



Go! Bus-ting out of the norm

Bus tours, custom charters make great holiday fun

A shared interest in Alberta's early settlement history binds the group this day. There's cohesion, too, in their choice of transportation. They've chosen a spacious, smooth-riding tour bus.

Cameron Malcolm is in the driver's seat and, as owner operator of [Out an' About Tours](#) of Edmonton, his clients chose his service for more than just transportation.

'I occupy a small but important niche in what has become a highly competitive recreation business in this province,' Malcolm says. 'Groups of all kinds are discovering ours is a practical, economical and preferable alternative.'

Buses, motor coaches, luxury vans; call them what you will. There are dozens of companies in the province and they serve a wide array of clients with coaches to fit any occasion.

In his leap to entrepreneur status, Malcolm acknowledges an advantage. 'I'd been a history buff all my life,' he chuckles. 'All I had to do was to learn to drive the bus.'

Tour content widely varied

He combines his new-found skill with knowledge not otherwise well known even to many historians. If you've collectively chosen tea at Rutherford House as a day-tour highlight, for example, Malcolm will tell you Edmonton owes its location to vegetable gardening. Early fur traders chose the riverside Rossdale Flats for their trading post site because the alluvial soil was perfect for the gardens that would provision the trading post.

A busload of birders swinging over the north end of Beaverhill Lake on its way to a stop at Tofield's Beaverhill Lake Nature Centre will discover that Elk Island National Park originally was set aside by Edmonton sportsmen who wanted a preserve to hunt the magnificent animals for which the park is named.

[Out an' About](#) also offers tours of historic churches, the Kalyna County 'ecomuseum', native Powwows and Jasper National Park. Information: 780 909-8687

[Brewster](#), synonymous with Rocky Mountain transportation from the earliest days of the packhorse, will whisk you to many mountain destinations in a luxury coach. For a small fee they'll take you up onto the Columbia Icefield, one of the largest accumulations of ice south of the Arctic circle.

We choose our drivers with the same care the trail bosses chose their cowboys almost a century ago,' says Lori Perlin, marketing and communications specialist. The day you depart from Calgary on either a Columbia Icefield or Trail of the Great Bear tour will indeed be a day you remember, she guarantees.

The icefield tour takes you westward through rolling foothills to the Bow Valley and ranges of the Canadian Rockies, with an optional Snocoach ride up to the glacier. The Great Bear tour heads south with stops at Waterton Lakes National Park and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.

Do-your-own-thing & specialty tours

[Brewster](#) is also currently exploring 'soft-adventure' touring, says Perlin, in packages that would allow mix-and-match recreational pursuits and touring. After an enjoyable ride and a day's hiking, your driver whisks you back to your accommodations, or all the way home.

'Our drivers tell us their passengers really appreciate being able to just sit back and relax,' she says.

Call 403 762-6700 for Brewster tour, holiday and charter options.

Among Alberta's niche operators, [Creative Journeys](#) (403 272-5653) lives up to its name with Calgary-based tours to the foothills and mountains, the badlands and prairies, as well as theme tours of 'western' dining spots, farmers' markets and eco-sensitive soft adventure activities.

On the 'Prairie Tour', for example, you'll visit the first Northwest Mounted Police outpost at Fort Macleod, stroll through the Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden at Lethbridge, the Helen Schuler Coulee Prairie Environment Center and the Alberta Birds of Prey Center at Coaldale, all in just one day.

Custom group charters

Wherever there's a common interest, there's an opportunity for a bus to beat the comfort, safety and economy of a convoy of personal automobiles, motor coach advocates say.

If you're all going to the same weekend ball tournament 200 kilometers away (124 miles), why drive home tired when you can leave it to a professional? Why not take a weekend tour-getaway with a group of your friends and maybe even all of your kids? It's a great way to bond!

Be it a sports event, a little recreation or a whole Alberta holiday, a touring coach may be just the way to go. And when the cost of a charter is spread over a large number of passengers, it's amazing how

thrifty a custom charter can be.

You don't even need a whole group to charter a motorcoach. For example, [Anderson Tours](#) of Sherwood Park (1-800-548-7262) offers custom tours for groups as small as 10. Spend a relaxing day touring the beautiful Devonian Gardens and George Pegg Historic Gardens. Or, for a one-of-a-kind family gathering, consider a day tour to Stettler with an entertaining excursion on the Alberta Prairie Steam Train.

If money is not the object, individuals or couples can charter a small bus or a comfortable van and a knowledgeable guide. Companies often take one or two people wherever they darn well feel like going, often making a 'tour' up as they go.

More tour companies, large and small, are easy to find. Click Search below, then select Tours. You'll find over 75 Alberta companies offering everything from multi-day motorcoach trips to half-day ecological and educational trips by van.

Travel Alberta specialists at 1-800-661-8888 are also happy to supply you with advice and contact information.

Search 'Tours' for tour operators who offer Bus and Van Charters.

<http://www.travelalberta.ca>

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