

Advice for Traveling Teacher Leaders

Travel organizations that are members of the Student & Youth Travel Association are proud of their commitment to travel safety and taking the steps necessary to reduce the chance of an unwanted event occurring during a tour they organize. SYTA Active Members in good standing adhere to strict performance and safety standards designed to improve the professionalism of the student group travel industry while placing special emphasis on implementing experienced-based best practices shared by member organizations to improve the travel experience for all groups.

When a SYTA travel organization leads tour groups, they strive to ensure these practices are in place. When they are not leading a tour group, and in an effort to help your tour be trouble-free, we offer some of our safety experience and practices to help you reduce the chance of a problem surfacing during your trip.

This list is not intended to be inclusive of every challenge a group could face when traveling. Each group is different, and the group leaders must assess the potential risks facing the group.

Time and experience have shown that following these suggestions could reduce the chance of a problem surfacing during travel. We hope you find them useful and we wish you the best during your upcoming travel.

Recommendations for Your Consideration

Hotels

1. After arriving at your hotel, confer with hotel staff on emergency and evacuation procedures. We encourage tour leaders to remind all travelers of the evacuation procedures and rules for the property, including not using elevators during an evacuation and making sure exit paths are free from obstructions. We recommend pointing out to your travelers a primary location to assemble outside the hotel during an evacuation. We also suggest establishing a secondary assembly location, in the event the first location becomes inaccessible.
2. We recommend tour leaders inform student group members of their responsibility for any damage to the hotel room or its property. We also suggest students are advised they are responsibility for any TV, Wi-Fi or phone charges incurred during their stay.
3. It is a good practice for the tour leaders to escort travelers to their rooms, to inspect the room for any previous damage and to ensure no unwanted items have been left behind by previous occupants. This is an ideal time to remind students of proper hotel manners and etiquette:
 - a. Adhere to proper dress in hotels, such as no uncovered swimsuits and no bare feet.
 - b. Never hang any item from a fire suppression sprinkler, located in hotel rooms.
 - c. Be respectful of other guests and keep nose levels appropriate to the situation and location.
 - d. Never block hallways or pathways.

4. We suggest room checks be conducted each evening, when travelers are expected to be in their hotel room for the night. These checks should be conducted with at least two tour leaders of the same sex as the room occupants. We recommend not entering the room but requiring each occupant to be visibly to confirm they are in the room. The expectation should be made that no one should leave the room after the check unless an emergency occurs.
5. Use of a buddy system in a hotel is proven successful. This practice suggests travelers be assigned a fellow traveler (a buddy) and that when moving within the hotel, they are required to travel in pairs at all times.
6. It is suggested that a security organization be retained to provide visual observation of the hotel floors where your group is located. This service could reduce the possibility of someone entering the area who should not be there and discourage students from moving from one room to another after room checks are completed.
7. Each group member should know the room location and contact information of all group leaders, in case of an emergency.
8. If the group is allowed free time to explore areas outside of the hotel property, a check-out and check-in procedure should be used. It's important to record the location they plan to visit and their expected return time. Students should be required to travel in groups. When possible, a mix of boys and girls may be best. For younger travelers in elementary and middle school, we do not recommend free time. Each group leaving on their own should have a charged cellphone, the leader's contact information, and the address and name of the hotel.
9. It is important to advise students not to open their hotel doors for anyone other than a leader, unless an emergency situation occurs, and a first responder is the earliest to arrive at the room. If they look through the peephole and see a hotel staff member, security guard, tour director if not a school employee, or someone else, they should call their chaperone and ask them to come to their room before opening the door. They should tell the person through the door that they must wait until their adult chaperone arrives.

Swimming Activities

1. During every swimming activity, a certified lifeguard should be present to perform guardian duties during the entire activity. If procuring a lifeguard is not possible, we recommend forgoing the swimming activity.
2. Prior to a swimming activity, check with the property management to ensure water treatment is current and within the regulation requirements for that location.
3. Prior to a swimming activity, ensure all required safety equipment is available and in working order, in accordance with local and state laws.

Motorcoach Travel

1. Prior to the departure of any motorcoach, the tour leader should ensure an effective safety briefing takes place. The message should include a requirement to use seat belt, if provided, at all times while the motorcoach is underway. We have attached the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration safety briefing for your reference.
2. The Department of Transportation no longer requires motorcoach companies to provide first-aid kits on buses. If they do have a kit, the driver is not allowed to administer first aid. Therefore, a member of the group leadership team should be currently certified in first aid, CPR, and AED use, and carry an appropriately stocked first-aid kit.
3. Prior to the departure of any motorcoach, the tour leader should ensure the travelers know and understand the location of all fire suppression equipment.

Group Movement

1. A count-off system should be utilized to keep track of group members. To set up the count-off system, assign each traveler a number at the beginning of the tour. Prior to starting the trip, the group should practice counting off from 1 to the highest number, representing all group members. In large groups, small teams could be formed—such as 10 travelers per chaperone—with numbers assigned to the members of these smaller groups. This procedure provides a fast and effective means to account for everyone in the group. The count-off should be done:
 - a. When the group has boarded their motorcoach, to ensure everyone is present before departing.
 - b. Whenever the group passes through a crowded area.
 - c. Randomly, to demonstrate to the group that you care about their safety.
 - d. Any time you feel the need to confirm group attendance.
2. When on sidewalks or pathways, a group should attempt to stay to the right side to allow others to easily pass by.
3. Group leaders and chaperones should position themselves at the front, at the rear, and within the group to maintain visual confirmation of the well-being and location of all group members.
4. All attempts should be made to keep group members at least five feet from the roadway curb, to prevent a traveler from entering the roadway unexpectedly.

Restaurant and Meal Activities

When arriving at a restaurant or catering facility, we strongly recommend all meal arrangements be confirmed for anyone requiring reasonable accommodations due to a food allergy or other medical condition. Although your travel organization will likely alert the facility of a meal request if they are informed of the need in advance, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual consuming the product to ensure it is free from any ingredient that could cause a medical situation. If the tour participant is unable to make that judgement, we recommend a medical aide travel with the student to ensure safe consumption of food products.

Amusement Parks and Attraction

1. Prior to arrival at the amusement park or attraction, make sure travelers' medical forms are with the leaders of the student travelers they are responsible for.
2. Let parents know ahead of time that you plan to visit an amusement park or attraction. Make sure they understand your plan for supervision at this location.
3. Travelers should be briefed on what to do in the event of an active shooter or other emergency at the location.
4. Determine if there is a first-aid station or team available and their hours of operation.
5. When arriving at an attraction or amusement park, establish meeting point in the event a group member becomes separated from the rest of group. Visit this meeting point, so everyone clearly understands the location.
6. Once the meeting point has been identified and briefed, show the group where the first-aid station is located.
7. While there, speak with the first responders, learn what the procedure is for using first aid and share the information with your group.
8. Provide the first-aid station representatives the group leaders' phone numbers, to be called in case of an emergency involving one of your travelers.
9. Get maps of the attraction and provide them to the group members.
10. Determine where the emergency exits are located and inform the group members.
11. Understand the weather forecast and locations of safety.
12. Allowing any student traveler unchaperoned free time at an amusement park comes with some level of risk. Each school should make the decision best meeting their needs. If high school-aged travelers are allowed to leave the main group, they should be in teams of at least four members to reduce the chance of becoming disoriented or lost. Group members in elementary or middle school may be broken into smaller groups but should be supervised by an adult chaperone at all times.
13. Set meeting times and ensure everyone understands the expectation to be at the meeting point before the set time.
14. Remind your travelers to listen to employees of the attraction and follow their direction.
15. When travelers are in theaters within an attraction or otherwise, they should ensure phones are turned off. Tour leaders should set phones to silent.
16. When preparing to leave an attraction or amusement park, ensure all participants are present. Each chaperone should check in with the tour director once they have accounted for their assigned students. Do not allow students to leave the location with a different chaperone.

Medical Emergencies

1. Prior to travel, conduct a search to learn the locations of medical facilities at and around your destinations.
2. When a student traveler needs medical attention, an adult chaperone should stay with the student. If the condition requires an overnight stay in a medical facility, the chaperone should remain with the student until the student's family members arrive to take over or the student's condition improves, allowing them to rejoin the group. Before these types of situations arise, it is a good idea to assess the tour leadership compliment and ability to effectively monitor the group when a chaperone is required to stay with a student, at the hotel or in a medical facility.

Summary

We hope you find these safety practices helpful when traveling. You may also want to share this document of experience-based practices with your school leadership and legal counsel, to determine usability with your group and seek their recommendations on how to best limit your organization's liability while traveling students.

Thank you from all of us at SYTA. We wish you a happy, safe and successful trip.

Motorcoach Passenger Safety Briefing with Seat Belt Reference

Welcome and thank you for traveling with us today. We are happy to have you aboard!

Your safety and comfort are important to us.

Before we get started on our trip, we want you to become familiar with the safety features on this vehicle and how to use them properly.

- ✓ **Please stay seated while the vehicle is in motion.**
- ✓ **If your bus has seat belts:** Please be sure to use your seat belt when the motorcoach is underway. Although motorcoach travel remains one of the two safest forms of travel, research has shown that those who wear their seat belt are up to 78% less likely to experience serious injury or death in the unlikely event of an accident. Please buckle up for your own safety.
- ✓ Never block the center aisle.
- ✓ Follow all safety instructions given by the driver.
- ✓ If necessary, notify authorities of an emergency by using a cellular telephone to call 911.
- ✓ There is a fire extinguisher on this vehicle. **Please watch as we point out the location.** It will be located behind the driver's seat, or beneath the front row passenger's seat, or in the front-most overhead compartment.
- ✓ Please remember: The primary exit from this vehicle is the same door at the front through which you entered.
- ✓ In an extreme emergency situation, the windows may also serve as exits.
- ✓ In case of an emergency, follow the instruction markings on the windows or the window frames.
- ✓ Also note: There is an emergency exit hatch in the roof above the center aisle.

Please take a moment to locate the emergency exits nearest to you. If you have any questions about the safety procedures, please ask.

Thank you again for riding with us today.