

HIRING A CHARTER COACH?

Ensure your group's satisfaction
by asking a few questions
before you buy



Shopping for a motor coach charter company to transport your group can be a confusing and uncertain experience for consumers. Prices and services vary from company to company, and healthy competition exists for your business. Selecting a company on the basis of price alone could lead to disappointment down the road. There are some unscrupulous operators who exploit a competitive advantage gained through non-compliance with the laws that regulate the motor coach industry.

Ontario's motor coach industry is proud of its exemplary safety record and continuously strives to provide the highest level of safety, service and value to consumers. Transport Canada has praised the bus industry for its remarkable safety record as compared to other modes of travel. While safety and compliance pays, it also "costs". Responsible, legal, and reputable coach companies make considerable investments to recruit and train suitable drivers, monitor driver condition

and performance, inspect and maintain their vehicles to prescribed standards, obtain required insurance coverage, comply with hours of service limits, etc. Unfortunately there are a few companies that don't. These companies can operate, albeit for a limited time, by cutting corners and shaving operating expenses in areas of safety, maintenance, insurance and evading other government regulations.

The Ontario Motor Coach Association has provided this list of suggested questions to help consumers select a charter company with confidence. Coach companies should be comfortable with your questions and prepared to respond. Assuring your charter company is fully legal and responsible before your trip can prevent disappointment down the road.

These helpful consumer tips are brought to you by the Ontario Motor Coach Association, a trade organization representing tour operators and motor coach companies in Ontario.



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Questions smart consumers ask when shopping for motor coach charter services

- ❑ **Does your company have a 9-digit Ontario CVOR number? If so, what is it?**
 - ❑ **Could you fax to me a recent copy of your Level 1 CVOR abstract?** *A CVOR Abstract is a one page document issued by the Ministry of Transportation available to the general public summarizing a company's record for a two-year period.*
 - ❑ **Does your company have a Public Vehicle Operating Licence issued by the Ontario Highway Transport Board that authorizes the service being offered? If yes, what is the licence number?** *If the trip is beyond Ontario borders, the company must hold an Extra-Provincial Operating Licence issued by the Board. Licences can be verified by calling the Ontario Highway Transport Board at 416-326-6732.*
 - ❑ **What is the name of your insurance company? What is your policy number?**
 - ❑ **Has your company filed a Certificate of Insurance with the Ontario Highway Transport Board?** *Ontario law requires a public vehicle operator to carry \$8 million in insurance for buses with 13 or more passengers. Insurance Certificates can be verified by calling the Ontario Highway Transport Board at 416-326-6732.*
 - ❑ **What is your company's policy regarding the number of hours a driver can work? Can you affirm that our driver will be in full compliance with the Ontario (and US rules) throughout the course of our trip?** *Ontario law restricts driving time to 13 hours in a day, after which the driver must take 8 consecutive hours off-duty before driving again. In the US, these hours are 10 and 8 respectively. It is unlawful for any person to request or require a driver to break these rules.*
 - ❑ **Will our coach have a valid safety inspection sticker?** *Ontario law requires buses to undergo a mechanical inspection every six months. The safety sticker must be placed on the front right corner of the coach and indicate the day and month of inspection.*
- ### For Travel to the USA
- ❑ **Does your company hold an Operating Authority issued by the United States Department of Transportation? If so, what is your US DOT number?** *The US DOT number can be verified through the US DOT web site at: <http://www.safersys.org/> In addition, insurance required by US DOT for US travel (US \$5 million) can be verified on this web site. The US DOT number must be displayed on the side of the coach.*
 - ❑ **Are your drivers enrolled in a drug and alcohol-testing program as required by US DOT? Can you provide proof?** *The US Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations require all bus drivers who enter the USA to be enrolled in a drug and alcohol-testing program.*

Additional things to consider:

- ▶ **Maintenance**
Don't be afraid to ask searching questions when it comes to the company's vehicle maintenance practices, such as "who inspects and maintains the coaches... where are the coaches maintained?"
- ▶ **References**
Be wary of companies that will not provide references attesting to their safety performance and service quality.
- ▶ **Driver training**
Ask questions to satisfy yourself that the company conducts regular driver training and evaluation.
- ▶ **Vehicle age and amenities**
Determine the age of the coach if that's important to your group. Motor coaches are solid and well made vehicles that have a much longer service life than cars, so older equipment that has been well cared for can indeed provide safe, clean and reliable transportation. Be sure to ask about amenities that are important to your group, such as video and sound systems, lavatory, reclining seats, wheelchair lifts, luggage storage, air conditioning, etc.
- ▶ **Back-up in the event of an emergency**
Even the most modern, well-maintained coaches can experience an unforeseen mechanical failure. Reputable and experienced companies have 24-hour back-up measures and contingency plans in place to minimize disruption and delays en-route.
- ▶ **When in doubt...check it out**
Legal, responsible and safe companies have nothing to hide and will proudly show you their maintenance and operations facility. If you're unsure whether the company's services will meet your needs, ask to drop by to see before you buy.

