

SO, YOU WANT TO TAKE A STUDENT TOUR?

By Diane Day, an experienced group leader

A. Making the decision

Making the decision to travel with students should not be difficult. You will at times doubt your own sanity, but, if you have planned well, traveling with students can be a fun and rewarding experience.

So what would motivate you to undertake leading a tour? Seeing your students grow and expand as citizens of the world? Using practical applications of content you have taught? Rewarding your students' hard work? Maybe these altruistic reasons are all well and good, but you also have to want to travel. The excitement and joy you experience will be reflected by your students' experiences. Your travel destinations may actually come from discussions with students. One of my first best trips came when a student said we should study about volcanoes –we live in Maine. I challenged him to find one we could visit. The kids researched areas that had volcanoes within a reasonable distance and came up with two ideas – Iceland and Costa Rica. Guess where we went in February?

Now is the time to have a discussion with your administrator. Then after all the plans are made, present the plan to your administrator for approval. The support of your school's administration is crucial! Some schools require a presentation to the school board so prepare well!

B. Choosing your destination

The choice you make for your destination should reflect your interests, but don't limit yourself. If you teach geography and you want to visit Greenwich, England don't bypass the rest of London! If you teach art, don't avoid places like Costa Rica – there is beauty everywhere!

Do some research, use good tour books such as Fodor's, Insight or Frommer's. The internet provides a wealth of information but can be overwhelming. You can also examine the itineraries from other tour



operators not necessarily tailored for student travel such as Trafalgar's, Globus or one of the many available.

C. What if I want to go someplace but I have never lead a group or never been to where I want to go?

Let's deal with the easy part of this - you want to go some place but you have never been there before. This is where selecting a reputable and experienced tour operator, such as Global Travel Alliance, comes into play. A good tour company will present to you an itinerary advising you in such a way that will keep the travel plans realistic. A six day trip through Germany, Austria and Switzerland is possible but you will spend a lot of time traveling and have a rushed experience. There are better choices. A good company will help you choose better options. Be wary of tour operators who promise you everything. Read the details of what the company guarantees. Will you be combined with another group? Will you leave on the date specified and from the airport you have designated?

If you are an experienced traveler remember that you are traveling with students and they have different needs. The pace of your days will be dictated by the age and size of your group.

D. Leadership is critical

You set the tone for the adults and students. Be fair and firm, clear and concise. Prior to leaving, set the rules and have clear consequences. If you have determined that curfew is at 10:30pm, enforce it! Do bed checks; some leaders will put tape on the outside of hotel room doors so that they will know if kids are violating curfew. The best form of leadership is based on trust and respect. Emphasize to your students that others are sharing your hotel and they have the right to enjoy the area without groups of kids creating problems. Share with them that they are representing their school, state, and country. One of my worst experiences was traveling on a cruise ship in the Greek islands. There were several student tour groups on board, all from the states (none with Global Travel Alliance), and the kids were running wild, purchasing alcohol, having food fights and running through the corridors all night. Eventually the ships' captain stepped in to discipline the students and the tour operator was told to never book with this cruise line again.

If you can, travel with another group that has an experienced trip leader before you take your own trip. Volunteer to be a co-leader. Bring good co-leaders with you, who will compliment your style.

E. Recruiting students

Plan to have at least twelve to eighteen months between the time you recruit for the trip and the time you leave. Recruiting students begins in your classes. Ask your tour operator for a DVD and play it before class. Talk it up during your classes or make your destination the subject of a class. For instance, if you're traveling to Costa Rica and you teach science, discuss the tectonic activity or biomes or history of Costa Rica. Be shameless – you need the kids to be excited. Don't feel guilty if students say that they can't afford to go, we will talk about this in a later chapter. Send home letters to parents with students that have expressed interest and or post the meeting time on your local TV channel and in your schools newsletter.

F. Managing Parents

The big question is “will you want to have parents along on the trip?” Parents who are along on the trip can be a double-edged sword. They can be the biggest thorn in your side, undermining the entire experience for you and their child or they can be a huge asset. There are circumstances that a parent might be welcomed, such as, if a child has a chronic disease like diabetes. However, once you allow one parent, the one you know will be supportive and follow the rules, what do you do if the next parent is a jerk? It's your call, but be careful! One solution to the problem may be to have a separate meeting with parents and if they still insist on going, involve your principal and a behavior contract. Anxiety from parents is normal – after all, you are taking their most precious possession on a major trip.

G. The First Meeting

Plan this with your trip coordinator; if possible, ask them to be there to answer questions. Have all materials ready, including passport applications, itineraries, travel applications, insurance forms, school code of conduct for field trip forms and any other paperwork you need. Review them all and anticipate questions. Prepare a slide presentation if one hasn't been given to you. Arrange for enough tables, chairs and pens. Have an accurate breakdown of costs, including transportation to the airport and back if needed, passport costs, insurance costs, tips, tours and meals not included in the itinerary.

What happens if you hold a meeting and no one attends? It does happen! Don't panic. First, did you advertise too far in advance, have a conflict with chorus or band concerts, athletic events or was the weather bad? Reschedule and get a little more aggressive, make phone calls to parents of kids who have expressed interest.



Even if your meeting is well attended you still have to get the tour applications and deposits nailed, so keep working. Global Travel Alliance will take care of the money matters so once they have made the deposits you won't have a lot to deal with except the all-important FUNDRAISING!

H. Money Matters

Unless you are really into it, fundraising is the hardest part, both organizationally and time wise. Encourage parents to organize the fundraisers; after all, they are the ones paying for this adventure. Fundraising varies from area to area - you know what works where you live and what doesn't. Some schools raise thousands of dollars by being very aggressive, for others it just helps defray spending money. Some students have sponsors that are willing to match the amount of money a student has raised. Students who are very motivated will urge relatives to donate towards the cost rather than make other gifts. Check out the resources available and ask questions of other teachers and administrators.

If your numbers are a few students short of the target goal talk with your tour coordinator and discuss all the options. They may have ideas to help and at this time you may take a longer look at allowing parents to go along on the trip.

I. What's Next?

You have enough recruited, now what? Stay in touch with everyone by having meetings throughout the year, increasing in frequency as the departure time approaches. You will need to check on passports if needed, ID's if you are flying in the U.S. (check with the airlines for requirements), packing lists, refreshed itineraries, medical release forms, money for spending, additional meals and transportation to the airport.

Stay in close contact with your tour coordinator and they will assist you with the extras. Prepare rooming lists, arrange to have copies made of travel documents, leave a copy of passports with the school administrators.

If your tour date is very far in advance you will need to keep the anticipation level from flagging. Have a travel party after school, call kids during the summer, put up posters in the hallway, be a cheerleader for the trip.

Arrange for a phone tree and designate an emergency contact at home. Check your cell phone plan and see if it covers your area of travel. This is really important if you are traveling internationally. Cell phones from the U.S. don't usually work from foreign countries and if they do they are extremely expensive. It is sometimes easier and cheaper to purchase a pay-as-you-go phone in your destination country if you feel it is necessary. E-mail service is available almost everywhere for a reasonable cost, so encourage this as an alternative to cell phones. Foreign phone cards are also easy to get and use.

With the ease of technology, student travelers usually have a variety of gadgets with them. Cell phone and DVD players are a major distraction - encourage them to be left home or ban them outright. They don't fit with the experience that we are encouraging. If parents panic about losing contact with their children and insist on phone calls, limit cell phone use to the evenings. Warn parents that they will be facing enormous cell phone bills if calls are made internationally.

J. Problems – The Natalie Holloway Issue

Perhaps the biggest concern parents have is safety. The number one priority that you have is safety. Global Travel Alliance has very definite rules when it comes to students and group safety. They must always travel in groups of three and **never** without a chaperone or without informing a chaperone where they are going. No boys in girls rooms and no girl in boys rooms, ever!

Conflict among kids is likely –rehearse how to resolve conflict quickly and without getting everyone involved. Handle discipline privately and then, unless necessary, don't refer to the issue again.

Major issues – things like drugs, alcohol use and inappropriate behavior with other students must be dealt with immediately. Don't bother to investigate, leave that to the schools administration. Just document the incident and make a decision how you are going to handle it. It is not unheard of to send kids home. Your priority is to the majority of your students – don't let one individual ruin the experience for the whole. Global Travel Alliance will deal with safety issues as they see appropriate.

Adults that misbehave should be handled in much the same way – speak to them in private. They can also be sent home.

Unexpected delays happen. The airlines will help if the delay is mechanical but don't expect much if the cancellation or delay is for weather problems. Contact Global Travel Alliance immediately.

What happens if a kid runs out of money? This also happens and for many it's the first time they have had to budget their resources...and they fail. Prior to leaving, collect an insurance fund of \$20-\$40 from each parent, that you hide away as emergency money for the student. Make sure that the student understands that after this there is no more money! If kids have renewable charge cards they can email their parents to transfer more money into their account. If students are using Green Dot cards make sure that they read the fine print. Can they be used in specific countries? Can they be recharged? ATM's are easy to find in Europe, but more difficult to find in Central and South America – make sure that the card the students bring has a Visa or MasterCard logo. American Express isn't always accepted worldwide. Traveler's checks are useless in Central and South America.

Lost articles are common which is why kids should leave valuable electronic items and jewelry at home. If you can call the hotels you have stayed at they may find the items and mail it to you, but this is also one of those hard lessons kids have to learn. Prior to leaving the hotel you may want to check each room. Lost passports are another problem. This needs immediate attention –consult with your tour guide.

K. Accidents, injuries and illnesses

Hopefully you have a copy of the students insurance card and a notarized *in parental locus* form. You should also have a copy of the parent's credit card, as most hospital emergency rooms require payment upfront. Travel insurance will also help in emergencies and I personally recommend purchasing it. If you are traveling in the U.S. things are easier. Notify the parents IMMEDIATELY.

Traveler's diarrhea is very common, and this requires the kids to be honest with you. If you can give a dose of Imodium or other over-the-counter medication early then there should only be a minimum of inconvenience to everyone. If it gets worse, seek medical attention immediately, as dehydration is very serious. Most hotels have a doctor you can contact and your Global Travel Alliance guide will help.

Obviously if you don't think you can handle the illness or it involves broken bone or worse, get help.



L. Scholarships

Students who financially are unable to attend but want to go – there are scholarship available, local and national. SYTA has a scholarship for students but don't ignore the Kiwanis, Masons and other local civic organizations. Thank you cards are necessary!

M. TSA

Know the 3-1-1 Rule. Until the TSA changes the rules any liquids in carry on luggage must be 3 ounces or less, in one ziplock baggie and they are allowed on one baggie. A 6 ounce bottle that's 1/2 empty isn't allowed – it clearly must be 3 ounces or 100ml.

N. Unexpected issues

There will be other issues that arise on your trip. The solution is to be consistent and use common sense. Remember to have fun!

Sample Packing List

(suggested) for Costa Rica

On the day we leave I suggest that you wear jeans and a sweatshirt, and under that wear a tee shirt. We will undergo several climate changes in six short hours!

In your backpack have the following – money, passport, munchies, book or something to occupy the down time (2 hour wait in Boston, 2 hour in Miami, etc.), camera and any electronic or other valuable items you have. Stay tuned for carry-on packing information regarding toiletries.

In your checked luggage (if applicable):

Underwear & socks – 1 for each day

4-5 pairs shorts

1 extra pair jeans

5-6 shirts –tee shirt type

PJ's

Toilet articles –DEODORANT, toothpaste/toothbrush, shampoo, conditioner, comb, brush, and shaving material

Beach towel

Sunglasses

Hat with a brim

Bathing suit -2

Raincoat/poncho

Sandals, hiking boots or really good sneakers

Ziplock baggie – gallon size – 3 or 4 – for dirty clothes and wet bathing suits

Sunscreen SPF 20 Biodegradable if possible /Bug Repellant

Money/cash

Camera and film or charger/batteries, extra memory card

Pair of cheap water shoes for rafting

Remember this is a tropical climate so bring light colored material and leave room for souvenirs. Machismo is the attitude that is common among men in Latin America, which basically means that if you dress in skimpy clothes you are inviting more than a comment. Dress modestly, cover yourself in a modest manner, shorts should not be too short and tops cover your belly. Spaghetti straps are okay at the pool but not on the street, layer with a tee shirt.

PARENT AND STUDENT TRAVEL CONTRACT

I. Please read carefully the Global Travel Alliance tour regulations (in your original travel booklet or on-line), which together with the Sacopee Valley Extra-Curricular Code of Conduct (which must also be signed), form the bases for the Behavior Contract below.

II. PLEASE READ AND SIGN THE FOLLOWING AGREEMENT:

I, _____, do agree to the following guidelines

(name of traveler – student and/or adult)

and expectations:

- a. Punctuality will be essential, especially for morning departures and tours.
- b. Neatness and cleanliness – for myself, as well as my hotel room and tour bus – are expected. I also agree to avoid wearing clothing with holes and rags.
- c. Excessive noise, especially in hotel halls and especially at night, is unwelcome and inconsiderate.
- d. Curfew will be respected; this could vary from 10:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m., depending on the current day's events and also the next day's schedule. All curfews are at the discretion of Ms. Beringer and our GTA tour guide.
- e. Listening to instructions and tour guide explanations will be important to me, as well as to others.
- f. **No members of the opposite sex are allowed in student hotel rooms.** You may visit in the lobby before curfew.
- g. **No smoking or drinking of any alcoholic beverages; it does not matter what other students elsewhere may be allowed to do. The leaders and chaperones will be very strict on this issue!**
- h. Shoplifting and possession of illegal drugs are extremely dangerous situations abroad, as well as at home!! DO NOT participate, or the student WILL be sent home abruptly, and at the parent's expense. (This can and has been done before.)
- i. Hitchhiking and/or driving any motor vehicle is strictly forbidden for all students.
- j. **ALL** scheduled program activities are required. Notify Ms. Beringer or another chaperone if you are sick and feel unable to participate. (That chaperone must notify Ms. Beringer ASAP.) If you wish to visit friends or relatives (outside our tour), give Ms Beringer appropriate advance notice and written permission from your parents.
- k. During free time, students may "explore" ONLY if they have notified Ms. Beringer (or another chaperone **in her absence**) and have received permission first.
- l. **ALL** students must travel in groups of at least three or more.
- m. **Swimming will only be permitted when a chaperone is with you! No swimming in the ocean without permission and a chaperone**
- n. I will respect and cooperate with the teachers/tour leader/assistant tour leaders -- Ms. Beringer, Mr. Peters, and Mrs. Hodgdon -- as well as the other designated adult chaperones.
- o. I recognize that these guidelines are not finite; Sacopee school rules in general, as well as common sense, prevail at all times.



***I understand that I am a representative of my school and my country, and I intend to honor both, as well as to validate the trust that my parents and my teacher have accorded me in allowing me this exciting travel opportunity.

Traveler's signature _____ Date _____

Also, if student is NOT traveling with a parent, then the parent needs to sign the following:

III. As parent (guardian or foster parent), I understand the above expectations as well, and also agree to allow Ms. Carol Beriger, as teacher and tour leader, to act **in loco parentis** on behalf of my son/daughter, and will abide by her requests and decisions, as the need arises. I also understand that Ms. Beringer will do her best to safeguard the students (and their airline tickets), will attend all meals and excursions with them, and encourage a safe, pleasant, and educational trip for all.

Parent signature _____ Date _____

Credit card company and # _____

Expiration date _____

State of _____, County of _____

This info will be kept confidential and is needed only in the unlikely disciplinary event of having to send a child home early or medical emergency.

Subscribed and sworn to (or affirmed) before me this _____ day of _____,

20____, by _____

Notary Signature _____

(SEAL/STAMP) Print, Type or Stamp Name of Notary

My commission expires _____

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and expectations:

- p. Punctuality will be essential, especially for morning departures and tours.
- q. Neatness and cleanliness – for myself, as well as my hotel room and tour bus – are expected. I also agree to avoid wearing clothing with holes and rags.
- r. Excessive noise, especially in hotel halls and especially at night, is unwelcome and inconsiderate.
- s. Curfew will be respected; this could vary from 10:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m., depending on the current day's events and also the next day's schedule. All curfews are at the discretion of Ms. Beringer and our GTA tour guide.
- t. Listening to instructions and tour guide explanations will be important to me, as well as to others.
- u. No members of the opposite sex are allowed in student hotel rooms. You may visit in the lobby before curfew.
- v. No smoking or drinking of any alcoholic beverages; it does not matter what other students elsewhere may be allowed to do. The leaders and chaperones will be very strict on this issue!
- w. Shoplifting and possession of illegal drugs are extremely dangerous situations abroad, as well as at home !! DO NOT participate, or the student WILL be sent home abruptly, and at the parent's expense. (This can and has been done before.)
- x. Hitchhiking and/or driving any motor vehicle is strictly forbidden for all students.
- y. ALL scheduled program activities are required. Notify Ms. Beriner or another chaperone if you are sick and feel unable to participate. (That chaperone must notify Ms. Beringer asap.) If you wish to visit friends or relatives (outside our tour), give Ms. Beringer appropriate advance notice and written permission from your parents.
- z. During free time, students may "explore" ONLY if they have notified Ms. Beringer (or another chaperone **in her absence**) and have received permission first.
- aa. ALL students must travel in groups of at least three or more.
- bb. I will respect and cooperate with the teachers/tour leader/assistant tour leaders _____ -- as well as the other designated adult chaperones.
- cc. I recognize that these guidelines are not finite; Sacopee school rules in general, as well as common sense, prevail at all times.

*****I understand that I am a representative of my school and my country, and I intend to honor both, as well as to validate the trust that my parents and my teacher have accorded me in allowing me this exciting travel opportunity.**



Traveler's signature _____ Date

Also, if student is NOT traveling with a parent, then the parent needs to sign the following:

IV. As parent (guardian or foster parent), I understand the above expectations as well, and also agree to allow Ms. Marilee Osier, as teacher and tour leader, to act **in loco parentis** on behalf of my son/daughter, and will abide by her requests and decisions, as the need arises. I also understand that Ms. Osier will do her best to safeguard the students (and their airline tickets), will attend all meals and excursions with them, and encourage a safe, pleasant, and educational trip for all.

Parent signature _____ Date

Credit card company and # _____

Expiration date _____

This info will be kept confidential and is needed only in the unlikely disciplinary event of having to send a child home early.



Sample Letter to travelers

Dear _____,

There will be mandatory student meeting off ALL student travelers to Costa Rica on Wednesday, January 17 at 2:15 in Ms. Beringer's room. EVERYONE must attend...no excuses! We have a lot of information to go over with you and we want to do it together in a group. Things we will cover include room and group assignments, what you can and can't do in CR, how does the money work, how do I get along with 24 people for 10 days without going crazy, and lots of other stuff.

So don't disappoint us and let the group down – be there. We expect this to only last for about 1 hour but if you're late getting there we will be later leaving, be prompt!

Ms. Beringer

P.S. If you haven't paid the \$60.00 for the trip to Boston and back please do as soon as possible