

House Hunting Survival Guide: 12 Tips for Success

By Danni Duggan

Congratulations. You have graduated from “just looking” online at houses for sale to actually stepping through the front door of one. Or two. Or fifteen. You have hopefully been pre-approved by a lender, and you are ready to start experiencing inventory in person with a Realtor® you know and trust. Hey, I know one of those...

I offer you the following tips to make the absolute most of your home buyer tour experience. If you are lucky enough to have a number of homes to choose from that meet your search criteria and are within your budget, this list will help you get through them efficiently, like a pro.

Danni's House Hunting Survival Tips for the Portland Real Estate Market

1. Prioritize your must haves/want to haves/don't needs. It is best to do this before you start touring homes, but be prepared for this list to magically transform once you start looking at homes. When my husband and I first moved to Portland, we requested 2200+ square feet and a 2+ car garage. We were confused when our Realtor® headed for the suburbs. She explained (very nicely) that in our price range, we would not find a home like that in Portland proper. After that conversation, and after sitting in traffic



on Highway 26, it became abundantly clear to us that proximity to Hawthorne Boulevard was our number one, non-negotiable must-have, followed closely by “nothing built after 1930.” Everything else that we thought were must haves fell by the wayside, without hesitation. But we needed to actually look at available homes and sit in traffic before we realized what truly mattered most to us.

2. Be pre-approved. This one confuses many buyers. Why work with a lender before finding a home you want to purchase? Well, unless you are looking to do an all-cash transaction, a lending professional can help you best establish your home buying budget. In Portland's current fast-paced market where multiple offers are common, an offer from a buyer who is not yet pre-approved is not the strongest offer possible. It may suggest the buyer is not as

serious as other competing buyers who are pre-approved. Also, it can be crushing to tour homes and then learn that you need to reduce your budget by tens of thousands of dollars. Jump into the market with your eyes wide open, then you can really appreciate the home touring process because you are only looking at homes you can afford.

3. Eat before you tour, and pack a snack. You never know how long the whole experience will take. Sometimes you will sail through a handful of homes in no time at all because none of them “sing” to you. Other times you will linger and start mentally placing your furniture throughout the space. You do not want to blow through a home tour because your tummy is rumbling or your brain is unable to focus.

4. Limit your fluids intake. If you



Danni Duggan
Oregon Real Estate Broker

503.719.2279 (cell)
danni@dannipdx.com
dannipdx.com

Premiere Property Group, LLC
3636 NE Broadway, Suite 150
Portland, OR 97232

tour a number of vacant homes, the water in these homes may be turned off, which means no working toilets. You want to be on the hunt for the perfect home, not the least objectionable public restroom.

5. Wear slip-on shoes. Basically you are looking for anything you own that does not lace, zipper, buckle, strap, or otherwise slow you down every time you walk through the front door of a home. Removing shoes or slipping “booties” over your shoes is customary in many homes for sale, especially during Portland’s wet months. Be a pro and do not get stuck in a foyer balancing and hopping on one foot while you wrestle with booties. I may have been that hopping person the first time I conducted a home tour.

6. Bring a flashlight. I am a fan of the camping head lamps, myself. Basement lighting can be sketchy to non-existent. Sometimes you want to peer into a storage area tucked under an eave or peek into a crawl space. I carry a flashlight with me on all home showings, but you are on your own if you decide to explore the crawl space!

7. Bring a tape measure. You may never use it. But you will kick yourself when you need one and do not have one. If you have any family heirloom furniture that you cannot imagine living in a home without, be sure you have the dimensions recorded somewhere so you know if it will fit in a home you are considering.

8. Use a checklist for each home you visit. I have a master Home Buying Checklist that I provide to my clients who want them so that they can consistently evaluate all of the homes viewed using exactly the same criteria. It is really easy to fall in love with a front porch swing that you never even contemplated, and then entirely overlook that the house has only one bathroom. If you view enough homes, they will start to blend in your mind, and you may forget key points about each one. Jotting down notes on a checklist, and then stapling each checklist to its associated RMLS data sheet or flyer will help you remember key details.

9. Go at your own pace. Sometimes you want to get into a home and wander around aimlessly. But if the home has the potential to be a contender, pull out the checklist and go through the home a second time, more methodically, and with purpose. Record the key details that matter to you. Conversely, if it is evident to you that a home is not what you seek, either before you enter the home or shortly thereafter, by all means shout out, “Next!” There is no need to waste your time in a place that you know is not right for you and your family.

10. Use a camera. If you have a cell phone, you likely have a camera. Use it to help jog your memory about certain elements of homes you like.

11. Visit the neighborhood again. If a home appears to be “the one,”

check out the neighborhood during the day and at night. You may never realize that a street light shines directly into the master bedroom unless you drive by at night, for example. Or, maybe the home is near a school, and during drop-off and pick-up, there are cars double parked down the block. Are the neighboring properties maintained? Notice any garage bands practicing next door?

12. Be honest. Be brutally honest with your Realtor®. I tell my clients that you are not touring my home, so there is nothing you can say to me about the home that (a) I probably was not thinking myself, (b) will insult me, or (c) will do anything but help bring your search criteria into even greater focus, thus greatly improving the pool of homes we view together in the future.

As someone who spends much of my time working with buyers, I want to get to know exactly what is important to you so that the time we spend together looking at homes is productive and leads to your successfully making an offer on the right home for you. Finding a home is easy. Finding the right home takes patience, some Q&A, and an understanding of what matters most to you. In the end, you will hopefully reflect on our time together and conclude that the process was fun, informative, and chock full of sensible shoes.



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dannipdx.premierepropertynw.com

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dannipdx.com

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