Welcome!

You can call me John. That’s not my name, but if I told you my name, you would butcher it. So, let’s just stick to John, ok?

You contacted our agency for local, private tours - and I was assigned your file. So, it is my responsibility to show you around the city and give you an….authentic...experience.

Before we head out, however, there are a couple of things I want you to keep in mind. First, I am known for being brutally honest. If you didn’t pick up on that until now, then you’re going to have to work on your perceptual skills - not just for this tour, but for life in general. You do seem a bit clueless.

Also - I don’t like you. How could I? I just met you. You are my client, not my friend. Make no mistake. But hey - I don’t dislike you either. So don’t look so hurt. Our relationship...purely transactional.

Speaking of transactions - you pay one fee. No tipping. I don’t want to feel pressured to cater to your sense of humor. It just doesn’t come naturally to me. If your joke is bad, I will let you know. If your comment is silly, I will let you know. If your comment is racist, I will more than let you know. The same goes for all the positive things you might say or do.

I want you to know: I am a local. Yes - my english is perfect; but that’s because I worked hard at it. I haven’t left this place since I was born. But I did date a native english speaker once; and that’s as much as I will say about my personal life.

Oh! one common misconception always comes up when I let people know that I have only lived here. They feel like they need to tell me how great their country is. Unfortunately, I have absolutely no interest in hearing it. The only thing I love hearing….is silence. I absolutely adore it. I think that silence is one of those resources we’re unfortunately running out of. We fill it with noise; jam it with useless comments born out of discomfort. Do you feel uncomfortable with silence? No? Show me.

[Pause for 10 seconds]

Good. I think we’re going to get along.

A few more things: during the tour, I want you to keep your phone, or any device capable of taking pictures, away from sight. Our tour company prides itself on giving you a real glimpse of daily life here. You called that…...oh yes, an authentic experience. Let me ask you a rhetorical question: where you live, do you see people taking pictures of their meal? They might if they’re at a really fancy place and the presentation is outstanding. But those are not the places I’ll be taking you to. Those are not “daily life” type places. McDonald’s is a “daily life” type place - from what I understand - at least for some people. Do you see anyone taking pictures of their meal in McDonald’s? You don’t have to nod your head; I said the question was rhetorical.

So, no pictures. Enjoy the trip. I want you to be in it; to really experience it. I do not want to take pictures of you. Whenever people hand me their phone to take pictures of them, they’re also handing me a reason to hate them. When I hold the latest version of the iPhone in my hands, I am reminded of how shitty my flip-phone is. Do you think that’s cool? To be reminded of a shitty situation? How would you react if I walked up to you and called you fat to your face; and then smiled? You wouldn’t like it, would you? But it’s the same thing, isn’t it? Being reminded of something you’re unhappy with. Sorry, that was an assumption on my part. You might be perfectly happy with being overweight - but you should know, it is aesthetically displeasing.

Some people bring those selfie-sticks to get around asking other people to take their picture. Therefore avoiding the uncomfortable situation I just described. I consider it an act of kindness, even though it is also the most ridiculous thing I have ever seen. Do you remember when people didn’t want to walk around looking at a map because they thought they looked uncool? And then Google solved that issue with Google Maps - allowing you to check your location discreetly on your phone. Now, the selfie-stick rises just like those foldable paper maps from the past - announcing to everybody: “hey! I’m not from around here!”

But that’s fair enough, I guess. After all, there’s nothing you can do to hide the fact that you’re not from around here. That you do not belong here. You are a tourist. And no matter what you do, there are some labels we just can’t get rid of.

However, some labels may be misinterpreted. I have some family members that went to visit your country - the same way you’re visiting mine. But instead of being called “tourists”, they were called “immigrants”. And it so happens that the treatment you get changes considerably depending on the label you’re given.

But that’s me taking their word for it. After all, I’ve never left this place, which I’m about to show you. Are you ready?