

# Coach Is Cool?

Getting to know the changing face – and pace – of bus touring

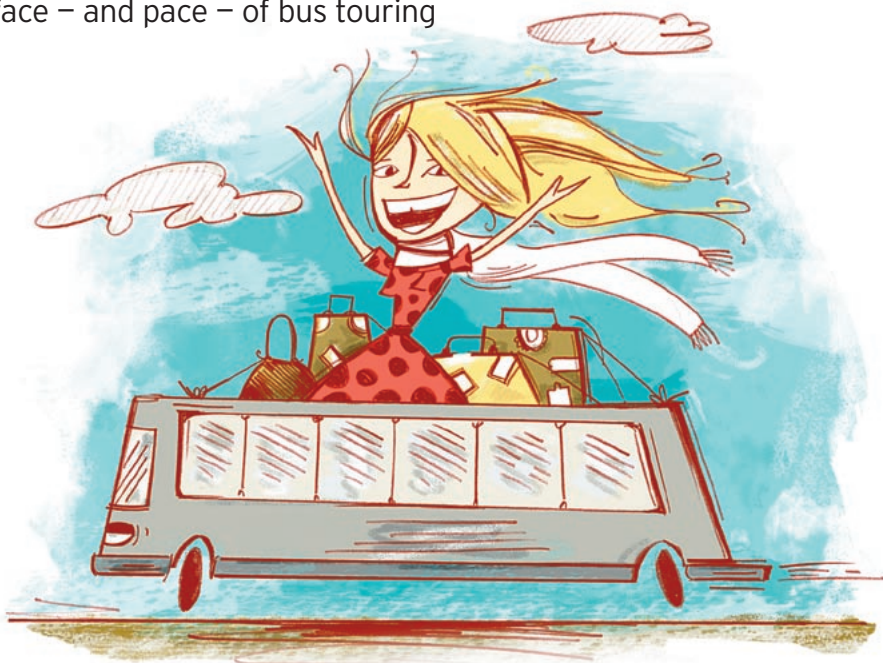
by Helena Zukowski 

**F**ORGET THE OLD ADAGE, “IF IT’S Tuesday, it must be Belgium.” Motorcoach travel has evolved from its brown-bag image of uncomfortable travel, too many destinations and too little time to see anything into a cushy, take-time-to-smell-the-roses mode of transport. As Andrea Theophilos, marketing manager of Insight Tours, says, “Even I had the same view about motorcoach tours before, but the product has changed. [Our coaches] spend more time in one place now and there’s more free time – and that’s just for starters.”

In recent years, coach touring has grown up, matured and even become luxurious while we weren’t looking. And a 10 per cent overall growth in the industry shows the travelling public is eager to hop on board, says Theophilos, even if the economic downturn has passengers waiting to book closer to departure dates. Insight’s premium class coaches are attracting more travellers with increased legroom, high-end excursions and most meals, she says. In the past, though dinner often meant long lineups at a buffet, now “we have unique features, such as our Dine Around Evening, which lets people eat at the restaurant of their choice.”

Of all the strong trends in motorcoach travel, choice is up at the top. Brian Crowe, president of Motor Coach Canada, says “Our challenge in the future will be to find tours for the baby boomers, our new junior-seniors. Boomers want experiences they can tell their grandchildren about, such as whitewater rafting.”

Michelle Jones, marketing manager of Trafalgar Tours, agrees. The company has greatly diversified its tours. “We have seven or eight different touring styles, with the objective being there’s something for everyone,” she says. For example, travellers on Trafalgar’s City Break tour can stay on their own but have access to the tour director. Boomers also love the cooking class tour, which includes going with the chef to market.




A long-standing advantage of motorcoach travel is affordability. Jones estimates that passengers save up to 40 per cent over all other types of travel on an average tour. Crowe points to another fact that accounts for greater interest in motorcoach travel – it’s greener than Kermit the Frog. “We’re seeing a renaissance in motorcoach travel because Transport Canada says it is the most environmentally friendly way of travelling.” Not only do motorcoaches use significantly less fuel per passenger than individual vehicles, they also emit 60 per cent less CO<sub>2</sub> than one standard mid-sized car, 54 per cent less than a passenger train and 86 per cent less than a commercial airplane.

There are other advantages to motorcoach travel as well. Solo travellers will tell you there is nothing lonelier than sitting with your entrecôte and frites by yourself in a cozy French bistro where everyone else is part of a twosome. On a group tour, most travellers invariably find someone of like mind with whom to share meals and tours. Motorcoach touring also takes the hassle out of travel – fussing with baggage and arranging your own connections. As well, the professional tour guide on each trip usually speaks a few languages and handles a multitude of problems with a smile. In the end, motorcoach touring,

particularly to volatile countries, is safer.

Before selecting a motorcoach tour though, Dean Smith of WestWorld Tours, CAA Saskatchewan’s motorcoach company, suggests asking your travel agent these questions: How many hours a day will be spent on the coach on average? Are seats assigned or can I change seats? What is the average age of people on the tour? How much free time is scheduled? Do we stay with the same bus and can I leave my personal items on board when we sightsee? Is all luggage handling included? How many meals are included? How strenuous is the tour?

The latter is a good question in light of one surprising trend: an increase in resource-based and agricultural tourism. “It’s those boomers again who want to get involved and see where the action is,” says Crowe, adding that touring mines and working on farms are big. “People don’t want to go to museums and just look at pictures anymore – they want to get their hands onto things. That’s why there’s a real growth in agricultural tours that let you milk a cow, for example.” Saskatchewan, with its endless miles of farmland, can stand up and cheer. 

*WestWorld Tours offers a variety of motorcoach trips. For more information or to book, contact your nearest CAA Travel location.*