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## Which Luxury Tour? 5 Critical Factors For Choosing A Luxury Tour

By Guy Rubin

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You've paid top dollar for your "luxury tour" but find yourself continually eating in shabby restaurants, puzzled that tourist sites shut early each afternoon while souvenir stores seem permanently open. You are angered not only by your guide's increasingly obvious dishonesty but also by the waste of your valuable vacation time.

This disappointing but common experience springs from the confusion people often have in choosing among a plethora of luxury tours, each of which claims to offer much the same product. This brief article describes 5 critical factors to help travelers read between the lines of glossy brochures and help them better assess the relative merits of rival tour operators.

#### 1) Trustworthiness & Security – the first filter

Typically, tour operators will ask you to pay for your tour in advance, in which case you will want to be sure that the operator is trustworthy and that your funds are secure. Such security works on a number of levels. On the most basic level – if your intended tour operator is not registered in a country with a reliable legal system and does not offer some sort of financial guarantee in your home country (surety bond or trust account scheme), then your deposited funds are as liable to disappear as whisky on St. Patrick's Day.

On a secondary level, especially in an industry as susceptible to risk as the travel industry, you want to be sure that even if the operator goes bankrupt (the fate of many after September 11, 2001) your funds will nonetheless be returned to you. For this reason, look for companies which are adequately bonded or – for greater security – for companies running industry-approved trust account systems, where your funds are independently held, usually by a major bank, until after the end of your tour.

Conclusion: For your own peace of mind, it is advisable to only deal directly with tour operators from countries with reliable legal systems, and then only with those tour operators which advertise surety bonds or industry-approved trust account systems.

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### 2) "Boutique" tour operator" versus "The Jack Of All Trades" tour operator

The tour industry divides into innumerable countries and activities. Whereas one tour company might specialize in one niche area, such as walking tours in the Loire valley ("Boutique" tour operator), another might offer every sort of luxury vacation in every country ("Jack Of All Trades" operator), including several walking tours in France. In this scenario, it is unlikely that the generalist tour operator can deliver a better like-for-like product than the specialist. Certainly, the generalist should offer a lower price since they are a high volume player. In terms of quality and service however, the specialist will always have the upper hand.

Conclusion: Ask your friends and travel agent, research the internet – if service and quality is what you value, find a boutique tour operator focussing on your specific region or activity.

### 3) Expert Status – the tour operator must be an expert on the destination

How well a tour operator knows their destination or activity will feed directly into your enjoyment of their product. If the operator simply sub-contracts all aspects of their tours to a local groundhandler, then you should expect abysmal service since the local groundhandler has a free hand to minimize costs at your expense. If the tour operator is simply decorating a local groundhandler's product with sophisticated features, the tour will share much in common with a tourist class tour apart from price. Instead, you should seek a tour operator, who is so familiar with the destination that they have a wide selection of hotels, restaurants and special events exclusive to that operator. You should aim to find the tour operator that specializes in your particular interest.

Conclusion: Test your tour operator with difficult questions. Find out if they really know their stuff.

### 4) References – the best judge of a tour company is a past customer

Good PR is available to any company at a price. Advertising in its various forms is not necessarily indicative of the quality of a company's tours. The best source of such information is past customers. When interviewing such a referee, you need to bear two things in mind. Since no company is going to forward a dissatisfied customer as a reference, what you need to look for is a customer who reports services over and above their initial expectations. Secondly you should value a referee's response in relation to their background. The response of an experienced luxury traveler should be given greater weight.

Conclusion: Request references, interview them thoroughly and weigh their responses accordingly.

### 5) Watch out for exclusions, particularly in tours to "difficult" countries

First, make sure you understand what is not included in your tour price. If the itinerary appears vague, contact the operator to find out exactly what the situation is. Areas where tour operators often scrimp are:

(i) Accompanying Tour Director – will they send your group with a tour director. If so, is the tour director local or Western? How much training have they received?

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- (ii) Meals – count how many are included and find out what their quality is.
- (iii) Domestic Airfare – often this is presented as an add-on.
- (iv) Tips to guides and drivers – if excluded, find out how much you are expected to pay per person per day.
- (v) Optional Add-ons – find out the per person price of each optional add-on you are interested in.

When you understand your tour's exclusions, think about the distinction between visiting "easy" and "difficult" countries. Even without language skills, the savvy tourist can handle himself effectively in Europe or North America. The same person will most probably be at sea in such countries as Russia or China. It is in these countries that exclusions for meals, accompanying tour directors or else "optional" add-on tours can become sources of displeasure.

For example, in "difficult" countries not having an accompanying tour director creates two problems. The first is logistical. Typically, the travelers will fly from airport to airport meeting local guides at each one. Should something go wrong during the airport transit, for example a cancelled flight, the customers will be stranded with no one to turn to for help. Anyone who has passed through a Russian airport knows how unsavoury this can be. The second problem is that in these circumstances, the

tour operator is trusting the local guide not to take advantage of their customers. They are hoping that the guides, usually supplied by the local groundhandler, will not abuse the customers time and enjoyment by taking them to commission-paying restaurants and souvenir shops . This is a common problem with even the most respected luxury tour operators. Therefore, those traveling to "difficult" countries should note whether or not they are going to be accompanied on the tour. A well-trained, accompanying tour director adds to the price of the tour, but so does wasting your money and time on a disappointing tour.

Conclusion – Avoid tours to "difficult" countries that exclude meals and an accompanying tour director.

Guy Rubin is a founding partner of Imperial Tours (<http://www.imperialtours.net>), a boutique tour operator offering luxury tours of China.

### **Luxury Watch Collection**

**By Archie Artienda**

When the topic is luxury what is the first thing come to your mind. Expensive? In this world we have to face the reality of truth that only rich people can afford to buy a luxury collection or a highly branded luxury, some cases are just for their egos. Having a luxury watches or luxury things are the great factor in our lifestyle and Status. Some Replica watches provide the not so affluent with the opportunity to sport incredible imitations of various luxury watches like: Rolex and other expensive luxury watches for a fraction of the price.

On the other hand, the downside of replica watches is that in one way it could be considered a form of stealing. Like buying bootleg copies of CDs or DVD's or illegally downloading music from the internet.

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You'll have to make that call but replica watches do "borrow" the copyrighted designs of the luxury watches. It is not a good idea copying the original version and do some clone without the rights, is stealing. But it is very different nowadays. Ok, let say that do u have one of the luxury clones. Well the main points and factor is, does the clone one have the same quality of the original luxury watch?

Great branded watches nowadays are advertising online, you can now have the chance to view the branded luxury watches. Some of the other watches company offers a great cost and a good quality that can satisfy the client.

Anyway, there are lots of branded watches now days like. If you wish to see the real brand of watches come and take a little tour on this site. At Luxury Watch Collection that provides you with the highest grade of replica watches of some of the most expensive originals found on the planet. At some of the lowest prices possible online, we provide you with the "class at a fraction of the cost"½. And view the great luxury watch collection that can satisfy you.

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