

Tour Managers 101

A plain-English primer on the tour manager (TM) — what they do, when to hire one, what they cost, and how the TM differs from a production manager.

What a Tour Manager Is

The **tour manager runs the tour day to day** so the artist can focus on performing. If the manager runs the artist's *career*, the TM runs the *road*. They're the single point of accountability from the moment the bus rolls until everyone's home: logistics, money, schedule, people, and problem-solving in real time.

A great TM is calm under pressure, organized to a fault, good with money, and able to “herd cats” — keeping a group of artists and crew on schedule across time zones, late nights, and chaos.

Core Responsibilities

- 1. Advancing the shows** - Confirm every detail with each venue/promoter before arrival: schedule, load-in, soundcheck, set times, curfew, hospitality, parking, production specs, guest list, settlement method, and contacts. - Distribute the **day sheet** (the day's schedule, addresses, times, contacts) to artist and crew each morning.
- 2. Settlements & money** - Reconcile tickets, expenses, splits, and merch at the end of the night and **collect the payout** (guarantee, percentage overages, bonuses). - Handle the float/cash, pay per diems, track every expense, and keep clean records for the manager and accountant. - Confirm deposits were received and chase any shortfalls before the set if needed.
- 3. Logistics** - Travel, hotels, ground transport, routing, and timing. Get the right people to the right place with their gear, fed and rested. - Manage passports/visas/credentials, border crossings, and carnets on international runs.
- 4. People management (“herding”)** - Wake-ups, lobby calls, departure times, and keeping the artist and crew on schedule and out of trouble. - Liaise between the artist, crew, venue, promoter, support act, and management. - Handle the human stuff — morale, conflicts, fatigue, and the occasional emergency.
- 5. Health, safety & contingencies** - Know the nearest hospital, hold emergency contacts and personnel info, manage illness/injury, weather and security issues, and the call to stop a show if needed.
- 6. Reporting up** - Keep the artist's manager informed: nightly numbers, issues, settlement results, and anything affecting the bigger picture.

When to Hire a Tour Manager

You don't need a dedicated TM for a first run of local club dates — early on, the **manager or the artist double as TM**, or a trusted, organized friend handles day sheets and settlements. Hire a real TM when:

- **The runs get long or far** — multi-week routing, fly dates, or international where advancing and logistics become a full-time job.
- **The party grows** — a band plus crew (FOH, monitors, LD, merch) needs someone coordinating everyone.
- **The money gets serious** — guarantees, percentage settlements, and cash floats need a pro who settles correctly every night.
- **The manager's time is better spent elsewhere** — booking, releases, and growth, not driving the van and counting merch.
- **The artist needs to just perform** — when doing it all themselves is hurting the shows.

For small runs, a **part-time/“per-run” TM** is common. As touring scales, the TM becomes a fixed, salaried role.

Day Rate Ranges (US, general guidance)

Rates vary widely by experience, tour size, market, and responsibilities. Treat these as **realistic ranges, not quotes** — negotiate per run and confirm what's included.

Level / Situation	Typical day rate
Entry / small club tours, developing acts	~\$150–\$250/day
Experienced TM, mid-level touring (theaters, established clubs)	~\$250–\$450/day
Senior TM, larger tours / festivals / international	~\$450–\$700+/day, often a weekly salary
Top-tier TMs on major tours	\$700–\$1,000+/day or negotiated weekly/tour salary

Notes: - TMs are usually paid a **day rate or weekly salary** for show days *and* travel days (sometimes a reduced rate on days off). - **Per diems** (typically ~\$30–\$75/day for meals) are paid on top of the rate, same as the rest of the crew. - Travel, lodging, and on-the-road expenses are covered by the tour, not the TM's pocket. - On bigger tours the TM may take a small percentage instead of or on top of a day rate — less common at developing levels.

Budget the TM into the tour P&L early; it's a core cost, not an afterthought.

TM vs. Production Manager (PM)

On small tours, one person does both. As tours scale, the roles split:

	Tour Manager (TM)	Production Manager (PM)
Focus	The whole tour: money, people, logistics, schedule	The technical production of the show
Owns	Advancing, settlements, travel, hotels, per diems, herding, reporting to management	Sound, lights, video, staging, rigging, power, stagehands, the technical advance
Manages	Artist + entire touring party	The technical crew and load-in/load-out
Lives in	The day sheet, the settlement, the calendar, the cash	The stage plot, input list, production schedule, tech rider
Reports to	Artist's manager	Often the TM

Rule of thumb: the **TM runs the business and the people; the PM runs the stage**. A developing act has a TM (who covers production tasks). A bigger production adds a dedicated PM so the TM isn't trying to settle the show *and* fix the PA at the same time. There's also a **stage manager** who runs the day-of show flow (see *Run Sheet Template*) — on small tours, again, the TM may wear that hat too.

Quick Glossary

- **Advance:** confirming all show details with the venue/promoter ahead of the date.
- **Day sheet:** the daily schedule and info sheet for artist and crew.
- **Settlement:** end-of-night reconciliation of tickets, costs, splits, merch → the payout.
- **Float:** the cash the TM carries for on-the-road expenses and per diems.
- **Per diem:** daily cash allowance for meals/incidentals.
- **Buyout:** cash paid in lieu of a provided meal or service.

Bottom line: the TM is the operational backbone of touring — hire one when the runs, the crew, or the money outgrow doing it yourself, budget the day rate and per diems into the tour, and split off a PM once the production gets big.