

Overseas Trips Guidelines Langsem 2007

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Overseas trips for language students

All comments are based on my experience garnered after taking several student language trips in consecutive years with groups varying from 22-34 to a range of destinations in Spain and Latin America.. Please feel free to take what advice you wish and discard the rest. The important thing is to plan well and then enjoy.

DO

- ✓ Buy a lonely Planet or equivalent guidebook to help with initial planning.
- ✓ Include a home stay or study experience. The focus should be clearly on language acquisition to clarify expectations for parents, Boards and Principals
- ✓ Include something exciting (eg we went caving and white water rafting in Chile, horse riding to a volcano and buried village in Mexico)
- ✓ Take a basic first aid course. This will give you confidence to deal with some of the health problems that arise.
- ✓ Take time to build team spirit with students who may not know each other that well.
- ✓ Consult with students, but don't base decisions entirely on their concerns.
- ✓ Keep all financial transactions absolutely transparent
- ✓ Arrange email contact with parents after initial meeting. This obviates the need for constant meetings with students at school, chasing students and vital information that doesn't reach parents. Parents much prefer this first hand contact with the teacher in charge.
- ✓ Pay airfares immediately. With fuel surcharges now commonplace you will be faced with hundreds of dollars of additional costs as international oil prices fluctuate, if you have arranged for payment by increment. This is incredibly stressful if you have given out quotes for a set amount for the trip, even if you have allowed for extra costs. I highly recommend payment on booking. You can reserve seats and pay up to 11 months ahead of your departure date.
- ✓ Plan your time with overseas seasons in mind. I have found the optimal time to take students is during the September break. This avoids climate or crowd problems in most countries, takes advantage of shoulder season rates for hotels and activities and is a great culmination to the three terms of study prior to exam preparation in term four.
- ✓ Keep in mind the motivating factor of these overseas trips. These trips are hugely motivating for students struggling to learn another language in a few hours of class time and they will work hard at language acquisition towards this very specific goal.
- ✓ Incorporate free time for students to explore places independently (in groups of course!)

DON'T

- Take people who don't speak the language, teachers or students, as this raises lots of difficulties, means the whole group has to function in English instead of your target language and rather defeats the purpose!
- Avoid taking parents as this can also create discipline problems and a division of efforts on your part. Only rarely do parents seek the same sort of experiences as the students do.
- Focus exclusively on history or culture – students love shopping and meeting people
- Depend on group bookings. Where possible, cost out the planned trip per person. This will avoid huge amounts of stress for all involved when people, as they inevitably do, drop out, forcing the cost up for those that are left if there are group based bookings.
- Take on fundraising. If people want to fund raise for the expenses organize a parent group to oversee this. You will have enough to do with overseeing the organization and payments, believe me!

Planning and Preparation (based on one year preparation)

Time	Action	Comments
Prior to starting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with students about what you plan and get general feedback. • Plan trip entirely. <u>Think about details now!</u> • Prepare a <u>detailed</u> trip outline, contact airlines and agents for costing. • Write trip proposal including outline and costs. • Correspond with overseas institutes for home stay or study arrangements • Consult your institute's trip policy to ensure parameters are met • Deliver proposal to Principal and Board for approval in principle and permission to proceed with planning 	<p>Be careful not to promise anything, but it is a good idea to sound out students as to their interest in specific destinations.</p> <p>Your school should have guidelines as to adults needed per number of students, opposite sex requirements etc.</p>
Start up Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up preliminary evening meeting with parents of interested students. • Prepare an engaging presentation of your destination with all details of cost and payment, including penalties for withdrawal from trip • Collect contact information from all interested parties, including phone numbers, cell phones, addresses and emails. • Have a form ready for people to take away and complete if they wish to continue, to be returned within one week. 	<p>Letter home, book seminar or lecture room if possible. You will need laptop, projector etc for presentation</p> <p>You need to sell the trip to parents as they will often be the one financing it. Make your presentation appealing!</p> <p>Ensure parents are aware of financial commitment and the penalties for withdrawal. Have these details thought out and prepared before hand.</p> <p>Circulate a prepared form for contacts during the meeting. This will save you a lot of time later on! You need all this information for your files anyway. Explain that this is needed for records and does not constitute commitment.</p>
Week 2 - 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate information from forms • Set up account with your school administration • Set up a folder for your trip • Organize travel insurance • Confirm home stay arrangements at this point • Confirm visa arrangements 	<p>Signing this form provides you with a clear commitment as to numbers.</p> <p>See insurance agent for details of recuperation of fares</p> <p>Have a clear idea of spending money needed per day for students.</p> <p>Clarify how they will access funds. Credit cards charge for cash withdrawals, eftpos charge for each transaction. Students should take one of each and carry them separately to ensure access to funds even if one is lost.</p>
Week 5 - 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book fares • Sight and photocopy <u>all passports</u> • Book language school • Confirm home stay arrangements • Book extra activities or hotels, transfers, internal flights, trains etc. • Arrange payment by increments for this part of trip 	<p>INSIST on parents organizing passports NOW, regardless of age, waiting for birthdays etc. YOU WILL HAVE PROBLEMS OTHERWISE!</p> <p>Make two photocopies of passports, one for your records and one for school or travel agent. Any overseas passports double check with embassy of destination visa requirements. Where possible get this in writing. Apply for any special visas required NOW.</p>

<p>Weeks 11- 40</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize ongoing team building evenings with students Send out email updates every month to parents with news of trip, current events in country of destination, reminders about increment payment dates, issues raised. <u>Final payments need to be made a minimum of 3 months before trip departure</u> Keep board informed once a term with report on trip progress Send home health forms Keep folder updated with emails, contact details, health problems, passport copies. 	<p>Get together at least once a term, do quizzes, trivial pursuit, food focused on destination. Encourage students to engage with different year levels going on trip.</p> <p>Use this time to prepare detailed records for each student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal contact details, cell phone, passport details parent contact details Emergency contact details Health issues and medication
<p>Countdown Weeks 41-50</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on cell phone issues for destination country. If cell phones don't work ensure students buy phone cards when they arrive and know how to use them. Keep board informed once a term with report on trip progress Distribute luggage specifications, clothing lists, behaviour codes to be signed. Ensure students have bought travel diaries (a4 spiral books work well) money belts, specified luggage, clothing Organise senior students to design and cost out trip t-shirt, collect money and print Purchase gifts for home stay families, etc. 	<p>Spain has Vodafone, works well with ours, don't need to do anything for trip contacts LA has different networks, very expensive to set up, need T3 phones, not worth the hassle.</p> <p>Prepare student booklets with maps, itineraries, all student contacts, hotel, home stay and study contacts etc.</p> <p>Bright t shirts with school logo, trip printed are a great way to keep students in sight in big airports or cities. Also a memento of their trip. School luggage labels can also be made with laminated card and plastic ties</p>
<p>Final days weeks 50-52</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final meeting. Final update for board. Distribute student booklets to be glued into travel dairies. Distribute trip shirts. Distribute tickets, luggage labels, any other trip information Final words about importance of punctuality and teamwork, luggage weight restrictions Organize transport to and from airport – carpool, shuttle etc. Deal with last minute lack of passports, sudden new visa regulations, broken legs, etc. 	<p>Students have carried their own passports, tickets and cards on all of my trips without incident. Money belts and using them are compulsory along with practise in how to carry bags, reminders about theft and consistent policies of <u>always</u> being with two other members of the group.</p> <p>We always have a good prize ready for the student with the lowest weight luggage on check in as a further incentive to keep it light.</p>
<p>Departure date</p>	<p>Airlines no longer do group check ins, so ensure students are there 3 hours before departure. This allows for an early check in, time for them to say goodbye to family and friends and check out the airport shops for last minute essentials.</p>	

(Shirley Taylor at GO travel has been the agent for all our trips. She has taken a huge amount of work out of my hands and I recommend her highly. Shirley has organized some very strange destinations for me, given us excellent prices, battled overseas agents and always comes to see us off!)

While away

Health	<p>Students should carry their own medication for asthma and allergies, including panadol, but it is a good idea to make sure everyone in the group knows about specific problems such as diabetes, severe asthma, peanut allergies etc. so they can summon help urgently if needed.</p> <p>A good supply of medication for both types of stomach upsets is recommended, plus clear briefings to the students about the importance of basic hygiene and washing all fresh food. Also vital is a large supply of love and understanding for homesickness and a busy program so students don't have much time to dwell on this.</p>
Travel diaries	<p>Students should be encouraged to keep this trip record, to draw, write and collect postcards and keepsakes for this. It is a great thing to be able to show parents and friends when they get back. I usually issue a budgeting page for these to help students keep track of their spending which they find very useful especially in the first days when they are still converting currencies. I collect these in on our second to last night and have a prize for the best one.</p>
Contacting home	<p>This should be kept to email. Frequent phone calls actually spoil the student's time away. As long as they can email home and hear from their families it is enough.</p>
Discipline issues	<p>There will always be students who push the limits. I have them keep a signed copy of their behaviour code in their travel diaries to refer to and make them aware that I am prepared to send them home at any point and they will pay the full cost. Other than that I trust to their general common sense and keep a close eye on curfews in hotels. Consistent issues of lateness or inconveniencing the group, I deal with by denying an outing. I have had minor issues, but never anything serious.</p>
Home stay and curfews	<p>Very clear outlines for home stay families are a must or students will take advantage of their host's willingness to provide a good time. Clear expectations of the student are also important, so they should know basic courtesies in their target language and use them. They should also insist on helping with household chores and preparing a Kiwi meal for their hosts. Appropriate gifts should be purchased before departure. Farewells can be prolonged and emotional so a definite timeframe works well and facilitates closure for all concerned!!</p>
What can happen: the good, the bad and the ugly!	<p>Issues I have dealt with include lost tickets, severe panic attacks, stomach upsets, asthma attacks, serious homesickness, budgeting problems, loss of money, loss of credit cards, students caught with alcohol, students up all night, students collapsing in city subways at midnight when they were supposed to be in bed in a village an hour distant, students falling in love, students with colds, lateness for rendezvous, lost luggage, altitude sickness, fainting, assault and breaking curfew. None of these were insurmountable and all were minor hiccups along the way.</p> <p>These same students have seen the <i>Alhambra</i>, met their pen pals in Madrid, seen spring in <i>Córdoba</i>, swum on the <i>Costa Brava</i> and Mexico's Pacific Coast, toured Mexico city, climbed the pyramids of <i>Tenochtitlan</i>, stayed with families in Chile, learnt <i>la Cueca</i>, tried <i>paella</i> and <i>empanadas</i>, cactus salad and <i>frijoles con arroz</i>, seen the sun set in <i>la valle de la Luna</i>, visited the highest geyser field in the world and walked the driest desert, ridden horses and hiked through the <i>Alpujarra</i>, enjoyed the tiny fiesta of <i>Capiliera</i>, visited <i>Málaga</i> and <i>Ronda</i>, studied the literature of Chile, rafted down the <i>Turbio</i> in flood and seen a village buried under a volcano at <i>Paricutín</i> to mention but a few things. Above all they have seen a world outside of their own, learnt to trust themselves and others and tell me they will never forget their experiences.</p>

On return - Debriefing

There is always a sense of anticlimax for students on their return from what is often their first big adventure.

Recommend a day of rest, even if this means a day off school. They will need it and it will help settle them.

Be sure to organize a reunion for students within a week on a date they can all attend, perhaps a pot luck at someone's house. This gives them an important chance to relive their time away with people who shared the experience. Students often form really strong bonds on trips like this and need time to ground themselves.

Prepare and deliver a report to the Board within two weeks of your return.

Have senior students who participated prepare a power point presentation with their photos and present this to school assemblies. (free publicity for your subject)

Prepare a newsletter for parents and send off as a final thank you for their support.

Ensure an item goes into your school newsletter about the trip.

Start planning for next year!!

