

Section 8. Travel Excursions

Most of the planning, preparation, leadership and emergency procedures relevant have been covered in the preceding sections of this document (Sections 1–7). Review, and adapt the guidelines provided in these sections while considering particulars of the destination, duration of journey and stay, activities to be undertaken, and particulars of the group. All out-of-province guidelines provided below will also apply to exchange trips and international travel situations. Additional specific guidelines follow for exchanges and international travel.

Out-of-Province Travel

Travel out of one’s home province, but still within Canada, is an important way for students to learn about and appreciate their country.

Planning and Preparation

- Follow all organization policies and procedures related to securing any necessary district approvals for out-of-province or other distant travel within one’s home province. Be aware of and respect proposal submission schedules. The process will typically involve submission of a preliminary proposal outlining the desire or intent to travel and parameters of the trip (who wants to go where, why, for how long, by what means will they traveling, and how will the trip be paid for). Then, assuming the trip has received preliminary approval to proceed, the teacher/leader should expect to be required to submit a copy of the more detailed trip documentation (e.g., final itinerary, travel details, copies of all relevant travel documentation (see below) with sufficient time for the office granting final approval to review the package and request and receive any items missing prior to departure.
- Parents/guardians must be given the opportunity to determine if the proposed trip will be reasonably safe for their child/ward. They must be invited to a pre-trip information meeting or equivalent (e.g., conference call, one-on-one calls, email conversation) to inform them of:
 - the trip logistics,
 - routes and destinations,
 - program and activities,
 - inherent risks,
 - behavioral expectations and consequences,
 - communications systems,
 - insurance,
 - safety plan,
 - supervision and child protection procedures,
 - budget/fundraising/payment schedule,

- parent/guardian agreement to assume the trip expenses (total trip budget as well as their child's expenses), except where other sources of funding off-set costs,
 - trip cancellation or student withdrawal policies and procedures,
 - contingency plans, and
 - emergency plans.
- Parents/guardians must have the opportunity to ask questions and receive responses prior to signing acknowledgement of risk and consent forms.
 - Keep the group size manageable (less than 20 is suggested) and determine an appropriate number of supervisors, based on the capacity of the supervisory team and group, the destination/ environment and activities to be undertaken.
 - At least one teacher/leader should have some experience supervising a similar group in a similar environment.
 - Inform parents/guardians if any unscreened adults will be supervising students without a screened leader present.
 - Where a reconnaissance visit is not possible, gather current information about the area from a cross-section of appropriate sources (e.g., travel agents or tour operators, the Internet, guidebooks, others who have visited, local authorities).
 - If traveling to participate in a convention, special event, attend a performance, etc., confirm reservations/tickets/attendance and accommodations prior to booking airfares.
 - If traveling to a special event organized by others, secure information from the organizers about ground transportation, accommodations, meals/cooking arrangements, what to bring, and other relevant information.
 - Ensure the group has credit or debit cards, traveler's cheques, and cash. Plan in a contingency fund to handle emergencies. Emergency health care costs may be refunded to the limits they would be covered in BC by MSP and/or other insurers, but will almost always need to be paid up front to secure the service.
 - If staying in hotels/motels/inns or hostels, pre-book accommodations. Use guidebooks, CAA/AAA diamond ratings or other reliable comparison guides, websites, and/or word of mouth of others who have used the accommodations to select an appropriate site for the group.
 - Consider using email, a blog, Facebook, Twitter or other social media to share updates and photos and let everyone at home know all is well. .
 - If traveling to a community where English is not commonly spoken (e.g., a French speaking community, an Inuk community), at least one adult teacher/leader should be able to speak enough of the local language to hold a basic conversation and know what to say in an emergency. If not, secure a local guide or host.
 - If traveling to a significantly different part of the country, at least one supervisor should be familiar, at a lay level, with the laws and culture of the destination. If not, secure a local guide or host.

Health Considerations

Inform group members of the following, as relevant to the travel excursion:

- maintain high standards for personal health, hygiene and cleanliness;
- get sufficient rest and sleep;
- prepare to need time to acclimatize if entering radically different climactic, landscape and/or cultural environments.
- where long flights are involved, jet lag sleep pattern disturbance can be reduced by shifting bedtimes and rising times 2-3 days prior to departure, and by getting outside and active under bright sun as soon as possible after arrival;
- to minimize travel stress, students may be encouraged to bring a familiar toy, book or other object(s).
- avoid mosquito bites (See [Section 3 General Considerations for Off-site Activities](#));
- avoid excessive exposure to UVA and UVB solar rays, especially if in warmer climates or on snow or water (See [Section 3 General Considerations for Off-site Activities](#));
- practise strategies for coping in particularly warm or cold climates, as appropriate;
- if personal medications need to be brought, ensure an adequate supply is brought, and that it is kept in original (e.g., hospital or pharmacy) clearly labeled (i.e., patient's name, contents, dosage) containers. Carry proof of need (e.g., copy of prescription or letter from doctor). See [Medications in Sections 4 and 6](#)).
- if a medication is essential, carry separate containers of it in two different pieces of luggage (at least one of which is carry-on), so that if one piece is delayed, lost or stolen, an alternate supply is available.
- if prescription glasses or contacts are worn, pack an extra pair and for extended trips, bring a copy of the prescription.
- if any group members use a wheelchair or have other special needs, check that destination facilities are accessible. Consider other resources and support needed.

Student Preparation

Instruct students, as relevant, to:

- travel to and from the destination with the group unless other formal, documented arrangements have been made with the parent(s)/guardian(s);
- take nothing along that they can't afford to lose and/or to deposit valuables in hotel safes or other secure places;
- carry a credit card(s) and/or traveler's cheques vs. large sums of cash, and practise discreet carriage of any valuables (e.g., in money belts, zip amulets; not flaunting wads of cash or expensive watches/jewelry, etc.) and keep credit card in sight when purchasing goods;
- present themselves as calm, confident and in control;
- stay with their group/buddy, recognizing "strength in numbers", whether in urban or rural environments;
- keep hotel door locked and meet visitors in the lobby; be wary about giving out room number, and personal or itinerary details;

- be cautious about accepting food or drinks from strangers; and
- know how to deal with unwanted attention from strangers by keeping calm, not retaliating, and going quickly to a safe place.

Travelers' Documents

All group members should carry:

- personal identification, some emergency cash, and a phone card or means to make an emergency phone call;
- the group leader's name; name address and phone number of group's accommodation; and, if relevant, the local contact's name and phone number;
- Medic-Alert bracelet, if appropriate (see [General Considerations for Off-site Activities in Section 3](#)); and
- a means of identifying themselves as a member of the group (e.g., brightly colored cap, scarf, ribbon on daypack or item of clothing in common color scheme) (see [General Considerations for Off-site Activities in Section 3](#)); and
- if not in an area where they speak the language commonly used, a note in this language for use if they get lost, asking to be re-united with the group at the accommodation/meeting point, or taken to the police station.

Air, Rail or Marine Travel

- All group members must be aware of luggage size and weight restrictions for each mode of conveyance (delays could pose huge problems for everyone).
- Ensure all group members are aware of prohibited and restricted items and materials, for carry-on and checked baggage. If unsure about an item, contact Transport Canada for clarification.
- If traveling by bus, plane, boat/ferry or train, try to ensure the group will be accommodated as a whole and not split up.
- Avoid riding on overcrowded conveyances (e.g., buses, ferries).
- Ensure students are aware of all rules, regulations, boundaries, etc. during travel;
- Ensure all personal luggage, including carry-ons is clearly labeled;
- If flying, ear pain can be troublesome for younger students. Encourage swallowing or chewing (e.g., gum) to relieve this.
- Encourage students to listen to any safety briefings provided, read all safety features cards provided and be aware of the location of emergency exits on any conveyance..
- Motion sickness and related nausea, dizziness and vomiting, can occur during any type of conveyance; from cars to planes, trains and boats. Covering the window beside the individual may help. Taking off extra clothing layers may help, if it is hot. Eating and drinking can help, but avoid excessively sweet, salty, or acidic items (e.g., fruit juice) or carbonated beverages. A cool wet compress may help reduce dizziness.
- If a group member has a visual, hearing, mobility or other disability, work to ensure that person's needs will be accommodated. i.

Exchange Visits

Domestic or international youth exchanges offer a unique opportunity for students to become immersed in a new culture and to learn in a supportive environment. The success of an exchange depends on good relations and communications with the partner organization. Rendezvous Canada (rvctours.com) can organize logistics and other aspects of an exchange trip and Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada (sevec.ca) offers partial funding for exchange trips it organizes for successful applicants. See other considerations related to excursions and/or international travel as relevant.

Teachers/leaders should brief their students ahead of time, sharing as much information as they have about the general social and cultural expectations of the region to be visited, behavioral expectations, etc.

In addition, review the subsection on **Billeting** in **Section 4 Special Considerations**.

International Travel

International travel can be extremely rewarding, but it is important that carefully documented preparation occurs. Hazards involved relate to physical and social environments, personal care, behavior, supervision, activities undertaken and equipment used. Information in earlier sections applies to visits abroad, but some additional factors need to be considered. Consult board and/or school policy regarding international travel.

Planning and Preparation

- The approval process for international travel is typically substantially longer than for trips within Canada, so the teacher/leader who wishes to initiate such a trip needs to start early. Consult board policies and district procedures regarding proposal submission deadlines, intermediate submissions and final approvals prior to departure. Consider also that it may take a year or more to get funding in place for a major international excursion if the students are not paying the full price themselves.
- Select an appropriate destination(s). Avoid excursions to known:
 - natural disaster areas (e.g., earthquake, flood, hurricane, tornado);
 - areas with serious potential health risks (e.g., Malaria, Mad Cow Disease, Hoof and Mouth Disease);
 - war zones, civil or inter-country (imminent or existing);
 - regions with political or civil instability (e.g., civil war, terrorism);
 - remote areas that require the use of non-commercial aircraft (e.g., private planes).
- Consult the Public Health Agency of Canada (phac-aspc.gc.ca) for health related news, advisories, warnings and information regarding how to secure assistance in various countries (e.g., medical, embassy, consulate).
- Consult the Country Travel Advice and Advisories at travel.gc.ca on the proposed destination, which includes travel information such as civil unrest, crime levels and types, regulations, information on the local Canadian embassy and emergency assistance, health conditions and entry requirements.
- Trips abroad may be organized as an independent venture, or as a pre-packaged arrangement from a tour operator. Such packages include travel, accommodation and/or

other tourist services (e.g., admissions to tours or attractions). When using a tour operator, request written evidence of security or bonding to provide for the refund of advance payments and costs of repatriation in the event of any failure to provide the contracted services. Have a written contract detailing roles, responsibilities, costs, cancellation policies, etc.

- Ensure all members of the group have valid passports (valid for six months past return date of trip); contact nearest Passport Office and visas (contact Foreign Government Office in Canada), as appropriate. If a passport is not required to enter a country, ensure other valid photo identification and proof of citizenship is carried.
- Visa rules are complicated and changeable. Presence of a visa is not a guarantee of entry into some countries. Seek assistance for special cases (e.g., a group member who is not a Canadian citizen, a student who is a ward of the court).
- Ensure that the name on a group member's's passport is consistent with what is on their other documents.
- Carry documentation proving the teacher/leader's right to accompany children other than their own (e.g., letters from parents/guardians, signed consent form that includes the travel details).
- It is recommended that group members have or secure comprehensive out-of-country travel insurance (covering medical evacuation, hospital treatment, etc.) appropriate for the destination country(ies) and activity(ies) involved. Contact the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) or the insurance broker.
- Have a phone card, credit or debit cards, traveler's cheques, and foreign currency, including contingency funds for emergencies (e.g., emergency medical treatment).
- All group members engaging on an international travel venture should have their routine immunizations (e.g., diphtheria, whooping cough (pertussis), tetanus, polio, measles, mumps and rubella) up-to-date. Determine what, if any, other vaccinations are required and ensure all these in good time (this may be several weeks to months prior to departure, so check early) and carry their documentation of such, if required.
- Consider the time of year and location in determining whether to suggest group members get a flu shot prior to departure.
- If appropriate given the destination and/or duration of trip, encourage or require group members to secure a physician's medical screening and encourage a preventative dental check-up.

Transportation

- Choose a safe form of transportation in each country. In some countries, vehicles may be allowed (including buses, vans or trucks) that are poorly maintained or overloaded, and/or where drivers have little or no training in safe operation.
- Always wear seatbelts when they are available, and never be afraid to tell a driver to "Slow down", "Stop", or "Let me/us out." Report reckless drivers to the company and if very serious, register a complaint with the Canadian Embassy.
- Avoid night travel in countries that do not have good safety records.

- In general, avoid motorcycle travel. If choosing motorcycle travel, insist that helmets are provided.
- If renting a vehicle(s), insist that they are equipped with seat belts, check the tires for sufficient tread and ask about the latest brake inspection.
- If the driver(s) are part of the group (e.g., teacher/leader), ensure they are familiar with the rules, regulations and procedures of the destination country (e.g., legal requirements, left-hand drive traffic, carrying capacity and loading requirements). All drivers must be appropriately licensed; check that a Canadian license is recognized or secure an international driving permit.
- If the vehicle is brought from home, ensure proper ownership documentation is carried.
- Road travel, in any country, is a significant hazard, particularly in rural areas and/or in developing countries. Risks may include roads that are poorly constructed and maintained; narrow, winding roads; hairpin curves with no guardrails provided; lack of sufficient lighting or traffic signals or signage; wild or domestic animals on or crossing the road; speeding, aggressive drivers; driver disregard for safety or the law; driving without headlights or tail lights; and/or driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Preparing Students

Every student on an international excursion needs to have a strong sense of ownership for the venture; an awareness that his or her choices can make or break the trip for everyone in the group. Students should be instructed in areas relevant to their safety, including, if and as appropriate:

- basic awareness and respect for local laws, religion, politics and culture (e.g., rules and regulations of behavior, body language, dress codes, local customs, religious mores, attitudes to gender);
- prepare to experience some culture shock, which can lead to feeling uncomfortable, frustrated, withdrawn, negative or unfocused. Usually, travelers are able to work through this and may even find they experience reverse culture shock upon returning home after a long time abroad.
- language - particularly common phrases;
- food and drink - basically boil it, cook it, peel it or leave! Each group member needs to avoid food-borne and water-borne illnesses. Use only sources of safe water and liquids for drinking (e.g., sealed bottled beverages or water boiled, filtered or treated with chlorine or iodine, pasteurized milk and dairy products, avoid using ice unless made with purified or bottled water); washing raw vegetables/fruit (with purified or bottled water) and/or peeling; ensuring meats and shellfish are thoroughly cooked (still hot) and avoiding reheated or precooked foods, cold meat, salads and salad dressing; and ensuring dishes are clean. Avoid food from street vendors. Brush teeth with purified or bottled water;
- avoid swimming, wading, bathing or washing clothing in polluted or contaminated water;
- avoiding touching animals in general if in a less developed country, to avoid bites and potential diseases. Wash hands well/use hand sanitizer immediately after touching any animals.

- Conditions in lodgings used (e.g., hotels, motels, hostels) may be quite different than those found in Canada. Inspect for exposed wiring, pest poisons, loose or missing stair or balcony railings and other obvious hazards. If one or more hazards are present, choose an appropriate course of action (e.g., get it attended to by lodging staff immediately, move to other lodging, or at least warn group members so they can avoid the hazard).
- bringing adaptor plugs for electrical/electronic equipment brought from home;
- bringing contact lens solution, vitamins and/or other items they may use but that may not be available or prohibitively expensive in the country visited;
- use of phones abroad (e.g., local phones, pay phones, use of calling cards or use of personal cell phones). Learn long distance rates and the potential for roaming charges and warn students to exercise caution unless they know all of the costs related to phone calls, data, and other services;
- the substantial risk of severe penalties (e.g., jail, even death) if caught with illicit drugs (or even alcohol) in some countries;
- for adolescents, information to help them protect themselves from contracting HIV (e.g., prevalence of the disease, risk behaviours (e.g., unprotected sex, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), alcohol use, multiple sexual partners), and steps to reduce the risk;
- the hard and fast rules re: never carrying packages or luggage for another person through Customs or across a border, never driving someone else's vehicle through customs or across a border, never hitch-hiking in a foreign land, and never leaving personal property with a stranger;
- if/as relevant, the limits on the quantities of medications (over-the-counter or prescription) that may be taken out of Canada or brought into the destination country;
- providing accurate, clear and consistent replies to questions on Customs Declarations cards or as posed by Customs' agents; and
- emergency procedures (e.g., what to do and where to go if injured, lost or stranded).

See Adventure Travel resource for more information re: Water Treatment

Travel Documentation

Documents to be carried by the teacher/leader or each group member, as relevant, include:

- travel tickets, passports and visas and a separate list of the numbers on these documents, or photocopies of them in a sealed, waterproof bag, stored separate from the originals (e.g., held in a sealed envelope by teacher/leader and a second copy kept in a sealed envelope by the Home Contact Person);
- copies of contracts with the tour operator, transportation, accommodation, and other service providers;
- a list of group members and their contact details;
- health/medical forms and significant medical histories of all group members (in sealed envelope);
- a doctor's or dentist's note regarding any prescription medications carried;

- parental/guardian consent forms, emergency medical treatment authorizations and emergency contacts at home (e.g., parents/guardians' names, phone numbers (residential, work, cellular) and addresses for the home and workplace);
- photos of each group member (in the event someone goes missing; passport photos for international travel in case a passport is lost or stolen and needs to be replaced);
- copies of volunteer consent/acknowledgement of risk forms;
- copies of driver's licenses and/or international driving permits;
- details of insurance arrangements and the insurer's phone number;
- accommodation contacts; and
- location(s) of emergency services (e.g., hospitals).

Organization and Home Contact Person Documents

- Both the school contact (e.g., principal or designate) and the Home Contact Person should have each other's names and numbers and copies of the itinerary and contact numbers/addresses of the group. In addition, the leader should provide each of these two people with a sealed envelope containing copies of the travel documentation items described above.
- See **Home Contact Person** in **Section 4** for guidelines regarding this role.

Participants' Documents

For international travel, participants should also carry on their person:

- their passport or other proof of residency, if they are non-Canadians residing in Canada;
- an appropriate amount of foreign currency and phone card or other means of placing an emergency call;

Emergency Procedures

Planning and preparation to deal with emergencies includes, but is not limited to:

- ensuring all members of the group and Home Contact Person knows the emergency protocols established and any modifications made based on new information;
- familiarity with diseases prevalent in the country(ies), what action to take to avoid infection or in the event that one or more group members become infected;
- knowledge of how to avoid health problems caused by insufficient or contaminated food and water, lack of sleep, or over-exertion;
- having an adult contact with a valid passport on standby at home to come and provide support in the event of an emergency;
- applying an Emergency Plan, coordinating communications with school and emergency response agencies;
- having a Communications Plan that considers common problems related to group travel abroad and identifies who to call at what numbers in what circumstances;
- having a system for securing additional funds, if needed. Keep original receipts for any purchases, as well as any bills (e.g., accommodations, medical), vehicle rental agreement;

- ensuring teachers/leaders and older, more mature students know the location and phone number of the nearest Canadian Embassy or Consulate. The Emergency Watch and Response Centre can be called toll-free in Ottawa at (613) 996-8885 8885 if urgent assistance is required abroad (e.g., a passport lost or stolen, detention by the police). There are additional toll-free numbers in at least 50 countries to reach this centre; see travel.gc.ca/assistance;
- completing a police report immediately if a group member loses his or her passport and/or if valuables are stolen;
- measures to be taken to remove an individual whose behavior threatens the safety of that individual and/or the group, ensure the repatriation arrangements are known by the parents/guardians concerned (including their responsibility to cover any and all additional costs related to this action, including those of a teacher/leader chaperone to accompany the student); and
- ensuring a contingency plan is in place to return the group or specific members home early.

After the Trip

After a major trip, consider the following:

- conduct a debriefing of the leadership team and students to discuss what went well, what could have been better and how. Debrief any incidents or near misses;
- instruct group members that, in the upcoming months, if they develop a fever, rash, difficulty breathing, or any other unusual symptoms, to seek medical aid and to tell the doctor or health-care provider their travel history;
- complete the financial reconciliation (i.e., funds brought in, expenses, deficit or surplus) and determine how any deficit or surplus will be dealt with. A surplus, for example, may go toward future activities of the group, school or to a charity; and
- complete any requirements related to providing the board or school with a summary report. File a copy of all essential documents, as required. If no incidents occurred where other copies of the documentation may be needed as evidence, collect and destroy the second copy carried on the trip, the copy held by principal or designate and the copy held by the Home Contact Person.

For unfamiliar terms, see the [Glossary](#) in the *Safety First! Level 1 Manual*.

See [Additional Resources and References](#) for other helpful websites and resources related to travel.