

DIY Tour Management Guide

How to run your own tour with no dedicated tour manager. This is the field manual for the artist (or a single team member) wearing all the hats: advancing, money, merch, travel, and keeping the wheels on. It assumes a small operation — a DJ/electronic act like Snooko, or a small band in a van.

The core idea: **a tour manager's real job is to remove every surprise.** If you're doing it yourself, your job is the same. Systems beat scrambling.

The one thing that makes DIY touring work: the day sheet

Build a one-page **day sheet** for every show and read it out loud each morning. Everyone in the party gets it (text, shared doc, or printed). It contains:

- Date + day of week
- City, venue name, full address (the one GPS finds)
- Promoter/venue contact name + cell
- Sound engineer name + cell
- Schedule: load-in / soundcheck / doors / support set / **your set time** / curfew
- Fee + balance payment method + who pays you
- Hotel name + address + check-in time + confirmation #
- Drive time to next city / next call time
- Notes (parking, gear quirks, guest list count, anything weird)

If you only do one thing from this guide, do this.

Advancing shows (yourself)

Advancing is confirming every detail with the venue/promoter ~1–2 weeks out so the day-of has no surprises. Send a short advance email and **get answers in writing**:

1. **Schedule** — load-in, soundcheck, doors, set times, curfew.
2. **Technical** — does your stage plot/input list match their system? For a DJ: confirm **exact booth gear models** (CDJ-3000? DJM-A9? linkable via USB/SD or laptop + Rekordbox/Serato? is there a working USB hub/link cable?), monitor situation, and whether you can patch visuals.
3. **Logistics** — parking/load-in access, green room, wifi, merch table location and whether they take a cut.
4. **Money** — confirmed fee, balance method (cash or wire), who hands it over, comp/guest count, settlement process for door deals.
5. **Hospitality** — rider items, meal or buyout, water on stage.
6. **People** — day-of cell numbers for promoter, sound, and house manager.

Save each show's advance reply in a per-show folder with the signed contract and deposit confirmation.

Day-of-show timeline (typical club night)

Times shift, but the *order* almost never does. Build backward from your set time.

When	What
Arrival / load-in	Get to the venue at the advanced load-in time. Park where you're told. Meet the day-of contact and the sound engineer first.
Setup	Stage/booth setup. Hand the engineer your input list / confirm DJ gear works. Test USBs/laptop link, every channel.
Soundcheck	Line check everything. Set monitor mix. For DJ: test a track through the system, set gain structure, check the booth monitor isn't blowing your ears out. Fix problems now, not during the set.
Down time	Eat. Hydrate. Set up merch. Confirm guest list with the door. Locate where you get paid and who pays you.
Doors	You're off stage; crowd comes in. Merch table staffed.
Support sets	Watch the room fill. Read the energy. Adjust your opener mentally.
Your set	Play the room you're in, not the set in your head (see Set List Guide). Watch the curfew clock.
Post-set	Merch push (you'll sell most right after you play). Thank the crew, the promoter, the sound engineer.
Settle	Collect the balance / run the settlement before you leave the building.
Load-out	Pack, count your gear, confirm nothing's left behind.

Two rules that save tours: **be early, and never leave money or gear in the building.**

Handling money

You are the bank, the bookkeeper, and the treasurer. Treat cash like it's radioactive — track it.

- **Know each deal cold** before you walk in: guarantee, or guarantee-vs-percentage, or door deal, plus what's covered (lodging, hospitality, ground).

- **Deposits** should already be collected at booking (industry norm: 50% on signing). The **balance** is paid the night of — get it in hand before load-out. If it's a wire, confirm it actually sent, don't accept "we'll send it Monday" from a new promoter.
- **Settlement** on door/percentage deals: get the **settlement sheet** showing tickets sold, ticket price, gross, the promoter's deductible expenses (only what the contract allows), and your split. Don't accept vague math. Ask for the box office count.
- **Carry a float** of small bills for merch change, tips, parking, emergencies.
- **Log everything daily** — one spreadsheet: income (guarantee, door %, merch), expenses (gas, tolls, lodging, food, gear, parking). Reconcile each night while it's fresh. Photograph receipts.
- **Separate business money.** Use a dedicated card/account for the tour. It makes taxes and the post-tour P&L survivable.
- **Tip the people who help you.** Sound engineers especially. It's the right thing and it pays off.

After the tour, build a simple **P&L per show and overall** so you know which markets and promoters to keep.

Merch (often where the profit is)

For small tours, merch frequently outearns the guarantees. Don't treat it as an afterthought.

- **Bring the right amount.** Estimate ~\$1–3 of merch revenue per head as a rough planning anchor and adjust by market; don't haul inventory you can't sell, don't run out of your hero item.
 - **Hero product + range.** One great shirt/hoodie people actually want, a low-price impulse item (sticker/pin), and something premium. For a DJ act, vinyl, USBs, or limited tees move.
 - **Take every payment type.** Square/Stripe tap reader + cash. Most buyers are cardless... actually the opposite now — most are cashless, so a card reader is non-negotiable.
 - **Staff it.** Someone working the table during and right after your set. If it's just you, set up before, and hit it hard immediately post-set when the buying intent is highest.
 - **Know the venue's cut.** Some rooms take a merch percentage (common in larger venues). Confirm in the advance and price/account for it.
 - **Count in and out.** Inventory before doors, inventory after. Cash should reconcile to units sold.
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Travel & lodging logistics

- **Routing realism.** 3–5 hours between shows is comfortable in a van; build in buffer for traffic, weather, and load-out running late. Don't plan to arrive exactly at load-in after a 6-hour drive.
- **Book lodging ahead,** not at midnight after the show. Cheapest reliable beds near the venue beat a "deal" 40 minutes out. Lock confirmation numbers into the day sheet.
- **Flying tours (common for solo DJs):** carry on what you cannot replace — laptop, USBs (have **backups** of your library on a second drive/USB), headphones, adapters, IDs, payment gear. Check the rest. Arrive with margin; a missed flight is a missed show is a refunded fee plus reputation damage.

- **Ground transport:** rental, rideshare, or promoter pickup — confirm in the advance who's getting you door to door.
 - **Gear redundancy:** for a DJ, two USBs + a laptop with Rekordbox/Serato + your music backed up in the cloud. For a band, spare cables, strings, fuses, a DI, gaff tape. The show must go on with one thing broken.
 - **Rest and food are logistics, not luxuries.** A blown-out artist plays a blown-out set. Schedule sleep and real meals like they're load-ins.
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Common DIY pitfalls (and how to dodge them)

- **No signed contract / no deposit.** “Verbal hold” isn't a booking. Paper it; collect the deposit.
 - **Vague advance.** “It'll be fine” from a promoter is not an answer. Get specifics in writing, especially **DJ gear models**.
 - **Showing up late to load-in.** Burns goodwill with the exact people who make your show sound good.
 - **Not settling the same night.** Chasing money after you've left town is how artists get stiffed. Collect before load-out.
 - **Underestimating costs.** Gas, tolls, parking, food, lodging, merch restock, and the merch cut add up fast. Budget with a cushion.
 - **No gear backups.** One dead USB or cable shouldn't end the night.
 - **Burning out.** No days off, no sleep, no food → bad shows by night four. Build recovery into the route.
 - **Treating merch casually.** Leaving the table unstaffed during your set throws away your highest-intent sales window.
 - **Forgetting the guest list discipline.** Every comp is an unsold seat. Keep it tight.
 - **No content plan.** You're in 8 cities with a phone in your pocket — capture footage nightly for the next announce.
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DIY tour kit (throw it in the bag)

- Printed/shared **day sheets** for every date
- Per-show folder: signed contract, deposit confirmation, advance replies
- W-9 + payment details ready
- Square/card reader + cash float + change
- Merch + inventory count sheet
- Gear + **backups** (DJ: 2 USBs, laptop, library backup; band: spare cables/strings/DI/fuses, gaff tape)
- Chargers, adapters, link cables, power strip
- Cloud backup of your music + all docs
- Basic first-aid + meds + earplugs
- A running income/expense spreadsheet