

## **Gotta get to the reunion somehow!**

Hi! I'm Edith Wagner, editor of *Reunions magazine*, and this time I'm going to talk about getting to your reunion.

How people get to reunions is an individual choice. We find most people attending class or military reunions are more apt to fly while people attending family reunions drive. It stands to reason because usually only one or two people attend a class or military reunion while a car load often heads off to a family reunion.

As air travel and gas prices get more expensive even reunions are looking for alternatives. If you have enough people attending from one area or along the way to your reunion site, consider a motorcoach. Yes, a bus, but by a much more luxurious name. A motorcoach.

The National Motorcoach Network has made it easy to make the right motorcoach choice for your reunion. They offer a convenient guide called *20 Consumer Protection Tips For Chartering a Motorcoach* to help you through the selection process. Use this guide and you will assure your reunion a safe, comfortable and satisfying travel experience.

The basics for hiring a motorcoach are very important to your success at this venture. We are assuming here that you have never hired a motorcoach or you have and you know there can be improvements. The more care and consideration you give this process, the better your reunion trip will be.

Ask how long the company has been in business. Find out when it was established, and how long it has offered charter coach service. The longer the track record, the better.

Request the company's US Department of Transportation or DOT number. This is really important because a DOT number is assigned by the US government and is required to legally operate a motorcoach.

Ask about their DOT Safety Rating. Safety ratings are issued from the company's accident record and adherence to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. It's easy to find a carrier's rating online. Go to [safersys.org](http://safersys.org). Search by company name and USDOT number. The highest rating is Satisfactory. Other ratings include Conditional, Not Rated or Unsatisfactory. Never charter from a company with an unsatisfactory rating.

Ask for a Certificate of Insurance which shows the carrier's insurance levels and effective policy dates. Accepted insurance levels call for \$5 million combined, single-limit liability coverage.

Ask for references and contact reunions or similar groups traveling on similar programs. Do not even consider a company unwilling to provide references.

Ask if the Company is available for inspection. Whenever possible, inspect a carrier personally. Look at motorcoach equipment, general offices and garage facilities. You can learn a lot just by looking.

Ask about the size of their fleet. Charter fleet size is important to indicate their ability to supply alternate vehicles in the event of a mechanical problem, particularly for a multi-bus caravan on weekends or during peak seasons. It also provides some insight into the company's success.

Inquire about the age of their equipment. Vehicles over 10 years old have greatly diminished reliability, unless they receive preventive maintenance. Of course, the newer the coach, the less likely you'll experience breakdowns.

Determine if the carrier is a full service company with their own maintenance facilities. Do they have a variety of vehicles to meet your special needs and do they help arrange tours and special services you may require?

Completing these basic steps is necessary to ensure you a safe and secure trip. These are things you'd likely not think of, if someone didn't tell you but are essential to your success.

So now, we're on to the fun parts of planning a motorcoach trip.

Meeting your needs. . .

These are the things you must take into this process of hiring a motorcoach.

You must have dates, a schedule and details clearly outlined for a company to give you a quote. Be prepared to provide a detailed itinerary so the company can provide an accurate quote for your trip. List your reunion's special needs; a video system, beverage galley, handicapped access, other equipment? A video equipped coach can be a genuine asset. You can show family and past reunion videos to help pass the hours.

However, only carriers legally licensed by the Motion Picture Association of America may show copyrighted movies so ask if the carrier is licensed to show motion pictures en route. If you plan to show movies, ask to see a copy of the carrier's MPAA license. Films rented from a video store are NOT licensed for public viewing.

Be a careful shopper.

A decision based solely on price may not be the best value. If you get multiple quotes, give careful consideration to all aspects of value versus cost.

Also think about these costs. Who pays for the driver's room? Is the driver's room included in the charter? Or, are you responsible for the driver's room? If you will have the coach for the duration of your reunion, must your driver stay at the same hotel?

What is the company policy for extra mileage costs above the contracted amount? What is their policy about "overage miles?"

Settle this before your reunion trip not when you get an inflated bill after you return!

For your own safety, ask if the company adheres to DOT driver regulations. The DOT limits the number of hours a driver can work to 10 hours of actual driving time. So, if your itinerary exceeds 10 hours, you must plan that ahead. Do you rest at 10 hours? Or is there a second driver?

As you plan, keep safety issues high in your mind. These are areas usually left untouched ... until a problem occurs.

Determine the company's procedures for on-the-road emergencies. They should have access to a nationwide reciprocal maintenance agreement to assure prompt service throughout the US.

Never charter from a carrier that does not strongly enforce a drug and alcohol-free workplace. Ask if they have a formal Drug and Alcohol Program and ask for a copy of their written drug and alcohol policy statement.

Request a list of qualified drivers who have a commercial drivers license or CDL. These drivers must also have a DOT driver's file, a current DOT physical examination and approved Medical Examiner's Card, as well as other driver qualification documentation.

And, finally, a word of caution for these times of high gas prices. Remember the high gas prices the summer of 2008 and keep the possibility in mind that that might happen again.

The motorcoach industry was devastated with fuel prices that approached \$4.50 per gallon for diesel and some trips were cancelled or postponed because of large fuel surcharges added to contracts finalized months earlier. In fact, this adds another reason you must be prepared for last minute — and unexpected — surcharges as carriers attempt to predict what fuel costs will be

between the time a contract is signed and the trip actually departs. In almost every case the small print allows carriers to pass these charges to the consumer, and in most cases consumers do not read the fine detail until they are hit with the increase. So read your contract carefully and contact your carrier if you have any questions.

This podcast was produced with the help of a public service brochure from the National Motorcoach Network. Permission to reproduce and paraphrase their material for reunion planners was granted with proper attribution to National Motorcoach Network, Inc. Contact their national Reservation Center at 1-888-SEEK-BUS (888-733-5287). Their web address is [motorcoach.com](http://motorcoach.com).

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We, at Reunions magazine, are always looking for ideas you've tested at your reunions. Feel free to email them to [editor@reunionismag.com](mailto:editor@reunionismag.com) or send them to Reunions magazine, PO Box 11727, Milwaukee WI 53211 or post them at our forum at <http://forums.reunionismag.com>.

Lots of ways to communicate about reunions.

If you've never seen *Reunions magazine*, you can request a free sample at [www.reunionismag.com](http://www.reunionismag.com).

Thank you for downloading and listening to this podcast.

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