

China School Trip Risk Assessment: A Guide for Teachers

This article takes a practical approach to the key areas that schools may wish to consider when preparing a risk assessment for a school trip to China.

Note: Risk assessments should be completed independently by the school in accordance with its own policies, applicable laws and regulations, insurance requirements, and safeguarding procedures. This article provides general information and guidance related to travel in China and is not intended to replace the school's own formal risk assessment.

1. What Should a Risk Assessment for a School Trip to China Cover?

Risks related to educational trips to China can be evaluated by schools from different aspects based on their own risk assessment policies.

First, it is possible to evaluate the itinerary and destinations of the trip. The itinerary might be the source of potential risks. If the trip includes too many activities, it increases the chance of participant fatigue, event delays, and students getting separated from the group, etc.

Secondly, the risk assessment procedure must consider specific characteristics and peculiarities of the group such as age of students, the size of the group, independence of the members, and necessity of supervision. It is also essential to consider health conditions, allergies, and special diet requirements.

Other key areas to assess include transportation, accommodation, food and dining, activities, weather and natural environments, crowded public places, free time, as well as emergency procedures and communication arrangements. These factors should be assessed in the context of the actual itinerary rather than simply relying on a generic risk checklist.

If you would like to review the preparation process for the entire trip in chronological order, you can also refer to our [Checklist for Teachers Leading a School Trip to China](#) for the key preparations to consider, from itinerary planning through to the final checks before departure.

2. How to Complete a China School Trip Risk Assessment

A risk assessment does not have to be complicated, but it should follow a clear and traceable process. Schools can use the following steps in accordance with their own risk assessment procedures.

Step 1: Identify Potential Hazards

First, identify and list the potential hazards and risks that may arise during the specific trip and activities included in the itinerary.

Step 2: Determine Who May Be Affected

A risk assessment should not simply state “students.” It should identify the people who may actually be affected by each risk. This may include students, accompanying teachers, trip leaders, local guides, drivers, and students with specific health or dietary needs.

Identifying the people who may be affected can help the school determine what control measures are appropriate for each risk.

Step 3: Assess Likelihood and Consequences

Schools can assess each risk according to their own risk rating system. A commonly used approach is:

Risk Level = Likelihood * Severity of Consequences

For example, likelihood and severity can each be rated as low, medium, or high, with the final risk level determined using the school’s own risk matrix.

Likelihood

Level	Description
Low	Unlikely to occur
Medium	Could occur
High	Likely to occur

Severity of Consequences

Level	Description
Low	Minor consequences
Medium	Could have a significant impact
High	Could result in serious consequences

The specific risk rating should be determined according to the school’s own risk assessment procedures. Schools should use their existing risk rating standards wherever possible rather than creating a separate system specifically for a trip to China.

Step 4: Record Existing Control Measures

Having determined the risks, make a note of the controls which have been put in place to deal with them. The objective of a risk assessment exercise is not to enumerate all possible controls, but to demonstrate how those controls mitigate the risks.

Step 5: Identify Further Control Measures

After the initial assessment, determine whether the existing control measures are sufficient and identify any additional measures that may be needed.

Step 6: Assign Responsibility

Where appropriate, the risk assessment should clearly identify who is responsible for implementing, checking, or following up on the relevant control measures.

Step 7: Consider Residual Risk

However, the risk can never be brought down to zero using controls; consequently, there will be a need for schools to determine whether the risk that remains once controls have been established has been

lowered to an acceptable level. If not, then additional controls can be implemented, and even cancellation of the activity can be considered.

Step 8: Review the Risk Assessment Before Departure and When Circumstances Change

Risk assessment cannot be viewed as an activity in which one creates a document, completes it and keeps it forever. There has to be a regular review of the document before the trip begins and when there are major alterations in the trip schedule or group profile. The relevant risks should be reviewed if any of the following changes occur:

- The itinerary changes;
- A new activity is added;
- The accommodation is changed;
- The mode of transportation is changed;
- The student list changes;
- A student develops new health or dietary requirements;
- Weather conditions change significantly;
- Local circumstances arise that may affect the trip.

3. Risk Categories: Transportation, Accommodation, Food, Weather, Activities, Crowded Places and Free Time

Transportation Safety

Student injuries during travel to different destinations are one of the frequent problems faced on educational tours. In China, the modes of transportation used when moving between cities include high-speed trains and coaches.

Key Risks: Traffic accidents, vehicles in poor condition, driver fatigue, and students failing to use seat belts properly while travelling by vehicle.

Assessment Considerations: Considerations for Assessment: The school has to conduct an assessment of the transport arrangements according to the actual plan, taking into account such factors as the means of transport, distance, the number of students and the degree of supervision they need. The school also has to make sure the transportation arrangements comply with its safety policy. For coach transport over long distances, the school has to consider driving time and alternatives for transport.

Accommodation Safety

Accommodation for students in China may include hotels, school dormitories, or educational activity centres. Accommodation safety is directly related to students' ability to rest properly and remain safe during the trip.

Key Risks: Fire safety hazards, inadequate hygiene standards, insufficient safety facilities such as door locks, and inadequate supervision or management at night.

Assessment Considerations: Schools should obtain information about the location of the accommodation, room arrangements, fire safety facilities, and emergency evacuation procedures. They should also assess arrangements for nighttime supervision based on the students' ages and the characteristics of the group.

Food and Dining Safety

China has a rich and diverse food culture, but for students from international schools, dietary adaptation and food safety are important areas that require particular attention.

Key Risks: Food allergies, food poisoning caused by spoiled or improperly handled food, gastrointestinal discomfort caused by spicy or oily foods, and potential issues with drinking water safety.

Assessment Considerations: Schools should confirm restaurants and catering arrangements in advance and communicate important allergy and dietary information relevant to the students' safety to the catering providers in a timely manner. For students with special dietary requirements, schools should confirm in advance whether suitable meals can be provided.

Weather

The weather could also be one factor that influences how safe a trip can be. It is important for schools to research the weather conditions in the places the students will be visiting prior to the trip and ensure that the tour operator is prepared.

Key Risks: Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke, Cold-Related Injuries, Heavy Rain and Flooding, Typhoons or Tropical Cyclones, Poor Air Quality, Excessive Sun Exposure, Sudden Weather Changes in Mountainous Areas, and Hiking Hazards.

Assessment Considerations: The school needs to take into account the prevailing weather conditions in each destination, considering the travel periods, and how weather changes would affect the travel. For outdoor activities, the school needs to determine whether the activity schedule needs to be changed.

Activity Safety

Cultural visits, educational activities, and outdoor experiences are important parts of an educational trip, but they may also involve specific safety risks.

Key Risks: Students separating from the crowd or getting injured in crowded attractions, risks during hands-on activities, and injuries in natural settings.

Assessment Considerations: Schools should assess each activity individually, taking into account its nature, the age of participants, the activity environment, supervision requirements, and potential incidents that could occur.

Crowded Places and Free Time

For international students, road environments, traffic conditions, and pedestrian behaviour in Chinese cities may differ from what they are familiar with. These factors can therefore be included in the pre-trip risk assessment.

Key Risks: Students getting separated from their group, losing personal belongings, or sustaining injuries due to overcrowding in crowded places.

Assessment Considerations: The following should be taken into account: procedures for headcounts, group organization, meeting place arrangements, designated activity zones, the buddy system, and measures to handle a student getting separated from the group. The time and locations for leisure activities should also be specified.

4. China-Specific Considerations: High-Speed Rail, Mobile Payments, Internet and Communications

Travelling to China involves some local systems, practices, and environmental factors that may be unfamiliar to international students. Schools should give these areas particular consideration when preparing their risk assessment.

High-Speed Rail Travel

China has an extensive high-speed rail network, and high-speed trains are often the preferred option for school groups travelling between cities.

Assessment Considerations: Schools should consider procedures such as security checks, ticket checks, waiting for trains, and boarding and getting off the train. They should also assess arrangements for group division, headcounts, designated meeting points, and the safe handling of students' travel documents.

Mobile Payments

Mobile payments, such as WeChat Pay and Alipay, are widely used in China. Some international students may need to understand the available payment options and make appropriate preparations before travelling.

Assessment Considerations: Schools can check in advance which payment methods students will be able to use and consider whether students without access to Chinese mobile payment accounts should have alternative payment methods or a reasonable amount of cash as a backup.

Internet and Communications

China's internet environment differs from that of many other countries, and some social media platforms and communication apps commonly used internationally may not be accessible in China.

Assessment Considerations: Schools should consider the communication needs of teachers and students during the trip and ensure that alternative contact methods and meeting arrangements are available in case the usual means of communication cannot be used.

5. Health, Allergies, Medication and Students with Additional Needs

Students' health and wellbeing are among the key areas that should be considered when preparing a risk assessment.

Collecting Health Information

Before the trip, schools should collect and confirm important health information relevant to travel safety, including medical conditions, allergies, medication requirements, and special dietary needs, in accordance with their own policies. Schools should also determine what information needs to be available to accompanying teachers and how relevant information can be accessed in an emergency.

Allergy Management

Food allergies may pose a significant risk to individual students and should therefore be considered as part of the risk assessment in advance. Schools should confirm the relevant allergy information and assess how it will be communicated to catering providers and accompanying staff. For students with a history of severe allergies, schools should also confirm the necessary medication and emergency response arrangements in accordance with their medical and emergency procedures.

Medication and Medical Support

For students who need to take medication during the trip, schools should confirm arrangements for carrying, storing, and administering medication in accordance with their own policies. They should also consider whether local medical resources are sufficient to meet the group's needs in an emergency.

Accessibility and Additional Needs

For students with mobility difficulties or other additional needs, schools should assess in advance whether appropriate arrangements can be provided for transportation, accommodation, attractions, and activity venues.

Student Wellbeing, Fatigue and Travel Adjustment

For longer school trips, trips with intensive schedules, or itineraries covering multiple cities, schools may also wish to consider students' fatigue levels, sleep arrangements, long-distance travel, and ability to adjust to an unfamiliar environment.

Where necessary, schools can reduce problems related to fatigue or travel-related stress by allowing sufficient rest time, avoiding overly intensive schedules, and making clear arrangements for students to seek help when needed.

6. Emergency Contacts, Contingency Plans and Incident Communication

Emergency Contact Procedures

Schools should prepare a list of emergency contacts that may be needed during the trip. These may include the school's internal emergency contacts, the insurance company or emergency assistance provider, the tour operator, local guides and drivers, as well as emergency services in China.

Common emergency service numbers in mainland China include 110 for police, 120 for medical emergencies, and 119 for fire services.

Depending on the nationalities of the students and the school's own policies, schools may also wish to record the contact details of the relevant embassies or consulates in China in case consular assistance is required.

Contingency Plans

Any itinerary may need to be adjusted due to weather, transportation disruptions, health issues, or other unforeseen circumstances. Schools should check whether reasonable contingency arrangements are available for key parts of the itinerary. These may include indoor alternatives in case of severe weather, alternative arrangements in the event of transportation delays, and access to medical support in case of illness or injury.

Not every activity needs a completely separate contingency plan. However, for key activities whose cancellation could significantly affect the overall itinerary, schools should consider suitable alternatives in advance.

Incident Communication Procedures

Communication is crucial during an accident. Depending on the nature of the accident, the following people can be contacted: the students, teachers who accompanied the trip, school authorities, parents or

guardians of the students, the local travel service provider, an insurance provider or emergency assistance service, and the emergency response team.

It would be wise for schools to clearly determine who will be the spokesperson for the school, who will communicate with parents or guardians, and what information needs to be communicated centrally by the school administration.

7. Example of a China School Trip Risk Register

After identifying and assessing potential risks, schools can record them in a risk register together with the relevant control measures and any further actions required. The example below illustrates how risks associated with a school trip to China might be recorded.

The risk ratings shown are examples only. Schools should assess each risk using their own likelihood and severity criteria and apply their own risk matrix.

Itinerary / Activity	Potential Risk	People Who May Be Affected	Existing Control Measures	Further Measures	Residual Risk
City walking	Road traffic	Students, teachers	Teacher supervision; use designated crossing points	Adjust the route according to local conditions	To be assessed
High-speed rail travel	Students becoming separated from the group	Students, teachers	Group arrangements; regular headcounts; designated meeting points	Establish a clear meeting procedure within the station	To be assessed
Outdoor activities	High temperatures or severe weather	Students, teachers	Check weather conditions; schedule rest breaks	Prepare indoor alternative activities	To be assessed
Restaurant dining	Food allergies	Individual students	Provide allergy information in advance	Confirm meals with the restaurant; confirm necessary medication and emergency arrangements	To be assessed
During travel	Students	Students,	Group	Establish a procedure for	To be

Itinerary / Activity	Potential Risk	People Who May Be Affected	Existing Control Measures	Further Measures	Residual Risk
	becoming separated from the group	teachers	management; regular headcounts	confirming the student's last known location and designate a person responsible for contacting the guide and venue	assessed
Hotel accommodation	Fire or other emergency evacuation	Students, teachers	Familiarise the group with evacuation routes and assembly points	Explain evacuation procedures after check-in and conduct a headcount	To be assessed
During the trip	Lost passport	Students, teachers	Keep important travel documents secure	Prepare passport copies and establish procedures for contacting the school, travel service provider, police, and relevant embassy or consulate	To be assessed
Air or high-speed rail travel	Transport cancellation or delay	Students, teachers	Confirm transportation arrangements in advance	Prepare alternative transportation, accommodation, and meal arrangements where appropriate	To be assessed
Group student activities	Serious behavioural or safeguarding incident	Students, teachers	Establish behaviour expectations and supervision responsibilities	Report, escalate, and follow up in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy	To be assessed

A more comprehensive China School Trip Risk Register may include the following fields:

- Location or activity
- Specific hazard and potential incident
- People who may be affected
- Existing control measures
- Likelihood
- Severity of consequences
- Initial risk rating
- Additional control measures required

- Residual risk rating
- Person responsible
- Target completion date
- Review date

Schools can adapt these fields to match their existing risk assessment procedures and documentation.