

Heart of England Blue Badge Training Course 2026/7

Frequently asked questions

What is the Blue Badge?

The Blue Badge started in the very early 1950s as a tourist guiding qualification in London, to ensure that people showing visitors around would be knowledgeable and skilled communicators. The system spread to other regions in the 1970s.

Originally operated by the now-defunct regional Tourist Boards, it has, since 2002 s been the responsibility of an independent organisation called the Institute of Tourist Guiding. This accredits courses like this one, examines students and awards the Blue Badge but it doesn't run the training itself.

How is the course structured? What does it consist of?

In order to pass the examinations set by the independent Institute of Tourist Guiding – as well as to be an effective guide, students need to pass a series of written exams and also practical tests on a coach, on a walking tour and inside various types of building.

To train students in this, the course is made up of several elements, spread over approximately one year .

There are “classroom” sessions (many actually done online) where students gain knowledge and are more formally trained. Some of these cover the region itself, its history, economy, sites of interest and people. Other parts cover what's called “Core Knowledge”, things which are important but not tied to the region: government, architecture, geology to name but a few.

Then there are practical training sessions on coaches and on foot where students' knowledge and technique are introduced and then honed and refined.

A really important part of the course is the period of self-study through the summer of 2026, where students, armed with advice, information and an outline syllabus from the introductory sessions, are expected to explore the whole region at their own pace ready for the intense practical and classroom sessions over the following autumn and winter. The region is large and sufficient time has to be allocated to enable students to get to know the whole region from a visitors point of view.

It is also important to understand that there is much more to the art of tourist guiding than “just” history. History is indeed a *very* important part of explaining the region; but equally guides will need a good knowledge of contemporary matters and even future plans and events. The economy, health and education, flora and fauna, agriculture and tour planning are all part of the required knowledge for a good tourist guide.

Guides who wish to advertise for work in a language other than their mother longue will need to take an additional language examination. *(NB The course and exams are all in English. However, non mother-tongue English speakers who qualify are automatically entitled to guide in their own language, but need to take the English 'language examination' if they wish to guide additionally in English.)*

Why qualify?

Unlike in some countries, the tourist guiding industry in the UK is not “regulated”. That’s to say that pretty much anyone can declare themselves a “tourist guide” and work.

However, the Blue Badge is recognised by the industry in general as a prestigious sign of excellence and helps immensely when advertising yourself for work.

Furthermore, qualified Blue Badge holders who join the British Guild of Tourist Guides avail themselves of specifically tailored public liability insurance without additional cost, a very important matter which is often overlooked. The Guild also arranges Continuing Professional Development events which enable Blue Badge Guides to extend and consolidate their knowledge.

What is the area covered by the course?

This is explained in detail in the Course Prospectus which can be downloaded from the training course website.

Why is the region so large? Why can't I cover a smaller area?

There are essentially two reasons for this:

Firstly, the courses are complex and expensive to arrange, so we need to attract an economic number of students to make the course viable. A larger recruitment and training area gives access to a larger number of potential students.

Secondly, from the students’ point of view, the larger the area in which guides are qualified, the greater their earning potential as guides. We realise that the course represents a significant investment for guides and want to make it as worthwhile as possible.

There is also the matter that the qualification, the “Blue Badge” is a very prestigious and internationally renowned qualification. Students need to show a wide area knowledge and skill to obtain it.

What sort of work is available if I qualify?

Virtually all guides are self-employed, so to some extent work follows what individuals choose to do or specialise in. Some guides specialise in walking tours in towns and villages, some on tours which use vehicles to travel throughout the region and so on. Guiding is a very diverse profession

As well as some bookings arising from the general public, most work comes from a tour operator, tour agent, company or organisation of some kind who will search out guides for a particular job. Over time, guides often develop a regular relationship with operators or agencies who come back to them when they need someone similar again.

By becoming members of guiding organisation, such as the British Guild of Tourist Guides and the Heart of England Tourist Guides’ Association (HETGA), guides also appear in lists, directories and on websites which potential clients can peruse.

If a guide works in a language other than English, they often develop relationships with tour operators in particular countries or communities as well.

Some guides also choose to become what's called "driver guides" where, with appropriate legal documentation, they use their own duly licenced and insured vehicles to transport and guide individuals or small groups.

Others run to a greater or lesser extent public tours on which individuals can book. There has also in recent years been the development of "online" tours done remotely online in various ways.

And who knows? A guide might come up with a completely new "model". Everyone is different.

What do guides earn?

As freelance, self-employed people, guides set their own rates. However, the British Guild of Tourist Guides has a list of suggested fees at <https://britainsbestguides.org/guide-fees/>.

Guiding is a very flexible profession, so a lot depends on how much an individual wishes to work and how far they are willing to travel within the region for it. The more a guide does of each of those things, the more earning potential they have.

Guides working in a language other than English will also have specialist opportunities to guide and to earn more within that particular market.