
Experiencing “walking” history – historical sight-seeing tours

If specific locations in your city played an important role in your research, you can consider mapping out an historical sightseeing tour to follow these traces of the past.

Such a tour is especially impressive if it includes stations where there is still some visible vestige of the past, no matter how small. Stations on a city tour might be buildings, parts of buildings or ruins, commemorative plaques, monuments, churches, cemeteries, administration buildings, peculiar aspects of the city’s architecture and much more. Sometimes only those who know what they are looking for can find these traces – for example, a circular street that marks a former city wall.

Planning the path

- Following your general research on the theme, search especially for old city maps, photos or descriptions of locations. Compare the material to the current city map: How did the city look before? Go to the places where the events took place: Did history leave traces there? Search with an “eagle eye”; on your city tour, you can also make small details meaningful again.
- Plan the path and possible stations of the tour. Consider how you want to conduct it: on foot, with the bike, using public transportation? Consider the pros and cons of various ways of taking the tour; check the connections and distances and prepare a realistic time frame for the tour. Rule of thumb: not longer than ten minutes per station and a maximum of two hours. If possible, plan the stations so that they follow a thematic or chronological sequence.

Planning the path

At the stations

- Have you found historical photos, drawings, prints or painted city views? You could make enlarged copies and show some of them during the city tour. They can help make the past alive in the minds of your participants.
- Involve your participants in the tour by, for example, asking them to formulate their impressions (“If you compare this apartment building with the one we just looked at, what do you notice?”).
- Consider whether there are texts (poems, letters, diaries, speeches ...) that you could read aloud at specific stations. Sometimes that can be very impressive – e.g., excerpts of a eulogy delivered at the grave of the deceased.
- You can go even further and re-enact historical scenes at the original settings. But during an historical city tour, such re-enactments should be oriented as closely as possible to the original events.

At the stations



Worth considering

- As preparation, work out the details of each individual station's program on paper. Afterwards, however, you should practice speaking freely. You could note key points on an index card as a memory aid.
- Protect your tour material (e.g., photos, pictures, index cards) from wind and rain – glue them on cardboard and stick them in clear plastic folders.
- Give your listeners the chance to make comments. In particular, long-time residents of the city can often offer supplemental information that might be new to you.

Tips