



Safety in the Field Guidelines

Introduction

Intrepid's core business of operating adventurous trips around the world carries with it inherent risks for both its group leaders and travellers. Some reasons for these risks are:

- the laxity of laws and regulations in some countries governing transport, infrastructure and the travel industry in general when compared to western laws;
- the potentially volatile political environment of the countries in which we operate; and
- the nature of the itineraries that we run, which often involve physically strenuous activities in remote locations.

With these factors in mind, we recognise that Intrepid has a responsibility to ensure that all reasonable precautions are taken to provide work and travel conditions which are safe.

The aim of this document is to give our travellers an insight into the safety standards they should expect when on an Intrepid trip. It is an abridged version of our operational Safety Policy that all leaders are expected to follow when running a trip. Please contact tom@intrepidtravel.com if you have any comments on this policy, or the application of it in the field.

No set of guidelines can anticipate all possible conditions that may arise. We ask our leaders to put sound judgement ahead of hard and fast rules, judging each situation as it arises. Our leaders are employed because they demonstrate sound operational judgement, and this extends to the application of safe travel practices. If in doubt about the safety of any activity on an Intrepid trip, whether it is mentioned within these guidelines or not, we ask our leaders to take the safer option.

Safety Guidelines

1. Transport

Intrepid does not recommend riding on the roof of any form of transport we use, whether this be trains, boats or buses.

1.1 Buses

In general

Travelling in any bus in some countries can be a hairy experience, with the existence of an invisible middle overtaking lane that doesn't exist on western roads. If your leader thinks a bus driver is driving dangerously he/she will ask the driver to slow down. If this has no effect (which may be the case on a public bus in particular) he/she will arrange for the group to get off the bus at the next opportunity, and use whatever means possible to continue the journey. This may be difficult in remote locations when the group was on the only bus for the day, and may mean a change of itinerary is necessary.

We accept that seat belts are not readily available on the transport we take, on either charter or public vehicles.

When taking Songtaews in Asia we ensure there's enough space for everyone to sit down on the benches. Passengers and leaders should not ride on the back "tailgates".

Public Buses

Catching public buses is part of the Intrepid way of travel, and we accept that these buses are often crowded, with people standing in the aisles. Intrepid travellers shouldn't be expected to stand for long distances as a matter of comfort rather than safety.

We rely on public transport providers to maintain the vehicles we use in a roadworthy condition, and do not perform independent tests on vehicles. If a group is scheduled to board a public vehicle which in the leader's opinion is unsafe to be on he/she will get the group off the vehicle and organise alternative means of transport. This may mean a change of itinerary is necessary.

Charter buses

When we charter a bus for the sole use of our group we wish to ensure that:

- The driver has the appropriate local licence to drive the vehicle; and
- The vehicle is regularly serviced – at least once every 12 months – and in the opinion of our leader is safe and fit for travel.

1.2 Motorbikes

Motorbikes are fun way to get around, but are also a high risk form of transport.

Motorbike taxis (riding as a passenger with a licensed local driver) are not organised as the sole means of transport for an Intrepid group. There will always be alternative options offered to the group. Group members and leaders should always wear a helmet when on the back of a motorbike when available.

Group members will not be asked to drive motorbikes solo as part of any itinerary. Any traveller who does ride a motorbike solo should check the terms of their travel insurance before doing so, as it will most likely exclude motorbike injuries unless they are licensed riders.

1.3 Boats and Ferries

Lif jackets are available on all boat travel our groups use. Your leader will inform you where life jackets are stored if it is not obvious when getting on a boat or ferry.

It is common for public ferries to be crowded. If your leader considers a ferry to be dangerously overcrowded they will arrange other boat transport where possible.

With both large and small vessels we rely on the boat operators to judge local conditions, and determine whether the conditions are safe for travel. If your leader thinks conditions are unsuitable he/she will postpone or cancel the boat trip, in consultation with the boat operator.

On smaller craft where the risk of capsize is higher you may be asked to wear life jackets, rather than just having them available to put on.

1.4 Bicycles

In many countries bicycle helmets are not a legal requirement. In general we do not require travellers to wear helmets when on bike rides that are part of our itinerary, unless it is a legal requirement in that country. Helmets are not readily available in many countries and you may wish to bring your own if this is a concern to you.

The exception to this our trips where cycling is the predominant activity. On these trips we require all travellers to bring their own bike helmets, and recommend that they are worn at all times when cycling.

When organising a group bicycle ride that is part of the itinerary a designated front person (the "scout") and back person (the "sweep") will be organised for the group.

Groups should not be riding at night without proper lights and reflectors.

2. Accommodation

Government regulations on safety standards in hotels and guesthouses we use in Asia and the Middle East are less stringent than those in the West. However, wherever feasible, the accommodation we stay in should have, in the case of "closed" hotels (with corridors, multi-stories etc), a second exit point in case of fire in the main exit. Please be aware that not all hotels we currently stay in comply with this standard, particularly in Vietnam and India.

In basic accommodation such as hill tribe huts or home stays your leader will inform the group about the dangers of elevated platforms, particularly in places where the group sleeps at night and are likely to be wandering around in the dark. You should use a torch/flashlight when making a night-time toilet visit.

3. Activities In general

We ask that you inform your travel agent of any pre-existing medical conditions before travelling.

If our leader is of the opinion that a group member is unsuitable for an activity on the trip, he/she has the discretion and authority to refuse that person to participate in the activity, for the safety of themselves, the rest of the group and the leader.

Exposure to sun is a real risk for travellers when doing any outside activity. We recommend that you slip, slop, slap at all times – that's slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen and slap on a hat.

3.1 Trekking

Many of our trips include a trekking component, whether it be an overnight jaunt or a strenuous 10 day walk. Trekking should be the highlight of the trip, but as it necessarily involves travel in remote areas it also attracts a greater degree of risk. The following guidelines apply to all treks that we run.

All travellers should have the correct footwear and equipment for the trek. Organise this before leaving home (see the individual trip dossiers for more instructions on what is needed).

At the end of each day of the trek your leader will outline the following day's walk and plans, as well as debriefing on the walk you have done that day.

When walking, the group must always stay between the designated scout and sweep. The scout and sweep will be two guides, or a guide and a leader, or a guide and a passenger. Group members should leave their packs on the trail if going into the bushes for a toilet stop, so they are not unknowingly passed by the sweep.

The group can walk in pairs or small groups, but should meet up together in its entirety at a minimum of every couple of hours, to ensure that all members are accounted for. The group should meet up at all major trail intersections, to make sure everyone takes the correct fork. Travellers can walk at their own pace in between group meets.

If local conditions such as weather, landslides, etc become an issue, your leader will seek the opinion of our local guides on the safety of the conditions and risks involved in continuing. The ultimate decision on whether to continue rests with the group leader.

3.2 Flat water canoeing / kayaking / bamboo rafting

Lifejackets must be worn by all group members and leaders when doing organised canoeing, kayaking or rafting as part of the group. Helmets are not essential for flat-water paddling. Group members should wear trainers or sandals, to protect their feet from rocks, but not to interfere with their ability to swim.

Group members should not go canoeing or rafting if they cannot swim confidently when in water above head height.

A scout and sweep system will be used when doing flat-water kayaking or rafting. The group should not separate more than 200 metres; the lead paddlers should raft up and wait for the tailenders on a regular basis.

Intrepid itineraries do not include canoeing, kayaking or rafting in white-water, which includes any rivers or streams with rapids.

Canoeing or kayaking

When canoeing or kayaking is part of a scheduled itinerary the group will be given basic instruction as to paddling techniques and what to do in the case of a capsizing by the local guides operating the trip.

Each kayak/canoe should have grab-ropes at each end, to aid in rescues in the event of a capsizing. Each qualified guide should have a throw rope readily available in case of a capsizing.

Bamboo rafting

When bamboo rafting each raft is propelled and steered by a local raftsman. This raftsman must be trained in leading water activities, including reading river levels, steering techniques and emergency first aid.

3.3 Caving

Do not enter a cave if you suffer claustrophobia - caving is not for everyone.

A scout and sweep system will be used when entering a cave with a group.

Every group member in the cave must have a torch if the cave is not illuminated.

3.4 Animals

When riding elephants or camels during our trips helmets are not available to travellers. We therefore ensure that only slow plodders are provided by the operator.

3.5 Snorkelling

Snorkelling should only be done by travellers who are proficient swimmers. Your leader will point out the geographical boundaries of the exact snorkelling site, and will designate a lookout who will not be snorkelling in the water. Before commencing snorkelling a communication system should be arranged for anyone who wants to convey distress - usually one arm raised straight (not waving!).

3.6 Other adventure activities

Any adventure activity that is not specifically mentioned in this policy is a high risk activity that is not included in any Intrepid itinerary. This includes diving, rock-climbing, white-water rafting, horse riding and tubing. These activities require a high level of technical expertise that Intrepid does not have and does not pretend to have. If you wish to partake in any of these activities in your free time please understand that you do so of your own choice and at your own risk.

3.7 Optional activities

If you elect to partake in optional adventure activities in your free time during a trip we emphasize that:

- these activities or operators are not part of the Intrepid itinerary;
- that Intrepid makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them; and
- Intrepid cannot guarantee your safety when doing these activities.
- Your group leader will require passengers opting to partake in high-risk optional activities to sign an 'Optional activity form' or a 'Passenger release form.'

4. First Aid Kits

Your leader will carry a medical kit with him/her at all times during your trip, including any trek, cycle ride, canoe trip, etc. This medical kit contains basic first aid supplies. Our legal responsibilities dictate that we cannot distribute drugs to any traveller.