

Four Seasons Magazine

LIFESTYLE TOURS



A handful of innovative companies are at the forefront of a new trend: urban lifestyle tours. More about a city's present than its past, these tours connect travellers to what's happening now, with visits to artists' studios, new restaurants, and trendy neighbourhoods.

TOKYO The recently launched **Bespoke Tokyo** is the brainchild of fashionable British expats Nicole Fall and former TV producer Charlie Spreckley, who offer what they call "urban safaris," or custom-tailored tours. For someone looking for a lively nightlife scene, that might mean a trip through the city's hottest new bars and clubs; for a group of gourmands, it could be a hunt for the best sushi bars (bespocketokyo.jp; about \$100 an hour plus a \$100 booking charge; maximum three people, minimum four hours).

LOS ANGELES **Take My Mother Please** features owner Anne Block, a vivacious redhead whose excursions are peppered with Hollywood gossip. They include the city's best chocolate makers, a celebrity tour of the Hollywood Forever Cemetery, emerging fashion designers' boutiques, and only-in-L.A. finds like The Paper Bag Princess, the shop where Julia Roberts found the vintage Valentino she wore when she won her Oscar (323/737-2200; from \$550 for a full-day tour with up to three people).

LONDON One of the early pioneers in lifestyle tours is Tobias Moss of **Karma Kabs**. His colourfully decorated fleet of Indian Ambassador cars has been a favourite of such celebrities as Kate Moss and Scarlett Johansson. For £70 an hour, up to four visitors can cruise around the city with Moss or one of his crew. That entitles the group to a customized tour with an itinerary determined by both the client's interests and the spontaneous stops of the driver. These might range from an insider art gallery and café in the trendy club Sketch to a drive down Brick Lane—London's Little Bangladesh—or a visit to an artist's studio (208/964-0700).

BERLIN Berlinagenten's **Urban Living Tour** (€519 for a maximum of seven people) brings you into the homes of several Berliners, such as a young photographer or an art-collecting architect. The Gastro-Rallye (€129 per person), a food-focused tour of the trendy East Berlin Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhoods, features a four- or five-course meal, with each course taken at a different restaurant. The Gastro-Rallye has proved so popular that Berlinagenten's founder Henrik Tidefjård plans to take the concept to Budapest and Zagreb this winter. "There are not many better ways to get local and discover a city's present than through its trendy neighbourhood restaurants," claims Tidefjård (30/4372-0701).

AMSTERDAM **Like-a-Local** is a quirky travel company that offers a variety of experiences hosted by Amsterdam residents. These might include a shopping spree with a local fashionista (€29 per person for two people for two hours, €35 for three hours) or a dinner cooked on a private houseboat (€25–€29 per person, including wine). Like-a-Local offers similar packages in Lisbon, Madrid, and other cities (20/530-1460).

—Gisela Williams

master plan With travel arrangements increasingly booked online, the details of a single trip—flights, car rentals, and so forth—can be scattered among several websites. Tripit, a free online service, consolidates bookings into a master itinerary that includes daily weather updates, maps, driving directions, and a calendar of local events. Users can add notes and share the trip plan with friends (tripit.com).