



# SAFETY & SECURITY HANDBOOK



# A Letter from the President

Dear ACIS Community:

In our 40+ years of operating educational travel programs around the world, we've had to navigate around all kinds of safety concerns. Sadly, it's become a part of modern life and one we can't ignore. At ACIS, our mission compels us to find ways to live fully and experience a world that is increasingly complex. To achieve this mission, we take every precaution to ensure that our groups are safe and secure while traveling with us:

- We constantly monitor the advisories and recommendations of the U.S. government. We will never operate a program in any area where there are State Department travel warnings.
- If ACIS determines a specific destination to be unsafe while a group is overseas, we will make immediate revisions to the itinerary to avoid the location in question at no additional cost to our participants.
- Our local offices in London, Paris, Rome and Madrid provide us with up-to-the-minute information on events and special circumstances, offering us an invaluable local perspective and expertise that allows us to respond quickly and appropriately to anything that may arise.
- We proactively check in with all groups mid-trip, either in person or by phone, to ensure their well-being and confirm that all expectations are being met.
- Our 24/7 Duty Officer system is available to react instantly to requests and concerns to guarantee the comfort, security and safety of our groups.
- Our safety and support infrastructure is the cornerstone of our business—it's a key reason why teachers choose to travel with us. We go above and beyond to not only provide once-in-a-lifetime experiences for our participants, but to also ensure that they return home safely.

Now, more than ever, we must continue on with what we've chosen to do—to travel, to engage, to teach tolerance, respect differences, shun hatred, and to see the world from a much broader perspective. No one organization, group, or individual can or should take this freedom from us.

Please rest assured that we will remain vigilant in our efforts to operate our trips safely and appropriately.

Sincerely,



Peter Jones  
ACIS President



# About ACIS

Current President Peter Jones founded the American Council for International Studies (ACIS) in 1978 with the core belief that travel changes lives. Knowing the important difference between a trip that's ordinary and one that's exceptional, he built ACIS from a deep understanding that ACIS group leaders and participants deserve the best—from itinerary development to best-in-class suppliers to, most importantly, the people hired to guide and care for teachers and students throughout the journey.



## A Global Network of Care

ACIS and its Encore Performance Tours division are headquartered in Boston, with regional offices in Chicago and on the West Coast. Over 40 current and former teachers serving as ACIS Academic Travel Advisors also provide a network of local support to teachers and schools throughout the country.

Overseas, ACIS maintains offices in London, Paris, Rome and Madrid as well as affiliate partner offices in other major European, Latin American and Asian cities. This on-the-ground presence provides crucial local expertise to support the well-being of our groups.

ACIS is also a division of the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS), an industry leader that has organized quality international educational experiences for over 1.5 million students in its 50-year history. With more than \$190 million in annual revenue and worldwide assets exceeding \$180 million, AIFS is one of the most financially secure companies in educational travel.

## Expert Partners and Resources

To run safe, educational, life-changing trips year after year, we follow the advice and guidelines from a wide range of specialists, including:

### Partners

- Cultural Insurance Services International (another AIFS affiliate)
- WorldAware International Integrated Risk Management

### Resources

- United States Department of State
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- World Health Organization
- United States Tour Operators' Association
- European Tourism Association
- American Society of Travel Agents
- International Association of Travel Agents Network
- Student Youth Travel Association

# Our Partnership with CISI

ACIS partners with Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI), a sister division of AIFS, and a world class provider of the most comprehensive student travel insurance available. For 20 years, ACIS and its participants have benefited from the immediate access and preferred support services provided by CISI.

Since 1991, CISI has insured over 1 million international students and cultural exchange participants worldwide. Their insureds travel to more than 190 countries annually. With its network of international offices, CISI has direct connections to participants and third party providers in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, South Africa and Australia.

The hallmark of its industry leading reputation is the level of service provided during coverage periods. CISI offers 24/7/365 worldwide assistance services—a resource for everything from a lost passport to an emergency evacuation. With doctors and translators on staff, CISI's services provide toll-free, worldwide access to benefits, care providers, and emergency assistance.

Additionally, CISI provides in-house crisis management support via their Global Health and Safety Manager. This manager monitors all ongoing medical cases, crises and events to ensure that their students and sponsors are getting the full attention and support that they need from care and assistance providers. This attention to detail is further augmented by the 24/7 Crisis Team at CISI—who are available at any time by phone or email.

ACIS and CISI vigilantly survey the global landscape on an ongoing basis to evaluate risk and remain at peak preparedness. To do this, CISI utilizes WorldAware and their Worldcue database to review and assess any potential risk for their insureds. WorldAware International delivers intelligence-driven, integrated risk management solutions that enable multinational organizations to operate globally with confidence. WorldAware's end-to-end, tailored systems integrate world-class threat intelligence, innovative technology, and response services to help organizations avoid threats and mitigate risk. Via the Worldcue Planner CISI can provide detailed information on specific destinations in regard to crime, security, civil unrest, terrorism and kidnapping. Detailed briefs are available with up-to-the-minute latest intelligence.

Included in ACIS's insurance plans is a benefit that provides for emergency evacuation if a security related event such as political unrest or a natural disaster occurs. Since 2010, CISI has safely evacuated over 100 students from world crises in countries such as Nepal, Israel, Egypt, Japan, Syria, Thailand and Haiti.

# Travel Protection

ACIS is one of the few companies in the educational travel industry to provide insurance protection free of charge to all of our participants. Our Basic Protection Plan, portions of which are underwritten by ACE American Insurance Company, provides:

- 24-hour medical assistance
- Emergency consultation, monitoring and evacuation as needed
- Medical interruption coverage
- Medical and job loss cancellation coverage
- Travel delay protection

## Comprehensive and Ultimate Protection Options

Participants may also elect to upgrade to our Comprehensive or Ultimate Protection Plans, which offer additional Medical, Travel Protection and Cancellation benefits, along with Baggage Delay/Loss coverage.

## Peace of Mind Program

Beyond the individual travel protection described above, groups are also covered by our Peace of Mind Program, which offers planning flexibility. Should a group leader desire to alter travel plans for the group as a whole, s/he may:

### ***Up to 45 days before departure —***

- » Change the travel dates of a tour
- » Change the itinerary of a tour

*(Travel modifications must be submitted in writing and finalized by 45 days before departure. Any cost differential for such moves will be passed along to the group. Contact us for full terms and conditions.)*

### ***44 days or less before departure —***

- » The same options apply provided that the U.S. Department of State states there has been a terrorist attack against U.S. interests and the U.S. Department of State issues a Level 4 Travel Advisory that American citizens should not travel to any area visited on the itinerary.
- » **We will always work with any group leader or school administration with an approaching departure date to adapt itineraries in the interest of group safety.**

## General Liability Insurance

School districts and teachers are also covered by a \$51 million general liability insurance policy that ACIS holds with Lexington Insurance Company. Traveling group leaders, assistant group leaders and schools are added to this policy as additional insureds. We would be happy to provide a Certificate of Liability upon request.

# On Tour Safety

We take the welfare of each and every participant on our tours very seriously. Just as we work tirelessly to provide once-in-a-lifetime experiences to group leaders and students, we are equally committed to ensuring that all of our travelers return home safely. Here are some of the steps we take to ensure each group's safety.

## **Tour Managers**

ACIS Tour Managers accompany our groups every step of the way during their time overseas. These travel professionals are available 24/7 and handle all of the logistical aspects of the trip, while also providing educational commentary to meet each group's unique tastes. All new European tour managers go through a rigorous screening process by our Tour Manager Office in London, followed by a training course led by our best tour managers and members of our U.S.-based staff. Outside of Europe, our tour managers are contracted local experts that are best in touch with the safety and security of their region. Annual training sessions are held each off-season to review best practices and procedures, and tour managers can always access the latest ACIS information through our dedicated tour manager website.

Tour managers outline safety guidelines during an arrival briefing held on the first day of each tour. Throughout the tour, participants are given clear check-in locations/times and student participants are instructed to remain in groups of at least three during all free time. Should an emergency arise, our tour managers are trained to respond and have immediate access to our network of offices for further assistance.

## **Transportation**

ACIS utilizes regularly scheduled flights on major international airlines to transport groups to/from their destination. While on the ground, we use modern, clean and comfortable touring buses with well-trained and friendly drivers. When trains are included on an itinerary, we regularly opt for the best trains in Europe, including Eurostar, TGV and AVE. Public transportation can be used as part of sightseeing visits within a city. Before accessing public transit systems, tour managers brief groups on general safety procedures and ensure that all travelers know the route to be taken and the final stop for each journey.

## **Hotels**

Our hotels are of 3- and 4-star quality and are located within city centers. These central locations provide a convenient meeting point in the case of an emergency and reduce the need to commute in and out of the city each day. ACIS' Travel App (free to all participants) includes the addresses of each hotel used on a trip and features maps that can guide participants back to their hotel from their current location without having to access a cellular or internet connection.

## **Mid-Tour Check-Ins**

Local ACIS staff from our overseas offices, as well as U.S.-based staff (including our president), regularly check in with groups in person to gauge each group's satisfaction and resolve any issues on the spot. Groups that are not seen in person will be checked on via either phone or email so that every teacher will have the opportunity to voice any concerns while a trip is in progress, not just after the fact.

# Communications

## **Duty Officer Network**

Whenever an issue arises on tour that is beyond the tour manager's ability to fix on the spot, both our tour managers and group leaders are trained to contact our 24/7 Duty Officer Network. (All group leaders and participants receive an Emergency Numbers Card with the pertinent contact information to keep with them while on tour). Our Duty Officer system is staffed by ACIS employees both in the U.S. and overseas, with the ability to reach out around the clock to whatever departments in the company are best suited to resolve the situation.

## **Phone Chains and Emergency Contacts**

All groups are required to establish a stateside phone chain before departure. ACIS has the contact information for the first person on each phone chain and will initiate communications should the group leader be unable to do so for any reason. Each participant also provides an emergency contact name, phone number and email address during the registration process, which allows us to reach out directly to individual participant families as needed.

## **On-Tour Communication**

Many of our groups today keep in touch on a regular basis with family and friends back home through a blog, private Facebook group, pre-set hashtags for Instagram or Twitter, or other social media tools like Remind, Cluster or GroupMe. Families can also stay in touch by activating an international calling plan on the traveler's mobile phone for the time s/he will be away or by setting up a cross-platform mobile messaging app such as WhatsApp. Most ACIS hotels have Wi-Fi available, which facilitates communication without having to pay for international data or roaming fees.

# ACIS Emergency Protocol

Whenever an incident overseas occurs that has the potential to impact the safety of our traveling groups, we follow these steps to review the situation, check in with groups and facilitate communication with loved ones at home.

## **1) Assess the Situation**

Through our partner agencies, we monitor world events and continuously assess the possible impact to our groups. As soon as we become aware of a safety-related event overseas, our Emergency Response Team (ERT) evaluates the severity of the situation based on the proximity of any of our groups to the event. All members of the ERT are notified of the event via both email and text. For situations that directly endanger any of our participants, the ERT will convene regardless of time of day or day of the week.

## **2) Confirm Location and Status of All Groups and Participants**

An Emergency Response Report is generated from our operations database outlining the location of all of our traveling groups, the number of participants in each group, and the contact information for each group's ACIS Tour Manager and designated stateside Group Contact.

We immediately reach out through our global office network to every ACIS Tour Manager guiding a trip in the affected region. Tour managers are instructed to: a) confirm the well-being of every individual within the group, and once confirmed, b) ask the group leader to initiate his/her emergency phone chain so that all families are updated as to the safety of their child. If for some reason, the emergency phone chain is not started directly by the group leader, our U.S. staff will initiate that process on his/her behalf.

The current status of each group is accessible by all members of the ERT, our overseas offices, the Traveler Support team that responds to our participant/family inquiries and the International Program team that works with our group leaders.

## **3) Prepare and Respond on the Ground**

ACIS Tour Managers review emergency procedures with groups at the mandatory arrival briefing that takes place at the beginning of every ACIS tour. All travelers are made aware of their hotel name and address, with instructions to return there if an emergency occurs when the group is not all together.

During the course of any day's free exploration time, tour managers will assign local meeting spots at designated times for ongoing check-ins. Travelers under the age of 21 are instructed to remain in groups of at least three during all free time. If travelers are unable to return to a designated meeting spot during the course of an emergency, they are told to contact ACIS' 24-hour emergency telephone number for further instructions.

When an emergency occurs, tour managers are trained to seek safe shelter for the group, either by returning to the group's hotel or to an alternative location as instructed by local authorities. Once the group is in a safe location, the Tour Manager will contact his/her local network office to report on the status of the group.

#### **4) Handle Catastrophic Events**

In the extremely rare occasion where an ACIS traveler is directly affected by an overseas emergency, the health protection included on all ACIS tours provides immediate care of any injured individual. We will reach out to the individual's designated emergency contact directly to inform them of the situation. Then, we liaise with Team Assist, our travel insurance provider, to arrange for transportation of the participant back home or for a family member to join the participant overseas if s/he is unable to travel. ACIS staff will be dispatched to the scene to assist in any way possible.

#### **5) Monitor the Ongoing Situation**

As the immediate crisis subsides and emergency communications are complete, the Emergency Response Team will rely on our local offices, tour managers and government authorities to determine the best course of action for our groups. Groups will be flown home or itineraries will be adjusted to move groups out of affected areas. Updates on individual groups will be conveyed using the group's pre-established communications chain, and general statements on ACIS' policies and response will be posted on [www.acis.com](http://www.acis.com).

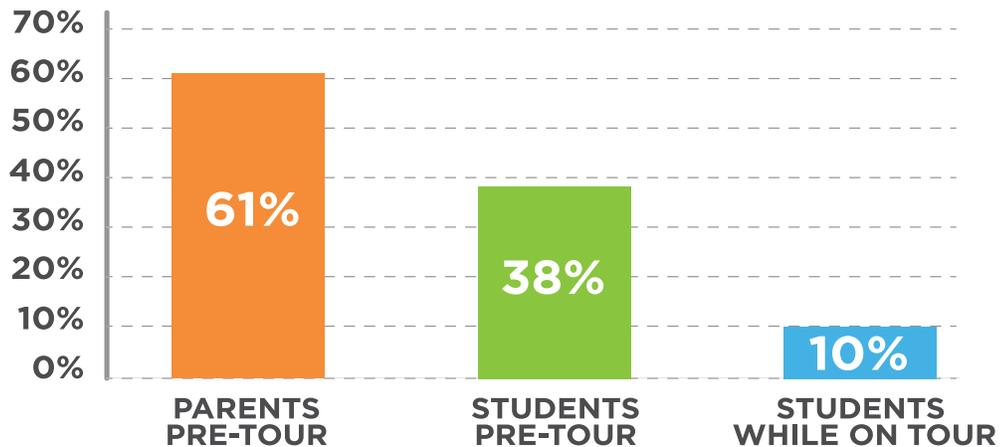
# Feedback from Recent Travelers

Safety is always a hot topic with our teachers, students and their parents. This has been especially true as of late with some of the recent events that have taken place worldwide. Often times, though, the situation “on the ground” feels quite a bit different than what is reported by the media back home.

Below are the results of a survey from over 500 people who have traveled with us. See for yourself what they had to say about their experience.

**99%** of travelers (and their parents) said they were glad to have gone on their trip

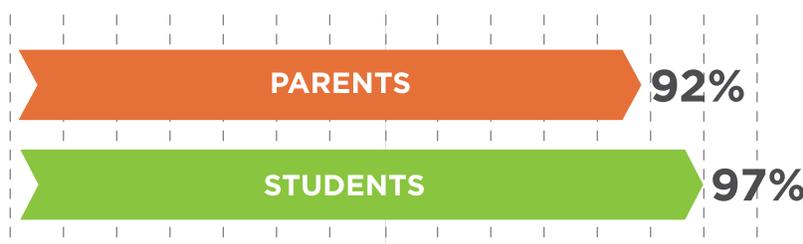
## Who felt nervous about traveling?



## Top 3 factors that made these travelers feel safer during their tour

- 1** The care they received from their tour manager
- 2** The hotels they stayed in all felt safe
- 3** Seeing all of the locals and visitors going about their daily lives

## Would tell a fellow student/parent to “Not Miss!” a planned trip to Europe



# Feedback from Recent Travelers

## COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS

“If there’s a medical emergency, it’s going to be handled. If there’s a problem with the plane or the hotels, it’s going to be handled. They really take care of you at ACIS.”

- *Desiree, French Teacher*

“My group’s parents were extremely satisfied with the trip and overall experience. I have had numerous conversations with other individuals in the school community and they can’t wait to send their son or daughter on a trip in the future.”

- *Marc, Psychology/Sociology Teacher*

“ACIS is the most amazing company if something goes wrong with your trip. They have people in place all over the world. The tour managers are absolutely fantastic in handling situations like that. They know where to go and what to do.”

- *Brett, History Teacher*

“ACIS understands the art of travel—your kids will see and experience more than they could possibly imagine. They will be excitedly happy, well fed, well cared for, and safe. They will experience the trip of a lifetime.”

- *Kathryn, Social Studies Teacher*

## COMMENTS FROM STUDENTS

“The trip was super super fun and very well put together! We always had things to do and places to see and were obviously never bored. ACIS really handled everything well and knew what they were doing!”

“Our tour manager, Lara, was excellent. It was a large group, and she made sure that everyone felt known. Also, Peter Jones checked in on us on the last night, and we talked at length. He was a good man for doing that!”

“Franz is such an amazing tour manager! He made our trip so enjoyable and he was so knowledgeable about everything. ACIS made my group and I feel confident every day, knowing we were safe and taken care of.”

“I was thankful that ACIS coordinated the travel when our flight was cancelled.”

“If you’re ever given the opportunity to travel, grab it and run with it. You will never regret it.”

## COMMENTS FROM PARENTS

“I felt very informed throughout the entire process. ACIS communicated everything very clearly, and it was a wonderful experience for my son!”

“I appreciated ACIS addressing the security issue and assuring the parents prior to departure.”

“Our tour manager was kind, attentive, knowledgeable, fun and hard-working. When my daughter had a sudden minor medical emergency, Paul took care of her needs so quickly, it didn’t interrupt the day or the trip!”

## Speak to a Reference

If you would like to speak with a fellow teacher or parent about their recent ACIS travel experience, we would be more than happy to connect you with someone.

Just send an email to [info@acis.com](mailto:info@acis.com) with the subject line “*Talk to a Traveler*” and tell us what you’d like to hear more about.

# Contact Us

## General Information

*For group leaders or schools:*  
800-888-ACIS / [info@acis.com](mailto:info@acis.com)

*For participants and parents:*  
877-795-0813 / [accounts@acis.com](mailto:accounts@acis.com)

Or use our chat feature at [www.acis.com](http://www.acis.com)

343 Congress Street  
Suite 3100  
Boston, MA 02210

## Emergency Information

*24/7 hotline:* 617-450-5678

