

Tour Guide Training

Module 5: Leadership

Trainer Manual

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Manual Introduction

This manual provides the content of what is taught in the module. Please:

1. Read it carefully
2. Make notes, or highlight sections that you need to remember
3. Read it just before the training so that you know what you need to teach
4. Check it after the training so that you can make any additional notes or changes to content that may have come up in the course.

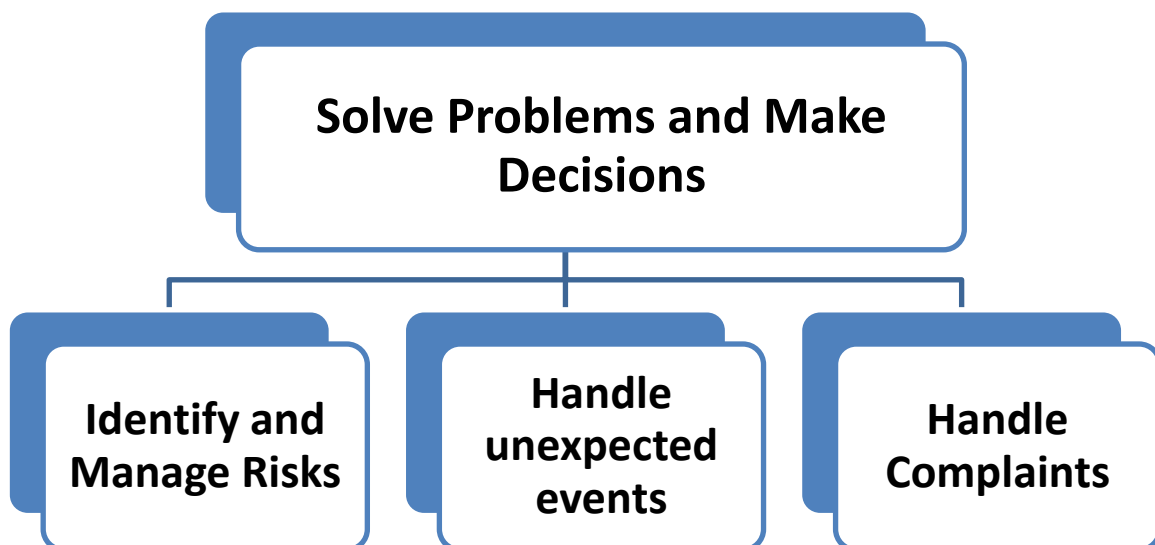
Module Introduction

The job of a Tour Guide can be very challenging! You often have to face different situations and problems and make decisions. Sometimes the situations can be very serious and affect the lives of your tour group.

It is an important part of your job to handle lots of different situations. This module gives you ideas for handling them.

You will learn how to solve problems and make decisions, then how to handle other types of situations/problems.

The content of this module includes:



Topic 1: Solve Problems and Make Decisions

When you have a problem on your tour, there is a process you can use to solve the problem and make a decision.

First remember: you must follow the Tour Operator procedures:

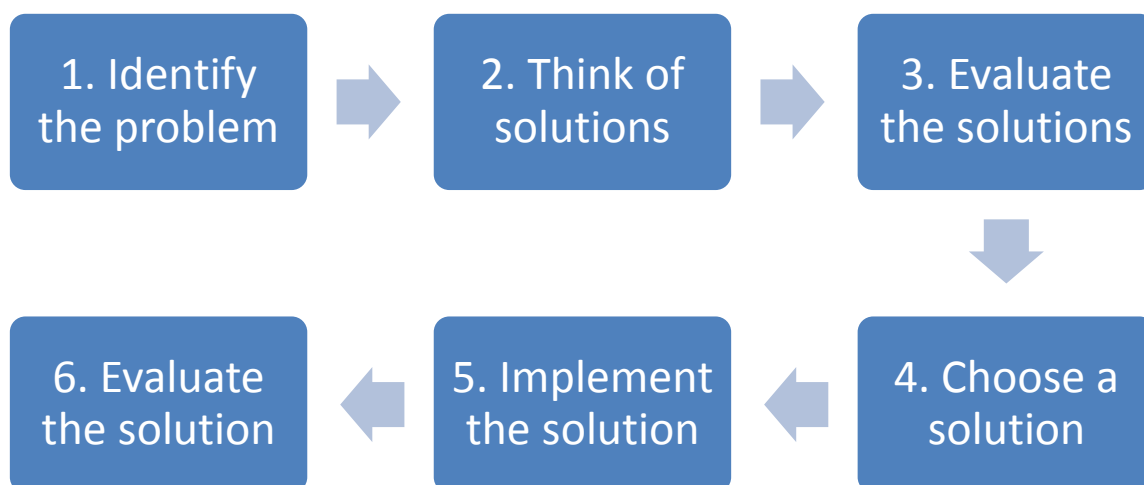
- Call the operations manager to tell them discuss the problem and options.
- They may have solutions you do not know about, or they may find legal or cost problems with the solutions you may have.
- They are there to guide and help you!
- Call especially if the solutions involves money
- Don't call for small problems that you can solve right there – like a guest who wants to change to another room.
- For a road accident, or a flat tyre – call operations so that they know about the problem

1.1 Decision making process

Prevent problems if you can! Try to do things so problems do not happen. In the example below, the guide should check or find out from the DMC if the vehicle has been serviced, if there is a kit (toolbox) to fix problems with, etc.

If you have a problem to solve, here is an easy process to help you solve it:

1. **Identify and understand the problem** – what is the problem?
2. **Think of a few possible solutions** – what can I do to fix it?
3. **Evaluate the solutions** – what is good or bad about each solution?
4. **Choose** the best solution.
5. **Implement** the solution – put it into action
6. **Check** if the solution works.



A Problem Solving example:

1. **Identify and understand the problem:** make sure you know what the problem is about – especially what caused it. Once you understand that, you can think about ways to solve it.

***Example:** the vehicle has broken down. After talking to the driver and checking the vehicle, you find that there is a leak in the fuel system. Your problem is to keep the tour on time and sort out transport as soon as possible.*

Remember: tell the clients what is going on!!
People in Asia are happy to let things happen around them, but people from the West want to know what is going on, how long it will take, when it will be fixed, etc.

2. **Think of a few possible solutions:** the more solutions you can think of, the better your chance to solve the problem.

***Example:** the vehicle cannot be driven and the fuel system needs to be fixed at the closest mechanic shop. What will you do with the 4 tourists you have with you? What are your options?*

3. **Evaluate the solutions** – what is good or bad about each solution?

- **Option 1:** wait until the vehicle is fixed which will take 4 hours. You can keep the tourists busy at the market, have lunch and take a walk around the town. They will also not have

to transfer their luggage and belongings.

Ask the operations office if you are allowed to keep clients happy and satisfied by offering them a free lunch, etc. Whether the vehicle supplier or the Tour Operator pays for this can be decided later

- **Option 2:** *find another vehicle locally – which is quick, but you don't know what the quality is. This will take a while and you have to rent the vehicle and driver at extra cost. The luggage and belongings will have to be transferred.*
- **Option 3:** *ask the Head Office/ Tour Operator to send another vehicle which will take 6 hours. This will take a long time and will cost extra for the company (or supplier of the vehicle, depending on the details of the vehicle contract). Luggage will have to be transferred.*

4. **Choose the best solution with the best outcome:** look at the positives and negatives of each solution and choose the best one. Call and discuss the situation with Head Office/ Tour Operator to make sure it is the best way to act and that you can do it.

Option 2 seems the best option.

That's the standard solution, clients need to be able to do the tour as planned.

The guide must do an incident report by calling Operations, as the Tour Guide cannot make this decision alone. The Operations Manager or even the Director of the Tour Operator needs to approve, as this is a changing quality and contract of the transport service.

The Tour Operator would know the quality of the vehicle, as they would work with local suppliers. The solution depends on where an accident/problem happens. If it is far away, then only Option 1 might be possible.

5. **Implement (do) the solution:** do what you have decided to do, if the operations office allows it.

Example: *make arrangements to hire another vehicle in the town, with the right money and permission from Head Office/ Tour Operator. Transfer luggage and carry on with the tour.*

6. **Check if the solution works:** follow up and see if the tour group is happy with the solution.

Example: *check that tour group is happy with the new vehicle. it might happen that the first vehicle is fixed and catches up with you in the evening, or at a site and can be used again.*

Always remember:

- 1. Call Operations!**
- 2. Tell clients!**

1.2 Handle problems with tour group members

Lao people are quiet spoken and do not like fights. Sometimes you have to handle problems between tour group members from other countries. If this happens, remember:

- problems don't go away, you have to fix them;
- try to use the excuse of safety when talking to the person who is causing a problem: people may listen and change if you show them what they are doing is not safe for themselves or others;
- treat people with respect – talk politely;
- talk with the people you need to, away from others, so you don't embarrass or challenge them in front of people so that they lose face;
- stay calm if you have to say something to a tourist;
- say what you need to carefully so the other person does not feel like you are angry– not: "You must not do that", rather: "We prefer not to do things like that when we are on tour/in this location";
- ask them, don't tell them. Not: 'Stop doing that' Rather: "Please could you not to do that because...?"; and
- try to think how they feel and how they see things. E.g. say something like "I can see you are tired and I know we walked quite a long way and it is hot, but I need you to know it is not acceptable/good for the safety of others for you to walk off on your own to have a rest".

When dealing with problems between tour group members always remember:

- YOU are in control of the tour – not tour group members;
- ask for help or back-up from management, other staff or security if you need it; and
- be very clear about what your responsibility and authority is: about discipline/ correct clients, or even remove them from tour.

What to do to fix problems between tour group members:

- 1 ask the tour members with the problem to come to one side and talk – Say everything that involves these tour members in front of them to keep things clear;
- 2 ask the tour members what the problem is – so you can understand the problem and also allows both parties to say what the problem is;

- 3 on a long tour:, try to solve the real cause of the problem. On a short tour, try to get a solution quickly to make sure the whole tour isn't affected;
- 4 explain how what they are doing is making the other tour members unhappy;
- 5 ask them to stop the bad thing they are doing – and thank them for their cooperation;
- 6 suggest solutions to help solve the problem quickly, like:
 - let people sit in different places (for example, on the coach) not near to each other, or so they cannot see each other;
 - ask parents to watch their children more carefully;
 - put tourists into different groups: split up those with problems with things like viewing, activities, dinner, etc.;
- 7 watch the situation and be prepared to:
 - ask again if you have to – people don't always act differently because you ask them to; and
 - suggest other solutions to problems –allow them to choose a solution they like most; and
- 8 thank people for their cooperation.

Topic 2: Identify and manage risks

There will often be risks to the tour members. You have to see and control these risks to keep your tourists safe.

2.1 What is a risk?

A risk is: a situation where there is danger

A possibility
or threat of damage, injury, liability, loss, or any other negative effect that is caused by external or internal vulnerabilities, and that may be avoided through pre-emptive action



Let's break this down:

Part of the definition	What it means:
1. A probability or threat of	1. Something bad could happen
2. Damage, injury, liability, loss, or any other negative effect	2. This will cause harm to people or property
3. caused by external or internal vulnerabilities	3. because there is not enough protection against the threat/problem
4. May be avoided by taking	4. It can be avoided IF
5. Pre-emptive action	5. Take steps/do things to avoid it

Risk management is the things you do to deal with threats or dangerous things/situations.

Your job as a Tour Guide is to:

1. look for threats that can harm people or things;
2. check how possible it is for these things to happen;
3. see how it can be avoided; and
4. do something to avoid it.

Remember your **Duty of Care** responsibility to your tour members, their property, and the property of the Tour Operator.

Why must we deal with risks?

To:

- avoid breaking the rules of **Duty of Care** – and be sued for damages (a worst case for the guide is that he/ she is the person sued for negligence);
- protect tour group members, tour staff, members of the public and the local community;
- protect the site against damage;
- protect the environment from negative impacts;
- keep the physical resources used safe from damage or loss;
- make sure the activity can be done in a safe way and that you control or avoid any danger, and
- keep the reputation of the Tour Operator safe.

2.2 Manage risks

The types of risks are different from tour to tour depending on:

- **the type of tour:** e.g. an adventure tour or a cultural tour;
- **where you go:** the places you visit;
- **what you do:** activities to do;
- **size of the group:** more people are more difficult to look after because you cannot see all of them all the time;
- **who is in the tour group:** young and adventurous, or older and wiser?
- **weather and local environmental** and other conditions.

There are 3 easy steps to manage risks in tour guiding:

1. **Identify** (look for) any risks;
2. **Assess** (think about) how serious the risk is; and
3. **Control** the risk.



2.2.1 Identify Risks

Check if there are risks to the tour members, their property, to yourself, or to the property of the tour company – e.g. coach, bus, boat.

Check the environment, and think about what you do there (what activity)?

Ask yourself:

- What can go wrong?
- Are there any dangers?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation before? What happened? Can you learn from that?

Risk factors to think about:

1. The physical environment:

- **temperature:** is it too hot, too cold, too wet;
- **conditions:** very steep and slippery; road conditions, river conditions, etc.;
- **time of day:** it may get dark soon, midday heat is too hot, etc.;
- **weather** (at the time and predicted), storms, floods, etc.; and
- **nature:** any dangerous animals or insects?

2. The group characteristics:

- **group size** for the activity (e.g. is it safe to have a large group all on kayaks at the same time in a strong river current?);
- **equipment:** is there enough equipment for everyone – e.g. life jackets; and
- the **personal health and ability** of a tour group: are they fit enough to safely do the activities (e.g. middle aged people on kayaks – including women who may not be strong enough to handle a strong current)

Most Tour Operators have standards that tourists must meet when there are physical activities in the tour like walking, sports, rafting, climbing, motor bike riding etc.

Remember: an activity that is suitable or safe for fit and healthy adults may not be safe or right for children, old people or disabled people.

3. Other factors: check if there are risks to anything else like:

- **lessons learned:** have you experienced or know of risks or accidents that have happened in similar conditions. What can you learn from these?


2.2.2 Assess Risk


Once you have identified a risk, you then have to think about how serious the risk is, and if it really could happen. We use a **risk matrix** to do this.

You need to examine (think about) the risk and decide:

1. **the impact:** what will happen? How serious will it be? How bad could the damage be? Could people be injured or die?
2. **the likelihood:** can it really happen? What is the chance of it happening?

Risk Matrix

Impact 	High	Medium	High	Very serious
	Medium	Low	Medium	High
	Low	Low	Low	Medium
		Low	Moderate	High


Likelihood: will it happen?

Key:

Low Risk: don't worry too much, it probably will not happen. If it does, there won't be too much damage.

Medium Risk: there is a chance that this will happen. If it does, there will be some damage.

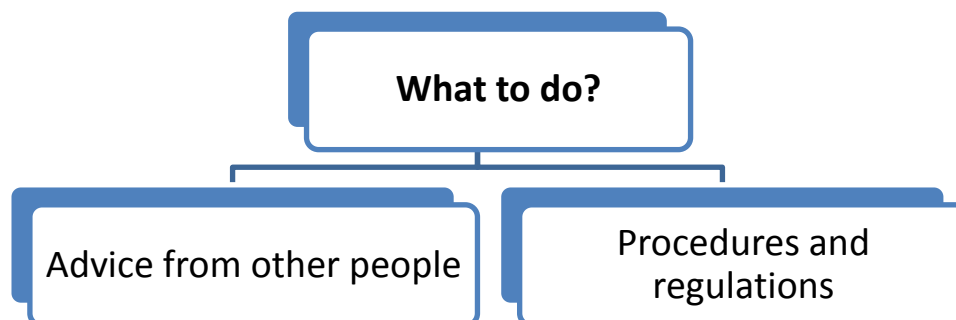
High Risk: there is a real chance that this can happen. If it does, there will be some nasty damage or injury.

Very serious Risk: the risk is very bad and going to happen. There will be very bad damage, maybe death.

2.2.3 Control Risk

Now you have to do something about it. This is called risk control.

How do you decide what to do? You have two places to get help, and you need to use them in the way your company prefers.



If you find a risk, you can talk to people and get their ideas and advice on the situation, e.g.:

- **Operations Manager:** call to explain the situation and ask advice on what to do;
- **other/experienced Tour Guides** who have handled situations like yours; and
- **other Tour Operators** for ideas: another operator may be close and able to help, especially if they are dealing with the same risk like flooding or bad weather.

All good DMCs must have an emergency management procedure (how they handle emergencies) and they must tell guides about this.

Follow risk management rules of the Tour Operator – like:

- standard procedures – what to do with a specific risk;
- checklists or guidelines; and/ or
- laws (rules) on safety: e.g. wear life jackets on a boat.

Remember:

One of the first things you need to do is explain the possible danger to your group. This will help them to understand what is going on, and that you have to make a decision to keep everybody safe.

You have different options, in a specific order. Try the first one first; if that is not possible, then try the next one.

1 **Remove the risk** hazard or threat/danger.

This is the best, most effective and most preferable.

If you cannot remove the risk then try to reduce it with one or more of the ways listed

below.

Example: a big storm is on its way, you are about to get on a boat on the Mekong. The winds will be strong and there is a danger of the boat turning over. The safest option is to wait until the danger is over and the storm has passed before going on the boat.

- 2 **Replacement** – replace a dangerous activity and do a safer one that still gives an experience similar.

You might have to use fake items and not the ‘real thing’, or have tour members watch a video rather than do a real (maybe unsafe) activity.

Example: on a mountain walk, the path has become very slippery with rain, is very steep, dangerous as people could slip and hurt themselves. The replacement is to take a different, safer path.

- 3 **Isolation** – make a space between a danger and the tourists, for example move them away, or put protection between them and the risk.

Example: at a village, when you get out of the car, a scary dog comes barking and looks like it may bite the tourists. Ask the tourists to get back in the vehicle while you arrange for the dog to be taken away before the tourists get out of the car.

- 4 **Make changes** – change how you do things, or change the equipment/tools in the activity to make it safer.

For example:

- smooth out uneven ground;
- use a type of equipment or item to protect tourists from being injured;
- limit the number of tourists that take part at once;
- limit the group size for an activity; and/ or
- closely watch and monitor activities.

Example: you want to play an outdoor game with tourists, but the area has some broken glass on it. First pick up and throw away the broken glass.

Example: a group of tourists is going kayaking in 2-man kayaks. The mothers in the group each want to take their children. As the tour guide, rather tell the women to go together and the men take the children. This balances the strength of the paddlers in case they get into a strong current and struggle

- 6 **Personal protective clothing and equipment (PPE)** – give and use items/clothing

(gloves, footwear, eye protection, helmets, etc.) to protect people's bodies.

PPE is for high risk sports activities where the activity is risky. Special equipment must be used to keep participants safe. PPE is used to do activities, sports, events, games, etc. Examples are cycling, motorbike riding, kayaking, ziplining, etc.

Example: kayaking PPE includes high-visibility life jackets, safety helmets, knee and elbow pads, whistles, etc.

General Risk Management guidelines for Tour Guides

- If the risk cannot be controlled stop the tour activity and do something else.
- Always follow health or safety procedures: e.g. wear lifejackets on boats
- Make sure that your tour members behave responsibly and safely – e.g. don't hang over the edge of a boat.
- Check equipment, places, facilities and the environment beforehand so that you understand if there are any threats or dangers.
- Know the plans for handling emergency situations – e.g. man overboard, boat turning over, accident, injury, etc.
- Stop the tour if the safety cannot be sure – and meet company policy about paying back tour fees for this.
- Give safety advice, directions and demonstrations– including:
 - watch and check to make sure they do what you told them like keep life jackets on on the boat; and/ or
 - give more help and guidance.

Give safety information to tour group members and a practice of safety procedures if needed. Never just believe that they will:

- see risks that you see easily; and
- know what to do in those dangers, avoid damage or injury or protect themselves or their property.

Topic 3: Handle Unexpected Events

Sometimes you have to handle unexpected (unplanned for) events. You must be able to deal with lots of different unexpected events.

3.1 Types of unexpected events

There are two types of unexpected events:

- **negative events** – like accidents and emergencies that change the itinerary, for example:
 - an activity is taken out of the itinerary;
 - something that was advertised cannot be done – e.g. an elephant ride; or
 - changing the arrival time for a destination/site or the time the tour will end.
- **positive events** – things that can be interesting and make a tour better.

Negative Events	Positive Events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather • A broken vehicle • Luggage problems • Something stolen • Injury or accident • Bad tourist behaviour • A site suddenly closes • Equipment breaks down • Bad road conditions, traffic or road accidents that make you late • Festivals or community gatherings – that make places busy/full of people. • Systems failure – technical and equipment that stops working • Injury, accident or death – with a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ tour group member ▪ staff member ▪ member of the public or ▪ An animal • Bad weather– including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bad weather conditions of, e.g. rain, heat, wind that last long ▪ Bad weather in an area close-by which will impact the actual tour area or the tour itself: e.g. flooding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A natural weather event that's unique and interesting: special sunset • An unexpected cultural activity – a wedding, a procession, a festival, a special market, boat race, etc. • You see special wildlife – which you don't normally see • Chances to do an activity <i>that is not on the tour itinerary</i>, but which is part of another tour. Never allow tour group members to do something which has not been risk assessed, tested and approved by the Tour Operator.

How to change the tour if a negative event happens:

- tell the tour group members immediately:
 - explain *what* the problem is –the group will already know there is a problem or can see the problem; and
 - tell them *how* it will change the tour and itinerary.
- decide how to deal with the event- different ways to do this:
 - use a Contingency plan and/or Emergency Management plan that the Tour operator prepared;
 - use your own knowledge and skills; or
 - include the tour group in the discussions and ask what they prefer to do.
- tell the group of the new plans, especially:
 - changes to schedule ; and/ or
 - changes to the itinerary.
- remove an activity or destination and replace it with another one with similar value, quality and experience. Ask management what you can offer as another activity – especially if there are extra costs;
- go fast with activities or commentaries – if you need to move the tour group away from an area fast;
- be positive and ‘sell’ the new plan to the group. Explain:
 - concern for their safety;
 - need to stay on schedule;
 - how good the new activity will be; or
 - arrangements which will apply (refunds, discount vouchers, free additional tour) where a part of the itinerary cannot be done.
- immediately tell management and other people who need to know (attractions, destinations, service providers like restaurants, hotels, etc.) of changes – and the reasons for changes. Update them about new times and/or that you won’t arrive;
- always follow tour operator procedures – don’t do something you are not allowed to do as a Tour Guide. Often you have to decide but management must allow it;
- always think about cost:
 - you must understand that any change from the itinerary may cost the Tour Operator or some other business extra money.

This means Tour Guides are **never** allowed to:

 - offer ‘anything and everything’ to make up for a problem;
 - make the tour longer than planned;
 - provide as much extra items (food, drinks) as you like; and/ or

You may have to:

- change timing of the tour – for example:
 - arrival times;
 - travel times;

- overall time of the tour; and/ or
- finishing time.
- change tour commentary or activities– for example:
 - research new information;
 - get resources/props to do a new tour activity;

How to make changes to the tour for a positive event:

You could:

- stop, pause or delay the tour – so tourists experience the event;
- give tourists information about the event – based on your own knowledge – or find information quickly, and
- explain why the event is special.

Why you need to learn Tour Operator procedures:

You must know the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for a Tour Operator and:

- learn, practice and be able to do all backup plans to handle unexpected events
- where the itinerary, route, activity etc. cannot be followed or if there is a serious emergency (e.g. Thailand tsunami, Lao Airlines plane crash in 2013); and
- learn, practice and be able to do all emergency plans – to handle unexpected emergency events.

Tour Guides must remember:

- keep promises to tourists or service providers;
- your responsibility of Duty of Care;
- know the terms and conditions and content of the tour/s – important for anything that you decide to do;
- report incidents in your daily report or incident report
- be responsible for your group and problems or incidents that happen–like injury, loss of enjoyment, loss of property;
- **do not get angry or upset** – when you deal with problems, challenges and issues in a tour or with tour group members;
- **have good communication** and people management skills – to give information, solve problems, find solutions, and deal with problems; and
- **have lots of patience** – because you *always* deal with and talk to others – it can make you very tired!

3.2 Contingency plans

Tour Operators have 3 types/levels of plans for tours and activities:

- **operational plans** – plans to followed/things to do if everything goes like the plan;
- **emergency plans** – if there is an accident or an emergency; and
- **contingency plans** – back-up plans in case something goes wrong. These can often be used when an unexpected event happens.

Contingency:

- An event that may happen but that is not likely or expected;
- A possibility that must be prepared for

Contingency plans are plans for tour staff to use in case certain predictable or likely events actually happen. They are also called ‘back-up’ plans.

They are “**Plan B**” – they tell you what to do when Plan A (what to do *normally* in the itinerary) cannot happen.

Example:

Plan A (the itinerary)	Plan B (the back-up plan)
Morning elephant ride	In case of rain, do museum tour

These events are not ‘emergencies’ (they do not put life or property in danger) but they can:

- disrupt the tour; and/ or
- disappoint tour group members.

Contingency plans help to:

- make sure tours run well if;
- control costs, time and activities;
- help meet customer expectations;
- guide tour staff and
- follow law, rules and regulations about delivering a tour

IF: there are problems, you can’t stick to the plan, unexpected events happen, things go wrong or you can’t do what was promised

When to use a contingency plan?

In case of:

- bad weather that stops an activity from happening
- unexpected closure of a site or attraction
- unexpected and big change in the size of the group – suddenly larger or smaller

- road closure that stops or delays you getting to your destination
- permits and permissions have been cancelled
- delays like tour group members returning to a point and/or getting on the tour vehicle – and itinerary cannot be finished in the rest of the time.

Who to tell if you have to use a contingency plan:

- management/Head Office;
- service providers like hotels and restaurants;
- your tour group; and
- other tours/Tour Guides who may have similar problems

Using a contingency plan can change activities or itinerary, in which causes:

- changes to other activities on the itinerary;
- need to buy extra supplies or resources; and/ or
- need to complete report at the end of the tour to explain why the plan was used.

Topic 4: Handle complaints

To travel is exciting, but it can be stressful. To be in a strange land, sleep in different beds, wake up early, go to bed late, long days of travel, etc., can make tourists tired and unhappy. This is often why people make complaints on tours.

4.1 Why people complain

Most complaints are because something happened or did not happen!

It is very important that you understand the tourist and provide good customer service! You have to know your tour members very well, know what they want and expect, and do this as best you can.

If you don't, they will complain. Conflicts and complaints are because expectations were not met:

- tourism is a **Service Industry** – we provide a service
- tourists have expectations and pay money to get what they want;
- Saving money to go on holiday is a decision almost as important as buying a house and a car. It is important to give good service and value for money;
- Complaints are normal – we must deal with them professionally. Tour Operators expect:
 - **1 small complaint per 500 tourists** (e.g. does not like the hotel room, does not like the guide who has to be replaced, etc.); and
 - **1 big complaint or serious incident per 5000 tourists.**
- . A tourist with unrealistic/unreasonable expectations or bad/insulting manners is not a professional complaint.

DMC Opinion: Managing and Avoiding Complaints

Antony Giblin: General Manager: Travel Indochina and Insider Journeys

“In this day and age and in this industry you need to aim for **zero complaints**.

This is possible! We have had some years in this office where there have been no written complaints.

We live in a time of social marketing where service and product feedback is completely transparent – and could cause massive damage to a brand name or a business. Clients can write whatever they want on the Internet for anyone to see.

You therefore have to take complaints minimisation very seriously.

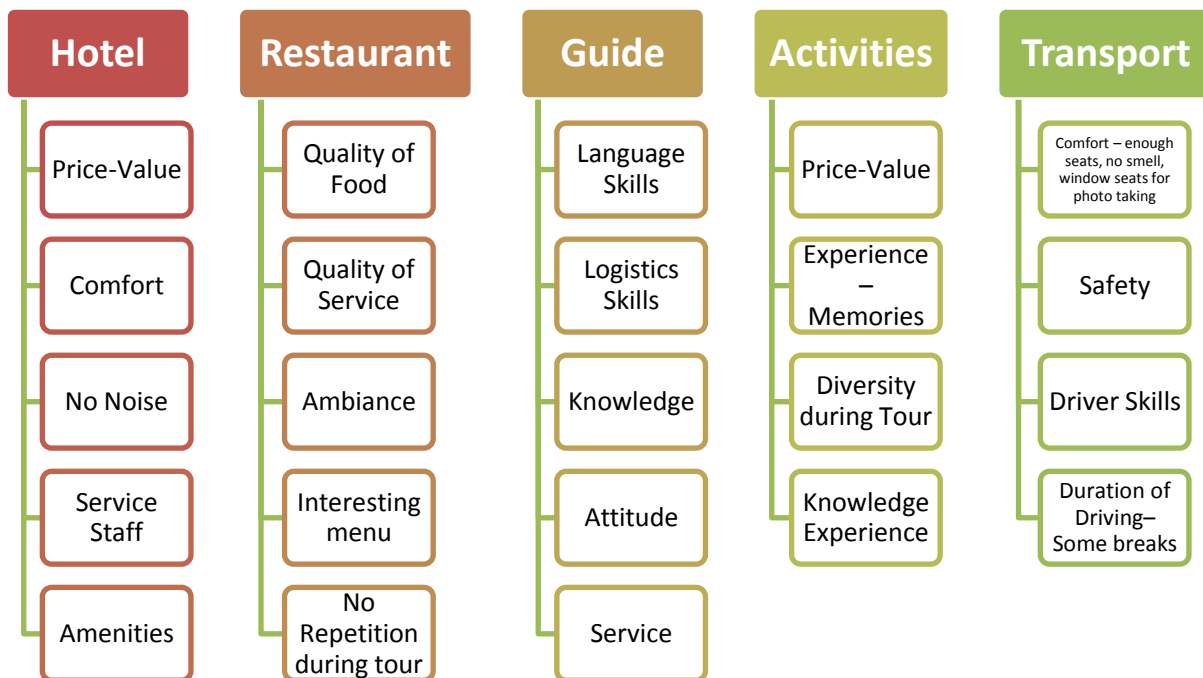
One of the best things we do to avoid complaints is to call pax on tour while they are in the destination. This gives us the chance to identify service failures and to do something about them (or make amends for them) before the clients have left the destination. “



4.2 Customer/Tourist Expectations

Tourists have certain expectations of the whole tour: what suppliers deliver (restaurants and hotels), the guide (very important – YOU!), the activities they do, and the transport they use.

Their expectations can be shown as follows for each of these tour elements:



4.3 Why is it so important to handle customer complaints?

Think about these facts about customer (tourist) service and customer complaints.

- A bad experience shows more than a good experience. A tourist who has a **good experience will tell this only to 6 – 10 other people**. Someone who has a **bad experience will tell 10 to 15 other people**;

- Tourists share their experiences with other people from **all over the world** – even total strangers – using platforms like Tripadvisor which is very easy! Bad comments or experiences will make news!
- tourists who have had a problem that was solved well become more loyal customers than those who have never had a problem with a company;
- When tourists tell you what they think about your services and performance, they give very valuable information.
- Complaints or tourist feedback tells a company:
 - where they have failed to deliver expected service;
 - where the company can improve service and performance; and
 - what customers appreciate.

Remember:

You can apologise for anything as long as you apologise the right way!

4.4 Benefits of complaints:

A tourist who complains gives the company a second chance. Sometimes a last chance, depending on what happened. This is why complaints are important to grow good and strong customer relationships, and why we should be thankful for complaints received, and deal with them in a good way.

Receiving a complaint is not a bad thing:

- A complaint is a chance to impress our customers about how well we respond and make them happy!
- sometimes we don't know there is a problem unless we hear it in a complaint; and
- if the complaint is handled/ corrected well, they are more likely to come back and use the services again, and become a long term customer.

We should only hear a complaint once because we should fix it the first time we hear it through:

- better service;
- fixing a procedure/way to do things;
- dealing with the suppliers so their service is better – e.g. restaurants, hotels, etc.; and
- teaching tour staff to do things differently.

Remember: most tourists who have a complaint just want it fixed. They only get angry or upset when their complaint is not fixed in a way that makes them happy.

How do we know about complaints:

- our tourists – complain directly to guides or the company;
- feedback forms;

- suppliers;
- Tour Operators (our Clients/ employers); and/ or
- guides or drivers.

4.5 Deal with customer complaints

'Prompt' means *'done at once/immediately'*. It is very important to deal with customer complaints *promptly* - as soon as they are received.

Why?:

- so tourist can see the complaint is taken seriously and you are doing something to fix it;
- to stop the situation from getting worse;
- to help the tourist with their problem; and
- to satisfy the customer.

Sometimes things go wrong, even if we try our best. **How** we handle and respond to complaints will either develop or damage customer relations and show the service quality of the company. An angry and frustrated tourist can be changed into a happy and thankful tourist if we know how.

A complaint that is not dealt with immediately causes more complaints, dissatisfaction and unhappiness by the tourist.

A few Helpful tips:

- it is not **what** you say - but **how** you say it!
- separate angry customers from a tour group - some people act crazy and make the problem bigger to get attention;
- keep a safe space between you and the tourist (at least **1- 2** metres), because some people do become physically threatening;
- humour can really help in tough situations, but make sure it is appropriate;
- Stay in a good mood – don't get angry or upset; and
- if the tourist has to wait while the problem is fixed, make sure you offer a magazine to read or something to drink and a comfortable place to wait.

4.6 Step by step complaint handling

It is best to have a plan to deal with them so you can handle the complaint well and without taking it personally.

Below is 5-stepsto deal with customer complaints:

Step 1: What is the problem?

Step 2: What caused the problem?

Step 3: What can I do to fix the situation

Step 4: How can I build rapport?

Step 5: What needs to change?

Let us take a closer look at each of these:

1 What is the problem?

Listen to the complaint:

- tourist may be angry or upset – allow them to vent (say) their frustration;
- listen carefully and let them say all that they have to say;
- do not interrupt or make any excuses;
- use the right body language – eye contact, nod your head, and make understanding sounds like hmm, uh-huh, and so on; and
- let them talk or rant (get angry/shout) until they are finished.

Apologise:

- even if it is not your fault;
- they need to hear an apology, – even if it is a general apology; and
- say something like: “I am really sorry about this”;

Empathise with (try understand) their problem:

- let the tourist/s know that you understand;
- try to put yourself in your tourist’s shoes: look at the problem as they must feel;
- imagine you had the same problem, and how you would feel if the same thing happened to you. For example, the complaint is that their room is so noisy that they cannot sleep. How would you feel if you were so tired that you cannot enjoy your activities properly? You would also be upset!
- the problem is much clearer when you see it from the tourist’s eyes;
- show them you care by saying that you would also be upset if the same thing had happened to you; and
- that will make them feel that they are understood.

Tell the customer you are going to help

Write down important details

Don’t get upset!

2 What caused the problem?

- Find out about the situation
- Decide if the tourist has a real complaint
- Apologise again if necessary
- Explain what happened

3 What can you do to fix the situation?

- Offer your best solution
- Offer another (second) solution
- Tell the tourist what you are going to do to fix the problem
- Do something to fix the problem

4 How can I build rapport?

- Thank the customer for the chance to fix it
- Offer some payment or refund (if employer allows it)
- When you have done something, tell the tourist the progress to fix the problem.
- Keep telling them about progress so they know you are doing something to help them
- Check up later to see if all is well with the tourist and that they are happy again
- **End in a positive way:** Thank the tourist for his/her complaint, for example, ‘thank you for bringing this to our attention’.

5 What needs to change?

- Find out how you can prevent this in the future
- See what needs to change to make things better the next time

Some guidelines

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm • Be professional • Be positive • Focus on a solution • Try hard to fix the problem • Act as if you are in control of the situation (even if you don't feel it) • Deal with it quickly and immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately defend (make excuses for) yourself or the organisation • Deny anything about the complaint (for example, saying ‘no, that cannot be possible’) • Blame someone else (e.g. the customer or the travel agent) • Take complaints personally • Get angry • Yell or shout

Note:

- if it is a small complaint – you can handle it;
- if it is a bigger complaint, the issue must be handled by DMC / Tour Operator management; and/ or
- good DMC/ Tour Operator management will phone or meet with tourist, if this helps fix the problem.

How to avoid complaints:

Complaints come when expectations are not met. If you manage expectations, you can avoid complaints!

Example:

Clients must stay in a hotel which is not of a very high standard but is the best available in a small town. To avoid a complaint, the guide should check the tour itinerary in advance to make sure it properly describes the hotel.

The guide should also be very careful to properly set expectations about this accommodation (set lower rather than higher). For example, announce that this is a simple hotel in a small town, and that it has very simple facilities, but is clean and the best that there is in the area. On check-in, the tourists are OK with the hotel – so a problem is avoided.

4.7 Deal with Anger

In Laos, people do not really get angry and shout at each other. So, you may not be used to tourists (from the West) who get angry, or who are not happy and say horrible things. This section will help you to handle these difficult situations.

When you deal with emotions (feelings), you can become emotional yourself. To avoid this, remember:

1. angry tourist may be used to people getting angry with them too. If you become angry it will just make things worse;
2. don't take it personally. See it as a way of talking and a problem that needs to be fixed;

However, if the problem is caused by your own behaviour or something you have done or not done, then you have to accept that you must change what you are doing or how you are doing it.

3. feelings are never right or wrong. They are just feelings;
4. be confident, not aggressive. say things that let the customer know that you are confident. Aggression only makes it worse; confident behaviour helps with solving problems;
5. recognize that angry people go through stages of frustration:
 - stage 1 is feeling helpless or powerless;
 - Stage 2 is feeling restrained or frustrated; and
 - Stage 3 is the full anger stage.
 It is difficult for people in Stage 3 to listen because they are too angry;
6. listening is the most important skill to deal with anger. Often, if someone who is upset sees you care enough to listen to the problem, the anger gets less and the person is happier to find/ listen to a solution; and
7. try to hear what the exact problem is and ignore any bad things they may say to you.