



SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SMS) POLICY

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CONTENTS

1. General Statement of Policy	2
2. Organisation of Staff	3
3. Monitoring of Staff	4
4. Accommodation	4-5
5. Transport	6-7
6. Excursions	8
7. Inspection Visits	8
8. Safety Information Before Travel	8
9. Tour Couriers	9
10. Emergency and Incident Procedures	9
11. Crisis Management Plan	9
12. Training	9
13. Contact Details	10

1. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The safety of all our tour participants (Scouts, Guides and Leaders) is of primary concern to Venture Abroad, and it is our policy to operate tours with the highest standards of health and safety that are reasonably practicable. By any reasonable definition of the term, group travel is safe but accidents can and do happen from time to time.

Our commitments to our clients are as follows:

- 1.1 We will promote a positive health & safety culture throughout our own and our supplier's organisations world-wide.
- 1.2 We will set standards that meet the needs of our clients that are measurable, achievable and realistic.
- 1.3 We will ensure the provision of adequate resources, both financial and human, to achieve a high level of safety and continuous improvement.
- 1.4 We will endeavour to provide party leaders with information that will increase their ability to manage safety on their trips.
- 1.5 We will measure and review our performance and compliance with our own system, and have our work audited annually by a suitably qualified external expert.
- 1.6 We will ensure our staff are trained to respond quickly and efficiently in case of an emergency.
- 1.7 We will review, maintain and update the SMS annually. We will review all procedures throughout the year when issues are notified to us. We will ensure that we investigate and make amendments if necessary. Additionally we will apply any recommendations which come from our external annual audit.

The Managing Director has overall responsibility for the direction of the SMS. All senior staff are responsible for monitoring safety standards. Our policy has been devised to comply with the minimum standards for best practice in the school and youth travel sector to ensure that reasonable precautions have been taken and due diligence exercised.

Signed:



John Boyden, Managing Director

2. ORGANISATION OF STAFF

2.1 Policy

The Managing Director has overall responsibility for the direction of the SMS ensuring that:

- Competent staff are appointed to implement the requirements of the SMS;
- Systems are developed for implementation of the SMS.
- Adequate human and financial resources are available to ensure policies are carried out.

2.2 Planning

2.2.1 The Senior Management is collectively responsible for the following:

- Ensuring participation of appropriately trained and competent personnel.
- Monitoring performance of the SMS and their departmental staff in its implementation, providing feedback to the Board of Directors on success and on areas for improvement.
- Keeping up to date with safety requirements and practices applicable to the provision of tours.
- Ensuring an annual examination to identify trends.

2.2.2 The Managers of our operational departments are responsible for the following:

- All of 2.2.1.
- The selection, as well as the active (e.g. inspections) and reactive (e.g. accident and emergency phone procedure, as per [section 14](#)) monitoring of accommodation centres, excursions and concert venues, jointly with the other managers, and in line with the relevant policies in [sections 4-10](#).

2.2.3 The Customer Relations and Transport Manager is responsible for the following:

- All of 2.2.1.
- The selection, as well as the active (e.g. inspections) and reactive (e.g. incident investigation) monitoring, of coach companies in line with the Transport policy in [section 6](#) and the emergency & incident procedures as detailed in [section 14](#).

2.3 Implementers

2.3.1 The responsibilities of all management and staff are as follows:

- Be diligent in complying with the responsibilities of the SMS.
- Carry out responsibilities in accordance with training provided.
- Bring to the attention of their manager any noted weakness with the SMS or any situation that has the potential for serious and imminent danger to clients.

3. MONITORING

3.1 Monitoring by Venture Abroad

- Trained staff will audit suppliers of accommodation and coach transport.
- Senior Managers will monitor their departmental standards by spot-checking the quality of work of their staff.
- Accidents involving clients relating to coach transportation, accommodation or activities arranged by Venture Abroad will be encouraged to be reported through the incident report forms (for use in resort) and questionnaires (for use upon return to the UK).
- Senior management will investigate incidents, accidents and 'near misses'. These will be reviewed as they arise as well as on an annual basis.
- A formal internal review will be held at the highest level each year. This will be used to identify trends and confirm that remedial actions have been implemented. Changes in procedure will be included in our policy document.

4. ACCOMMODATION

All accommodation used by Venture Abroad is either requested directly, or through an agent. An agent is an organisation that has access to a variety of accommodation types to find suitable and available options. Often they also organise other parts of a package, such as transport and excursions. If any component of a tour is booked through an agent, their details will be on the final itinerary.

4.1 All Accommodation (including that featured in brochures)

- A contract is signed confirming (as a minimum) that the accommodation conforms to local & national fire, safety & hygiene standards and additionally a set of specific safety standards, aimed at further improving client safety.
 - We will obtain a copy of the current fire certificate or local equivalent.
 - We will obtain a copy of the supplier's current insurance policy.
 - We will endeavour to obtain a copy of the hygiene certificate or local equivalent.
 - Alternatively, we can ask the accommodation provider to sign a declaration confirming that they have the above documentation.
 - We will ensure that children and adults are accommodated separately and according to gender breakdowns.
 - Each accommodation centre will be subject to an audit prior to using it for the first time.
 - It will thereafter be inspected every three years using the SMS core questions as a minimum.
 - As a minimum, a standard audit will be attained if the accommodation is used as a 'one off' or if it is used for less than 5 groups within any 12 months. A standard audit is completed by the hotelier or agent on our behalf.
 - If the property is used by more than 5 groups within any 12 months a supplementary audit of the accommodation will be undertaken. A supplementary audit is completed by a member of Venture Abroad staff who have undergone appropriate training.
- In addition, 'camping' tours involving tents and campsites will also be subject to checks and we will carry out a campsite audit where practicably possible. However, it

is worth noting that these tours naturally bring their own additional risks and we therefore have an additional, specific risk assessment available for your consideration when staying on a campsite.

4.2 Accommodation supplied via Agents

- We shall ensure the agent signs an agent contract confirming that the accommodation they offer have a current fire certificate, the appropriate insurance cover, and endeavour to obtain a hygiene certificate or local equivalent. Furthermore that they conform to a set of specific safety standards, aimed at further improving client safety.
- A record of agent/ ground handler audits will be maintained, and accommodation audited in this manner will be treated in the same way as if the accommodation had been contracted directly. In addition the agent will be informed of the audit standard achieved.
- If any audited establishment falls into the unacceptable category, we will advise the agent and request alternative accommodation. Agents are aware of the criteria and minimum standards we adhere to.

4.3 Accommodation Ratings

Following the above audit procedures relevant to the particular accommodation centre, the ratings below will be applied by Venture Abroad:

- 4.3.1 High Conformity Conforms
No areas of improvement can be identified. The management will be commended and encouraged to maintain their standards.
- 4.3.2 Acceptable Conformity
Room for improvement has been identified, but the defects do not render the building unsafe. The defects will be brought to the immediate attention of the management at the time of auditing. The deficiencies will be risk assessed and a schedule of recommendations will be issued to the accommodation in writing.
- 4.3.3 Exceptional
Room for improvement has been identified where the defect could be easily remedied with minor action taken by the client and/or Venture Abroad ie. Taking a smoke detector on tour. The defects will be brought to the immediate attention of the management at the time of auditing.
- 4.3.4 Unacceptable
We will remove this accommodation from our programme and will not consider its reinstatement until the defects have been rectified and the establishment has been re-audited to a standard of either High Conformity Conforms or Acceptable Conformity.

5. TRANSPORT

5.1 UK Based Coach Operators

- For all coach operators operating tours into Europe, prior to use for the first time, we will obtain a copy of:
 1. Their operating licence
 2. Motor vehicle insurance
 3. Public liability insurance
- Alternatively, we can ask the coach operator to sign a declaration confirming that they have the above documentation.
- We will endeavour to select coach operators who belong to recognised industry bodies such as the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), Guild of British Coach Operators or Coach Marque accredited operators.
- We will ensure all coach companies used sign a coach contract in which they confirm that they comply with all national, local, trade & other laws, regulations, rules and codes of practice. This contract also stipulates a set of safety standards regarding drivers' hours, driver vetting, insurance cover and vehicle age.
- In line with UK legislation, all UK coaches will be fitted with lap-belts as a minimum. In the event of a vehicle breakdown abroad, it is unlikely we will be able to find a vehicle with lap-belts as this is not a legal requirement in Europe

5.2 Regular Use List

- We have established and will maintain a list of UK coach operators that we use regularly, or anticipate using more than 5 times in any 1 year – this will be called the regular use list. For companies on the 'regular use' list, we shall:
 1. Obtain and keep on record a copy of the operating licence, motor vehicle & liability insurance (or declarations confirming these details).
 2. Inspect the coach operator prior to using them for the first time and thereafter at least every three years.
 3. The inspection will use the SMS 'core questions' as a minimum.
 4. Maintain a schedule of the audit status of coach operators and review it on an annual basis. This will be measured in the same way as the accommodation audits above (in terms of high conformity conforms, acceptable conformity and unacceptable).
 5. Ensure that the drivers have no material criminal record or detrimental employment record.

5.3 Operators not on the 'Regular Use List'

- In certain circumstances we may not always be able to find an operator from our regular use list. Circumstances including, but not limited to:
 - High season (when all operators on the 'regular use list' are fully booked)
 - When the group is located in a remote area and we do not have an operator in that area (i.e. The Orkney Islands)
 - When a group has special coaching requirements (i.e. request a specific coach company not on the regular use list or request a trailer when we do not have trailer operators in that area).
 - In these instances we will comply with section 5.1 of this policy.

5.4 Non-UK Coach Operators secured by Venture Abroad

- We will ensure all coach companies used sign a coach contract for non-UK operators in which they confirm that they comply with all national, local, trade & other laws, regulations, rules and codes of practice. This contract also stipulates a set of safety standards regarding drivers' hours, driver vetting, insurance cover and vehicle age.
- Non-UK coach companies that are contracted directly by us which will be used, or we anticipate that we will use them more than 10 times in any 1 year will:
 1. Be audited every 3 years using the SMS core questions as a minimum
 2. Obtain on an annual basis and keep on record a copy of the operating licence, motor vehicle and liability insurance (or declarations confirming these details).

5.5 Non-UK Coach Operators secured by Venture Abroad's Agents

Venture Abroad's agents providing foreign coach services will sign a contract in which they agree that the companies they select will comply with the applicable national, local, trade or other laws, regulations, rules & code of practice. This contract also stipulates a set of safety standards regarding drivers' hours, driver vetting, insurance cover and vehicle age to which the coach company must agree prior to initial use by Venture Abroad.

5.6 Public Transport

- Appropriate means of public transport will be arranged whenever this is the best means of getting the group to its destination.
- Public transport regulations are determined by the appropriate authorities in each country. As this is outside our control, it is not felt that any additional measures can be taken by Venture Abroad and care must be taken by clients to ensure that it is appropriate.

5.7 Air

- All transport by air from the UK is regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and adheres to strict safety measures. The CAA has granted Venture Abroad an Air Travel Organiser's Licence (ATOL No 3475). No additional measures need be undertaken by Venture Abroad.
- All transport by air outside the UK is governed by foreign national regulating bodies. Again, no additional measures need be undertaken by Venture Abroad.

5.8 Ferries/Eurotunnel

All ferries and Eurotunnel are regulated nationally. For major British ferry companies used, we will check on an annual basis that levels of on board safety are being maintained, and pass on any safety information provided to our groups.

5.9 Rail Transport and Eurostar

All rail transport is regulated by the countries through which trains travel. No additional measures need be undertaken by Venture Abroad.

6. EXCURSIONS

6.1 Excursions booked through Venture Abroad

- We will use reasonable endeavours to obtain evidence that health and safety has been evaluated from the providers of visits and excursions.
- An outline of any potential remaining risks which the provider wishes to bring to the attention of school and youth groups.
- Venture Abroad will provide a generic risk management handbook for all tour types.

6.2 Adventurous Activities

- All activities which fall under The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority's (AALA) description or that have a considerable risk will be subject to an audit prior to being used.
- It will thereafter be reassessed every three years using the SMS core standards and questions as a minimum.
- Guidance will be sought from an appointed Technical Advisor when required to ensure that all risks have been considered and the activity is safe for use (where an activity is deemed not to be safe for use, we will remove them from our programme).
- Details of local certification and insurance cover will be requested.
- A specific activity based risk assessment has been compiled by Venture Abroad which details relevant risks to be considered by groups undertaking adventurous activities as well as any risks the provider wishes to bring to the attention of school and youth groups.

(Our risk assessments should be used as a guide and are not replacements for undertaking your own specific risk assessments on the spot. Any changes to the identified risks on the day of the activity should be assessed and if deemed appropriate, the activity should be halted until the risk has been managed.)

7. INSPECTION VISITS

Venture Abroad will provide means for clients to inspect a destination in advance of travelling with their group. This may be at an additional cost.

8. SAFETY INFORMATION BEFORE TRAVEL

Venture Abroad shall provide written practical safety information to their clients prior to their tour to include local area information and fire safety precautions.

9. TOUR COURIERS

9.1 UK Citizens

Any tour couriers with UK citizenship are police checked for suitability for working with children (DBS checks, previously known as CRB checks); this could be a member of the Venture Abroad staff or an externally contracted courier.

9.2 Non-UK based couriers

Any tour couriers who do not have UK citizenship cannot be police checked under the DBS scheme, however Venture Abroad will seek confirmation that tour couriers are suitable for working with children by liaising with relevant foreign agents and monitoring feedback.

10. EMERGENCY & INCIDENT PROCEDURES

Emergency Phones

- On a rota basis, one fully-trained senior member of Venture Abroad staff per operational department are appointed as 24 hour emergency contacts for group leaders to contact when on tour. All group leaders, coach operators, accommodation centres and agents will be given these contact details and guidelines on the circumstances under which the emergency phone should be used.
- We have produced and maintain a fully documented emergency procedure that is available to all clients and is operational when any clients are abroad or in transit.
- A file outlining details of current groups on tour and emergency contact numbers for suppliers will be distributed to the 24 hour emergency contacts.

11. CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Crisis Management Plan is a document defining procedures and the roles that staff would assume in case of a serious incident involving Venture Abroad groups on tour.

12. TRAINING

12.1 General Training

- There will be formal training given to all appropriate staff during their induction, following which this will be renewed as requested. Employees will be trained in those areas of the SMS for which they may be required to exercise responsibility.
- All staff will undergo SMS awareness training and kept aware of the latest developments with the SMS.

12.2 Audit Training

- In-house training will be provided to staff who undertake accommodation and coach audits.
- In addition external bodies training is also available to all staff who undertake accommodation and coach audits.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

For further information please contact:

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