

Tips for Traveling With Your Team

Recently, opportunities to compete or to attend overnight camps have exploded across the country, attracting cheerleading and dance teams in unprecedented numbers. Enticed by the adventure, teams choose to travel for the training, for the chance to win prize money, for the opportunity to win bids and awards, and for the bonding experience that such opportunities provide. Experienced coaches know that traveling with your team can be either a fantastic experience or one that makes you wish you had stayed home. So here are some important travel tips to help you execute a plan and fill your scrapbook with wonderful travel memories.

First, break the trip planning down into different areas of responsibility.

Recognize that a trip involves at least five planning elements: Travel, Lodging, Event (The reason for the trip) Team interaction, and Risk Management. Then, rule number one is to Delegate, Delegate, and Delegate. Assign responsibilities in each of the areas not requiring your immediate supervision, like travel or lodging because you cannot do it all and focus on your number one job, which is coaching.

Take plenty of chaperones on the trip. Be sure to check out the chaperones as to what kind of experience they have and what their tolerance level is. An overly tolerant chaperone isn't always a good idea, nor is a real strict one with no sense of humor. Experienced chaperones have a knowledge base that is frequently helpful. Delegate some of the responsibilities in travel and lodging to the chaperones. Plus, a parent with experience in risk management can put together your plan and dispense the information at a team meeting beforehand.

Print up flyers explaining expectations for the parents and the team.

Encourage parents to discuss their expectations and to remind their children of the immediate consequences that exist for misbehavior. Say to them, "It's that cut and dried – safety first – so if you went against what we asked you to do, then you have to go back home." Come to an agreement beforehand as to the plan of action. If someone breaks the rules, do you fly him or her home? Who pays? Does the parent drive to pick them up? Lastly, make sure everyone reads and signs the agreement and receives a copy of the signed document. Be sure to explain team, coach, and organization goals and the rewards for their good behavior as well.

Prepare an emergency plan for the travel and event. For example, a good travel plan will include a lost traveler response and a trip delay response. An emergency contact and insurance information should be collected on every traveler as well. These forms can be duplicated and entrusted to several different chaperones and coaches.

Prepare a lodging emergency response plan. Remember that national disasters, weather emergencies, strikes and power outages can occur anywhere, anytime. Begin by asking the hotel for its Emergency Response Plan. Some hotels post this response information in the room itself or via the hotel channel. You need to know where to go, when, how, and whom to see in an emergency. Also, coaches and chaperones should

pack a small emergency kit and glow sticks, which can be used to find your way in a dark, smoky hallway. Review other lodging safety issues; such as, if someone knocks on the door with a delivery, always phone the front desk first to see who it is. Never share your room number or say it aloud in a public place, and always have a buddy system in place. What is your lost traveler response?

Protect your travel dollars. Consider purchasing travel insurance through your travel agent, booking agency, or credit card company. Nowadays, trip cancellation or trip delay insurance can be purchased from reliable sources for a reasonable fee, usually based on the cost of the trip. Read the fine print and make sure the policy coverage meets your needs.

Always request lower floors when lodging with a team. Exiting in an emergency is easier from the second floor than the tenth. Similarly, make sure everyone is aware of the emergency exits and stairwells on their floor. There should be an outside meeting place that everyone will go to in an emergency. Lastly, make sure then that your team is as close together on one floor as possible.

Include a chain of command in coaches and chaperones. Provide the appropriate response to an illness or emergency involving one of the team, coaches, or participants. This plan should also include a phone chain created at home base so that only one other phone call would need to be made in an emergency.

Provide chaperones with proper instructions. Adults and parents who accompany a trip need specific instructions and objectives for team behavior. They also need a schedule, cell phone numbers, hotel room numbers, emergency information, emergency plan, and a team list.

Supply your parents with lodging information. Include the name of the hotel, the phone number, and the address. Encourage team unity by preparing rooming assignments, which pair together team members who are not best friends or part of the same click. After you receive your hotel room numbers, be sure to record it on your rooming list and use your phone chain to inform their parents.

Make up a travel schedule. Include departure, meeting, arrival, and event times and dates. Deduct a half hour from the planned time, so that you spend less time waiting for stragglers. Always do a head count before any departure.

Have a “go to” bag divided into files. Place your essential documents in alphabetical files. Don’t forget your schedules, tickets, and photo identifications. Tuck your reservation numbers and important contact information in an easy to find spot. Do not leave tickets and boarding passes with team members. Put one organized chaperone in charge of dispensing and collecting these just before boarding a plane or train.

Pack the essentials. You can be sure that somebody will forget something, so try to keep it to a minimum. Be sure that at least one person packs a sewing kit, a pair of scissors, an extra pair of sox, an extra body suit and bloomers, hair ribbon, and other items or accessories that you could not replace. Have roommates assign shared items like curling irons. No reason to take four! Only permit one bag per person, and you won't need a bellman.

Create a food kitty. Collect \$10 cash from every team member before departure. When they are broke and hungry on the return trip, break out the cash and create some grateful smiles.

Don't overwhelm the destination hotel front desk. Only the coach and no more than one assistant should approach the desk to check in or to check out. Have a bag for all your keys or cards and refer to your rooming list. Be sure to inform the front desk promptly of any problems or discrepancies in your expected service. Always get the name of the person you speak to and keep it in a safe place.

Avoid additional room charges. Make sure hotel room phones are turned off to placing outside calls. Most team members have a calling card or cell phone to use instead. Be sure team knows that room service or movies are additional charges, and a credit card will be needed to open an account for the room

Assure promptness for events. Set meeting times 15 to 30 minutes ahead of the actual time. A knock on the door will arouse sleepy heads much quicker than a wakeup call or alarm clock. To be safe, use all three methods. Prevent stragglers by not permitting anyone to take a bathroom break or any other kind of break within 30 minutes of any departure. Be sure to re-confirm all departure and performance times with the transportation companies.

Check out early. Some chains have the in-room checkout option, via hotel channel. If not, bring your bags down early and check out before having breakfast. The hotel can store the luggage, and you won't have a long line of coaches and guests to deal with when your bus is leaving in five minutes.

Encourage Parents to be in the Know. Remind them to encourage their child to respect authority, to follow the rules, to be supportive of their teammates, and to keep in touch with home. Make them part of your successful team.

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