



# The School Travel Consultancy



A guide to planning exceptional  
educational adventures & school expeditions  
**Part 5**





## Section 5: Whilst you are away

# Money Management

Money management for group leaders can sometimes be daunting – especially if group numbers are high, resulting in large sums of money having to be looked after.

Your tour or expedition price will include all transport, accommodation, most meals and entrance fees - see your quotation for details. However, there are some incidentals that may have to be paid in cash. These may include:

- Tips
- Visas on arrival, and/or departure taxes (if not included in your ticket – see your trip notes for details)
- Entrance fees during free time
- Laundry
- Food & drinks not included
- Items of a personal nature

For much of the above, students can reasonably be expected to look after their own money. For larger sums, and your emergency fund, it may be worth considering other alternative arrangements in addition to just cash.

## Tips for safer money management and handling:

### Do:

- Ensure two or more teachers have access to an emergency fund (some cash, with access to more funds on a debit card if necessary)
- Take a debit card to top up personal cash. ATMs are surprisingly common in the developing world, although check with your bank how much they will charge for cash withdrawals. (see pre-paid credit cards overleaf). You can find Visa and MasterCard cash machines worldwide on the following websites:
  - [www.visa.com/atmlocator/](http://www.visa.com/atmlocator/)
  - [www.mastercard.co.uk/atm-locator.html](http://www.mastercard.co.uk/atm-locator.html)
- Recommend that all students use a hidden money belt (or neck wallet) for securely holding cash and passports.
- Split group funds between teachers and various locations (on your person and between bags).
- Consider using a small 'spare' wallet – easily accessible – with a little money for small daily purchases and an old credit card or two. Should you be unlucky enough to be mugged/held up, you can hand it over and your attackers will most likely be contented. Your main cards and cash remain safe elsewhere.
- Ask your guide where cash machines and money exchange is available throughout your trip so you can plan accordingly.

### Don't:

- Change money on the black-market.
- Change money at the airport unless you absolutely have to – the exchange rates are usually terrible. If you do urgently need money on arrival, then change just enough to get you to a bank or exchange bureau away from the airport.
- Bother with travellers' cheques – whilst secure, these are less flexible and in some countries it can be difficult to find a place willing to cash them.

## Prepaid Credit Cards

These are a very convenient and secure method to carry spending money - safe from both fraud and theft. Money is “loaded” onto the card before departure and it can then be used just like a debit card abroad. They are an ideal choice where you know that money will be needed to pay for group meals or activities or when needing to access cash.

A few keys points to bear in mind when choosing a card:

- Different cards have different prices and attributes, so it pays to choose the right card for your destination and style of trip.
- The card should be backed by a major brand, such as MasterCard or Visa, as this enables its use in ATMs worldwide.
- Check the exchange rates, set up and running costs. Some cards have variable exchange rates, others fix your exchange rate when you load the card.
- Can you load the card with Dollars or Euros, or only Pounds?
- Can you get extra cards (for additional staff members) at a reasonable rate and how can you top-up the card if need be when abroad? Do you need to give additional access to the account for a member of school staff back home?

One card supplier recommended to us is **ICE Travellers Cash Card**, but there are various on the market.

**Remember:** It is worth giving your emergency home contact the details of how to load more money onto the card in the case of more emergency funds being required when you are abroad.

## Tipping Guide

For better or worse, tipping is a fact of life in many developing nations. The ‘etiquette’ of how much to tip, when, and to whom, can be a daunting thing to understand.

The tour operators we work with usually include a ‘recommended’ tip amount in their pre-departure information. Whilst this is useful, remember that in many of the places we arrange travel, average monthly wages are low. This is worth bearing in mind as it is easy for an overly generous tip to seem excessive when compared to monthly salaries and income.

Those who work in the tourism industry are in a very privileged position, so don’t feel too guilty if you tip less than the recommended amounts.

We suggest you speak to your tour/expedition leader about helping you organise tips for your driver(s), local guide(s), porters and cooks.

Remember to tip your leader too – if you think he/she has earned it.



# Personal Health & Hygiene

For school pupils on expeditions to exotic foreign climes, often for the first time, heat, humidity, noise and smells, indeed "culture shock" in general, can be alarmingly good at distracting attention and lowering one's guard.

Add to that the potential for a host of medical issues, unusual customs, poor road conditions and any number of other circumstances, you could be forgiven for thinking that any trip abroad is bound to end in mishap.

The reality, however, is that with good preparation and a little knowledge of the basics of travel health and safety, the vast majority of trips abroad take place with no, or only minor, incident.

**Culture Shock:** When the cultures are challenging and vastly different from our own, readjusting can sometimes be difficult. Typical symptoms include: low-level anxiety, depression, boredom, irritability, lethargy and excessive sleeping and homesickness.

Travelling in a group often lessens the impact of culture shock but there are things you can do to reduce its occurrence:

- Plan thoroughly
- Read up on your destination
- Don't panic
- Recognise that it is normal to feel a little overwhelmed and that it will pass
- Share concerns and worries with other members of the group
- Get plenty of rest
- Make an effort to remain social, even if you don't feel like it
- Contact friends and family at home
- Have a sense of humour!

## Sun, Heat & Humidity:

In hot climes, it is vital to drink plenty of fluid to avoid dehydration and heat stroke. Do not underestimate just how much liquid you need to take in to remain hydrated, especially if combining physical activity in a hot/humid or dry environment (this includes altitude).

The easiest barometer to measure whether you are drinking enough liquid is to check your urine – it should remain a light straw colour and not deep yellow in colour. Your local guide will be an expert in dealing with the local environmental conditions. A few tips...



(In case you need a reminder to use sun-tan cream)

- Drink little and often – it is easier to keep hydrated than to try and re-hydrate
- Wear loose fitting, light coloured clothes
- Wear a wide brimmed sunhat and use high factor sun cream
- Cottons, linen and "wicking fabrics" are the most comfortable
- Plan your activities to avoid the hottest parts of the day
- Take it easy – don't plan to do too much

**Clean Water:** In Africa, Asia and South America, maintaining high standards of personal hygiene should be one of your highest priorities – and a common source of problems is water. Outside of Europe and North America purify all water (via tablets or boiling) or use bottled water. Make sure that bottled water is properly sealed – in some areas “entrepreneurial” individuals collect up empty bottles, fill them with tap water and re-sell them.



**Responsible tourism vs bottled water – a difficult debate:**

Bottled water, if readily available is the easiest way to drink safe water. However, before diving down this route, consider the environmental impact. Developing countries are unlikely to have access to the recycling facilities we do back home, so if your group of 20 drinks two bottles a day for 10 days, that’s 400 plastic bottles thrown into landfill (or worse still, dumped on the outskirts of town).

**But...** if you don’t buy bottled water, you are depriving local people of trade that they need to make a living.

**The solution?**

One way around this conundrum is to purify your water rather than buy bottled water, and then supplement this with purchases of Coke / Fanta / Sprite – many of which can usually be found in glass bottles which can be recycled / re-used. This way, you’re restricting the plastic thrown away, yet still contributing to the local economy.

**Diet:** Your stomach needs time to adapt to the local cuisine, just as your mind needs to adapt to the culture and body to the environment. Start with mild food, or prepare with some spicy food before you leave home.

*Top tips for healthy tummies*

- Wash hands thoroughly before handling food.
- “Wash it, peel it, cook it or forget it” (and don’t forget to wash it in purified water!)
- Avoid salads, ice in drinks and water ices unless you know they’ve been washed or made with purified water.
- Ensure all food is piping hot.
- Choose dishes that have to be cooked from fresh, rather than those that could be re-heated.
- Eat at busy restaurants.



**An alcohol based disinfectant hand-wash is highly recommended** – bottles are small enough to be kept in a pocket or your day sack and they provide instant cleansing. Be very attentive to washing hands before eating.



### Personal first aid kits

Your tour / expedition leader will have a group first aid kit in case of emergency. For day to day small health issues, all travellers should carry a personal first aid kit – contact your local pharmacy or travel clinic for advice. A suggested personal first aid kit for students should include:

- Oral rehydration sachets
- Antihistamine cream or spray
- Travel sickness tablets / bracelet if known to suffer
- Sunscreen
- Antiseptic cream or spray
- Sterilising tablets
- A small selection of plasters
- Some sterile wipes
- Nail scissors



Keep finger and toe nails short, clean any scratches or wounds immediately and use antiseptic cream.

### Teeth

Visit the dentist before you travel and ensure oral hygiene is maintained whilst you are away. **Don't forget to wash your teeth in purified water!**

### Mosquitoes and Malaria

Avoiding being bitten is the number one line of defence against insect transmitted diseases. Wear long trousers and long sleeves. Some mosquitoes bite during daylight hours, so it is not just at dusk you need to be vigilant. Use mosquito netting or fans and a good insect repellent – DEET is popular and effective, although test you don't react to it. 50% DEET is the recommended concentration. Remember to re-apply regularly – every hour is good – especially in hot, humid climates where you are sweating a lot.

If you are visiting a malarial area, it can be helpful if the whole group takes their weekly (if using) anti-malarial prophylaxis tablets on the same night. This reduces the risk of any individual forgetting them.

### Wildlife

- **Scorpions & Snakes:** Fortunately rare. Take care when walking in undergrowth or putting on shoes, and/or collecting firewood.
- **Dogs:** Stay clear of any dogs as Rabies is prevalent in many areas outside the UK. If licked or bitten by a dog (or other animal) seek medical advice immediately.
- **Other animals:** We recommend that do not you touch or feed any animals whilst you are away, unless part of a pre-arranged activity and you are told it is safe to do so.

# Safety management abroad

## Daily briefing & general group management

A daily meeting is an excellent opportunity for the forthcoming day's activities and events to be discussed as well as any group or individual concerns or points of safety to be aired. It is an opportunity to ensure everyone knows what is happening when, where and why. Your guide will arrange regular meetings, but you may feel the need to convey further information from a pastoral care perspective.

Remember to:

- Conduct regular head counts
- Have plenty of breaks
- Make allowances for heat, humidity and weather
- Have group members memorize important information such as the name and contact details of the local operator and where they are staying (or use a contact card system such as the sample in the appendix).
- Decide on pre-arranged meeting points, should anyone get separated. Asking for a photo of each student prior to leaving the UK is useful if case anyone gets lost.

## Personal Safety

Wear day-sacks properly, not just slung over a shoulder. Avoid dimly lit areas and be aware of what is going on around you. Busy markets are a haven for pick pockets, as are bus and train stations. Be alert to strange behaviour and scams: if a situation "feels" wrong, then it probably is wrong. Ask your guide about local issues you should be aware of.

## Accommodation

All our tour operators conduct assessments of the accommodation they use during a trip. Even so, group leaders should familiarize themselves with each new night stop and convey potential risks and fire escape routes to the group. Establish a rendezvous point.

## Transport

Depending on the destination, your transport may or may not have seat belts (elephants in Nepal rarely do...!) If available, make sure they are used. Always make a quick assessment of your transport and if you have concerns talk to your leader and consider alternative arrangements.

## Remote supervision

On certain trips it is natural that the group will not remain together 24 hours a day. Wandering through bustling markets, for example, is simply not feasible with a group of 20 people. Where remote supervision is deemed acceptable, make sure the follow are put in place and adhered to by the all members of the group:

- A buddy system. Four per group is a good number (three is a minimum).
- Rendezvous points and how/where to summon help if needed.
- Establish timings for the activity and ensure every group has access to a watch.
- Rules specific to the task (e.g. out of bound areas / activities).





# Water Safety

Any activity that is part of your itinerary (e.g. a boat trip, snorkeling or sea kayaking) will have been risk assessed by your tour operator and will have in place the necessary safety measures to ensure the activity is as safe as necessary.

That said, it is not uncommon for water to be 'encountered' in other parts of your trip – outside of the jurisdiction of your tour operator. So, whether the hotel you are staying in has a pool, or you are considering wild swimming at the end of a day of trekking, you need to make special consideration for everyone's safety.

It is a good idea to discuss this with senior management and parents as well, before the trip takes place, so boundaries can be set and rules established.

## *Top tips to consider:*

- Always seek local advice as to the safety of rivers and the sea if planning to swim.
- Always ensure one member of staff remains out of the water / pool / sea at any given time, so they can watch the group.
- Do not allow diving in rivers or pools where the depth of the water is unknown and/or where underwater hazards cannot be assessed.
- Conduct a swimming test prior to departing the UK – some activities such as rafting may have a minimum swimming distance requirement.
- Seek parental approval to allow swimming in non-lifeguarded pools / rivers / the sea.

## **More information:**

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) has issued some excellent guidance on group safety at water margins. This can be viewed on line at:

<http://www.rosipa.com/leisuresafety/Info/WaterSafety/groupsafety-watermargins.pdf>

## **Expedition water safety:**

Plas y Brenin and other outdoor course providers run a course called '**Expedition Safety at Water Margins**'. The course is for anyone intending to lead or assist in the leadership of an overseas expedition with young people and covers hazard identification, control measures, river crossings and more.



# Returning home

After an exciting adventure or expedition it is always a thrill to come home and tell family and friends the tall stories of your adventures. But it is important to follow things through.

Your group of students will have changed their outlook on life and many may find difficulty in re-adjusting to everyday normality.

## Reverse culture shock

Reverse culture shock is a recognised condition that occurs when travellers return home and have difficulty readjusting to western cultures and the extravagant excess of our life of plenty.

**Symptoms may include any or all of the following emotions:**

- Need for lots of sleep
- Change in priorities
- Restlessness
- Missing people and places from abroad
- Confusion, frustration, boredom, insecurity
- Feelings of alienation or withdrawal
- Feelings of resistance toward and lack of understanding from family and friends

**There are a few ways to help you adjust to life back home, suggestions include:**

- Staying in touch with your group and sharing your experiences
- Stay connected to your destination through global news networks and newspapers
- Journal your thoughts and emotions
- Share experience and thoughts through writing, blogging, photo competitions...
- Start planning your next adventure!



That's all folks. Look out for our next instalment which will run you through:

***Section 6: Responsible Tourism***

*Introduction*

*Environmental Considerations*

*Ethical Awareness*

*Cultural Awareness*

***Section 7: Sources of Information***

*Useful links*

## Got a question?

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