

---

# **COVID-19: Educator Resource Guide for Student Group Travel**

## Message from the SYTA CEO

Dear SYTA Friends,

I know this is an incredibly difficult time for many of you—a global disaster no one could have predicted, which we are all struggling to comprehend and manage. I want to assure you the entire Student & Youth Travel Association leadership and staff are here to support and guide you. We will all work together to get our students back to the life-changing experiences of travel, as soon as it is safe.

We have developed this resource guide for parents, teachers and school administrators, to help you feel confident about the group travel process. We have included detailed information about why it is important to use a professional SYTA Member tour operator to plan your travel, an explanation and infographic to illustrate the process of booking group travel, and information about keeping our youth safe on the road.

We have appreciated your patience and understanding throughout these past months of heartbreaking cancellations, as we have been working together to determine the best solutions for spring travel plans and for the safest and most financially secure way to provide travel experiences for our young people in the future.

The members of SYTA want to be your trusted partners in providing students travel experiences, which are proven to improve their classroom experience, increase their self-esteem, and increase their tolerance for and understand of new cultures. These will be important tools for our young travelers as they navigate a different world, post-COVID-19.

In good health,



Carylann Assante, CAE  
CEO



---

## Student Travel & COVID-19

The ramifications of COVID-19 began in early 2020, when SYTA members began being notified of school closings and subsequent postponement and cancellations of student trips. Our tour operator members took immediate action in the face of this unprecedented global disaster to protect our student travelers and teachers with, whom they had worked so diligently to plan trips.

The priority was and is to ensure safe travel of students and youth, across the country and around the globe. SYTA leadership coordinated with industry and consumer groups to ensure the safe return of traveling students and the financial security of our members and their customers.

Working with a coalition of industry groups, SYTA has been active in pushing the United States government for financial support to help the travel industry and its customers. We have been sharing information about SBA loans to keep afloat tour operator companies and small businesses that supply group travel, in turn helping operators continue to work on behalf of their customers.

# The Group Booking Process

During this pandemic there have been incidents where some groups were not able to receive full refunds for trips planned. We understand the frustration you may feel during this confusing time.

We would like to clarify the process of group travel booking, to help you better understand how and when your funds are spent, and how we are advocating on your behalf to process your refunds or reschedule your trips.

First, we all want to assure you we are staunch consumer advocates for you and your students. As the single point of contact for clients, tour operators work each day to streamline a complex process.

From the first call with a teacher or director inquiring about a student trip, the tour operator sets in motion a process of setting educational goals for the group, presenting travel options, checking availability, and making presentations to the school administrator, teacher, director, or parent booster group. Among the considerations that must be discussed and decided on from the start are:

- What are the ages and experience of the group?
- What are the educational and skill-building goals?
- Are there specific performance venues, festivals or destinations you will consider?
- Are there special needs within the group of students?
- What are the budget parameters of the group, per student?

Once these basic questions are answered, the tour operator must begin an intensive, time-consuming process of responding to these needs. They will be in touch with their vendors, which could include accommodations, restaurants, motorcoach companies and airlines, festivals and performance venues, theme parks and attractions, and tour guides and directors.

Reservations are usually made two to four months after the contract is signed with the "client," which is you. The tour operator must then make deposits to hold those contracts. These payments are typically made from the deposits required upfront, but sometimes are paid in advance by the tour company.

Just as securing your reservations and other bookings takes time, it takes time for tour operators to request refunds from each vendor on any given trip. Each vendor has varying terms and conditions, depending on the contract, and tour operators could work with as many as 20 or more vendors per trip.

This is why we continue to ask for your patience as tour operators do everything possible to best serve your interests and needs. Tour operators want to work with you again once this crisis passes, and are doing everything they can to return to the business of changing student lives through travel.

## Benefits of Working with a SYTA Member Tour Operator

The Student & Youth Travel Association is the premier organization for businesses dedicated to providing young people with life-enhancing travel experience. The association of 140 tour operators and more than 900 suppliers and destinations sets the student travel industry standards to help students, parents, educators, performance leaders, and directors experience travel's social and educational value.

One of the greatest advantages to using a tour operator, rather than planning a student group trip on your own, is benefiting from the relationships tour operators have with the various vendors, such as hotels and attractions. Tour operators cultivate these relationships over many years through networking, conferences and meetings with associations such as SYTA. As a result, they build volume over time. That means leverage in securing group rates, VIP access and tickets individuals would not be able to get on their own.

These relationships have proven their value during times of crisis—particularly the COVID-19 national emergency. As destinations and attractions closed and airlines canceled and reduced flights, tour operators have been able to take advantage of their vendor relationships to get faster, more accurate and better resolutions to problems.

It's also important to note the majority of SYTA members are former educators, or their families have been in the business for years. Providing student travel is their sole focus. SYTA members are passionate about the impact travel and experiences have on youth and often travel with student groups to guide and provide expert assistance.

Members of SYTA are trusted professionals who use best practices through SYTA's advocacy, education, training and networking opportunities. They attend conferences, meet new vendors, and learn about new destinations, attractions, restaurants, and hotels that provide further customer options. They participate in conferences and virtual learning to improve their safety, crisis, and emergency response plans; they are equipped with the knowledge to lead and support your group during an emergency and provide critical support to youth and their families. They know where emergency and medical facilities are located, at all points along your travels.

---

## Student Group Travel Moving Forward

We know students are going to be traveling again. SYTA members are here for you when that planning begins. The safety and well-being of our student travelers is our top priority.

In light of the ongoing pandemic, we are fully committed to providing continued safe guidance, expertise and travel assistance for you when you begin to reschedule plans affected by the novel coronavirus. We hope the information in the following pages will be helpful to you as we all move forward together.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Group Cancellations & Refunds

We encourage all parents and faculty to consider postponing, rather than canceling, the educational experience to ensure your child still receives the benefits of travel. If that is not possible, please note the following information.

**Q: What are my options for refunds of canceled or postponed trips?**

A: If rescheduling or postponing a trip is not an option, tour operators will work on your behalf to secure refunds from vendors where possible. Please note the section above on the booking process and understand this is a time-consuming process, one in which not all funds deposited are still in the tour operators' hands and some fees have been incurred to pay for the booking process.

**Q: Who is responsible for ensuring I get my money back? Why can't I get a full refund right away?**

A: Tour operators are your advocates, working on your behalf to secure any refunds for your trip. Payments to vendors are made in advance by the tour operator. Itineraries may include multiple vendors, each with a different refund policy. The full refund amount could vary based on contract terms and conditions and on any nonrefundable deposits outlined in that language.

If you booked parts of your trip yourself, you will need to request refunds directly from the related vendors.

**Q: If I cannot get a full refund, could I get a partial refund?**

A: In most cases, tour operators can secure at least a partial refund. Each situation is different and must be viewed on a case-by-case basis, as terms and conditions vary with each vendor.

**Q: Why isn't the refund process easier?**

A: Cancellations and refunds would have been easier under normal circumstances. Now, with shutdowns, furloughs, and vendor layoffs, tour operators are working with changing refund and cancellation policies out of their control.

In some cases, no one is working at the vendor to process the refunds. Tour operators paid these vendors with the deposits and payments from clients and do not actually hold the funds.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## U.S. CARES Act/ Stimulus Package

**Q: Now that the government has passed the CARES Act, how does this affect our ability get a refund for my trip?**

A: The United States Congress recently passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for small and mid-size businesses.

Loans secured through the CARES Act are primarily operational for small businesses and not allowed to be used for the purpose of refunding money to customers for things like student trips. The loans are restricted to items such as payroll, salaries, rent and insurance. In addition, the U.S. Government has awarded \$25 billion to airlines for bailouts of their businesses, which we are hopeful will increase the probability of a more generous refund policy, although that remains to be seen. While it would seem these new financial aids would speed the process of determining possible refunds to our customers, the application and receipt of loans and bailout benefits is extremely long and complicated. Tour operators are asking customers to continue to be patient while they continue to find satisfactory solutions for trip cancellations as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Q: Now that the airline industry has received separate funding, why can't I get an airline refund?**

A: Each airline has its own refund and credit policies, which are constantly changing. At this time, we do not know how this funding will affect refunds and cancellations for group customers. Note: Tickets purchased individually are refunded or credited differently than tickets purchased for groups.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Rescheduling Travel

**Q: I am only interested in keeping some of my travel plans. I'd like a partial refund for certain previously planned activities. Is it possible?**

A: It may be. Tour operators negotiated special group rates with vendors that they provide to you. In some case, the negotiated rates are part of a packaged itinerary unable to be broken up into segments and refunded. There may be contract or liability issues if the student purchased their trip as part of a school group and now wants an individual refund. Your tour operator will work together with schools to resolve these situations on behalf of their student travelers.

**Q: How can I change my travel plans to a different date/location? Will the cost be affected?**

A: Tour operators work in advance to develop an itinerary meeting their group's goals and budget needs. This includes trip timing, destination cost and number of students traveling. The itinerary price may vary based upon time of year and new pricing that may be in place as a result of the pandemic. Operators are working with vendors to make travel as accessible and affordable as possible and will offer needs-based options.

**Q: Will original airfare costs be honored, or will my flight credit only go toward the new airfare rates?**

A: Airline policies, determined by each airline, change daily—especially during the pandemic. Operators will continue to work with airlines on behalf of their clients, for the best possible flights and rates. It is important to note airlines extend different rates and policies to individual travelers who book direct or through online services. For a student group, tour operators secure special rates and group reservations, so youth can travel together with chaperones and group leaders.

**Q: What if airfare or hotel prices increase later?**

A: Tour operators continue to negotiate on behalf of clients and secure the best possible options for future travel. They will work with you to develop an itinerary for your group that meets your budget needs.

**Q: Who is my point of contact to resolve my travel plan concerns?**

A: Your tour operator will continue to be your point of contact and work on your behalf with vendors to secure refunds and credits.

**Q: When will travel restrictions be lifted? What if we do not feel safe to travel for another school year? How do we get our money back?**

A: Travel restrictions are determined by the government and individual school boards. If your group determines they do not want to travel for another year, your tour operator will help you to understand all options before further postponing the trip or requesting a cancellation.

**Q: If we choose to rebook our travel plans later this year, will you provide masks or other resources as precautionary measures?**

A: We will continue to use trusted resources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization and U.S. Department of State and individual school board policies to determine how precautionary measures are implemented for a trip.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Rescheduling Travel

**Q: Some students are no longer able to participate in a group trip. What are the options for a partial refund?**

A: Group travel arrangements are based upon the total number of students participating in the trip and are priced accordingly. The tour operator working with the school will determine what refunds are available for individual students.

**Q: We are on the fence about rescheduling. Why should we still go on our trip?**

A: Conditions are changing constantly and federal, state, local, and school guidelines and regulations must be followed. We will continue to monitor the situation and work with schools to rebook trips.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure youth are still able to have this important educational experience. We remain passionate believers in the impact of travel on students.

Research shows travel experiences are proven to increase youth independence, self-esteem, intellectual curiosity, cultural tolerance, self-expression, adaptability and even desire to seek higher education. We will work with our vendors to see what additional value and opportunities are available to groups who keep their travel plans.

---

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Insurance Considerations

Many SYTA Member tour operators offer trip insurance—travel protection—for their clients and there are many options for schools, teachers, and parents to individually purchase policies. SYTA urges you to follow the advice of your tour operator regarding the best insurance options for your groups.

**Q: Should I purchase travel protection insurance for my group or my child, or is it included in the cost of the trip?**

A: It is recommended that travel protection insurance be made available for individual travelers to purchase.

**Q: Should I always buy Cancel for Any Reason insurance in light of what has happened with this pandemic?**

A: As a consumer, you should consider all your options to protect your trip. Cancel for Any Reason often requires confirmation of purchase within a specified time period from your initial deposit. When canceling travel under the CFAR provision, you may be entitled to a portion of nonrefundable trip costs; the percentage you get back may vary.

**Q: If I cancel my trip, will my travel protection insurance guarantee a full refund of my trip cost?**

A: There are many kinds of travel protection. Coverage depends upon the travel insurance purchased by the individual or group.

# Safety for Youth Traveling

## Health and Safety on the Road

Tour operators, teachers and group leaders should review specific processes and guidelines for traveling during a pandemic—especially those provided by official resources such as local health departments and school boards. It is highly recommended to review the standard practices for when a student becomes ill on the road and sharing that information with parents, in advance of the trip.

Below is general information on COVID-19. As the situation is changing daily, this should not be considered all-inclusive; rather, it is a snapshot of what we know at the time of this guide.

### Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection while traveling.

- Wash hands multiple times daily, for at least 20 seconds.
- Utilize alcohol-based hand cleansers when arriving at and departing locations.
- Frequently wipe surfaces with cleansers—cellphones, keys and other personal objects.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough and immediately throw away the tissue, or sneeze or cough into the bend of your elbow.
- Do not share food and drinks.
- Maintain social distancing in public spaces.
- Give fist bumps or elbow bumps instead of handshakes or touching each other.

Add any additional guidance from your school.

### Know the symptoms of COVID-19.

The CDC notes these symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat;
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

For some people, the symptoms are like having a cold; for other people, symptoms are severe or even life-threatening.

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>

<https://www.cdc.gov/CONTACT/>

Make public inquiries via e-mail at [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov) or by calling 800.232.4636.

# Safety for Youth Traveling

**If a student becomes ill on the trip:**

The teacher leader, with the support of the tour operator/director or guide, will implement the crisis management plan based on the severity of the illness.

**If the student shows signs of having a fever or cold:**

The student should be separated from the group, with a teacher or chaperone, until proper medical treatment may be determined. A teachers or chaperone should confirm the parents were notified and gave permission to take the student to a medical facility. The teachers and chaperones should designate who will stay with the student at the medical facility during treatment, not expected to be overnight. The rest of the group will most likely continue with the planned itinerary while the student receives treatment. It is important to communicate the situation with the other students, to avoid stigma or isolation of the ill student. Once treatment has concluded, provide details to the teacher or chaperone who stayed with the ill student on how and when they can reunite with the rest of their tour group.

If a student needs to miss an activity due to illness or injury, one teacher or chaperone must stay behind to address the student's needs.

**IF IT IS AN EMERGENCY:**

The teachers and chaperones will contact emergency medical services (EMS) to start the medical transport, then contact the parents. A teacher or chaperone should stay with the student throughout the experience. It's important to call the parents on a regular basis, to provide updates from the doctor and to allow the student to talk with the parents. Every two hours is a good guide unless other timing was determined with the parents. The teacher and parents will determine if the student will return home. The tour operator, working with the parents, will help facilitate the return of the student. The parents are responsible for the cost of the medical treatment and travel expenses home.

Travel safety and risk management resources are available at SYTA.org in the Safety Resource Center.

<https://syta.org/why-travel-matters/>

# Economic & Social Impact of Student Travel

## Global Student Travel

A growing and vital market around the world.

- The global youth travel market, according to the WYSE Travel Federation, generates \$333 billion in tourism receipts and accounts for at least 20% of the global travel market.
- The United States is the No. 1 destination choice for student and youth travel around the world—thus benefiting from the greatest percentage of that value.
- The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicted youth travel would account for 300 million arrivals worldwide by this year—and was showing a 3% average annual growth.

## Social Impact of Student Travel

Travel changes young lives for good!

- According to the SYTA Student Travel Digest, 74% of teachers surveyed believe travel has a very positive impact on students' personal development.
- Also from the Digest, 56% of teachers believe travel has a very positive impact on students' education and career.
- The Digest shows as well that 74% of teachers believe travel positively impacts students' performance at school.
- Teachers perceive travel as a remarkable opportunity for youth to get in touch with cultures and communities outside their usual environment—74% see increased tolerance of other cultures and ethnicities, while 66% believe that international travel increases students' tolerance and respect.

## Student Travel Industry

An underestimated economic driver.

- The U.S. student travel industry alone supports hundreds of thousands of jobs—among them tour operators, motorcoach operators and drivers, and security personnel—and supports the commerce of destination management organizations and suppliers in every aspect of a trip: attractions, festivals, concerts, theaters, restaurants, special events, and more.
- The majority of student travel tour operators are small businesses, many of which are former teachers and educators.
- While on a trip in the U.S., student travelers visit an average of two or three destinations and spend twice as much money as adults.
- The peak season for the student travel market is March to July, indicating that student tour operators will have lost nearly 100% of their business for 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## SYTA Contribution

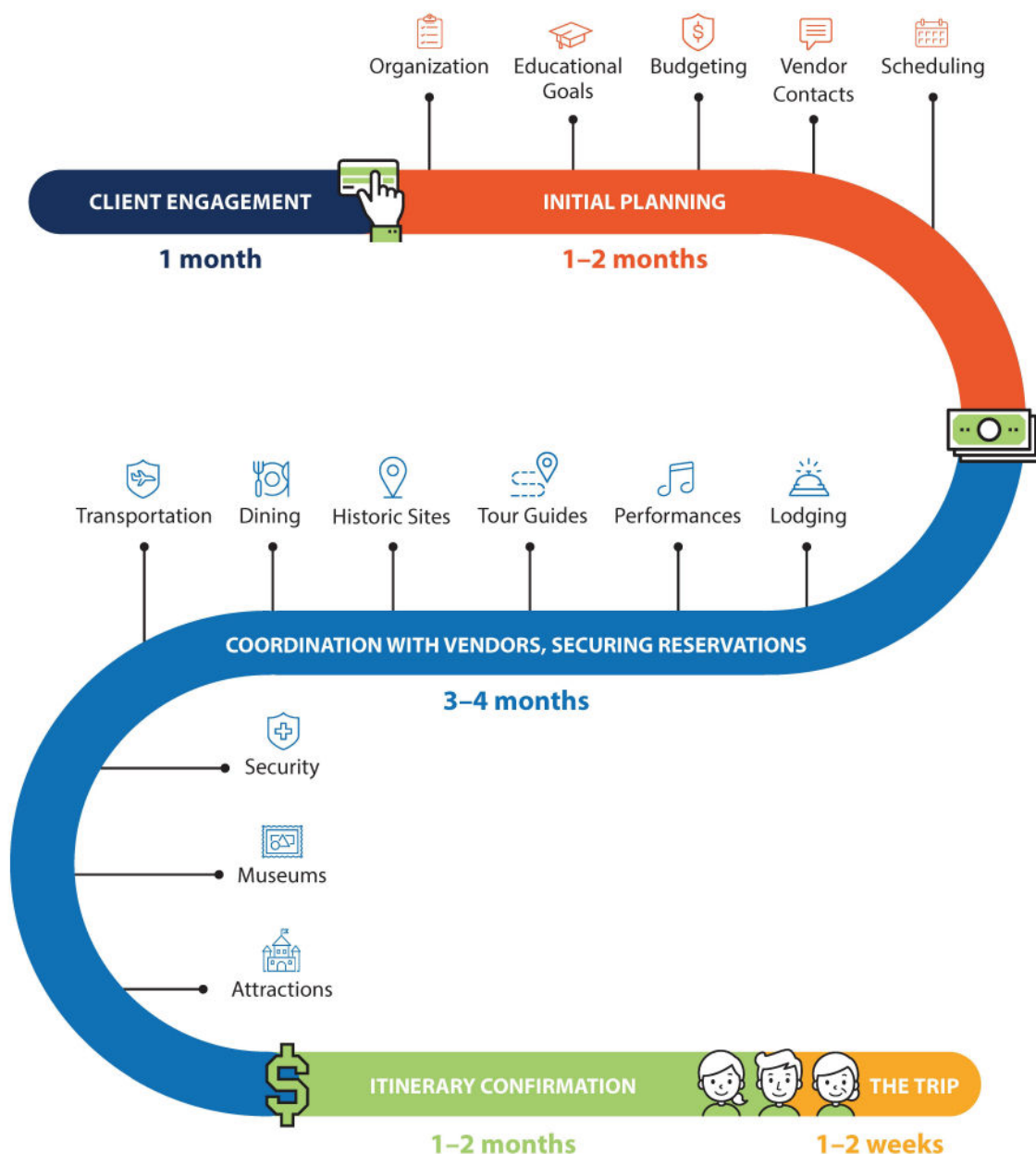
Professionals with safety as their No. 1 priority.

- Student & Youth Travel Association members constitute 140 tour operator companies and more than 900 supplier partners.
- SYTA Member tour operators move more than 3 million students and youth travelers annually.
- SYTA travelers generate in excess of \$1.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

# DECISION TO DESTINATION: THE STUDENT TRAVEL PROCESS



Planning a student group trip can be complex, which is why tour operators are your partners—streamlining the planning and contracting process, collaborating with teachers and administrators to achieve trip educational goals, and ultimately providing students with life-changing opportunities and experiences. Student tour operators work behind the scene to ensure your trip is a success.\*



## Tour Operator Process Percentage

10%	Tour operator engages with client
30%	Tour operator conducts initial trip planning
35%	Tour operator coordinates with vendors and secures reservations
15%	Itinerary is completed and confirmed
10%	Students go on trip

### KEY

- Client makes initial payment to tour operator
- Tour operator distributes money to vendors
- Final payments: all outstanding balances due from client / all payments made to vendors

For more information, visit [www.SYTA.org/Travel-Tools](http://www.SYTA.org/Travel-Tools)

Follow Us:



\*Disclaimer: The purpose of this graphic is to demonstrate an example of the student travel process and does not represent all travel booking experiences. Travel timing and scheduling may vary depending on the trip, but most payments are completed at least six weeks prior to the travel date.