



Risk Assessments Explained

A help pack for managing safety on your off-site educational tour

nst the **experience** shows



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Introduction

Educational tours are statistically one of the safest environments for children to be in, and risk assessments play a key part in this. Risk Assessments Explained was written in response to the large number of Group Leaders that seek help with completing their own risk assessments for their NST tour.

The advice in this guide is suitable for all schools, state managed or independent, and complements current good practice. **You should recognise the importance of always referring to your employer's guidelines**, but here we seek to illustrate, in non-technical terms, common basic principles and how they can be effectively used to benefit your own Group Management Plan.

Risk Assessments Explained is divided into four sections:

- What NST do for you
- What you need to do
- A practical guide to risk assessment
- Further advice, permissions and training

Please remember, whilst there are many ways to complete a risk assessment, the most important thing is that you have taken time to consider what could go wrong and decided on appropriate measures to control the risk.

Section 1. What NST do for you

By choosing NST as your travel partner, you will save a considerable amount of work, be able to show due diligence and demonstrate good practice. This is of particular importance if you are considering organising residential tours yourself, even in the UK.

What do we cover?

To manage safety effectively, the following aspects of your tour should be assessed:

- Accommodation
- Transport
- Excursions

Worldwide, and even throughout Europe, there are no consistent sets of safety standards. Additionally there are no guarantees that local standards aren't being compromised by poor management.

With our experienced auditors and regular safety training, NST's team is able to make accurate and informed decisions on the suitability of your tour components, which means you don't have to.

When you use NST as a supplier, you are further protected by the law as accountability then lies with us rather than yourself¹.

Our auditor's check

Accommodation	Transport (e.g. coaches)	Excursions
Fire Security Food hygiene Pool safety Electrics Glazing & general safety Insurance & licences	Licences Maintenance Breakdown cover Insurance Driver suitability Seat belts Coach age	Risk category Local licences Insurance Instructor competence* Suitability of equipment*

* Where appropriate

In addition to the above checks, we constantly monitor the performance of our partners and suppliers across all of our groups' experiences, and we recheck regularly. The work we do is designed to constantly encourage a positive attitude to health and safety in all the destinations you travel to.



¹ Package Travel Regulations 1992

What else do we do?

24 hour help line

Of course not everything is an emergency, but when things go wrong you need the reassurance of an experienced team helping you there and then. A team with local knowledge and the contacts to resolve issues quickly.

From small worries to major emergencies, we have successfully assisted Group Leaders when they needed us the most, and we do so for all of our groups - 24/7.

A network of local support

Our City Representatives are based in many of our destinations and are there to help you. We have also worked with many of our local agents for years. They both fully understand the needs of your group and have the detailed local knowledge to act immediately when needed.

Easy-to-complete checks on us

We are your supplier, and as you would do with any supplier, good practice says you should assess us to prove your due diligence. We have made this easy for you.

Everything we do is monitored and assessed under the rules of the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge and School Travel Forum schemes. Under these, we are audited by independent experts every year to ensure we are performing to current good standards – particularly our safety management.

Choosing NST to organise your tour will make verifying the safety standards of everything you book through us, from your accommodation to your excursions, much easier for you. All you'll need to do is check our external accreditations on the LOTC or STF websites.

You'll have financial protection from the moment you book to your safe return with NST too, because we are fully bonded through ABTA (for non-air travel) and ATOL (for air travel). This is the best way for you to protect parents' money and give yourself peace of mind as if you book direct with the airline, you may not have this protection. ABTA and ATOL maintain a public list of valid bonded operators that can be quickly checked on their websites.

Having done this, your due diligence is completed; the rest is up to us.



Why can't we do everything for you?

Much as we would like to do everything on your behalf, there are very sensible reasons why we can't.

Good safety management depends on assessing the risk. Somebody needs to consider who will be affected then take appropriate control measures. Therefore, a good knowledge of who is in your group is essential. For example, think of who is best placed to decide what to do to protect Victoria with her chronic asthma.

Example – One venue, same hazards, two groups - two correct solutions.

Consider two groups visiting a large amusement park in Europe. Group A is a primary school visit with the children aged 9 - 10; Group B is from a secondary school with pupils aged 13 - 15.

From a generic viewpoint, the hazards will be somewhat consistent with any other large amusement park. The significant hazards might include:

- Getting lost
- Other members of the public
- Sickness
- Trips & minor injuries
- Petty theft

However, the control measures used to protect the children would vary because of the age and experience of the children.

Group A may decide the appropriate control measure is to divide the group up according to their leader/pupil ratio (which in itself will also be influenced by the age of the children). Thereafter, each leader stays in close control of their own group, moving around the park in small units together.

Group B may feel that such close control was inappropriate, particularly since one of the objectives of the visit may be to educate the pupils in the management of their own safety. They may decide to allow more remote supervision, by providing more pupil instruction, establishing a base to which pupils could always return, patrolling or stationing leaders as appropriate.

This example clearly indicates that the unique dynamics of the group, and the individuals within it, dictate reasonable and appropriate control measures.

Therefore, it would be inappropriate for anybody without good knowledge of the group to attempt to complete this phase of the Group Management Plan.



Section 2. What you need to do

What are the basics of risk assessment?

Within the context of school travel, a risk assessment is consistent with a Group Management Plan. In other words, the means by which you will 'steer' your group through to the objective of arriving home safe and sound.

The concept is quite simple:

- Somebody identifying a hazard
- Recognising somebody is at risk from the hazard
- Putting some judgement on the potential likelihood and severity of the harm that might befall them
- Then crucially putting in place the necessary control measures to rectify the problem

It is important to recognise that you already risk assess many, many times in an average working day. For example:

Every day risk assessment and control		
On entering your classroom you see Tracy balancing back on the back legs of her chair		
1	Hazard Identification	You identify the hazard - a fall
2	Person at Risk	Tracy is the person at risk
3	Likelihood & Severity	Likelihood of fall is quite high and potential for harm also quite high
4	Control Measures	Tracy told to sit straight on chair, then seen to do so

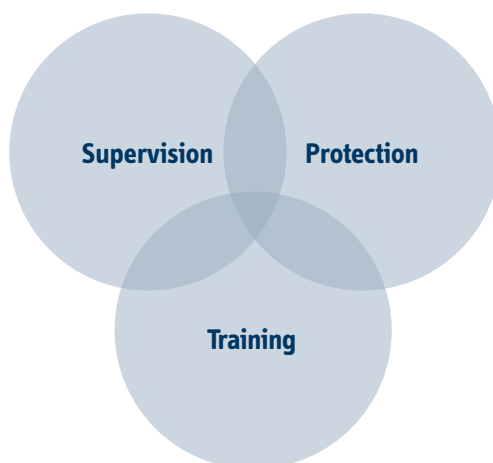
Please note: The best control measure is most dependent on the person and not the hazard. For example, if Victoria was at risk and unlikely or unable to follow the simple instruction "sit straight", you may feel another control measure, such as gently moving her chair yourself, would be appropriate.

This simple example shows how common the process is; what is uncommon and causes concern is to write risk assessments down, but even then, the steps remain the same.



What are appropriate control measures?

It's very useful to consider the range of possible measures under just three headings:



For example, some measures that may be considered for a field trip to a local wood:

Supervision	Protection	Training
Pupil / teacher ratios Appropriate dispersal of teachers throughout the group	Suitable clothing Sun protection Safe walk routes	Agreed code of conduct Pre-visit briefing

You may not need something from each category; pick the ones most suitable for your group and what you are doing. However, by checking all three headings you will cover what you need to do.

What is expected of you?

Essentially, you need to be duly diligent in preparing a Group Management Plan which means covering what is reasonably foreseeable and then responding within a reasonable range of measures.

You should concentrate on significant risks; there is no expectation for insignificant risks to be included in a formal risk assessment. Professional judgement, particularly when backed by experience, is sufficient to deal with many situations dynamically whether within school or off-site.

Where examples of current good practice exist (as with your employers' or the DfE's guidelines) you should ensure they are followed. If alternative practice is to be followed, it should be of an equivalent standard or better, not worse.

We recommend that at least two or more leaders participate in the planning process. Two professionals considering a range of options strengthen the argument that the measures taken have been reasonable.

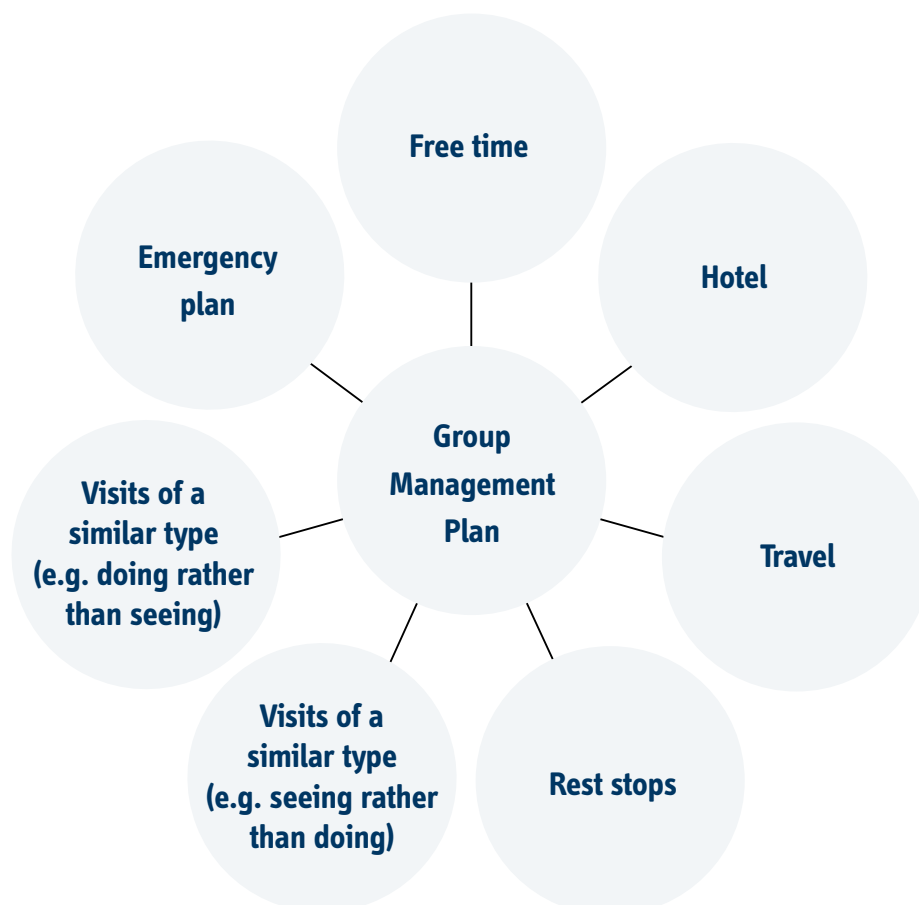
Finally, the natural discipline of writing down agreed plans and the potential need to evidence the process are good reasons to ensure decisions are recorded formally. It also means that the management plan can be readily shared as an active dynamic document and form a record for use next time.

Section 3. A practical guide to risk assessment

Always refer to your employer's guidelines and procedures!

1: Recognise the common building blocks

Before starting your risk assessments, it's important to be aware of the common building blocks which make up a tour, each of which will need to be risk assessed and will form a part of your individual Group Management Plan.



Please note: For excursions where your group are more actively involved in doing rather than seeing, then you will need to consider them separately to those visits where your group are involved in seeing rather than doing (e.g. museums or sights). Likewise, if the activity is very 'technical', or is outside any adult's experience in your group, you should consider recruiting expert help. This might be in the form of a local guide or instructor. Outdoor and adventurous activities would be a good example of where this might be required.

Any school tour can be broken down into a small number of 'instances'. Once you have risk assessed one excursion, for instance, you will easily be able to apply the same logic to a similar excursion. Similarly, once you have risk assessed one accommodation, you will be able to apply your logic for this to the accommodation you use on your next tour.

Where factors are, like this, repeated and common across many tours, your future Group Management Plans will take less time to complete as you will be able to use past risk assessments as your starting point. Once established, generic risk assessments can be used again and again or shared. Likewise, they may come from elsewhere within your school or local authority.

2: Identify general hazards

Group Leaders have asked “Do I have to risk assess the Eiffel Tower? How do I do that?” Put that way, it seems an unreasonable, impossible task. Luckily it is more a question of managing your group safely round the series of obstacles the Eiffel Tower presents, such as:

- Children getting lost / group being split
- Children acting inappropriately
- Strangers
- Petty theft

Perhaps, also consider:

- Trips on stairs
- Fear of heights

As the best risk control measures always relate to group management, once you have risk assessed one visit such as the Eiffel Tower, it will be easier to then apply your logic to other similar visits.

3: Identify group specific hazards

This is the time you need to consider the unique needs of your group as part of your risk assessment. Even if an identical itinerary is followed, every tour should be considered unique, because each group will be different.

Remember to consider the characteristics of adults within your group as well as the children. Key areas to consider include:

Children

- Age
- Gender mix
- Experience
- Special needs
- Medical needs
- Specific behavioural issues

Adults

- Ratios
- Gender mix
- Experience
- Special skills including first aid and life saving
- Relationship to group
- Medical needs

It's at this stage that a site visit is often useful. There is no substitute for first-hand knowledge. Think of a preview visit as 'walking the course' and an opportunity to add finer detail to your Group Management Plan and your educational approach.

Ask your Educational Tour Co-ordinator for details of how NST can assist you in this area by organising a preview visit to your chosen destination.

4: Decide on control measures

As previously explained, Supervision, Protection and Training are the three key headings under which you should map out appropriate control measures for any potential hazards the risk assessment process makes you aware of. You may not need to add control measures under each heading, but by simply checking all three headings, you will cover what you need to do.

The following helpful guide offers a starting point from which you can build your own individual Group Management Plan, and is intended to prompt consideration of common areas where hazards might exist. It is advisable to use this generic guide as a starting point to assist you in selecting and adding control measures which are appropriate for you and your group.

First and foremost, the make-up of your group (both adults and children) is the most important factor. You should consider:

Your Group	Children	Adults
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Age ■ Gender mix ■ Experience ■ Special needs ■ Medical needs ■ Specific behavioural issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ratios ■ Gender mix ■ Experience ■ Special skills inc. first aid & life saving ■ Relationship to group ■ Medical needs

	AREA	SUGGESTED CONTROL MEASURE	✓
Pre-Tour Planning	Leader competence & readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EVC liaison ■ Group Management Plan (risk assessment) ■ Permissions obtained 	
	Staff competence, readiness & understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Briefing meetings ■ Clearly assigned roles ■ Mix of experience ■ Specialist skills covered ■ Suitable gender mix ■ All adults CRB checked where appropriate ■ Agreed communications plan 	
	Pupil readiness and understanding, & discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use of NST's Safety Education Lesson Plan ■ Code of conduct agreed ■ Special needs identified ■ Medical needs identified ■ Advised about special clothing / equipment ■ Advised about cash & valuables ■ Agreed mobile phone policy 	
	Parent understanding & consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Parents' evening ■ Consent forms ■ Code of conduct to include consequences ■ Advised about special clothing / equipment ■ Advised about cash & valuables 	
	Unsafe suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST Safety Management System covers this 	
	Financial loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST ABTA bond V0550 covers this 	
	Medical emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST insurance covers this ■ Home contact list ■ Sufficient staffing to allow for medical care duties 	
	Other emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ School emergency procedure ■ NST provide 24 hr emergency assistance 	

	AREA	SUGGESTED CONTROL MEASURE	✓
Coach Travel	Safe transport, vetted drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST Safety Management System covers this 	
	Traffic flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advise children before disembarking of traffic flow differences ■ Drivers are requested to park for safe disembarkation 	
	Travel sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify problem children in planning and ensure suitable precautions are taken at outset 	
	Lost children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2 x head count before setting off ■ Buddy system 	
	Service stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow sufficient time ■ Ensure children know meeting point and time ■ Remind about traffic flow ■ Monitor for purchases of alcohol and tobacco 	
	Petty theft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No valuables left on coach overnight ■ Vigilance during arrival and departure from hotels 	
	Breakdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST coaches will have breakdown cover ■ On motorways or busy roads move group off the coach to a safe place 	
	Accidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local emergency service contact numbers ■ NST Emergency assistance ■ School emergency procedure 	
Ferry Travel	Missed connection, weather, strikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST travel insurance covers all eventualities ■ NST travel assistance 	
	Embarkation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure children know what to listen for and what to do ■ Ensure children are aware of deck number and stairway to return by ■ Remind children of traffic movement on car decks 	
	Pupil behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify a fixed base in seating area with staff on duty ■ Staff patrolling ■ Code of conduct applied ■ Monitor for purchases of alcohol and tobacco 	
	Minor accident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Report to information desk for first aid assistance 	
	Sea sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify problem children in planning and ensure suitable precautions are taken at outset 	
	Rough crossings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Restrict children's movement to below decks 	
Air Travel	Airports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST provision of airport representative to smooth flow ■ If meeting at airport agree meeting point and time ■ Identify a fixed base in departure hall with staff on duty ■ Clearly agreed times ■ Agree meeting procedure at arrival airport 	
	Air sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify problem children in planning and ensure suitable precautions are taken at outset 	

	AREA	SUGGESTED CONTROL MEASURE	✓
Hotels	Safe hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST Safety Management System covers this ■ NST own accommodation provides enhanced levels of safety ■ NST request a fire talk by management on arrival ■ Ensure leaders know escape routes and safe meeting place 	
	Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vigilance when arriving and departing from hotels ■ Have list of pupils' rooms and ensure pupils have list of leaders' rooms ■ Deposit valuables and money in hotel safe or safe deposit 	
	Pupil behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Code of conduct applied ■ Monitor for alcohol and tobacco consumption 	
	Free time (evenings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure no go areas are known ■ Code of conduct ■ Agree duty rota with staff and advise pupils 	
	Pools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply employer's rules regarding use of pools ■ Specific reminder to children about use of pool ■ NST Safety Management monitors quality of pool 	
	Smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clear smoking policy ■ Bedrooms to be non-smoking 	
	Complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Take up issues immediately with hotel management ■ If unresolved, take up with NST representative or call NST UK contact during office hours 	
Visits	Unsafe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST Safety Management System cover this ■ NST will advise on any elements that are inherently unsafe or have risks outside common experience. 	
	Specialist skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NST Safety Management System vets the competence of all visits that need specialist skills to ensure safe delivery ■ NST will advise where specific training and skills are needed for participants ■ Leaders to be competent persons if leading activities requiring specialist skills 	
	Getting lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agreed supervision and information on what to do ■ Buddy system ■ Clear time and place information ■ Agreed meeting points if remote supervision used ■ Accommodation address cards ■ Mobile phones (allow for non UK use) ■ Wristband identification systems 	
	Petty crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agreed supervision and information on what to do ■ Buddy system support ■ Report all crime to local police for insurance purposes 	
	Inappropriate attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agreed supervision and information on what to do ■ Buddy system support 	
	Minor accidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ First aider in group ■ Knowledge of local emergency numbers ■ NST insurance covers medical attention 	
	Traffic flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advise children before disembarking of traffic flow differences 	
	Swimming / water edge work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Refer to employers' specific instructions or RoSPA guidelines 	

	AREA	SUGGESTED CONTROL MEASURE	✓
Visits	Free time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Code of conduct ■ Clear time and place information ■ Ensure no go areas are known ■ Buddy system ■ Agreed meeting points if remote supervision used ■ Monitor purchases for alcohol, tobacco and dangerous objects 	
	Weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider weather critical visits, picnics etc and plan wet weather alternative in advance 	
Emergencies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure all leaders are aware of and have information on: Employer emergency procedure NST emergency support NST emergency medical support 	

5: Create a back-up plan

It's better to plan and not need it, than need it and not plan!

It's important to think of the obvious 'what ifs' and formulate a plan B, just in case. Again, you are not required to consider all the many, minor details that could possibly change, but for example:

- What if a venue is weather dependent and can't be used?
- What if there is a sick child, how will the sick child be looked after and what's the effect on the rest of the group?
- What if one of the members of staff falls sick?

One of the hardest decisions for you to make is to stop an activity at short notice with a group of excited, expectant pupils without a pre-prepared alternative.

The ultimate Plan B is an emergency procedure for worst-case scenarios. These are usually already established by your school or local authority and must be considered. You will be sent details of NST's 24 hour numbers for emergencies and medical cover before you go.



6: Ongoing & dynamic – safety management ‘on the ground’

Armed with your Group Management Plan, including your plan Bs, you will have a well-considered approach to your tour. However, the world is a dynamic place and circumstances can change. You and your team must monitor the effectiveness of particular control measures and adapt as and when required. Well considered plan Bs will help here, but inevitably, on the spot decisions will need to be made.

Management of safety ‘on the ground’ is key and appropriate skills and experience are called for. However, you no doubt already deal with such instances in your daily work.

If an activity you’re planning is very technical or outside of your leaders’ experience, you should consider recruiting expert help. This might be in the form of a local guide or instructor. Outdoor and adventurous activities would be a good example of where this might be required.

Discuss your coming day’s plans and possible variations before setting out. Again after you return, review the day and look forward to the next. These meetings can be short and informal and jotting down any changes on your Group Management Plan forms a useful and easy record of the decisions made.

7: Review

As the majority of educational tours follow similar patterns, it’s very good practice when you return home to get together with colleagues and reflect and review the planning process and risk assessments used. These can be used to inform next year’s or other tours.



Section 4: Further advice, permissions & training

Be aware that our approach to risk assessments is not the only one. There are a number of approaches all of which lead to suitable outcomes.

Your employers will have their own policy and guidance for supporting tours which you should request if you do not have a copy. It is also likely that your employers may have an advice and approval process that you are required to follow. Initially, seek guidance from your Educational Visit Co-ordinator (EVC) in school or your Local Authority Outdoor Advisor.

Acknowledgements

DfE

The Health & Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits (HASPEV), 1998

Health & Safety, Responsibilities and Powers, 2001

The Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits, 2002

A Handbook for Group Leaders, 2002

Group Safety at Water Margins, 2003

Oxford Cambridge and RCA Examinations

OCR Certificate in Off-Site Safety Management

Adventure Activities Licensing Authority

“...and by comparison.” Marcus Bailie, Head of Inspection, November 2003

NASUWT

Educational Visits, May 2004

NUT

Health & Safety Briefing: School Visits, March 2005

HSE

Five Steps to Risk Assessment, Jan 2001

Mr Chris Lowe

Chair, Educational Visits Advisory Council

The Outdoor Education Advisors' Panel

Risk assessment and risk management working group.

www.oeap.info



Extra Help for You

We offer a range of literature to help you on your way, including:

Group Leader Booking Guide

This guide is intended to take you through each stage of the booking process, answering frequently asked questions and providing you with tips and support.



Safety Education Lesson Plan

Our RoSPA endorsed Safety Education Lesson Plan provides useful guidance on involving children in the risk management process before your tour and whilst off-site.



Safety Management System (SMS) Policy Document

This document details NST's commitment to the management of safety on tours. A current copy of this document will enable you to evidence that you are following current best practice with regard to the selection of NST as a reputable tour operator.



For further information, please call 0845 688 8987

NST, Discovery House, Brooklands Way, Whitehills Business Park, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY4 5LW



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