back to them. When we guided at Grand Canyon, the company we worked for had an agreement with a local fast food restaurant, where we could meet our tour guests in their parking lot—win/win. We would also pick up customers at their motels. When we guided in Escalante we had a small, colorful storefront with a parking lot. We sold camping gear, books, maps, and other fun stuff. Guiding in Escalante wasn't as busy as work at the Grand Canyon, so we had to supplement our income apart from the guide service.

How much are you charging? Do you have a warm body minimum to go out on a tour, i.e., at least two people must be signed up for a tour to depart? Do you have a private tour fee? And if so, does it cover operational costs that negate

implementing the “warm body minimum”? Are your prices comparable with other local guides? A good rule of thumb is to charge per person, with a lesser charge for children (if they are able to go out on the kind of tours you provide).

We always had a two person minimum, and then a private tour fee that would supersede that rule if someone wanted to pay that. Our prices included transportation as well.

For example:

The Half-Day Desert Hike: \$60 per person, \$35 for children ages 10 to 17, two person minimum.

Private Half-day Desert Hike: \$200.

The upshot to implementing a two person minimum for your tours is two-fold: you will always be able to turn a profit on your tours, and you won't be working as much for less money, i.e., taking out one person for \$60. Every now and then, a single person would call up and want to go out on a tour that had no other folks signed up. Of course, they wanted to go out at the \$60 rate, but we had to remind them if we had no other people signed up, the tour would be canceled unless they wanted to pay for two people, or hire us privately and go out with no other people.

We would also try to work with the lone tourist and get them booked on a tour with other people so they could pay the single rate, and most of the time we could accommodate them in that regard. If you like the idea of a two person minimum for each

tour, make sure that is clearly marked for each tour offered on your web site.

Are your tours kid-friendly? Children younger than ten were usually not able to take half a day of hiking, so we made that clear in our marketing material. If you are offering 4x4 tours, children of any age can usually go out. We did not allow children and infants that were still in car seats to go out on any tours, and we made that clear on our web site.

Take into consideration other people you may be signing up to go out on a tour. Do they want to be stuck in a vehicle or out hiking with children that may or may not be well-behaved? If you have a tour that is more family-oriented, make it clear on your web site so people with children will sign up for that trip and not one that may or may not be appropriate for a small child. Also list the age range and price for children if they are welcome to join a tour.

Vehicles & Scheduling Logistics

The smaller the truck, the less people you can take out on a tour—and your profit margin will be small compared to your expenses. A Jeep-like vehicle is nice, and people love the idea of a tour riding in said vehicle, but it limits the ability to create profit, unless you are charging an outrageously high fee per person—and in that case, you won't be working as much as you can. Don't limit your profitability by driving a small SUV. We liked larger SUVs that could hold at least eight people, like a Suburban or an Expedition. Those aren't real sexy off-road

vehicle choices, but believe me when I tell you that people are definitely more into what you have to share with them and show them than the kind of vehicle you are providing for transportation.

The more people you can get in the truck on a tour, the more money you make, and the less you have to work—also meaning, you need to schedule certain tours on certain days of the week. This may not be true if you are working at a busy national park or monument. You may have enough business in those places to go out on tours all day, seven days a week. You can work as much as you want, seven days a week if you have a limited season when tourists visit. But, in order to avoid burn out, you need to work smarter. Plan for days off from certain tours, and encourage advance reservations from tourists.

If you are working in a slower, less visited market, you increase profitability by offering certain tours on certain days—then, you can pack as many people into the truck as possible. If you get more calls for a particular tour on days you haven't planned to run it, then you can decide if you'd like to work. Otherwise, *you are running the tour*. You tell the tourist when the tour is departing and they will usually change their schedule and go along with your schedule. We always encouraged advance reservations as much as possible, as days we needed to rest up were sometimes punctuated with people calling and wanting a tour or hiker shuttle services. Of course, we would always encourage the walk-ins to get on the tour that was already booked for departure on the next day. Or you can make the

decision to have an “advance reservations only” policy, thereby tightly controlling your work schedule.

Be sure to get a cool sign or sticker for the sides of the tour truck that matches the design on your web site. People may have seen your web site planning their trip, but not made a reservation. Your truck with a matching decal may re-ignite the memory of checking out the web site, and they may sign up for a trip (again, steer them toward a tour that is already booked and departing unless it is worth your time, i.e., a large group or a private tour).

If you are not offering transportation services in any way, and are instead meeting your customers at a trail head or visitor center and walking from there, you can sign up as many people as you want within the limitations of your permit, of course.

Chapter Seven: Online Marketing

It is a fact that most people pre-plan their vacation activities online and make a reservation using the internet. YOU MUST HAVE A WEB SITE. Aside from your permit, this is the most important part of owning a guide service. It is worth the money and the time to invest in a professional web site. I cannot stress this enough. If you have no clue about how to create or build a web site, you will need to learn or hire someone to do it for you. Your web site needs certain pages and options on it as well that help your customers connect to you and make a reservation for your services.

Your dot.com name. It is important to buy a dot.com name for your site that will rank high in search engine listings for activities in your chosen market area. For instance, having Billsexcellentadventures.com is not a good choice. Is it a movie? Is it blog? Who knows? And, it will get lost in the search results for guide services in your area. If you choose something like CanyonToursandHikes.com, that's much better, as you can see.

Home Page. This is the first thing your potential customers will see. Have a nice banner with your company name, phone number, and contact email that also shows up on every page of the site. Have a nice, beautiful slide show with pictures of the actual places where you will take them on the tours. Have clear navigation links to other pages. Make your first paragraph on this page one that includes your company name, where your guide service is located, and what kind of tours you do. In fact, you only really need that one paragraph on your home page.

Search engines generally search for the first 25 words on a home page to rank it; make sure all the good key words people might use to find you are there in that first sentence of the first paragraph.

About Page. This is the page where you get to talk about you. The biggest part of the tour is the guide, right? Talk up your experience, your first aid certifications, and anything else you can think of that might be a selling point for a customer. Use a flattering photograph of yourself, preferably doing something outdoorsy.

Tours Page. This page will have descriptions, pictures, and pricing for each of your tours. Describe what customers can expect, what kind of shape they should be in, and if it's kid-friendly. Clearly explain each tour and its level of difficulty (if it's a hiking tour), the length of time it will take, appropriate equipment and footwear that the tourist should bring, and physical and age considerations. Have prices and departure days and times clearly stated. Place rates for hiker shuttles here, too—or, create a new page for hiker shuttles with all the rates and routes you service. I've seen a few tour sites that don't have pricing. I think not listing prices is shady, and I wouldn't hire a guide service without knowing the cost for the service up front.

Online Reservation Page. This page will have an automated form that your web site visitors can fill in to reserve a tour. That information will then be automatically emailed to you. Have all the tours, times, days, and price info on this page for the

visitors to choose. Have an area for credit card information and its billing address. Be clear that if the tour they choose is filled to capacity, you will contact them for other days and options.

Once you receive the email with information from the online form, and you can accommodate their desired tour option, put them on the calendar, and send the client a confirmation email with the date, time, number of people, and where you will meet to begin the tour. If they call and make a reservation, send out the exact same confirmation email. If you do not want to take reservations online via an automated form, but would rather talk with all of your customers, that is your decision. But, having the form available is good customer service, as most people make reservations using automated forms for everything they do on their vacation.

More About The Confirmation Email. If you want, include your disclaimers and policies in the confirmation email as well. If you charge a deposit fee for a reservation and collect the rest of the payment after the tour, make sure you let the customer know (somewhere on the online reservation page, before they hit “enter” and send off the info) that their credit card will be charged for that amount and the balance will be due after the tour. Reiterate that policy in the confirmation email as well. If your credit card processing firm allows, have a policy to keep the deposit amount if your guests are a no-show. Otherwise, you will be taken advantage of at least two or three times a year with someone making a reservation and not showing up.

Include a liability waiver as an attachment with your confirmation email if your insurance provider wants one from your customers. Include language that states their likeness may be used in marketing and promotional materials, including the web site and social media sites. Let customers opt out of being included on promotional materials if they ask—you will have many other clients that won't mind.

Selling Other Items. If you are going to accept credit cards, why not sell other items on your web site, like guide books, maps, tee shirts, or anything else a tourist might buy? It might be worth the effort to set up a shopping page on your site to have another stream of income if you are working in a tourist market that isn't as busy as a top-tier national park.

An internet presence is crucial to your business. If you are not a web master, it would be worth the money to have a site created for your guide service by a professional that has created sites for the hospitality industry before. If you cannot afford to hire a web master, be ready to learn a whole new skill to create and maintain your web presence. Also set up business pages on social marketing sites, like Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Upload pictures of your happy tourists on your tour and talk about how the day went. Allow your customers to comment on your trips on these sites as well. Be vigilant for people spamming your social marketing sites, or of competing guide services placing false or derogatory statements on these pages (it happens). You should have full administrative control of your social marketing pages, check them twice a day, and delete

comments that are not truthful, helpful, or relevant. Encourage your guests to write a review for your tours on sites like Yelp.com or TripAdvisor.com.

Buying links to your site on local business association web sites or chamber of commerce web sites is also very important. Look these sites up and see what kind of links you can get with them, and how much that will cost. It is marketing money that must be spent in order to make money, and it's very important to get your company's information on all kinds of general tourism sites for the area where you are guiding. Usually, state-run tourism sites will provide you a small listing with a link back to your web site at no cost. You may want to consider joining the official organization representing outfitters, www.americaoutdoors.org They too have a directory for their members with links to their web sites, as well as a plethora of other important information about all things guide and outfitter.

Ads in the back of relevant magazines that include a link on the companion web site for the magazine may be worth the money--or not. Again, it's marketing money that has to be spent. Get creative, and try to get your site linked to as many free places as possible first before spending thousands of dollars you may never recoup. If you operate in an area where there are a lot of travel journalists coming to write about all the great things to see and do, be sure to get a mention in their article. Your web site will get a large increase in hits and views if your company and its web site are mentioned in a travel article or news piece.

Chapter Eight: The Hospitality Industry

So you are in business. Your guide service is running, and you are offering your tours. There are some issues to take into consideration regarding customer service and providing a good experience for you guests. Hospitality is really about using your common courtesy and common sense when catering to a paying customer.

Communication. If you are explaining your service clearly on your web site and over the phone, that is the first step in providing quality customer service. Just imagine being your customer: what kind of questions would you have if you were going to hire a guide service? How would you feel if you were thinking a tour would be one thing, yet when you arrived, it was something totally different altogether? Stay consistent, be clear with your language in your marketing, over the phone, and in person, and you will have very few difficulties in meeting your guest's expectations.

Keeping the Schedule You Set. Staying true to the departure times and days you set is so very important. Never leave a guest hanging, don't be late, and never book a tour and then cancel it because you don't feel like doing it—unless you are so sick that you could not safely conduct the tour. If you cannot go out on the tour for whatever reason, try to accommodate your guest's schedule as much as possible when rescheduling the tour. If you cannot do that, refund all deposit money and offer profuse apologies. Find another tour company that you feel reasonably comfortable with recommending and offer their services. Do

everything you can to maintain a positive perception of your company with your guest. The bottom line here, though, is keep your word with your guests. This is also part of providing high-quality customer service.

The Customer Is Always Right—98% of the Time. We want customers to be glad they hired a guide service to enhance the enjoyment of their trip. Barring unforeseen issues, like a customer being physically unable to join a tour (see Part Three, Pre-screening Your Guests), whatever the customer wants you should try to provide, within reason, within the limits of your permit, and within the comfort zone of your other customers. As always, if a customer wants something super-spectacular, point them to the private tour option. Be aware that even though you are bored with the scenery, your guests have possibly never seen these sights before and will be very impressed. So don't talk-down the area if you are bored with it. Stay upbeat, and communicate that the natural beauty they will be experiencing is amazing, unique, and worth the price of your tour. If you have communicated well, as far as your company's policies and expectations of what the tour will provide as an experience, your customer will be happy.

If the customer is not happy with the tour when it is over and the time to pay up comes around, you as the owner of the business need to decide for yourself whether or not you will allow them to take your tour for free. 98% of customers will be incredibly happy with the tour; most people are in a great mood because they are on vacation. There will, however,

always be that 2% that just hates everything, including you and your tour. Mercifully, it happens rarely and you will not have to deal with the grumpy guy very often. Stick to your guns, and if you've clearly communicated your company's policies, they should pay you.

As the tour operator and owner, you are also responsible in making sure all of your guests are comfortable with the group that is going out together. There might be a situation that arises where you have a complete jerk checking in that could ruin the tour for everyone. It is within your power to refuse service to troublemakers, people that seem intoxicated, or seem mentally "off"; don't make the tour uncomfortable for other paying customers, and don't put yourself at risk by taking out a guest that could turn into a liability. Once again, if you are refusing service to someone, refund their deposit if one was taken, and send them on their way.

Housekeeping. If you are providing transportation as part of your tours, is your vehicle relatively clean? Are the seat belts easy to get to? Do you have extra bottles of water available? Or prepackaged snacks like energy bars, cookies, or chips? Be sure to do a cursory check of your vehicle after each tour and make sure there is no trash or dirt on the seats or floorboards. Make sure all the seat belts are easy to get to and working. Check the oil and all the tires after each trip--better safe than sorry. Restock the water, snacks, and anything used out of the first aid kit. If you find something a guest left behind, do your best to get that item back to them before they leave the area.

Chapter Nine: Keeping it All Going

Let's fast-forward a bit and say you are winding down your first season as a guide. Things went well, you had a great season with no crabby tourists, and you were able to pay off your start-up costs and pay some other bills. What happens now?

The first thing that you should do is year-end accounting for all the tours you conducted. Sometimes, a land agency will want a percentage of all the money you earned taking tours on public land for a year, and you should be able to provide that to them with a simple accounting of your income from the tours.

Keep Back Funds to Cover Start-up Costs & Permit Renewal.

Another thing you may want to take into consideration is the next season's start-up costs. Let's say you have no tour income from Thanksgiving to St. Patrick's Day. Have you saved back enough money to pay bills over the lean months? Do you have enough money to pay for your various insurance premiums that will be due when you restart your regular tour schedule?

Does the land management agency with whom you are working need you to renew your permit for the next year or is your permit good for a longer period of time? This is important to know, as some agencies will NOT send out a "renewal letter" letting you know your permit is about to expire. It is important that you keep track of when permits need to be renewed and if there is a cost or a re-certification for first aid or food handler's card associated with that. The old adage is true, "it's always something." Just don't let it creep up on you. Stay ahead of the

game and be ready to take care of what you need to do to keep your permit valid, because sometimes it may not get reissued if you miss your renewal, or you may be charged late filing fees, or you may be charged with some minor offense related to illegal guiding.

Keep Your Marketing Up to Date. You don't need to update your web site often, but if it becomes dated, or your prices are not correct, you need to fix it immediately. Don't let your marketing reflect one price or expectation, then not deliver it to a customer.

Is there a good enough market base at those winter outdoor and RV shows across the country for it to be worth your attendance? Booths are costly at these shows, but it could be a great place to reach out and sign people up on tours, especially if you have a permit at a top-tier national park or monument. Just because it's your down-time doesn't mean you can't be working to create more business for the coming season.

Keep Learning New Things. Would you like to know more about web sites, internet marketing, and other aspects of web site upkeep? No time like the end of the tour season to delve into this activity, which will pay you in the long run if you decide to take over your web site duties. Also, it is helpful to learn aspects of marketing and customer engagement no matter what kind of business you are running. Learning about web sites and internet marketing will help you be a better businessperson overall.

Head to lectures about wildlife, history, archaeology, or any other scientific endeavor that is going on in the place where you do tours. Keep up with the latest theories, and talk to leaders in their respective fields about new discoveries and local places of interest for the scientific community. Stay fresh on all the things tourists might ask you about! Plus, it helps to meet the local science folks. They are usually some of the best people you will ever meet, and they are generally excited to tell people about what they are doing.

It's not about you, it's about your customers--the tourists. Are you getting tired of hiking that same old route on your tour, tired of giving the same talk, answering the same questions? You know a place that is “cooler,” and that place is off your permit allowances? HOLD UP. If you want to change a route, or anything at all about your permit, call your outdoor recreation planner and ask how to go about doing such a thing. If your permit only allows exactly the routes or activities that you requested the first time you submitted your application, you will need to find out how to make changes to that and go about it properly by consulting with the outdoor recreation planner that signed the last O.K. to get you a permit. Don't change anything about your tours without clearing it with the planner first.

The tourists, the people that pay your bills and give you money, will be impressed no matter where you go or what you show them, truly. Remember, they are tourists. That means they don't live there, and they don't get to see this scenery every

day. They will love and appreciate anyplace that isn't a cubicle in a big city, that I can guarantee. Don't worry that your route isn't "cool" enough or cutting-edge; people from Roeland Park, Kansas, won't know that, and will think what you're showing them is incredible. Trust me. You are the MC, you are the tour guide, and people that have entrusted you with a few hours of their precious vacation are going to think you and where ever you are guiding is the best thing since sliced bread.

Chapter Ten: Small Town Living & The Competition

If you are moving to a small town or gateway community adjacent to a national park, forest, monument, or other well-known scenic area to start your business, and you have never lived in a small town before, there are a few things you should know about that.

All kinds of interesting people live in a small town outside of a national park. Many of them are going to be small business owners in the tourist trade, like you. Many of them are going to be old locals, people whose families have been in that town for generations. Other people are going to be government employees who work at the park/forest/monument. Depending on the size of the town, you will meet new friends, and socialize with people you may never have considered socializing with before you moved to the town. Living in a small town really is a learning experience on a whole new level, especially when it comes to dealing with people.

I have many experiences and anecdotes from moving to a small town to start up a guide service, and not all of them are pleasant. Just be aware that to fulfill your dream of owning a guide service in a place where you will have a decent number of customers comes at a bit of a personal price. Your town may not have a hospital, there may be limited choices of stores and shopping close by, you may not be able to just hop in the car and go buy what you need, and there may not be any night life to speak of. You might be ordering stuff off the internet and waiting a couple of days before it arrives--and these are only

the logistical hardships that being in a small town over a period of time can present. Dealing with people is another issue altogether.

The old locals may not like you. After all, you are moving somewhere to guide people around their stomping grounds--and they have lived there their whole lives! In their eyes, if you are catering to tourists that want to see the pretty rocks and trees, you are possibly an environmentalist in opposition of heirloom job opportunities like logging and mining. Some small town locals might be verbally, or in rare cases, physically hostile toward anyone that is a new person in their town. Rumors may come back to you that you are an undercover FBI agent (I heard it about another business owner), you are building a gas station (a friend building an inn heard that about himself), you are a drug dealer (every guide in my town heard that about themselves), or you work undercover for EarthFirst or The Wilderness Society, trying to close roads on federal land (I heard that too). The old locals probably don't like the park/monument/forest employees or the government, either. Everyone has their opinion, but your business will rely on a positive interaction with that federal or state agency and its employees—they will be your de facto partner in your business efforts. Keep that in mind.

Also keep in mind everybody knows everybody in a small town. Keep your opinions about other people, politics, and environmental issues to yourself until you get to know more townsfolk. As much fun as it is to gather socially with folks for a

beverage or two, if old locals are in the mix keep an eye open for trouble and leave at the first hint that something could go wrong.

If you are moving to a well-known tourist area, you will also have other tour companies and guides that will be competing with you for tourist dollars.

A Word About The Competition

We all want people to like us. We all want to make new friends, and have a relationship with other business owners that do similar work. However, there are businesses that will also be offering tours that will not have your best interests at heart, for obvious reasons. Other similar tour companies might want to offer you deals, like giving you overflow if they are busy, or wanting a commission if they sell one of your tours. Some of these people may make offers to work with you, get to know you and your business operations, then work behind your back badmouthing your services, lying about your business and experience to agency employees and tourists, and outright stealing business from you.

In their eyes, it's all part of doing business. In fact, the other group of people that you need to watch more closely than the old locals is the business owners that "got there first," so to speak. Not everyone operating a tourist business will feel this way about you, but many small business owners and other guide services will be hostile towards you, or actively working against you. It happened to me.

Small-minded business owners that don't like competition are rampant in tourist markets. If you are new to a small tourist town, just lay back, keep a low profile, and keep your nose to your own grindstone. The whiners, morally challenged crappy people, and various sociopaths will make themselves known in approximately six to eighteen months after you meet them, sometimes sooner. So until you get to know folks in town, keep your business intentions as private as possible.

You might be able to work out partnerships with other business owners that would be a better fit, like hotels, motels, bed and breakfast inns, and restaurants. It would be in your best interest to focus solely on *your business* for the first year or two you are in business, get the details right for your service, then go to other businesses if you both can benefit from working together, like a tour and lodging package with a local inn or motel. Unless you are offering vastly different kinds of services and tours, don't reach out to other guide services. I'm sure some of them are actually nice people, but this is your business and you need to focus on you. Keep your interaction with other guide services professional—and minimal.

Epilogue

I think I've covered everything that you will need to know practically, and some other things that may or may not have been thought of in the great excitement to start your own business.

I truly hope that this information will serve you well, and help you avoid some headaches that I had to muddle through on my own when I started a guide service.

If, after guiding tours for awhile, something comes up and you can't find the answers here, please feel free to email me at julia@traildirt.com and I will do my best to answer your question, or at least point you in the direction of someone who can. Who knows...your question might become part of an update in the second edition!

I truly appreciate your interest in guiding, and in finding out as much as possible before making a go of it.

Good luck, be good, and may business be good to you.