

A Whitepaper for the  
Members of UMA and their Customers  
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# A Guide to Purchasing Professional Motorcoach Services



*What it takes to drive your business.*

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## Introduction

From time-to-time UMA will commission studies and guides for our membership and for the industry we serve. The results are published here and distributed to the appropriate audience. In the past several decades, certain guides have been more popular and requested more often that we have rewritten them to bring them current. These guides are offered here free of charge and will hopefully allow you to get the answers you need to the questions you have.

For more information, contact UMA at:

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1-800-424-8262

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[info@uma.org](mailto:info@uma.org)

# A Guide to Purchasing Professional Motorcoach Services

**Transportation by motorcoach** is America's safest, most convenient and hassle-free mode of ground transportation. A group trip or tour is made easy by using one of the professional motorcoach company members of the United Motorcoach Association (UMA).

**While it's a simple matter** to arrange for your group's transportation by motorcoach, most consumers feel "under-educated" when they first step into the process. This quick checklist is designed to help you find the right transportation company and ask the right questions. It's intended to serve *only* as a guide. The list is divided into **safety** considerations, a **shopping** checklist and a travel group **transportation needs survey**.

**Use this guide** when you plan your trip and make photocopies for your future travel use. Once you've reviewed the list, we invite you to browse through our directory of more than 800 member companies to [locate](#) the UMA professional operators in your area. If you have any other questions, we also invite you to drop us a note at [info@uma.org](mailto:info@uma.org).

## THE CARDINAL RULE: DON'T BUY ON PRICE ALONE.

All motorcoach companies are **not** alike. When you're deciding on which company to use, remember that **safety** can be affected by many mechanical components which *you can't see*. If the price you receive from one operator is significantly or surprisingly lower than others in your community, it may be because that company is saving money by poor or inadequate preventative maintenance procedures. **Don't risk heartache to save a couple of bucks!** Follow these guidelines and remember that **safety** is a reputable company's **first** priority.

As a final safety note, you may wish to check with your local law enforcement agency or the closest state police installation to ask about their experiences with the company you'd like to hire.

# 1. SAFETY & OPERATIONAL CHECKLIST:

## Operating Authority

- Operator should provide proof of current operating authority from the \*Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) if your trip will cross state lines. Some states also require their own operating authority if your travel does not cross any state or international boundaries.

\* **Note:** The Interstate Commerce Commission was eliminated by Congress at the start of 1996. It's safety and carrier certification responsibilities have now been transferred to the FHWA [within the U.S. Department of Transportation](#).

## Insurance

- Operators should be willing to provide proof of valid, current insurance coverage for any vehicle which might be used. The insurance must provide \$5 million per incident minimum liability if the carrier is authorized for interstate service by the ICC (now the USDOT).

## Vehicle Inspection

- Look for proof that the vehicle you will be using has passed a complete mechanical inspection within the previous 12 months. Most states will issue decals or reports to be placed on the coach indicating the date of a successful inspection. If the carrier's state does not require a periodic inspection, look for a decal issued by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) or, at a minimum, a copy of the operator's own annual inspection form for that vehicle.

## Company Inspection

- Operator should NOT have an Unsatisfactory USDOT Safety Rating. Some operators, however, may have not yet been rated by the USDOT. You may call the USDOT to ask about a carrier's current safety rating. You may also check the carrier's record online using the USDOT's new "[SAFER" \(Safety Fitness & Electronic Records System\)](#) database for the carrier's safety profile. We caution, however, that the SAFER system is acknowledged by USDOT to contain some errors.

## **Driver Licensing**

- All drivers must possess valid, current "commercial driver's licenses" or "CDLs" at the time of your trip. CDL's are issued only after drivers have demonstrated their ability -- through skills and written tests -- to control the type of heavy vehicle they will be using on the job.

## **Emergency & Breakdown policies**

- Ask about any affiliations with state or national professional associations or emergency aid organizations which might be expected to assist in the case of a mechanical breakdown or other complication during your trip.

## **Subcontracting Agreements**

- If the motorcoach company will not be providing all of the vehicles needed for your journey, ask your prime operator about other companies which might be used to augment his vehicles. Ensure that the subcontracted company also provides satisfactory answers to each of your checklist questions.

## **2. MOTORCOACH SHOPPER'S CHECKLIST:**

### **Inspection of Vehicles**

- The consumer should be provided an opportunity to conduct an inspection of available vehicles to determine vehicle and equipment preferences and review vehicle cleanliness.

- **Vehicle Preferences**

- Do you desire newer vehicles or (often) less expensive older vehicles?
- Do you desire a motorcoach equipped with video or audio playback capabilities?
- Do you need a vehicle with disabled passenger boarding assistance devices?

### **Price and Package Costs**

- Determine how the trip price is determined? (Hourly costs, mileage, complete package?)
- Ask if special rates or discounts are available for off-season, weekend or other packages?
- Ask about driver accommodations and costs. Are they included in a package price or are they the travel group's responsibility to arrange?
- Ask about driver gratuity policies? Are they included in the price of the coach?
- Ask if an additional driver will be needed for itineraries which extend daily service beyond the legal USDOT hours of service rules.
- What is the contract deposit policy? How much is expected at the time of the reservation.
- What is the refund/cancellation policy?
- When is final payment due?
- If your group wishes to view commercial video tapes or movies, ask the motorcoach operator who is responsible for meeting copyright law requirements.
- Ask about smoking, alcoholic beverage and carry-on food policies of the motorcoach company.
- Ask if the operator is aware of any costs normally incurred by consumers which are NOT part of his package price (destination charges, city taxes, permits, etc.)

### 3. DETERMINE YOUR TRAVEL GROUP NEEDS

- Determine what size coach and what level of luxury or additional equipment you will need or desire.
- Determine whether or not you will need a coach on which smoking, alcoholic beverages or food are allowed.
- Determine if your group will include any disabled persons who may need boarding/disembarking assistance.
- Determine the TOTAL number of persons who will be travelling in your group.
- Determine the total length of your trip, including preferred time-of-day starting and ending times, departure and return points.
- Determine your itinerary, including time-of-day preferences for specific attractions.
- Determine who will serve as the responsible liaison to the motorcoach company for any en route changes or decisions.

**For a UMA member motorcoach provider in your area**, you should visit [BusRates.com](http://BusRates.com) a database of motorcoach and charter providers. These are not brokers, all the companies listed own their coaches. Look for companies listed with the UMA Logo.

If you're considering a motorcoach company which is not a UMA member, you may also wish to check the [USDOT's Passenger Carrier Safety Ratings](#) list to certify that the carrier does NOT have an **UN**satisfactory safety rating.

#### **4. A FINAL NOTE**

We're pleased to help you better understand the professional motorcoach industry and we invite your inquiries through [info@uma.org](mailto:info@uma.org). You will also find that each UMA member may be reached through the Internet's e-mail system.

We regret, however, that UMA is unable to make travel arrangements for callers or provide specific carrier recommendations. Similarly, while UMA members are regarded as professional motorcoach operators, UMA can not guarantee the service or performance of any member.

You may write to UMA at *113 S. West Street, 4th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314* or phone us at 1-(800) 424-8262 or (703) 838-2929. Thank you for using UMA member professional motorcoach operators.



## About UMA

The United Motorcoach Association ("UMA") is North America's largest association of professional bus and motorcoach companies. Founded in 1971 as the United Bus Owners of America, UMA's membership now includes over 900 motorcoach companies. Another 250 motorcoach manufacturers, suppliers and related businesses are currently "Associate" members of UMA.

Headquartered in Alexandria, VA, across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, UMA serves the informational, legislative, regulatory and business needs of its member companies. Within the membership, companies range from one and two vehicles to those with many hundreds of coaches; from small tour-specific companies to those performing intercity route service, charter and tour operations on a coast-to-coast scale.

The UMA's offices are located in Alexandria, Virginia.

You may contact UMA CEO Victor S. Parra at (703) 838-2929 or, toll-free, at 800-424-8262.

If you'd like more information about UMA or how to become a member, please write to [info@uma.org](mailto:info@uma.org).



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