

A parents' guide to adventurous activities abroad for young people

British Standard BS 8848:2007+ Amendment 1:2009 Specification for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions, and adventurous activities, outside the United Kingdom

Tens of thousands of young people take part in organised activities abroad each year – from abseiling in France to teaching in Africa and hiking in the Himalayas. Activities such as school or university expeditions, adventure holidays, charity challenges and gap years can be great fun, broaden horizons and teach new skills. But, if your son or daughter plans to take part in one of these activities, their safety is bound to be your biggest concern. And, whether your child is at primary school, secondary school, or an independent 21 year old, you will have lots of questions:

- Who will have overall responsibility for their safety while they are away?
- What activities will they be doing?
- What advice or training will they be given?
- What are the risks and how will these be minimised?
- What happens if they become ill or have an accident?
- Who, if anyone, will be supervising them?
- Are staff competent and experienced?

The British Standard (BS 8848) sets minimum requirements developed specially for UK organisations that offer adventurous activities abroad to make sure that ventures are planned and managed with care, taking into account these sorts of questions.



What are British Standards?

The British Standards Institution (BSI) has been developing standards for over 100 years to make products and services safer for consumers. Standards set out good practice and guidelines for organisations to follow.

It's not compulsory for organisations to sign up to a standard, so you can feel confident that those that choose to comply with British Standards take safety and customer service seriously.

BS 8848 – The basics

Adventurous activities are designed to be exciting and challenging. Of course, no venture can be risk-free but the British Standard for Adventurous Activities (BS 8848) aims to create an environment where the possibility for accidents and injuries, is reduced. It gives organisations minimum standards to follow to make sure that overseas ventures are planned thoroughly and carried out as safely as possible. It covers all aspects of a venture - from the activities people take part in, to the transport they use and the accommodation they stay in – and has three important core principles:

- **Informed choice** – all risks should be assessed and clearly explained to participants and parents so that they understand what they are getting into before they book.
- **Single provider** - there should be one clearly identified organisation in charge of the venture to take overall responsibility.
- **Capable staff** - all ventures should be run by competent and experienced staff.

BS 8848 – What to expect from organisations

BS 8848 describes what organisations should do, see below. The standard is voluntary, so make sure you choose an organisation that complies.

Clear roles and responsibilities

- One individual or organisation should be clearly identified as the 'venture provider' with overall responsibility for all parts of the venture, including those run by third parties.
- A competent leadership team should be appointed with relevant training and experience, plus knowledge of the activities, environment and needs of the participants.

Good planning and preparation

- All aspects of the venture should be assessed for suitability and safety – including travel arrangements, accommodation and equipment, as well as the activities themselves.
- Venture providers should gather information about participants, including pre-existing medical conditions, to assess each person's capability to take part in the activity.

Clear, accurate information

- **Before** booking, the venture provider should give all potential participants clear information about price, timings and itineraries, plus an explanation of activities and any significant safety issues. It should also provide details of the expertise of the staff in charge.
- **After** booking, the venture provider should give all participants detailed information about: accommodation, transport, meals, itinerary, payment schedules and insurance. It should also highlight the responsibilities of participants. For example, to get relevant visas or to buy their own insurance.

Competent staff

- In addition to the relevant qualifications and experience, all staff should have good communication skills and proven competence for the job.
- There should be a single overall leader who knows the skills of the group, and has supervisory responsibilities.
- Checks should be carried out on all staff working unsupervised with children under 18.

Be prepared

- There should be written plans in place to analyse risks and manage safety.
- All staff should be made aware of the key risks associated with specific activities and locations and have procedures in place to minimise and manage them, for example, dehydration or altitude sickness.
- All staff should know what to do, how to act and who to contact in the event of illness, accident or emergency.
- All staff should have access to medical advice and support for each venture.
- There should be a written incident and emergency plan for each venture.

It is vital that the venture provider communicates the above information to its entire staff so that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

Checklist for parents and participants

- ✓ **Choose the right venture** – help your son or daughter find a project that suits their interests and abilities. Where do they want to go? What do they want to do? How long do they want to go for? Are they fit enough to take part? What will it cost in total? When is payment required? It is worth getting information from several providers so that you can compare what is on offer.
- ✓ **Check credentials** – how long has the organisation been running? Can you speak to previous participants to get feedback on their experiences? Does the organisation running the venture comply with BS 8848? If not, ask them why not.
- ✓ **Know before you go** – before booking, or parting with any cash, it is vital that you and your child know exactly what is involved in the venture. Where will they stay, what will they be doing and what are the potential safety issues? Make sure you have all the information you need and don't be afraid to ask lots of questions.
- ✓ **Find out who is responsible** – there should be one clearly identified 'venture provider' and a named venture leader in charge. Make sure you know who it is.
- ✓ **Signing up** – read all the terms of the contract carefully before you book and sign. If your son or daughter is under 18, you will need to sign on their behalf. If they are over 18, help them check everything before they sign.
- ✓ **Booking information pack** – once you've booked you should get a detailed pack telling you all about the venture. If this doesn't arrive, chase it up.
- ✓ **Emergency contacts** – know how to contact your child while they are away in case of an emergency at home. And make sure the venture provider has your contact details too.
- ✓ **Complaints** – if you have any complaints contact the venture provider in the first instance. If you have any problems you can seek advice from Consumer Direct (who can put you in touch with the relevant Trading Standards if you need to take your complaint further).

USEFUL INFORMATION

British Standards Institution (BSI) 020 8996 9001 www.bsigroup.com

Consumer Direct (for advice and links to local Trading Standards) 08454 040506 www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

GapAdvice.Org 01494 673 448 www.gapadvice.org

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) 020 7591 3030 www.rgs.org/GO

Trading Standards www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/

Universities Safety and Health Association 01273 641 882 www.usha.org.uk

Year Out Group www.yearoutgroup.org

Young Explorers' Trust www.theyet.org

Frequently asked questions

Q. Must all organisations that run adventurous activities abroad comply with the standard?

A. No, the standard is voluntary so not all organisations choose to comply. Each organisation that wishes to use the standard should apply it to each venture they provide. Ask if your chosen venture complies with BS 8848 before you book.

Q. My daughter wants to go on a charity bike ride in Cuba when she finishes university. She won't have to pay to go, just raise sponsorship. Is she still covered by the standard, even though she's not paying directly for the trip?

A. Yes, so long as the organisation involved complies with the standard. BS 8848 can be applied to ventures that are run on a voluntary basis or in return for payment.

Q. My son is 22 and wants to go on an organised trip to teach English to children in India. Is he still covered by the standard or is it just for children of school age?

A. Yes, he will be covered so long as the organisation running his venture complies with the standard. The standard is not age specific and applies to all young people and adults.

Q. How do I know if an organisation is following the standard?

A. Once an organisation has signed up to the standard it can choose to 'self-assess' or to employ an external auditor to check that it complies with the standard. Before booking ask for confirmation, in writing, that the venture is compliant and how this compliance was assessed.

Q. Who do I complain to if I think an organisation isn't following the standard?

A. You should complain to the organisation first to give it a chance to put things right. After that, contact the Trading Standards office that covers the area the organisation is based in (not necessarily the one closest to your home).

Q. If an organisation doesn't follow the standard is it breaking the law?

A. It is not a legal requirement to follow the standard. But, if an organisation claims to comply with the standard, then doesn't, it is in breach of contract and can be reported to Trading Standards. Even if it does not claim compliance, in the event of a serious complaint or incident, the standard could be used in a court of law to provide a benchmark of good practice and possibly to prove negligence.

Q. Where can I find a copy of BS 8848?

A. Your local public library should be able to give you access to a reference copy, or you can purchase a copy from BSI either as a printed document or in electronic form (PDF format).

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