

Guidelines on Study Tours Outside Hong Kong¹

Study Tours outside Hong Kong

This refers to activities designed and organized by schools in which students, under the care of the escorts appointed by schools, are arranged to take part in visits, exchange programmes, studies or services conducted outside Hong Kong. These Guidelines are drawn up with an aim primarily to reminding schools to ensure the safety of participants of study tours. Schools should make reference to the curriculum guides on various Key Learning Areas to design suitable study tour programmes according to their respective school-based curriculum and needs of the students, including the learning objectives and corresponding activities.

I Planning and Preparation

- 1) Schools should make overall planning of study tours outside Hong Kong in light of their development priority and needs, such as manpower arrangement, estimated expenditure, number of tours and schedule of other school activities.
- 2) All escorts in the study tour should have experience in leading students to take part in outdoor activities or overseas visits, with at least one of them being a teacher of the school.
- 3) It is advisable that at least one of the escorts or participants has received training in first aid.
- 4) Each study tour should be led by at least two escorts, with each escort² taking care of no more than 10 students³.
- 5) Schools should maintain proper communication with teachers in deploying suitable teachers to escort students to take part in exchange programmes and make appropriate teacher deployment with respect to the objectives and arrangements of each activity. Considering the flight schedule of individual tours and teachers' work schedule immediately after returning to Hong Kong, schools should flexibly re-arrange the teaching schedules of the teachers concerned to allow them to have enough rest before resuming normal duties. Whenever necessary, schools may seek advice and instructions from their respective school management committees.

¹ This Guide is extracted from the Guidelines on Outdoor Activities (GOA) for easy reference. Schools, in planning for overseas visits, should refer to relevant parts of the GOA for reference/necessary actions.

² Escort(s) refer(s) to school teacher(s)/staff and adult(s) appointed by the school, such as parents and alumni. They should have a good knowledge of the nature of the activity and of the problems that likely to arise, and should undertake to take care of and supervise the students in the course of the tour.

³ For the manning ratio for special schools, please refer to Appendix X of the GOA "Manning Ratio for Outdoor Activities of Students of Special Educational Needs" to make appropriate arrangements.

- 6) The capability of the participants⁴ to take part meaningfully in the activity must be taken into consideration when deciding the destination, itinerary and duration of the tour, etc. Stakeholders and parents should be consulted on the details.
- 7) Other factors including climate, accessibility, language, condition of hygiene, accommodation and food of the place of visit should also be taken into account.
- 8) Places with potential hazards, such as political unrest, lax security, epidemic disease outbreaks, threats of earthquake or frequent occurrence of typhoons and flood, should be avoided.
- 9) Schools should draw up contingency plans in advance (e.g. procedures for handling delay or cancellation of the tour in response to changes in weather conditions, Air Quality Index/air pollution level (as appropriate), political environment or transportation, and to handle withdrawals or accidents in the course of the tour) and inform the students and their parents of the plans. Schools should also set up an emergency contact system with the parents and the collaborators/ host organizations to facilitate communication with these parties.
- 10) Information relevant to the itinerary, such as the addresses and telephone numbers of the lodging places, location of the local police stations, hospitals, clinics or first-aid units as well as the emergency call numbers en route, should be collected. Such information should be given to the parents and the responsible person in the school before the trip for emergency needs.
- 11) Schools should organize a briefing session before the trip to inform students, parents and accompanying members of the details of the tour, duties of every party and rules and regulations to be followed by the students and parents as required by the schools. Students should be reminded of the need to follow the escorts' instructions and observe all the safety regulations throughout the trip.
- 12) Pre-tour training should be provided as far as possible, which should consider the following areas:
 - (i) orientation;
 - (ii) team-spirit;
 - (iii) discipline;
 - (iv) manners and behaviour;
 - (v) safety measures – protection against mosquito bites, fire precaution and escape, proper use of electrical appliances, food hygiene, road

⁴ Participants include all members in the study tour.

safety, protection of personal belongings, and what to do in case of getting lost or injury, etc.;

- (vi) immigration (customs) procedures;
 - (vii) luggage – clothing, medicine, money, etc.;
 - (viii) social customs and taboo of the place of visit;
 - (ix) points to note for travelling abroad;
 - (x) contingency plan
- 13) It is preferable to arrange two students or more to live in a room when allocating accommodation. This will facilitate provision of support to fellow members. Once the arrangement for accommodation is finalized, no student should be allowed to make any change without a proper reason so as to avoid causing confusion.
- 14) The school should study and comply with, as appropriate, travellers' health advice as detailed in the relevant website of the Department of Health (<http://www.travelhealth.gov.hk/eindex.html>) regarding various health risks and advice as well as vaccinations.
- 15) The school should obtain a letter of consent and a health certificate from the parents of each student and also take note of the health condition of the students. If a participant is not feeling well before the trip, the school or the escort should persuade the participant to seriously consider his/her health condition and consult a doctor. The participant should not insist on joining the tour. If a participant shows symptoms of having contracted an infectious disease, it will be in the interest of the safety of the other group members that he/she should refrain from joining the tour.
- 16) The school should examine the travel documents of the participants as soon as possible and, if necessary, check their certificates of immunization. If their travel documents are not valid or the vaccination they have taken does not meet the requirements laid down by the place of visit, the school should remind the participants to get the necessary documents or health certificates as soon as possible.
- 17) Each participant of the study tour should prepare suitable travel and medical insurance. Schools should remind parents that they may take out appropriate insurance (including medical insurance, personal accident insurance and insurance that covers costs for providing emergency service) at their own costs for enhanced protection. Schools may also arrange relevant insurance on behalf of parents/teachers with their consent. However, parents/teachers should be given the

full discretion in accepting such arrangement.

II. Points to Note during the Study Tour

- 1) The escort should pay attention to the weather forecasts and news broadcasts of the place of visit. If there is any change in weather or other conditions, a contingency plan should be worked out as soon as possible.
- 2) The escort should have full knowledge of the health condition of each participant in order to determine whether specific participant(s) should not be allowed to take part in the activities of the day. He/she should take timely and appropriate action having regard to the circumstances of individual cases. The escort should also arrange for any sick member to see the doctor immediately and to take effective preventive measures according to the doctor's advice. If necessary, the escort should inform the parents and the school of the students' health conditions as soon as possible.
- 3) The escort should bring along with him/her the necessary safety equipment for the tour, for example, a first aid box, communications equipment (mobile phones) or torches.
- 4) Students should be divided into small teams. Each team is put under the care of an escort.
- 5) The prime concern is the safety of the participants of the tour. Activities should preferably be conducted in one large group or in small teams. Lone ventures should be avoided as far as possible. Escorts should advise the participants to bring along with them copies of their travel documents for identification purpose where necessary. Moreover, if the participants discover anything suspicious/unusual during the visit, they should report it to their escort as soon as possible.
- 6) The participants should be fully briefed on the itinerary or details of the programme before the activities begin each day. After each day's activities, a meeting or a sharing session should be conducted to review the performance of the participants, the tour arrangement and the relevant safety measures, and to make preparations for the activities of the following day.
- 7) When travelling by any means of transport (including aeroplane, vessel, train or motor vehicle), participants should stay alert, obey the relevant safety regulations and acquaint themselves with the emergency escape routes or exits.
- 8) The escort should monitor the speed of the vehicle in which they are travelling to ensure it is within safety limits. He/she should remind the driver or the reception

personnel of the importance of road safety when necessary. Moreover, the escort should be aware that the driver gets sufficient rest or works according to duty roster to avoid prolonged driving without breaks. It is not advisable to press ahead with the journey when the weather is bad or when the schedule is tight.

- 9) After checking in a local hotel, the students should first find out where the “fire escape” is. They should also acquaint themselves with the exit direction, the escape route and the place of assembly in case of emergency.
- 10) The escort should carry with him/her information such as the full list of the group members and their respective hotel room number to facilitate assembly and checking of participants. The escort should also inform the participants of his/her room and telephone numbers to facilitate communication.
- 11) The escort should always remind the participants to take proper care of their travel documents and other personal belongings.
- 12) The participants should put the room key, a torch and other important items in a convenient position before going to sleep, so that they can get them at the first instance even in darkness.
- 13) The participants should pay attention to food hygiene and should not eat uncooked food and drink untreated water. They should not patronize unhygienic stalls or restaurants.
- 14) The participants should wash their own clothing regularly and maintain good personal hygiene. They should avoid staying long in places which are crowded or have a high level of air pollution. If necessary, they should wear masks to reduce the risk of being infected by bacteria and viruses.
- 15) Each participant should carry a watch and take note of the time of assembly and return for all activities. They should arrive at the fixed assembly point punctually as instructed.
- 16) The participants should bring along with them long-sleeved shirts and long trousers, mosquito repellent and sun block, etc. to help prevent mosquito or insect bites and sunburn.
- 17) If a student needs to leave the tour group temporarily, he/she must seek prior approval from the school through his/her parents. While the student is away from the tour, he/she must be accompanied by an appointed adult. The student must also inform the escort and other members of the tour where he/she will go, when he/she will return and how to contact him/her.

- 18) The participants must make sure they have sufficient rest so as to maintain physical fitness to engage in all the activities throughout the journey.
- 19) The escort must report regularly to the responsible person of the school in Hong Kong regarding the well being of the tour members and the progress of the activities in accordance with the agreed reporting mechanism. This is to keep the school informed of the latest movement of the tour, which will facilitate handling of inquiries from the parents.
- 20) Participants' absolute safety should be accorded the highest priority and in no way be compromised. If there are happenings of certain incidents that warrant the involvement of local official authorities such as the police, the escorts should act accordingly without any delay.
- 21) If assistance is needed during the tour, the escort should consider calling the 24-hour hotline (No.: +852 1868) operated by the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department (<http://www.gov.hk/en/residents/immigration/outsidehk/assisthk24.htm>).
- 22) In the event of an accident (e.g. traffic accident or fire), other emergencies (e.g. robbery or assault), injury or death in the Mainland, it should be reported to the local public security authorities for assistance. For assistance from the police, please dial 110; for ambulance service, dial 120⁵; for fire departments, dial 119; and for reporting of traffic accidents, dial 122.
- 23) Hong Kong residents abroad in need of help can contact the local Chinese diplomatic and consular missions for assistance and services. Hence, the escort must make ready for use the information of relevant Chinese diplomatic and consular mission(s).
(http://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/services/Assistance_Outside_Hong_Kong.html#c)

III. Overall Considerations

- 1) In devising safety measures, the school should refer to the above guidelines and make necessary adjustments, having regard to the nature of the tour, the ability/condition of the participants and the environment of the place of visit. This is to strike a balance between the objectives of the activity and the principle of safety.

⁵ Fees are generally charged for medical services, which may include ambulance fees and emergency treatment fees.

- 2) The Security Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has set up an “**Outbound Travel Alert (OTA)**” system to help people better understand the risk or threat to personal safety in traveling to the popular travel destinations for Hong Kong residents. Schools planning the study tours should observe prudently to the OTA. Details of the OTA can be accessed through (<http://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/ota/index.htm>).
- 3) The school should make sure that all students, with or without disabilities, are given the same chance to participate in these study tours if the circumstances warrant. Moreover, the school should give those students with disabilities the assistance they require, for example, to prepare for them special “identification and S.O.S. cards” and to arrange the escort to keep their photographs and copies of their travel documents just in case they are needed.
- 4) The school should read carefully the EDB circular memorandum on the details and policy specifications of the Block Insurance Policy (BIP)⁶ and follow the relevant guidelines and instructions strictly⁷. Generally speaking, the BIP is not a comprehensive personal insurance coverage for students/teachers. If parents/teachers wish to have a comprehensive personal insurance coverage, e.g. travel insurance or medical insurance, they may acquire it at their own cost as per Part I point 17 of this Guidelines or the school may do so on behalf of parents/teachers with their consent. Moreover, the school is requested to observe the following:
 - a) All escorts are to be appointed by the school. The person appointed, as well as the programme, place and schedule of the visit must be approved by the school and recorded accordingly.
 - b) If there is any query concerning the coverage of the Policy or if an accident occurs, the school should contact the insurance company at once.
- 5) Schools organizing or collaborating with agents or overseas education institutes to organize study tours should make reference to Chapter 1 “Notes for School Heads and Teachers/Instructors” and Chapter 2 “General Measures for Activities on Land” of the “Guidelines on Outdoor Activities” as well as the relevant circulars/letters

⁶ The BIP is not a comprehensive personal insurance coverage for students/teachers. If parents/teachers wish to have a comprehensive personal insurance coverage for their children/themselves, e.g. travel insurance, life insurance, personal accident insurance, medical insurance or critical illness insurance, they may acquire it separately at their own cost from any insurance company. If it is considered necessary to arrange additional group personal insurance for students/teachers participating in school activities, the school may do so on behalf of parents/teachers with their consent. However, parents/teachers should be given the full discretion in accepting such arrangement.

⁷ If civil servants from government schools are injured in accidents when participating in study tours outside Hong Kong, their schools should timely report and handle the cases according to the relevant Civil Service Regulations on duty-related injuries.

issued by the EDB. Schools should also abide to the applicable tendering and purchasing procedures with prudence.

- 6) If agents are commissioned to organize study tours outside Hong Kong after appropriate tendering and purchasing procedures, the commissioned agents must be licensed travel agents, and the accompanying staff must hold a valid Tour Escort Pass issued by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. In addition, schools can request the commissioned agent to provide a sexual conviction record of the accompanying staff.
- 7) The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong has uploaded on its website the “Code of Business Practice on Study Tours” inside which has laid down the points to note for organizing study tours. Schools are advised to make reference to the relevant regulations before arranging the study tours. Moreover, the Council organizes Certificate Courses for Outbound Tour Escorts on a regular basis; schools may consider arranging teachers to enroll in the course based on their needs. The relevant information can be assessed through the following path:
 - Code of Business Practice on Study Tours
(http://www.tichk.org/public/website/en/codes/codes_of_conduct/part_two_5/html)
 - Course information
(http://www.tichk.org/public/website/en/course/outbound_escort/index.html)

8) **References**

- Guidelines on Outdoor Activities (EDB Website: www.edb.gov.hk, Home → School Administration and Management → Administration → About Activities → School Activities Guidelines)
- Passing on the Torch National Education Platform — Tips (on emergency and crisis management procedures during school mainland exchange programmes, and formulation of appropriate contingency plans)
(<http://www.passontorch.org.hk/en/tips/main>)
- School Crisis Management (EDB Website: www.edb.gov.hk Home → Students and Parents Related → Crisis Management)
- Travel Assistance (Immigration Department Website: www.immd.gov.hk, Home → Our Services → Travel Assistance)
- Request for Urgent Assistance (Beijing Office Website: www.bjo.hk, Home → Request for Urgent Assistance)
- Sexual Conviction Record Check (Hong Kong Police Force: www.police.gov.hk, Home → Useful Information → Sexual Conviction Record Check)

- Beijing Heavy Air Pollution Contingency Plan (Trial) (Beijing Municipal Commission of Education Website:
<http://zhengwu.beijing.gov.cn/yjgl/yjya/t1371977.htm>)

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