

# UK's Coach Tourism: Coaches Growing in Popularity

Even travel experts are often ignorant at how big the coach market is. More than seven million people take a coach tour in the UK each year with getting on for another two million going on an escorted tour to the European mainland and beyond.



Another impressive statistic is coach tourism being worth £2.35 billion to the British economy. Underlining the massive value of coaches to local economies is another impressive figure. When they get off their coach in cities, towns and tourist destinations, coach passengers spend an additional £1.2 billion, or about £189 per coach traveller.

In the UK, the coach tourism industry has certainly built on the staycation trend which sees no sign of abating as more and more Brits look to cut their holiday costs and choose an all inclusive package with real value.

While 2011 continues to be tough for all holiday companies coach operators are holding their own and many report passenger numbers increasing by five per cent and more. Best sellers have been tours to the south and south west of England while the numbers of people taking coach tours to Ireland, which have declined in recent years, have increased by 13 per cent.

But with people having less money to spend on holidays, a huge number are turning to day trips with around 265 million booking a day out on a coach. These are really impressive figures and reflect how coach operators are helping boost visitor numbers to historic properties, gardens, theme parks and attractions.

Another boom is in London theatre trips - coach bookings now account for 15 per cent of the 14 million seats expected to be sold this year in West End theatres.



However the trend towards booking later has now hit the coach market. Traditionally a typical coach passenger books their short break or holiday many months ahead of travel - but with the squeeze on family finances, even among the older generation - many are looking to see if there are last minute bargains before they book.

“Overall we believe coach tours have been outperforming other holiday sectors this year,” said Sean Taggart, chairman of the Coach Tourism Council, a 300 strong membership organisation which promotes travel and tourism by coach in the UK.

“In the current economic climate when household budgets are really stretched, there are indications the great value for money of a coach tour is attracting more people to go by coach - and not just the old.”

“With it now costing upwards of £70 to fill up your car with fuel, the British public is now recognising that it’s cheaper to leave their own car at home and get a coach from near where they live.”

What’s more they can travel by coach with a healthy conscience. Not only is modern coach travel seven times safer than travelling by car, but it is also almost six times ‘greener’ than driving a car or going on holiday by air, and twice as ‘clean’ as going by train.

The days of the seaside charabanc are long gone. New coaches now cost upwards of £250,000 and feature reclining seats, air conditioning, double glazed windows and on board facilities. Unseen elements are quiet cabins and a smooth ride.



Many operators now have coaches that cost much more and feature club class style leather seats with extra legroom, drop down DVD screens, toilet facilities and even kitchens. Premiership football clubs and international sports teams now travel to matches on special coaches run by CTC operators. Coaches got the Royal seal of approval at the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, being used to transport guests from Westminster to Buckingham Palace.

For consumers the CTC promotes holidays by coach through findacoachholiday which provides links to its 150 coach tour operator members who run tours from starting points across the UK. They offer a huge choice of tours including destinations that are difficult to book for individual travellers, such as the Scilly Isles and the Orkneys.

Going by coach is also the best way to see dramatic scenery, rolling countryside and coastal vistas, whether it's the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales, the wild west of Ireland or the Scottish Highlands.

On the Continent escorted tours by coach are for many people still the best way to visit long-standing favourites such as Provence, the Black Forest, the Austrian Tyrol and the Italian Lakes. Echoing the popularity of cruise holidays, many coach companies now also arrange river cruises on the Rhine while World War I and World War II Battlefield tours, are if anything more popular than ever.

**By Paul Ovington**

Paul Ovington of the Coach Tourism Council outlines the latest trends in the UK coach touring industry.

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