

## Travel Talk: from Passion to Profession

Story: Sarah Parsons West

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Choosing a career can be a life-long winding path for some people, bouncing from place to place before realizing – *‘hey, that’s exactly what I want to do – keep going from place to place!’* While others meticulously plan and prepare their futures early on, through education and training. Regardless of the route you take to get there, if a desire to see the world while guiding others propels you forward – a job as a Tour Guide might be the ultimate satisfaction.

“I believe that people should travel because there’s a lot to see in the world,” says Botrous “Peter” Helmy, an Egyptian Tour Guide, who loves History and language. “When you travel, you



learn about other cultures. This will keep you educated and make you appreciate the world more,” he says.

A tour guide for 14 years, Peter currently works with the England-based company, *Timeless Tours*. He’s led hundreds of tourists across the historic lands of his native Egypt; visitors ranging in age and nationality.

“When you start traveling while you’re young it will make you gain experience in a short time; and it also makes you appreciate the way you are living back home,” says Peter.

“Traveling helps broaden horizons and break down barriers, bringing an understanding of different cultures,” agrees Surekha Narain, a tour guide living in New Delhi, India.

“The joy and satisfaction of getting to know my city better through exploring and sharing passion with like-minded people, made me leave a Foreign Exchange Dealer finance job so I could follow my heart’s desire,” explains Surekha.

“My dear mother gave me the chance to turn my passion into a profession,” she recalls, starting her own tour business ten years ago. Surekha guides tourists across the city on a variety of heritage walks, through her aptly named company, *Delhi Metro Walks*.



With deep respect for their unique cultural and historical treasures, both Peter and Surekha thrive on sharing the secrets of their home country with international and domestic travelers.

“I live and work in one of the best cities in the world,” says Adam Smith, a personal concierge with *TriBeCa* in NYC. Like Surekha and Peter, Adam has the privilege and ability to share his own city with visitors, as a career.

“As of 2018, New York City remains the most visited destination in the United States. There’s always something new to see; and to teach others about,” he says.



“Tourists spend more money in the U.S. than any other country,” says Adam, “while attracting almost as many tourists as France, Europe’s top destination.” Adam feels this provides him a strong sense of job security.

“I think people will always travel, to fulfil their own curiosity and search for fulfillment. It’s my job to help them accomplish that,” he says.

No matter how much enjoyment travelling provides, guiding is still work – and takes a lot of skill to be successful.



“I studied tourism and hotel management for four years,” says Peter, about Egypt’s course requirements for becoming a licensed tour guide. “Egyptian history is very rich,” he says, “and I feel that it’s my duty to show people just how amazing our history is.”

To be successful within the [tourism] industry, knowing your history is key, Peter suggests. “Study your history, so you can have an answer to all the questions. Read and learn more about other cultures because that will help you have better understanding while dealing with tourists from around the world,” says Peter.

“On-the-job experience,” Surekha says, is an invaluable part of the job. “Reading widely, and not just historical books,” is important; as is, “learning how to quickly understand customer needs via initial email exchanges,” she suggests.

With a background in finance, Surekha stresses the value of quality customer service and client management. “Face challenges and respond quickly, while remaining sensitive to customer’s needs,” she says.



Guiding diverse, especially large or high demanding groups, comes with unique challenges. Keeping the group together in crowded places, and overcoming cultural barriers, such as multiple languages and expectations, are daily tasks.

Tour guides often represent the ‘local’ community and are sometimes the only person a tourist will feel comfortable interacting with. “I feel I’ve been successful when a tourist comes as a stranger and leaves as a friend,” shares Peter.



“I love being social and this job gave me the chance to have friends all over the world,” he says. “For me this is priceless, it gives me a chance to know their culture. It’s like I have traveled to their countries while I am still in my own country.”

**E**ach of us is a Citizen of the World, after all. It's our duty to get out there and explore, to figure out just where we belong. For those adventurous souls bold enough to transform wanderlust into a career, we urge you to go for it.

“Follow your heart's desire and be innovative,” Surekha says.

“Live the life you want,” says Adam, “You'll learn so much about yourself through the eyes of others.”

“Keep traveling – don't stop,” says Peter, “because, there is a lot to discover in the world!” ---

***For guided travels abroad and domestically:***

***<https://www.gotimelesstours.co.uk/> (Timeless Tours – UK & Egypt)***

***<http://delhimetrowalks.com> (Delhi Metro Walks – India)***

***<https://www.bigbustours.com/> (US and International cities by Tour Bus)***

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***(pages 37-43)***