



sport • ski • study

Before you go: a planning & safety guide



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1. Our Commitment to You

Established in 1992, Absolute Travel & Tours Ltd. (also Absolute Travel, Absolute School Travel, Absolute Sports Travel and Absolute Skiwise), is a specialist tour operator organising sports tours, educational study trips, ski trips, activity trips, performing arts trips, festivals and tournaments for schools, colleges and clubs to destinations at home and abroad.

The most effective way to ensure a safe and trouble-free tour is to prepare thoroughly. Our pre-tour safety guide provides information we believe will assist group leaders in the planning and preparation of their tours. At Absolute Travel & Tours, we are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for our clients. We operate a 'Safety Management System' which is annually audited by a suitably qualified external agency. This ensures that all reasonable measures are taken to assure our clients of a high level of safety and professionalism throughout a tour. We commit to:

- Maintaining and developing the highest safety management standards for the tours, trip (and supplies) that we provide.
- Planning and setting standards which meet or surpass the needs and expectations of our clients, which are both measurable and realistic.
- Providing the best financial protection available so that our clients can book with confidence.
- Maintaining active communication with industry specialists, to promote and develop best practice.
- Undergoing a comprehensive annual audit by qualified external consultants.

2. Planning

Set the Objectives

Why are you going on the trip? What are your hopes and priorities? An assessment of your goals is perhaps your first step. It is important that you create or choose (and ultimately agree) a package to suit both your budget as well as the aspirations for you and your party. A clear understanding of your objectives enables other decisions to be made.

Consider Your Group and Destination

Each group is unique - the combination of individuals that make up the group is likely to change each time you travel. As such, even if you visit the same places, you may need to consider different measures to accommodate the individuals. In some cases, you may need to consider a different destination to enable you to achieve your objectives. Remember also to consider your team of group leaders and ensure all the necessary skills and staffing ratios are available.

Guidance

Absolute Travel & Tours Ltd. is a partner of the 'Travel Aware' (formerly "Know Before You Go") campaign. Please visit the website at <https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk/> during the initial planning stage for up-to-date travel advice and information. For up-to-date advice about the country that you are proposing visiting, visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice for details.

ABTA's Guide to Planning and Booking a Holiday

There is some very useful generic advice on the ABTA website. It's worth checking out their information pages.

Visit **ABTA's** <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/planning-and-booking-a-holiday> for lots of help with your planning.

For **OEAP National Guidance** for Group Leaders and Trip Co-ordinators, please visit: <https://oeapng.info/>

3. Getting the Ball Rolling

School, LEA and Governing Body Policies, Procedures and Permissions

Always ensure you understand and comply with the requirements of your school, academy, college or governing body's policy and procedures for foreign travel and touring. Make sure that you have the necessary permissions to proceed and be aware that you may be required to state the educational objectives. Where applicable, sports teams will also need to seek approval from the appropriate governing body prior to match confirmations. Please ask us if you require any assistance in good time well in advance.

Supervisory Staff & Experience

All supervisory staff must accept responsibility for the wellbeing of students including matters relating to safety and discipline. The skill and knowledge of the staff can help avoid the occurrence of many incidents on tour. It is recommended that at least one accompanying staff member has had previous experience of travelling abroad with youth groups. Absolute Travel & Tours offers a free place ratio for supervisory staff that is often greater than required by most LEA policies. If non-teaching adults are travelling as supervisory staff, it is vital to check the implications with your governing body or LEA.

Pre-Tour Meetings

It is important to meet regularly with staff accompanying the tour to establish policy, share duties and to communicate this policy to the students participating on the tour. A pre-tour evening meeting for leaders, students and parents will provide an opportunity to reinforce guidelines, answer questions and perhaps run through the tour itinerary. Aspects of safety and behaviour should certainly be raised at such meetings and students should be advised of their individual responsibility for collective safety.

Codes of Conduct

It is good practice to agree a Code of Conduct with pupils and parents before the tour. Acceptance of the code will provide group leaders with the necessary authority to carry out their responsibilities. The code should include behaviour during free time, which is regrettably, when many accidents happen.

4. Risk Assessments and Inspection Visits

Risk Assessment

This is the process of identifying risks and applying measures to avoid or counteract them. The aim is to guide your group safely through the series of obstacles you will encounter. Remember to formulate a Plan B where appropriate. Further guidelines on what is expected can be found in the 'Demystifying Risk Assessments' document, which is available to download from our website. It sets out, with examples, what is demanded and is compatible with advice from the Department for Education and Scottish Government, although the most up to date advice should always be sought and followed. There are many ways to record risk assessments and you should follow your own school, college, Academy, Trust, governing body or LEA guidelines and formats.

Inspection Visits

An inspection visit to your selected destination offers the opportunity to familiarise yourself with the accommodation and surrounding area prior to your tour. It is an ideal opportunity to check the detail of your risk assessments. We provide two kinds of inspection visits as follows:

Accompanied Group Inspection Trips

We organise group inspection trips to selected destinations. These will include the chance to assess accommodation, facilities and suppliers and formulate your own risk assessments on location and ask any questions at the time.

Individual Inspection Visits

For tour destinations not covered by group inspection trips, we offer group leaders the opportunity to make an a hoc visit on suitable dates to be agreed. We will pay for 2 nights' bed and breakfast accommodation for the Group Leader (or as pre-agreed) and can help with travel and other arrangements (costs not included). Please contact us for further details.

During Your Inspection Visit

- Familiarise yourself with the accommodation and the areas you plan to visit and consider what potential problems may arise both on an individual and group (as a collective) basis.
- Confirm that your control measures will work and are likely to be effective.
- Select appropriate group meeting points for different activities where this might be necessary.
- Identify potential trouble spots and record any 'out of bounds' areas.
- Note useful telephone numbers (and locations) of doctors, chemists and emergency services etc.
- Visit the nearest tourist office.
- Take a colleague with you (even if this means requesting extra funding from your SLT) as two heads are better than one.

If You are Unable to Undertake an Inspection Visit

We appreciate that it is not always viable to organise an inspection trip and that you may have questions on safety issues, practicalities and in resort logistics. Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss. Alternatively, you may seek advice from your governing body or LEA. There are almost certainly experienced leaders running similar trips from schools in your area.

5. Fire Safety in Accommodation

Varying Standards

It is important to recognise that standards and regulations on fire and safety differ greatly throughout Europe and the rest of the world. As a minimum, all our properties will conform to local regulations. Where we use properties on a regular basis, additional recommendations may be made. The Inspection Standard for general safety and fire safety in our accommodation has been developed in conjunction with RoSPA and the Fire Protection Association (FPA) and with reference to the EC recommendations (88/666/EEC).

Induction Talk

We request an induction talk (and where practical a fire drill) to be given on arrival at your accommodation. This is an important safety measure, so please ensure you ask for an induction or at least advice upon your arrival. If circumstances prevent any talk or walk through on arrival, group leaders may wish to undertake their own evacuation exercise.

Fire and Safety Precautions

Group leaders must ensure that all group members know what to do in the event of a fire and are aware of;

- what the alarm will sound like
- how to raise the alarm
- the accommodation's procedure in the case of fire including all escape routes and where the assembly point/s is/are

Additionally, there are some other precautions that group leaders can take whilst staying in any hotel:

- Check where the fire alarm call points are or how to sound the fire alarm
- Ask the means of calling the fire brigade
- Check the fire escape routes on a daily basis and during the evening to help ensure that they are free from obstruction.
- Report any problems to the hotel management
- Ensure group members unplug electrical appliances before leaving a room unattended and before going to bed, noting that appliances that stay heated (eg. travel irons, hair straighteners) are a particular potential risk
- A strict no-smoking policy must be adopted in all accommodations at all times
- Instructions for what to do in an emergency should be posted by the hotel in every room (see Appendix for a typical sign that can be used as an example for demonstration) often on the back of bedroom doors.

6. General Safety in Accommodation

Reception Times and Cover

Check the times of reception and night porter duties. You never know when you may need to contact someone for assistance or important information.

Lifts

Some group leaders stipulate lifts are out of bounds for students. Either way, close monitoring and sensible use of lifts is recommended. We advise against the use of 3-sided lifts. These still exist in some older hotels and can be dangerous.

Glass Doors

Be aware of clear glass doors or patio doors that are difficult to see. It is easy to walk into these risking injuries. Running in the hotel should be forbidden. Keeping bedrooms tidy will reduce the risk of falling, tripping and potential injury. ABTA say that "glass in balcony doors can be difficult to see in bright sunlight and at night and very few hotels have toughened or safety glass in their windows, doors and panes."

Free Time

One of the most common causes of injuries is horseplay in rooms during free time. Typical incidents are trapped fingers in doors, falling from bunks, falling into glass doors, slips and trips. Whilst most injuries tend to be minor, some are serious!

Hotel Swimming Pools

Many hotel pools do not provide lifeguards. We advise you not to allow your students to swim without competent and qualified supervision. LEAs generally have guidelines for this, which should be followed. Pay particular attention to depth markings, safety signs and notices. Do not allow diving or jumping into swimming pools as the water depth may vary, be unclear and be insufficiently deep to prevent injury. Every year, serious injuries occur in hotel swimming pools and student safety must be the priority.

See **ABTA's swim safe page** at <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/staying-safe-on-holiday/swim-safe> for guidance.

Electrical Sockets

Some hotels still have electric sockets in the bathrooms. We would strongly recommend that you advise your students not to use these under any circumstance.

N.B. Many overseas plugs do not have an earth. Please be careful whenever using electrical sockets abroad and check that that they are fit for purpose. When traveling abroad, you can check if your appliances will work by comparing the voltage of the appliance to the voltage of the country's electricity supply.

Balconies and Banisters

We strongly recommend that balconies are “out of bounds” to school groups and these should not be used by students. Consider requesting lower floors or bedrooms without balconies if possible. Is it possible to lock balcony doors? Failing that, please convey the importance of being incredibly careful if balconies are used. All individuals are hereby specifically warned that jumping from, leaning over, climbing on or climbing over balconies are extremely dangerous and strictly forbidden. The FCDO and ABTA run campaigns to try and reduce the number of serious balcony incidents that happen every year, especially in Spanish resorts. You can check out the FCDO news section for details on the campaign visit the Travel Advice page for Spain in the section called ‘Balcony Falls.’

Every individual has a responsibility for their own safety and for the safety of others. N.B. The taking of unnecessary risks (self-exposure to peril) can be life threatening and have the most serious of consequences and (furthermore) will not be covered by travel insurance.

Check out the following FCDO link: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/spain/safety-and-security>

The FCO states “There have been a number of serious accidents, some fatal, involving British nationals falling from height, including from balconies. Do not take unnecessary risks around balconies or other high places, particularly if you’re under the influence of drink or drugs. If you are staying in a room with a balcony, follow the safety advice at the hotel or apartment, and watch out for friends who may be at risk. In some regions you may be fined or evicted from your hotel if you are found to be behaving irresponsibly around balconies. Your travel insurance may not cover you for incidents that take place on a balcony or if you were under the influence of drink or drugs when the incident happened.

See **ABTA’s balcony safe page** at <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/staying-safe-on-holiday/balcony-safety>

ABTA’s top balcony safety tips are as follows:

- Be aware that glass in balcony doors can be difficult to see in bright sunlight and at night and very few hotels have “toughened” or safety glass in their windows, doors and panes.
- Before closing the door whilst on the balcony, check that there’s a handle on the outside, so you can get back in.
- Never lean over, sit, or climb on the balcony wall or railings.
- Don’t try to pass items to someone on another balcony.
- Don’t climb from one balcony to another.
- Never stand on balcony furniture.
- Never jump into the pool from your balcony.
- Don’t hang towels and clothes over the balcony façade as you may be tempted to lean over to retrieve items that may fall over the edge.
- If you lose your room key, always contact reception, if someone is not on the desk, either call the contact number for the night porter or security or stay in a friend’s room. No matter what, don’t try and access your room via your balcony.

We can supply posters to print should you wish to take some with you to display prominently in your accommodation. See our **Balcony Safety Appendix** for further details.

Make sure banisters and rails are sturdy and report any defects to the accommodation management immediately. Insist on a room change if you consider there is any danger to the room occupants. Please also bring this to our attention so that we can ensure remedial measures are put in place.

The throwing of anything from accommodation balconies is also extremely dangerous and strictly forbidden. Please report any such behaviour to the hotel management and reps without delay.

7. Transportation

Coach Transportation

All coach companies that we contract are subject to an audit process prior to first use in accordance with our Safety Management System. Some of the UK coach operators we contract may also be subject to an inspection. We will ensure that the coaches that we contract for ski trips will be properly equipped for winter conditions and that equipment will include appropriate anti-freeze systems and snow chains. We also check with our suppliers that their drivers have been trained in how to fit snow chains and any other equipment and have the appropriate experience to drive in winter conditions.

Seatbelts

All UK-originating coaches are fitted with seatbelts. In addition, it is now compulsory for passengers to use seatbelts on coaches both within the UK and also in a growing number of countries within Europe. It is not compulsory for coaches to be fitted with seatbelts in the USA and laws vary from one state to another. We request the supply of coaches that are fitted with seat belts but this cannot always be guaranteed. You are strongly advised to use seat belts where fitted. In some cases, failure to use them can result in on-the-spot fines and heighten the chance of serious injury.

Induction Talk

We encourage Coach companies to ask their drivers to give a short induction talk prior to departure - please request a safety briefing from the driver(s) if this is not automatically provided – bearing in mind that this may not be delivered abroad.

Safety Points to Remember:

- Staff should be seated strategically near all exits. Check that these are operational if you can.
- Check the location of the First Aid Kit
- Check the location and operational instructions of Fire Extinguishers
- Please use the seatbelts when seated - it is law in most countries – and compulsory to do so.
- Keep all luggage clear of aisles and exits
- Do not disturb the driver whilst he/she is driving
- Ensure a rubbish collection facility is provided and used. Remove potential hazards - a bottle or tin can on the floor could roll under the driver's pedals and impede his/her ability to drive
- Standing in the aisle is not permitted whilst the vehicle is moving
- Take care getting off the vehicle, especially on the Continent. The door may open directly onto the road and the traffic will be approaching from an unfamiliar direction
- Always have two people carry out a head count before leaving every stop

Non-UK Coaches

Regulations applying to travel on non-UK registered vehicles vary from country to country. We aim to ensure that coach companies contracted comply with locally enforced regulations. It should be noted that some countries outside the UK do not yet require coaches to be fitted with seatbelts and it may not therefore be possible for us to provide such a facility.

Most coach drivers in non-English speaking countries will have at most very limited knowledge of English. If the group is making extensive use of a vehicle abroad, groups should consider the inclusion of one or more linguists in their staff team. Alternatively, we can usually provide an English-speaking tour escort or guide to accompany the group abroad if required at an additional cost.

Air Travel

Very strict safety criteria apply to all air travel originating within the UK. These are closely monitored by the Civil Aviation Authority. You should pay attention to the terms and conditions particular to the airline, which we shall send to you with your flight confirmation. You should be careful to ensure that baggage is not left unattended at the airport at any time and to ensure that no-one could interfere with your luggage at any time prior to travel. It is essential that restrictions concerning items that may be carried as part of any carry-on allowance are strictly adhered to.

All passengers must observe the safety instructions and demonstrations that are given prior to take off and stow luggage carefully in the lockers provided. During your flight, dehydration is a potential risk, so drink plenty of bottled water if you can. Simple exercises in your seat or in the aisle when permitted to do so may help prevent problems associated with sitting still for longer than usual as well.

The CAA have in the past produced an information sheet called 'Travelling Safely' with further safety information for flight travel. For up-to-date advice, however, you should visit <http://www.caa.co.uk/passengers/> for guidance and support.

Ferry Transport

Group Leaders are responsible for the supervision of their party at all times. They should report to the Duty Manager at the Information Desk on board the ferry immediately on embarkation. Natural exuberance from children is to be expected but the dangers of unruly and foolish behaviour whilst on board should be explained to your party prior to boarding. All individuals are hereby specifically warned that jumping from, leaning over, climbing on or climbing over railings, balustrades and balconies is extremely dangerous and strictly forbidden.

You should ensure that all members of the group listen to and are familiar with the emergency procedure that will be announced shortly before departure. Clarify any nautical terminology (eg. Muster Station) if necessary. We recommend you establish a specific area on board as a base, although assigned seating is not typically possible. Group members must not return to the coach deck until specifically called to do so.

P&O Ferries produce a document called 'Behaviour of Young Persons' detailing specific risk assessment and safety information for ferry crossings which is available at any stage for Group Leaders on request. Other ferry operators have their own operating procedures.

Public Transport

The regulations concerning public transport are determined by the appropriate authorities in each country. If it is envisaged that the group will use public transport, we recommend that at least one member of the group has had prior experience of the relevant system, particularly knowledge of capacities, frequency and the best method of obtaining tickets to avoid delay.

8. Sport, Ski, Study

The sport, ski and study elements that you undertake and that are included in any package will be central to accomplishing your goals and objectives for the trip or tour.

It should be noted that participation in any sporting/winter sports/adventurous activity carries an increased element of risk. Absolute Travel & Tours implements measures as outlined in our 'Safety Management System' to minimise and control such risk, but by the nature of the activity undertaken, an element of risk will remain. You will always need to risk assess accordingly and make your party aware of any heightened personal risk, based on their own individual participation.

Please see our Code of Conduct sections below (for both students and teachers) as these are relevant to the trips to be undertaken and your individual and collective responsibilities.

Sports Matches and Coaching

Please refer to the Association for Physical Education (afPE) 'Safe Practice in Physical Education, School Sport and Physical Activity'. See <https://www.afpe.org.uk/page/SafePracticeinPESSPA> for more details and should you wish to order a copy of this resource. Group leaders are responsible for ensuring that all pupils wear clothing and footwear appropriate to the sport and playing surface. Please ensure that you and the players are aware of any rule variations in sports matches against foreign opposition, as there are sometimes differences in other countries, and it is normal to play and abide by the local rules. Matches organised overseas will often be against club, rather than school teams and age groupings may vary as European categories follow the calendar year rather than the school year typical back at home. Please ask us for full clarification in advance in order that you can take this into account in your planning. It should also be noted that foreign referees and officials may interpret the same laws differently to that which you are used to at home. Tournament regulations, where provided, will be available in advance on request.

Activities

The spirit of adventure and excitement should always be encouraged but the wellbeing and safety of pupils/students is always paramount. Students should be adequately prepared for all activities and made aware of their personal responsibilities for safety. This includes paying attention to the safety briefings and adhering to any Code of Conduct presented by the activity providers. They should share in the assessment and management of the risks associated with activity ventures – this is an important part of the learning process. Clothing and equipment should be suitable for the intended activity and any safety equipment provided must be worn.

Skiing

Skiing is an activity that requires a degree of self-control, discipline and fitness. Trips should be preceded by a programme of regular pre-ski exercises and fitness training sessions, which will help to prepare pupils for the rigours of the activities to be undertaken. Clothing must provide adequate protection against snow, wind and cold. Ski helmets should be worn for added head protection (these are now compulsory in many countries). Sun cream should be applied to prevent sunburn and lip balm to prevent chapped lips. Pupils must have any medication if required and pre-warn instructors of any special needs.

A minimum of four hours daily tuition is typically included in standard Absolute Travel & Tours (Absolute Skiwise) packages. If pupils are allowed on the slopes at other times, they must be supervised by a member of school staff with appropriate qualification and knowledge of the area. It is recommended that staff hold an up-to-date ASCL qualification in order to facilitate this. Pupils should not be allowed to ski alone or outside marked ski areas and trails at any time. Teachers remain *'in loco parentis'* at all times which means that lunchtime supervision by reps or instructors is not included in our packages (even if offered and made available) and the responsibility of pupils remains the responsibility of the school.

Group leaders should make pupils aware of particular slip, trip and fall hazards including warnings concerning slippery footpaths, walking in ski boots, traffic risks when disembarking from coaches and ski buses (especially when carrying skis or snowboards), falling icicles and freezing temperatures. Après-ski activities should also be fully assessed in advance. See our Group Leader Guidelines for assistance. Pupils should be adequately prepared for all activities to be undertaken and for their personal responsibilities for safety. This includes paying attention to any safety briefings and adhering to any Code of Conduct presented by instructors.

The **International Ski Federation (FIS)** operates the following **safety conduct code** applicable to all skiers or snowboarders, which is binding by law:

- 1) Respect for Others: Behave in such a way that does not endanger or prejudice other skiers or snowboarders.
- 2) Control of Speed: Adapt your speed to your ability, the prevailing conditions of terrain, and the density of traffic.
- 3) Choice of Route: Choose your route in such a way that you do not endanger other skiers or snowboarders ahead.
- 4) Overtaking: You may overtake to the left or right but leave enough space for others to continue their line.
- 5) Entering and Starting: Check up and down the slopes before starting off so not to endanger yourself or others.
- 6) Stopping on the Piste: Avoid stopping on the piste in narrow places or where visibility is restricted.
- 7) Climbing on Foot: When either climbing or descending on foot, keep to the side of the piste.
- 8) Respect for Signs: A skier or snowboarder must respect all signs and markings.
- 9) Assistance: At accidents, every skier or snowboarder is duty bound to assist.
- 10) Identification: Whether involved or a witness, you must identify yourself to others following an accident.

In respect of accidents, the FIS advice is as follows:

Assisting in case of an accident

- Secure the accident area
- Protect with crossed skis or planted snowboard above the injured person. If necessary, post someone up the slope to give warning.

First Aid

- Airway – check it is clear
- Breathing – check for breathing
- Circulation – cover any wound and apply firm pressure
- Provide warmth – give nothing to eat or drink (especially alcohol)

Alert the Rescue Services

- Contact the resort's emergency services – the telephone number is normally on the piste map
- Place of accident (piste name and nearest piste marker)
- Number of people injured
- Type of injury

Establish the facts of the accident

- Names and addresses of people involved as well as witnesses
- Place, time and circumstances of the accident
- Terrain, snow conditions and visibility
- Markings and signs
- Report to the police as soon as possible

See <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/staying-safe-on-holiday/safe-and-healthy-holidays-snow> for ABTA's guidance.

9. Staff and Student Code of Conduct)

School, Academy and College Supervisory Staff

Group leaders are responsible for the overall coordination and management of pupils at all times, and for ensuring that they are aware of, and abide by the specified Code of Conduct. You should be confident that the wellbeing of pupils is never compromised, and that you have the appropriate level of control and discipline in place to manage the group safely:

- be aware of pupils' individual learning needs, behaviour patterns, medical issues and abilities
- ensure that pupils have the skill levels, general fitness and physical maturity necessary for the demands of the activity
- that pupils have received an appropriate preparation for the activity in which they have been asked to participate
- keep a register of participant names and emergency contact details on location at the venue
- pupils, other staff and parent supporters are managed appropriately
- should be satisfied of the competence and suitability of other staff, coaches and instructors
- staffing is sufficient to cope with any circumstances that might reasonably be foreseen including emergencies caused by illness or injury
- pupils are directly supervised at all times, including time spent in changing rooms, which may require the attendance of both male and female staffing at the venue as appropriate
- appropriate insurance is in place and documentation including emergency contact details are to hand
- first aid kit and medical supplies appropriate to the size of group and activities being undertaken

Pupil Code of Conduct

Group leaders should ensure that all pupils should;

- respect all requests and decisions made by, and cooperate fully with, staff, officials and instructors
- be responsible for having personal medication to hand at the venue
- be punctual and participate fully in all activities
- be well-informed about emergency and safety procedures
- have the skill levels, general fitness and physical maturity for the demands of the activity
- abide by the laws, rules and regulations of any activities participated in
- not leave group sessions/activities without permission
- behave in a manner which reflects positively on themselves, the group and the institution that they represent
- avoid behaviour which may offend or inconvenience others
- exercise a duty of care to each other and consideration to others

10. Excursions and Visits

It is essential that you ensure that any visit or excursion selected is appropriate for the members of your group. Please note that almost any visit carries some inherent risk, particularly where children and young persons are involved. Your risk assessments should have considered appropriate control measures. Where any safety equipment is provided, this must be worn as advised. Group Leaders are responsible for ensuring that the children are fully supervised and that any instructions or safety briefings are followed.

11. Staying Safe on Tour

Being in a new or foreign environment on a trip with your school, college or group can be very exciting, but any travel brings with it certain risks which you should collectively and individually attempt to mitigate and minimise. Group leaders, staff and travellers alike must all take reasonable care for their own safety (and the safety of those travelling with you). Don't take risks that you wouldn't do at home just because you are away. ABTA has some very useful information, guidance and videos on their website.

Local Laws and Customs

Find out about local customs and dress and behave accordingly. Obey local laws – there may be serious penalties for breaking a law that might seem trivial at home. Be respectful when talking about local cultures and traditions. Visit ABTA's <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/planning-and-booking-a-holiday/local-laws-and-customs> for more.

Crime

You're as much at risk (if not more) of being a victim of crime when travelling as you are when you're at home. While this means you should be on your guard, staying safe is more a matter of common sense and taking simple precautions. You and your group should be especially vigilant in busy areas, markets, the beach and in cities. Guard valuable personal items. Don't openly display valuables such as mobile phones, devices, or digital cameras, and take care in crowded areas where pickpockets and bag snatchers may be operating. The majority of reported thefts are a result of items being left unattended or thieves using distraction techniques. Only carry with you what you need for the day. Use the safety deposit boxes in your hotel bedroom (if provided) or the safe at the hotel reception if not, for all personal and group valuables. Do not leave cameras, phones, money, devices, gadgets and other valuables loose in bedrooms or unattended in public areas. Stay in small groups – don't get isolated and left alone. Try to avoid remote backstreets and poorly lit areas.

Photography

You will no doubt wish to take photographs and video footage of your tour. Be aware when doing so, as in certain situations this may offend or be misunderstood, especially near military institutions or religious buildings.

Food and Drink

Stay hydrated - be sure to drink plenty of water. Check whether it is safe to drink local tap water. If not, stick to bottled water. Be aware when buying and consuming food other than from the accommodation, especially from street vendors. See ABTA's page: <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/staying-safe-on-holiday/stop-sickness-scams-and-what-do-when-you-have-genuine-claim>

Protection from the Weather

Always take and wear clothing appropriate to the weather – hot, cold, or otherwise. Be safe in the sun – avoid excessive sunbathing and wear a high factor sunscreen, hat and sunglasses.

See ABTA's <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/staying-safe-on-holiday/safe-and-healthy-holidays-sun> for guidance.

The Beach, Sea and Lake

Being aware of the dangers at the beach and spotting the hazards will ensure that your visit to the beach is a safe and enjoyable one. When visiting the beach you should consider the following: We recommend you establish an area on the beach as a base; check the beach surface for broken bottles or other hazards; whether there are lifeguards available - we recommend you try to choose a beach that offers a lifeguard service and only swim where the patrol operates, within the area of red/yellow flags; whether the tide is in or out; are there rocks, piers or breakwaters that may affect paddling and bathing; is the beach busy; are there watersports taking place; are these in zoned areas; what are the sea conditions like; does the beach shelve steeply? Children should always go with a staff member, not by themselves. Don't swim alone. Make sure that you know where everyone in your group is. Constant supervision is the only real means of ensuring pupils' safety. We strongly recommend that you do not visit the beach after dark.

12. Travel Insurance and Emergency Medical Assistance

Travel Insurance

The safety and wellbeing of our customers is our primary objective. That's why travel insurance has been included in your package. Full details of the policy are always readily available to view, download and access from our website at <http://www.absolutetravel.co.uk/info-zone/travel-aware>

You should check that it meets with your requirements and is fully fit for purpose. This is included in your package (unless you have requested otherwise). You can opt out if you wish and your package will be discounted accordingly. Many schools have insurance in place with the RPA (or other commercial insurers), but it would be best to check that any such policy covers you for all the elements of any trip to be undertaken. Either way, it is a condition of booking that you have comparable and adequate cover in place whether through us or organised independently.

13. Health Advice for Travellers

It can be especially disconcerting to suffer illness abroad. Furthermore, medical treatment generally has to be paid for. As well as taking appropriate travel insurance cover, there are some further precautions that you should consider:

Visit your Doctor

We recommend you visit your doctor as soon as possible before you travel. Check what vaccinations you need; check to see if you need extra health precautions; check if your medication is legal in the country you are visiting - pack it in your hand luggage; if you are taking prescribed medication, take a copy of the prescription with you, and find out if you will need to take a doctor's letter with you.

GHIC

You should obtain a GHIC (Global Health Card) well before leaving the UK. For most people, the GHIC replaces the existing EHIC for new applications although you can typically use an EHIC if you have one prior to expiry date. Both are free and you should beware of and steer clear of unofficial websites that may charge you a fee when you apply. The GHIC (nor the old EHIC) is not a substitute for travel insurance as you will not be covered for medical repatriation, on-going medical treatment or possibly treatment of a non-urgent nature. Remember, each person in your group requires a card. You can presently use a GHIC (or existing valid EHIC) while visiting EU countries and Switzerland, although more countries may be added. See <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/>

Parental Permission for Medical Treatment

You should obtain the written permission of parents/guardians prior to travel for group leaders to carry out the following:

- Administer prescription medication required by students if applicable
- Administer pain relief medication as appropriate (eg. Paracetamol)
- Authorise medical treatment in the event that this is deemed necessary by the medical authorities present.

Group Members' Medication

Record any particular medical details or medication requirements for members of the group. Let other staff know where these details are held. It is essential to bring sufficient supplies of medication to last for the duration of the tour (allowing also for any unforeseen delays) - additional supplies may not be readily available locally.

First Aid Kits

Many LEAs and school/sports governing bodies stipulate that a first aid kit be carried on all tours. This policy may specify the contents of such a kit. Keep in mind that you are providing for a group and not just a few people and take into account the activities which pupils will be participating in. Headache and stomach-ache remedies such as Paracetamol are worthwhile but should not form part of the first aid kit. Best practice determines that these should be kept separately and both administered and controlled by one member of staff only.

First Aid Qualification

We recommend that at least one member of staff should have completed a first aid course. Your LEA or governing body may insist on this or other similar qualifications. If you are leading a very large group, you may wish to consider taking a qualified first aider specially to handle medical matters.

14. Preventing the spread of Infection

Absolute Travel and Tours Limited is committed to the best possible safety standards for our groups. In the post-Covid 19 environment it is important that everyone plays a role in the prevention of spread of infection (POSI). The suppliers we work with each have their own unique procedures and policies in relation to illness outbreaks, viruses, and pandemics. Many will have documented contingency plans in place for the continuity of the business in the event of a major incident and these questions feature in the General Safety section of our Accommodation Checklists and Audits.

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/>

15. Emergency Contacts

In the event of a serious incident whilst on tour, your first point of contact should be the local emergency services. However, it is essential to communicate speedily with other contact points:

Designated School Contact

Designate a school contact in the UK who will be available whilst you are on tour, especially on travelling days when you are most likely to need to make contact (eg. due to a travel delay). A complete set of tour documents should be left with them. This will facilitate speedy assistance in the event of an emergency. This person must be able to contact all parents, perhaps via a pyramid telephone communication system.

Absolute Travel & Tours 24-hour Emergency Contact

We operate a 24-hour duty officer service for group leaders. Our staff members are trained to operate to established emergency procedures in case of any major incident. These procedures set out channels of communications, duties and responsibilities, enabling quick and efficient assistance to be provided.

Tel: +44 (0)1279 647 566 Outside office hours this is a message with alternative emergency telephone numbers.

Tel: +44 (0)7795 466 016 Duty Officer emergency line for Group Leaders only

N.B. Under no circumstances should the emergency telephone numbers be passed on to parents or pupils as this may result in our management team being diverted from helping you.

16. Other Useful Information, HSE Guidance and Brexit

LEA, School or Sports Governing Bodies

Your LEA or school, college and governing bodies will have guidelines relating to travel, trips and tours. It is essential that you follow their recommendations at every step along the way.

Government Publications

The Department for Education issues guidance and Health and Safety advice for schools. Visit the following link for Departmental advice on health and safety covering activities that take place on or off school premises, including school trips: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-safety-advice-for-schools>

For further resources, please visit: www.education.gov.uk

Please visit the Health and Safety Executive's website: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/education/school-trips.htm>

The Scottish Government has also produced a good practice guide as follows:

<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/health-and-safety-on-school-excursions-a-good-practice-guide/>

Brexit

Travel to Europe is a little different now that we are no longer a Member of the European Union (EU), so it's important you plan early. See <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/brexit-advice-for-travellers> for advice.

ETIAS

In 2025, the EU is introducing a new travel authorisation (a visa waiver system) called ETIAS. All British citizens will need one prior to travel to the EU. See Passport and Visa section below for further details. You can visit the website on the following link here: https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

17. Passports, Visas and Waivers

Passenger Information

You will be required to send us various details and documentation at the time of booking and/or in advance of the trip and your prompt attention to these is vital to ensuring the smooth running of your trip. **A full passenger list** will be required, inclusive of dates of birth and other information depending on your tour. This is required at the point of booking for flight tours. It is essential that the names you supply on your passenger list match the names that appear on the passports. Discrepancies may result in additional charges, and even refusal to travel.

Passports & Visas

For overseas trips you will need to ensure that every member of your group has valid documentation to travel. You should ensure that any applications for required documentation are made in good time so that they are received well before you depart. **A full valid passport will be required**, and depending on the destination, it is sometimes necessary to have an extended period of validity beyond the end of the trip. For some European trips a Collective Passport may be used for qualifying groups. However, they are not accepted by several airlines, in some countries and are problematic with some ferry companies. As such, you must double-check with us at the booking stage if you are considering this option. Some countries require an entry visa (or other documentation) for your stay. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct documentation to satisfy all entry and travel requirements. Please refer to our Booking terms and Conditions. For information on passports and passport applications visit: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/passports> and for adults at <https://www.gov.uk/renew-adult-passport> and for children at <https://www.gov.uk/get-a-child-passport>.

It is important to note that **a visa may be required by a non-UK passport holder** that is not required by a UK passport holder. We recommend you check with the relevant embassy or consulate. If you have a British passport, **it can't be more than 10 years old when entering the EU** and most places will require you to have at **least three months** left on your passport on the date you depart from your destination. **N.B:** From 2024 UK passport-holders will need an **ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System)** for travel to most European countries. You will need to complete an online application regardless of your age. Anyone aged 18 or older must pay the fee of €7 per application. Applicants who are under 18 or above 70 years of age are exempt from this payment, but children must still apply. Non-UK passport holders must check with the necessary authorities for appropriate Visa or other entry requirements. Further information and apply online at https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en.

NEW: Travelling to the EU? You need to get an ETIAS prior to travel

Important: Please read the following section from ABTA's website (as at the date of publication of this document).

In 2025, the EU is aiming to bring in a new travel authorisation (a visa waiver system) called **ETIAS**, which will be similar to the ESTA for travel to the USA (see below) and be valid for three years. Once introduced, British passport holders travelling to the EU will need to apply and pay for an ETIAS via the [official ETIAS website](#). School children (as well as adults) must have a valid ETIAS prior to travel. It is free for those aged under 18 years old or over 70 years old and costs €7 per person for everyone else. Find answers to the most **commonly asked questions** [here](#).

Once ETIAS is live, certain travellers may be exempt. You can find the list of exemptions [here](#). If you are married to an EU citizen and are travelling with your spouse to or within the Schengen Area, you may find you're exempt from the 90/180-day rule for any period where you travel together. You should check with the country you are visiting before travel to confirm the paperwork that would be required. More information is available [here](#).

Travelling to the USA - Visa and entry requirements

If you are travelling to the USA, you may require visas. For British citizens an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation) is required and needs completing online at a present cost of \$21 per person (but subject to change). All other nationalities must check with the necessary authorities for appropriate passport and visa entry requirements.

Waivers

We will advise groups in advance where the signature of a waiver by a Group Leader or parent may be required in resort or prior to travel. This is sometimes required in ski resorts in the USA for example. Notwithstanding the above, Group Leaders have the reassurance that the primary contract is with Absolute Travel and Tours Limited and is signed under English law. This means that the protection offered under the Package Travel Regulations takes precedence over local disclaimers that may be demanded in resort.

18. School Travel Forum (STF) & LOTC Quality Badge

We are **longstanding members of ABTA** (the leading travel association), one of the most trusted and recognisable brands in the country. We are also Assured members of the **School Travel Forum (STF)** and have been awarded with the prestigious **Learning Outside the Classroom (LOTC) Quality Badge**. **Why is this important?** It means that we:

- understand and facilitate the needs of school and youth groups for sport, ski and educational travel
- have effective safety management systems in place, specifically focussed on group travel with young persons
- offer fair terms and conditions to our customers and adhere to the ABTA Code of Conduct
- ensure that you have best financial security and protection for the payments you make to us

To ensure our health and safety standards are maintained, our systems and procedures are fully audited annually by independent experts. STF membership is the benchmark for good school tour providers. Consequently, it is an Awarding Body for the prestigious **Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge (LOTC)**. The Outdoor Education Advisors Panel (OEAP) endorses the Quality Badge and requests Local Authorities to recommend the use of Badged Providers and require the minimum of additional paperwork where Quality Badge accreditation is in place. This means that you can book your trip with confidence, meet your due diligence and reduce the amount of External Provider paperwork necessary.

19. FCDO Travel Advice

FCDO Travel Advice – Travel Aware

Preparing for safe and healthy travel abroad

The Travel Aware campaign is a joint venture between the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and the travel industry to help make sure British travellers are better prepared when they go overseas. The purpose of travel advice is to provide objective information and advice to help you make better-informed decisions about foreign travel. No foreign travel can be guaranteed as safe, and you take personal responsibility for any trip you make abroad. The FCDO keeps travel advice under constant review, so check the website regularly for updates.

Further details on travelling abroad can be obtained by visiting www.gov.uk/travelaware which provides important information on all the destinations we feature, as well as travel tips, checklists and safety videos. You should visit this in advance and sign up for e-mail alerts for your chosen destination.

The FCO campaign aims to promote the following key messages:

- Get adequate travel insurance
- Check FCO's country and travel advice
- Research your destination – know the local laws and customs
- Visit your GP before travelling
- Check your passport is in good condition and valid and that you have any visas as may be required
- Make copies of important travel documents
- Tell someone where you are going and leave emergency contact details with them
- Take enough money and access to emergency funds



The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides invaluable information for those travelling abroad and we would encourage everyone to read their country specific and travel advice. Direct links to some of the useful sections are detailed below:

Travel advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

Travel checklist: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-checklist>

E-mail sign up: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/email-signup>

Urgent help: <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/embassies>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fcdottravel>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/FCDOGovUK>

ABTA advice: <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice>

20. Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

We take our responsibility to the environment seriously. We are mindful that the landscape and environment plays a vital role in everything from winter sports in the mountains to activities on the lakes or fields and we rely on, and are thankful for, the goodwill and generosity of our hosts and facilities in destinations around the world. As tourists we are privileged to have the opportunity to travel, explore and appreciate life away from home. We share collective responsibility to ensure the sustainability of the world we inhabit together. We can all make a difference by:

- Using the rubbish bins/bags on coaches and aeroplanes to dispose of waste both appropriately and responsibly
- Respecting the environment (lakes, ski resorts/mountains, sports facilities) in all the destinations we use
- Adhering to local regulations, customs & cultures within places of worship, historical sites, villages, towns & cities
- Recycle paper, plastics, bottles and other elements when travelling or in destination
- Only print whenever necessary and keep tickets, itineraries and guidelines online or on devices whenever possible
- Using water sparingly and responsibly in accommodations and other venues and using showers rather than baths
- Only putting out towels and other items for washing in accommodations as and when really necessary
- Using re-usable water bottles and other re-usable items

21. Travel Checklists

Don't forget to visit ABTA's website, which has a huge amount of useful information about the planning and booking of a holiday. Visit: <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/planning-and-booking-a-holiday>

Travel Checklist – Before You Go

- Don't travel without insurance - make sure it covers you for any activities you are likely to undertake
- Travelling within the EU? Then get a free Health Insurance Card (GHIC) for free or reduced emergency care - you still need full travel insurance though!
- Check with your doctor as soon as possible to find out if you need any vaccinations or other precautions before you travel
- Make sure you have an in date, valid passport (you'll need 3 months validity beyond your return date for EU travel).
- Make sure you have the visa(s) you need, which means a new ETIAS for all British groups (even children)
- All first-time adult passport applicants must now attend an interview to verify their identity. It now takes up to six weeks to get a first passport. Please visit <https://www.gov.uk/renew-adult-passport> for more information.
- There are different rules for passports for children. Follow this link <https://www.gov.uk/get-a-child-passport> for details.
- For some countries your passport must be valid for 6 months after your return date from your travels. Please check now.
- Take photocopies of your passport and other important documents and keep these separate from the originals when you travel and/or store them online using a secure data storage site
- Fill in the emergency contact details in your passport, making it easier for the authorities in an emergency
- Find out where the nearest embassy is - check their website to find out what services they offer and their opening times
- Take enough money for your trip and some back-up funds. Consider a pre-paid currency card. Advise your bank and/or credit card companies if you intend using your cards while abroad
- Consider taking your mobile phone - check with your service provider to make sure your phone works abroad and be aware that the cost of using it abroad can be substantially higher than at home. Consider storing useful numbers such as the police and the local embassy or Consulate.
- Invest in a good travel guide to help you plan your trip (and phrase book for whilst you are away)
- Travelling to the USA? British citizens travelling to the USA will require an ESTA (Electronic System for travel Authorisation). The form needs completing online. Visit <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/> ensuring that you visit the Official site and not any imitations or unofficial websites. The cost is presently US\$21 per person. All other nationalities must check with the necessary authorities for passport/visa requirements.

Travel Checklist – When You Are Away

- Think about what you are doing at all times - don't take risks that you wouldn't at home!
- Remain alert and guard valuable personal items at all times. The majority of reported thefts are a result of items being left unattended or thieves using distraction techniques. Don't openly display valuables such as mobile phones or cameras
- Find out about local customs and dress and behave accordingly. Obey local laws - there may be serious penalties for breaking a law that might seem trivial at home
- Be careful when taking photographs, videos or using binoculars. Such activities may be misunderstood, especially near military installations or religious buildings
- Drink plenty of water. Check whether it's safe to drink local tap water - if not, stick to bottled water

22. Striving for Excellence

Absolute Travel and Tours Limited is committed to the continued improvement of safety standards. The review and assessment of our own systems is ongoing as we aim for the highest level of safety, professionalism and client satisfaction.

Customer Communication

Please immediately report anything that causes concern to the appropriate party (eg. rep, hotelier, coach driver or other supplier), and record any incidents on an Incident/Accident Report Form. If the situation cannot be satisfactorily resolved, please contact us and we shall endeavour to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

We shall also send you a Customer Feedback Questionnaire in advance of your trip, which we shall ask you to complete and send back to us on your return. These steps help us to address matters with the supplier concerned and be proactive in preventing similar problems happening in the future. We believe that by listening to our clients we can continue to improve our products and services.

