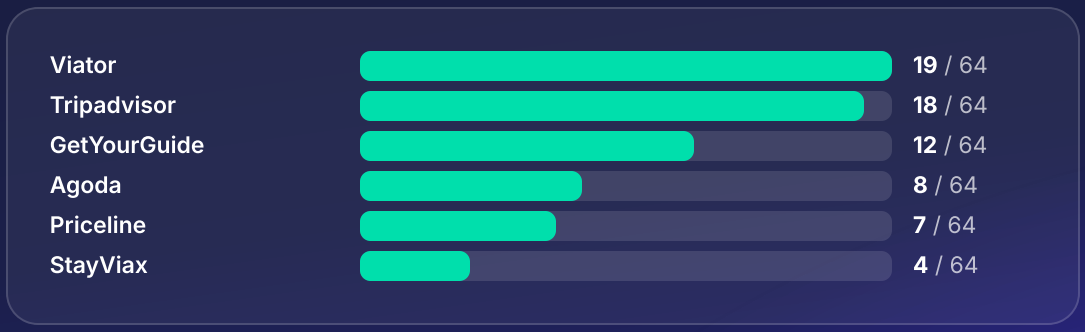
Who AI Recommends for Private Tours

A Google AI Mode study of 64 real traveller questions across 20 cities, 18 traveller types and the full booking journey.

Research study · November 2026

COMPANIES MOST OFTEN NAMED OR CITED, OUT OF 64 ANSWERS



Private-guide marketplaces were named in **0** of 64 answers.

64	72%	0
traveller questions	of answers named a company	private-guide marketplaces

Ameneh Saeednia
Senior SEO and Generative Search Strategist

Summary

Key findings

We asked Google AI Mode 64 questions a real traveller might ask about **private and guided tours**, from "do we need a guide?" to "how do we complain afterwards?". Each answer was scored for the companies it named and the sources it cited.

72%
of answers named or cited **at least one tour company**

3
platforms dominate: **Viator, Tripadvisor, GetYourGuide**

0
answers named a **private-guide marketplace**

~450
words per answer, on average

1

The big platforms own the answer

Viator appeared in 19 answers, **Tripadvisor** in 18 and **GetYourGuide** in 12. Even for "private guide" questions, AI Mode pointed travellers to booking platforms, not to private-guide specialists.

2

Brands peak when travellers vet guides

Questions about **whether to hire a guide** and **how to check a guide** named a company in **12 of 13** answers. That's where the decision is made.

3

After booking, brands disappear

During and after the tour, only **4 of 10** answers named a company. AI Mode turned to **consumer bodies, transit authorities and city sites** instead.

4

Accessibility answers name almost no one

For **wheelchair users** and **toddlers with strollers**, 6 of 9 answers named no company at all. A clear gap for brands with real accessibility expertise.

What it means

AI search is already a **storefront for tours**, and the shelf is stocked by a few platforms. Specialists win only where they publish **specific, checkable answers** to a traveller's exact situation.

Method

How the study worked

Item	Detail
Tool	**Google AI Mode** (google.com, AI Mode tab)
Dates	November 3 to 4, 2026
Session	Logged out, new search per question, location Vancouver, Canada, English
Prompts	**64** from a 3,000-prompt library (Wave 1 sample)
Coverage	20 cities · 18 traveller types · 10 journey steps · 32 topics
Wording	Neutral: no prompt names a brand or asks for "the best company"
Runs	One run per prompt

What we recorded

Full answer text, including the **source cards** AI Mode shows.
Companies named or cited: booking platforms, tour operators, marketplaces.
Sources: domains and named sites (official bodies, blogs, forums).
Answer type: names companies, or advice only.

How to read the numbers

Company detection was automated, then checked. A platform counts whether it was **named in the text or shown as a source**. Groups of 2 to 8 answers are **directional**, not statistically significant.

Example prompt	Traveller	Step
When is a local guide worth hiring in Prague? I am travelling alone. Our timing is flexible.	Solo traveller	3 Do we need a guide?
How can we compare reviews of different guides in Kyoto? We want to keep the total cost down. We have a full day.	Limited budget	5 Compare tours
After a tour in Amsterdam, how should we raise a concern about cancellation and refunds with the provider? ...	Short stopover	10 After the tour

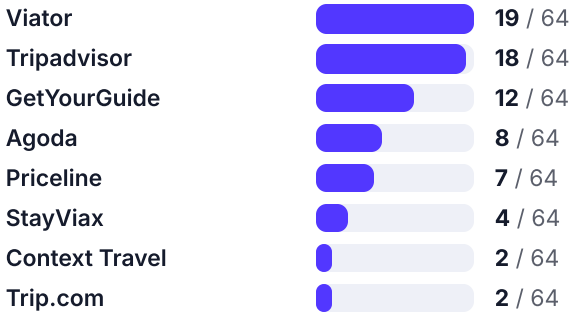
The full prompt library, sampling method and scoring rules are described in the companion document *The Travel Prompt Library: AI Visibility Across the Booking Journey*.

Finding 1

Three platforms stock the shelf

Across 64 answers, **43** named or cited at least one booking platform. Three dominated.

Answers naming or citing each company (of 64)



What stands out

Viator, Tripadvisor and GetYourGuide together appear across most commercial answers.

Hotel and travel booking sites (Agoda, Priceline, Trip.com) are cited for tour questions through their activity pages.

Private-guide marketplaces, the businesses built for exactly these questions, were named in **none**.

Local operators do appear

17 answers named a specific local operator, usually for a niche need: food tours for a vegetarian, rickshaw tours for a wheelchair user in Vienna, photo-tour operators in Cape Town.

Why it matters

When a traveller asks AI Mode how to find, compare or vet a guide, the answer often sends them to a platform's listing. **Being the platform AI points to** is now part of distribution, not just search ranking.

Finding 2

Brands peak when travellers vet guides

Companies appear most when travellers are **deciding whether to use a guide and checking one**. They fade once the tour is booked.

Answers that named or cited at least one tour company, by journey step



Decision steps

Do we need a guide? 5 of 5 answers named a company.
Check the guide: 7 of 8, mostly through review platforms.
This is where a brand earns or loses the booking.

After booking

During the tour: 3 of 6. **After the tour:** 1 of 4.
Answers cited **European Consumer Centres**, **Transport for London**, **TransLink** and **city websites** instead.
Service and complaint questions go to **official sources**.

The opportunity

Post-booking questions are almost empty of brands. A tour company that publishes **clear policies, problem-handling guides and on-tour advice** could own a part of the journey nobody else is answering.

Finding 3

Who gets generic answers

Some travellers got company-rich answers every time. Others got advice with no company at all.

Traveller type	Answers	Named a company	Pattern
Family with kids	4	4	Platforms and family-tour listings
Family with teens	4	4	Platforms, day-trip listings
Quiet settings	5	5	Platforms and calmer-experience operators
Returning visitors	4	4	Food-tour and niche local operators
Limited budget	3	3	Free walking tours, review platforms
Wheelchair access	5	**2**	Mostly advice and **transit authority** sources
Toddler and stroller	4	**1**	Mostly practical advice, no operators
Short stopover	3	**1**	Cruise-port logistics, official sources

Reading this

Accessibility and young-child questions are **high-stakes and specific**. AI Mode answered them with checklists, not recommendations.
That suggests a **trust gap**: few sources state accessibility details clearly enough for AI to recommend a provider.

Caution

Each traveller type had **2 to 5 answers**. Treat these as **signals to test**, not conclusions. Wave 2 will repeat them.

Finding 4

The sources AI Mode leans on

Beyond the companies it named, AI Mode built answers from a mix of platforms, aggregators, blogs, community sites and official bodies.

Source type	Examples seen	Typical use
Tour booking platforms	viator.com, getyourguide.com, tripadvisor.com	Finding, comparing and vetting tours
Hotel and travel aggregators	agoda.com, priceline.com, trip.com, stayviax.com	Activity listings, logistics
Local operators	Secret Food Tours, We Hate Tourism Tours, Outback Prague, Cape Town photo-tour operators	Niche needs, food, photography
Travel blogs and guides	bestpragueguide.com, voicemap.me, fanvancouver.com, thesanetravel.com	Advice and itineraries
Community	Reddit, Facebook groups, YouTube	Reviews, real experiences
Official and public bodies	European Consumer Centres, Transport for London, TransLink, Ajuntament de Barcelona	Complaints, transport, accessibility

Pattern

Platforms win **commercial** questions. Official bodies win **rights and logistics** questions. Blogs and forums fill **experience** questions. A brand needs content that fits the type of question it wants to be part of.

Video and community count

Reddit, Facebook and YouTube appeared as sources in **8** answers, usually for real experiences and reviews. Video and community content are part of the shelf too.

What it means

Five moves for tour brands

1

Win the vetting step

Publish **guide credentials, reviews and how you vet guides** on pages AI can quote. That is where brands appear most.

2

Answer the accessible journey

Step-free routes, vehicle details, toilet access, pace. **Specific, checked facts** fill the clearest gap in the data.

3

Own post-booking questions

Clear pages on **delays, weather, refunds and complaints**. Today AI sends travellers to consumer bodies.

4

Be present on the shelf

Listings and reviews on the platforms AI cites, plus **community and video** presence, all with consistent facts.

5

Measure by journey step

Track **which steps and travellers** you appear for, not one visibility score. Repeat the same prompts quarterly.

Next in this study	Why
Wave 2: repeat all 64 prompts twice	Measure how stable AI Mode answers are
Add ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity (signed in, memory off)	Compare tools; logged-out limits blocked them in Wave 1
Run Follow-up 1 for each prompt	Brands may appear deeper in the conversation
Expand accessibility and post-booking prompts	Test the two clearest gaps with more data

Study design, prompt library and analysis by **Ameneh Saeednia**, seogirl.ca. Answers collected from Google AI Mode on November 3 to 4, 2026, logged out, from Vancouver. AI answers change over time and by location; results describe this sample only. Prepared with AI assistance.