



Cheat Sheet: A Quick Guide to NPS Commercial Use Authorization Requirements Effective October 1, 2019

New CUA Requirements and Fees for Road-based Commercial Tour Operators will go into effect on October 1, 2019.

National park commercial use authorization (CUA) processes and fees for road-based commercial tour operators have varied from park to park. Thus, the National Park Service (NPS) is standardizing CUA requirements and fees agency-wide.

Following is a quick reference to the National Park Service's new requirements for road-based commercial tour operators. You may also find information on the National Park Service site on [Commercial Use Authorizations](#).

What is a CUA?

A commercial use authorization (CUA) allows an individual, group, company, or other for-profit entity to conduct commercial activities and provide specific visitor services within a national park.

The NPS issues CUAs to manage a wide-range of commercial visitor services, like group tours, bike tours, guided backpacking, and photography workshops.

This cheat sheet deals only with the CUA requirements for road-based commercial tour operators.

Why does NPS require CUAs?

It is illegal to conduct business in a park area without a permit, contract, or other written agreement. By law NPS has the authority to issue CUAs to allow business operations and *requires* NPS to collect a reasonable fee for CUA administration and management.

How does NPS define a road-based commercial tour operator?

Road-based commercial tours are defined as one or more persons traveling on an improved roadway on an itinerary that a company or individual has packaged, priced, or sold for leisure/recreational purposes.

Road-based commercial tours generally provide no other visitor services except those incidental to the tour, like on-board interpretation and stops at visitor centers, restaurants, exhibits, etc.

At the discretion of the park superintendent, however, road-based commercial tour CUAs may cover minor additional services such as guided day hiking.

Transportation-only services such as taxis, shuttles, and chartered motorcoach companies **do not meet the definition** of road-based commercial tours if those services are not prepackaged. (Parks may issue these transportation-only providers a road-based transportation CUA if the park superintendent decides managing the use is necessary for preservation and proper management of park resources and values.)

Who will need to acquire the road-based commercial tour CUA — the tour operator or the chartered motorcoach company?

The responsibility for obtaining a road-based commercial tour CUA will fall on **the company that packaged, priced, and sold the tour**, e.g. an inbound/receptive operator or tour operator.

A chartered motorcoach company, however, must acquire a road-based commercial tour CUA if it also packages, prices, and sells tours directly to consumers **or if** it contracts directly with a foreign tour operator to provide the transportation, as the foreign operator would not hold a CUA.

When will the new CUA requirements go into effect?

The new CUA process for road-based commercial tour operators is effective **October 1, 2019**.

What is included in the standardized process?

Road-based commercial tour operators will be required to:

- Obtain a CUA for each NPS unit in which they operate;
- Pay required CUA fees (see below), and;
- Submit mandatory annual CUA reports after each CUA operating season.

What fees will be required with the new standardized road-based commercial tour CUA fees?

CUA Application Fee

An annual non-refundable fee of \$300 will be required for each submitted CUA application.

Entrance and Management Fees

Beginning October 1, 2019, road-based commercial tour operators will pay a per passenger entrance fee based upon the new [entry fee changes](#) in parks that charge entrance fees. There will not be different peak season rates as had been proposed.

You will also find a downloadable spreadsheet at the bottom of the [NPS Commercial Use Authorizations webpage](#) that lists just the parks and their per-person fees, both as of 10/1/19 and as of 1/1/20.

For operations in parks without entrance fees, road-based commercial tour CUA holders will pay a **\$5 per client CUA management fee** due upon submission of the required annual CUA report.

For operations in parks that collect an entrance fee, **NPS will deduct a \$5 per client CUA management fee from entrance fees** paid by road-based commercial tour CUA holders.

Road-based commercial tour operators **will not pay both** a per person entrance fee and the \$5 management fee.

How do I apply for a CUA?

Currently, CUAs are managed at the park level. Applications and associated information, including any additional documentation requirements, are available through each park's website or CUA office.

NPS is working to create a **centralized system allowing online CUA application** submission and expects the system to be in place when the new requirements go into effect in 2019.

All parks use the standard OMB approved [CUA Application \(NPS Form 10-550\)](#), but are able to add conditions specific to the CUA service type. It is important to reach out to individual parks for applications including those specific conditions.

Are Commercial Tour Operators required to pay the Market Price Fee?

The Market Price Fee described on the NPS CUA web-page **does not apply** to road-based commercial tour operators.