



Safer adventures: Managing the risks of adventure travel

Your guide to the British Standard for adventurous activities outside the United Kingdom (BS 8848:2014)

Adventure travel is supposed to be challenging. But regardless of your age, destination or chosen activity, your safety should be of paramount importance. BS 8848 sets standards to minimize the risks of adventure travel. Knowledge of the standard is important to anyone organizing, or taking part in, an overseas venture.

Hundreds of thousands of people take part in organized activities abroad every year. Overseas adventures can be great fun, broaden horizons, and teach new skills. But, if the venture isn't managed properly, the consequences can be very serious, resulting in accident, injury or even loss of life.

Whether you're a student going on a geography field trip; a young person planning a gap year or adventure holiday; someone in their forties taking on a charity challenge; or a pensioner considering a volunteering project; BS 8848 can offer you peace of mind. Providers that comply with the standard must endeavour to keep participants safe and informed at all stages of the venture.

If you, a family member or a friend are planning an adventurous activity abroad make sure that the chosen provider complies with BS 8848.



Safer adventures: the basics

What does the standard cover?

BS 8848:2014 "Specification for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions, and adventurous activities outside the United Kingdom" can be used by providers of any adventurous activities abroad, including:

- adventure holidays
- gap-year travel
- volunteering projects
- charity challenges
- expeditions
- field research
- educational visits.

Any UK organization (e.g. schools, charities or tour operators) planning an adventurous activity abroad, for individuals or groups, can use the standard and should consider its requirements.



How does the standard protect consumers?

BS 8848 details good practice for venture providers to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone taking part. It shows organizations how to plan ventures, identify potential risks and manage them effectively. It also requires participants to be given clear information so that they can make informed decisions about risks to their own safety.

The standard covers all aspects of the venture – from planning, transport, staff and accommodation, to the activities themselves. In summary, BS 8848 requires:

A single provider – one clearly identified person, or organization, to take overall responsibility for the whole venture.

Informed choice – participants to be given clear information about the venture, and potential risks, before they book.

Capable staff – all ventures to be run by competent and experienced people.

Good preparation and planning – policies and procedures put in place to identify and manage risk at every stage of the venture.



Safer adventures: the details

What should I expect from a good provider?

Organizations that comply with BS 8848 must:

Assign clear roles and responsibilities

- Identify one individual or organization as the 'venture provider' who is accountable for all parts of the venture, including those run by third parties.
- Assess the services of any third party providers, for example, for travel, accommodation or venture activities.
- Give clear instructions to the leadership team about following procedures and supervising participants.

Appoint competent staff

- Assign an overall group leader who knows and understands the skills of the group.
- Recruit leaders with the right skills, training and experience for the activity being undertaken.
- Carry out relevant checks on all staff working unsupervised with children under 18.

Plan and prepare

- Plan and research all aspects of the venture – including the location, transport, accommodation and equipment – to assess them for suitability and safety.
- Prepare an itinerary and budget for each venture.
- Collect information about participants, including any pre-existing medical conditions, to assess that the venture is suitable for everyone involved.
- Check the availability of local medical services and support for each venture.

Provide clear, accurate information

- Before booking – give potential participants clear and detailed information about activities; the expertise of the leaders; potential safety issues; price; itineraries; and any prerequisites for travel (e.g. fitness or training), so that they can decide if it's the right venture for them.

- After booking – provide detailed information about accommodation, transport, meals, payment schedules, insurance, and the participants' own responsibilities (for example to obtain relevant visas or insurance).
- Make sure that everyone involved in the venture is aware of the risks of specific activities and locations – for example dehydration or altitude sickness – and understand what to do to minimize these risks.

Safety management

- Develop written plans to identify, assess and then manage potential health and safety risks. These should cover the venture itself, plus the capability and experience of the venture leaders and participants.

Emergency plans

- Produce a written 'incident and emergency response' plan for each venture to detail what should happen if things go wrong.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the emergency plan; have access to medical advice and support; and know what to do and who to contact in the event of illness, accident or emergency.

Checklist

Top tips for anyone planning an overseas adventure:

Research – find a project that best suits your requirements and abilities. How challenging do you want it to be? Do you want to be part of a supervised group or do something on your own? Do you have the necessary skills, experience, mental aptitude or fitness to take part in the venture? What training is required before you go?

Compare providers – gather information from several venture providers so that you can compare what's on offer.

Check compliance with BS 8848 – be sure to choose a venture that complies with BS 8848. If you're not sure, ask.

Signing up – read the terms of the contract carefully before you book. People under 18 will need a parent or guardian to sign on their behalf.

Information pack – once you've booked, you should receive a detailed venture information pack. Make sure you have all the information you need and don't be afraid to ask questions.

Find out who is responsible – there should be one clearly identified 'venture provider' and, for groups, a named venture leader in charge. Make sure you know who these are.

Emergency contacts – make sure that your family knows how to contact you while you're away, and that the venture provider has details of who to contact back home in case of an emergency.

Look after yourself – take responsibility for your own safety by following the venture rules and ensuring that you have suitable insurance.

Raise concerns – if you have any concerns during the trip tell the leader immediately.

Complaints – if you have any complaints contact the venture provider in the first instance. If you need any help or advice about making a complaint, contact Citizens Advice (see Useful Information on page 7).



Frequently asked questions

Q. What is BSI?

A. BSI is the UK's National Standards Body. It's been developing standards for more than 100 years to make products and services safer for consumers. Standards set out good practice and guidelines for organizations to follow.

Q. Must all organizations that run adventurous projects abroad comply with the standard?

A. No, the standard is voluntary. If an organization decides to use 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 written confirmation that the venture is compliant and how this compliance was assessed.

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

A. It's not a legal requirement to follow the standard. But if an organization claims to comply with the standard, then doesn't, Trading Standards may be able to take further action. Consumers can get in touch with their local Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline (see Useful Information on page 7). Even if an organization doesn't 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 best practice.

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

A. Many libraries and universities can access reference copies of British Standards, or copies can be bought from BSI at shop.bsigroup.com/bs8848.

Useful information

ABTA

Travel advice and details of UK travel agents and tour operators
020 3117 0599
www.abta.com

BSI

For information about standards
0845 086 9001
www.bsigroup.com

Citizens Advice

For advice about consumer rights and complaints via national helpline or local bureaux
08454 04 05 06
www.adviceguide.org.uk/consumer

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

For advice about overseas travel
020 7008 1500
www.gov.uk/fco

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

For information and advice about expeditions and field trips
020 7591 3030
www.rgs.org/GO

Trading Standards

Enforcement of consumer-related legislation
www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

Universities Safety and Health Association

Promoting health and safety in Higher Education
www.usha.org.uk

Year Out Group

Information and advice about taking a gap year
www.yearoutgroup.org

Young Explorers' Trust

National charity promoting safe and responsible expeditions for young people
www.theyet.org



Contact us to find out how BSI helps to make excellence a habit.

About us

BSI

BSI was established in 1901 and has been developing standards for over 100 years. Standards set best practice and guidelines for organizations to follow. Standards make good business sense, and make products and services safer for consumers.

- BSI Group has 2,900 employees globally and works in 150 countries
- We publish around 2,500 standards a year
- There are approximately 34,000 published standards that help make our lives easier, safer, healthier and more sustainable.

CPIU

The Consumer & Public Interest Unit (CPIU) works within BSI to represent consumers in standards development and reflect the public interest in the decision-making process. It investigates areas where new standards might be beneficial to consumers, and ensures that new standards address key consumer issues, by working with relevant consumer organizations to feed their initiatives and concerns into the standards development process.

CPIN

The Consumer & Public Involvement Network is supported by the CPIU, and is made up of individuals and representatives of consumer and public interest organizations who take an active part in standards-making committees. These people ensure that the interests of UK consumers are represented in UK, European and international standards.

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