



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Emergencies in Visitor Guiding

From a **visitor guiding perspective**, an **emergency** is defined as:

An unexpected, serious, or critical event or situation that arises during a tour or related activity, which poses an immediate threat to the safety, health, well-being, or security of guests, the guide, or other personnel, and/or significantly disrupts the planned operation of the tour, thereby requiring immediate, decisive, and often pre-defined action.

Key characteristics of an emergency in visitor guiding include:

- **Unexpected Nature:** It's an unplanned occurrence that deviates sharply from the normal course of events.
- **Imminent Threat:** It presents a direct and urgent danger (physical, psychological, financial, or reputational).
- **Requires Immediate Action:** There is no time for prolonged deliberation; prompt response is essential to mitigate harm or negative impact.
- **Potential for Significant Disruption:** It can force a change in itinerary, require evacuation, or even lead to the cancellation of the tour.
- **Beyond Normal Operations:** It surpasses routine complaints or minor inconveniences and necessitates specific, often specialized, protocols.
- **Varying Scale:** Emergencies can range from isolated individual incidents (e.g., a guest's serious injury) to large-scale events affecting the entire group or region (e.g., natural disaster, political unrest).

Examples of Emergencies in Visitor Guiding:

- **Health/Medical:** Severe illness (e.g., heart attack, stroke, acute allergic reaction), serious injury (e.g., fall, accident), epidemic outbreaks.

- **Safety/Security:** Theft, assault, lost or missing guest, political unrest, civil disturbance, terrorism, active shooter.
- **Logistical/Operational:** Vehicle breakdown in a remote area, road closures, critical infrastructure failure (e.g., hotel fire), unannounced attraction closures that cannot be re-routed.
- **Environmental/Natural Disasters:** Extreme weather conditions (e.g., flash flood, severe storm, heatwave), earthquakes, wildfires, volcanic activity.
- **Psychological/Social:** Escalation of group conflict, severe emotional distress of a guest, death of a passenger.

In essence, an emergency from a visitor guiding perspective demands the guide to shift from their primary role of leading and informing to becoming a **first responder, problem-solver, and crisis manager**, prioritizing the safety and well-being of their group above all else.

How to Deal with Emergencies in Visitor Guiding

Accidents, vehicle breakdowns, or the theft/loss of possessions and travel documents are highly stressful situations that can quickly escalate into emergencies on a tour. As **visitor guides**, you're expected to handle these challenges professionally and calmly to ensure the safety and well-being of your guests and the smooth continuation of the tour.

Theft or Loss of Possessions

When a guest reports stolen or lost items, here's how to manage the situation:

- **Gather Details:** Record precisely what item(s) were stolen or lost, along with the approximate time and location of the incident.
- **Assess Value:** Determine the approximate value of the missing objects (e.g., money, jewelry).
- **Consider Police Report:** While your guest may be emotional, in most cases, involving local authorities for minor theft of possessions (especially money or jewelry without unique identifiers) might not be practical. The time required for police procedures is often disproportionate to the likelihood of recovery. Discuss this reality calmly with the guest.
- **Maintain Tour Flow:** Ensure the day's program or itinerary is not interrupted for the rest of the group. The needs of the majority must be balanced with supporting the individual.

Lost or Stolen Travel Documents

The loss or theft of an ID, passport, or visa is a critical emergency, as it's impossible to leave most countries without valid documentation. Immediate action is required:

- **Report to Police:** Lost or stolen IDs, passports, or visas must be reported to the police immediately.
- **Inform Diplomatic Mission:** The consulate or diplomatic representation (embassy) responsible for issuing the document must be informed at once.
- **Contact Tour Organizer:** Immediately notify your agency or tour operator.
- **Leverage Travel Insurance:** Discuss the situation with the guest, as travel insurance often provides support for such emergencies.
- **Maintain Liaison:** Continue to cooperate with the diplomatic mission until a temporary travel document has been issued, allowing the guest to continue their journey or return home.

Traffic Accident

If the coach or tour vehicle is involved in a traffic accident, follow these emergency procedures in order:

- **Determine Exact Location:** Pinpoint your precise location immediately.
- **Assess Casualties:** Quickly determine if there are any injured or deceased individuals.
- **Seek Medical Assistance within Group:** Ask if there is a doctor or certified first-aiders within the group who can provide immediate assistance.
- **Call Police:** Contact the police immediately. They will arrange for an ambulance if necessary.
- **Coordinate with Driver:** Discuss and coordinate the next steps with the coach driver.
- **Inform Tour Organizer:** Notify your agency or tour operator promptly.
- **Document and Photograph:** Record the accident details and take pictures as evidence for later reporting.

Coach Breakdown

A coach breakdown requires swift action to minimize disruption and ensure guest comfort and safety:

- **Determine Location:** Identify your exact location.
- **Coordinate with Driver:** Discuss next steps with the coach driver. Can the coach be fixed on-site? Can the coach company provide a replacement vehicle quickly?
- **Communicate to Guests (Short Delay):** If the coach can be fixed quickly, communicate this information and the estimated timeframe to your guests. If possible and safe, suggest guests leave the coach to go inside a nearby service station. Otherwise, for safety reasons, advise them to stay inside the coach.

- **Inform Tour Organizer:** Contact your organizer immediately to report the breakdown and any potential delays.
- **Notify Attractions:** Contact scheduled attraction providers to inform them of your late arrival for entrances.
- **Re-book if Necessary:** If the delay means you'll miss scheduled attractions, contact the organizer to discuss possible re-booking or alternative arrangements.
- **Await Replacement (if unfixable):** If the coach cannot be fixed, await the arrival of a replacement vehicle.
- **Document Everything:** Meticulously record all communications and timings during the recovery period, including possible outcomes like replacement coaches, delays, missed entrances, or missed meals.
- **Arrange Alternatives:** Work with the organizer to arrange suitable replacements or alternatives for any missed entrances, meals, or other services.

Case Study: Carlos's Stolen Wallet

Scenario: You're leading a group to an archaeological site with a ferry connection. During lunch, Carlos approaches you distressed.

Carlos: "Oh no, something terrible just happened to me. My wallet got stolen. All my money... just gone!"

You: "Okay, Carlos. Please calm down. Are you sure the wallet is missing?"

Carlos: "Yes, I am sure. I have now searched everything and my wallet is gone."

You: "All right, Carlos. We need to act quickly, but also keep the group on schedule for the ferry. You can file the report now, but you won't be able to join us at the archaeological site. You'll rejoin the group later at the hotel."

Carlos: "Okay, that's how we'll do it!"

Carlos proceeded to file a police report while the tour group continued their visit to the archaeological site. He successfully rejoined the group later at the hotel.

This example illustrates the critical balance a guide must strike: supporting the individual in an emergency while ensuring the tour continues for the entire group.

Crisis Management in Visitor Guiding

A **crisis** is a time of extreme difficulty or danger, often demanding swift and challenging decisions. These can range from health threats (like a global pandemic) to natural disasters, political unrest, or even terrorist attacks. During these most severe emergency situations, **visitor guides** must act promptly, professionally, and successfully to manage the crisis. Here are the recommended steps to take.

Throughout any crisis, the guide must **remain calm and organized**, communicating with all stakeholders in a concise and factual manner.

The Evolving Landscape of Global Crises

The modern world faces continuous challenges from natural disasters, terrorism, and conflicts, making safety a paramount concern in the tourism industry. Recent years have tragically demonstrated how these events and crises significantly impact tourism, often endangering far more people than the direct victim count suggests. Few countries remain entirely exempt from such threats.

For example, a regional conflict, while not directly involving tourists, can lead to widespread travel advisories, flight cancellations, and a dramatic drop in visitor numbers for an entire country or even a broader geographical area. Similarly, an unexpected natural disaster, even if localized, can paralyze infrastructure and cause widespread panic among travelers.

Safety Measures and Early Warning Systems in Tourism

Tourists may often be unaware or uninformed about current dangers and risks, or they may be unfamiliar with foreign customs and cultures. Recognizing this, tour operators and organizers have implemented robust safety measures to fulfill their legal obligations of keeping their customers safe. These measures typically range from sophisticated early warning systems to detailed emergency protocols, which can differ from one organizer to another.

Early Warning Systems: Staying Ahead of Threats

Most reputable tour operators utilize modern early warning systems to monitor global events that could impact their tours. Examples of such systems include:

- **A3M Global Monitoring:** A comprehensive information and communication system for travel management, used by major tour groups like TUI, that provides real-time alerts.
- **Risk Compass:** Another advanced system designed to help assess and manage travel risks.

Components of Effective Early Warning Systems:

1. **Information Gathering:** This core monitoring system operates 24/7, continuously updated with current political and meteorological news, as well as health information from around 200

international sources. It also tracks potential disruptions like strikes and large demonstrations.

2. **Analysis:** An expert team evaluates all incoming information. Relevant insights are then displayed on a world map using different colored symbols to visually represent varying risk levels.
3. **Communication:** Tour operators receive numerous reports daily, ranging from bomb attacks to severe weather warnings or taxi strikes. To avoid "information overkill," each customer (and guide) receives only the messages that directly affect their specific tour or destination.

Proactive Measures for Visitor Guides:

As a visitor guide, you are on the front lines. You must actively work to avoid critical situations by utilizing modern communication tools and taking preventive measures:

- **Follow Long-Term Warnings:** Adhere to travel region warnings issued by your country's national disaster/emergency ministry.
- **Consult with Organizer:** Maintain close communication with your tour organizer and strictly comply with their established procedures and guidelines.
- **Prepare a Risk Assessment:** Conduct a thorough risk assessment for each tour, identifying potential hazards specific to the itinerary and demographics of your group.
- **Comply with Authorities:** Always follow instructions from local authorities to keep any risk as low as possible.
- **Take Weather Forecasts Seriously:** Pay close attention to extreme weather forecasts and adjust plans accordingly.
- **Avoid/Abort Crisis Areas:** Avoid traveling to areas experiencing a crisis. If you unexpectedly find your group in such an area, immediately abort the travel.

Addressing Specific Crisis Scenarios (Revisited and Enriched)

1. Missing Participant or Immediate Danger

Safeguarding customers is paramount. A participant might go missing for various reasons, such as a misunderstanding of meeting times or deciding to explore independently without informing the guide. However, missing vulnerable customers could be at serious risk.

What would you do if a participant is missing?

1. **Step 1: Make Immediate Contact:** Try reaching them by mobile phone or a friend's phone (exchanging numbers at the start of the tour is highly advisable).

2. **Step 2: Revisit Last Known Location:** Go back to the last place of contact or wait at the last agreed meeting point.
3. **Step 3: Involve Authorities if No Contact:** If you cannot establish contact, **immediately notify the police and inform your tour organizer.**

2. Participant as a Victim of a Criminal Incident

Depending on the severity of the incident, a customer may require immediate help:

- **Notify the police and a doctor** (if injured) without delay.
- **Record all details:** What happened, the exact time and location of the incident, any possessions stolen, and whether the person is injured.
- If the guest needs to be **hospitalized**, protect their belongings and identify/instruct any accompanying friend or relative.
- **Inform your tour organizer** and discuss the next steps and instructions.

3. Death of a Passenger

The death of a customer on a tour is a profound emergency that requires a sensitive, step-by-step approach:

1. **Step 1: Get Immediate Help: Notify the police and a doctor immediately.**
2. **Step 2: Secure Personal Papers: Collect the deceased's personal papers in the presence of a witness** to ensure transparency and accountability.
3. **Step 3: Inform Organizer: Inform your tour organizer immediately** with all relevant details (name, participant number, services booked by the deceased, time and preliminary cause of death, personal data) and await their further instructions.
4. **Step 4: Notify Embassy/Diplomatic Mission:** The organizer will typically handle this, but be aware that the embassy or responsible diplomatic mission will need to be notified. Official documents (death certificates, police reports, export permits for the corpse) will need to be translated into certified translations.

Important Considerations:

- **Do not contact the deceased's relatives independently;** always coordinate with the tour organizer first.
- Recognize that a death will profoundly impact the other participants and the tour itinerary. Be prepared to address their needs and adjust plans accordingly.

Responding to Unforeseen Large-Scale Crises

If unexpected natural disasters suddenly occur, or if the group encounters armed conflicts or a terrorist attack, the **integrity and safety of all involved have the highest priority**. In such extreme circumstances, you must **immediately follow the crisis procedures outlined by your organizer**.

Preparing for the Unforeseen

Crises present immense challenges for us as **visitor guides**. We not only have extensive organizational tasks but also must respond to the emotional needs of participants, all while managing our own well-being. Every crisis is unique, yet we can significantly improve our preparedness by mentally rehearsing different scenarios.

- **Practice Crisis Scenarios:** Role-play various crisis situations with a friend or colleague, following all recommended steps in the correct order. While no amount of practice can fully prepare you emotionally for a guest's death on tour, rehearsing emergency procedures will help you act effectively when under immense stress.
- **Develop Coping Mechanisms:** Research relaxation and breathing techniques that can help you manage severe stress. Practice these techniques regularly with a friend, relative, or colleague.

Activities for Enhanced Preparation

To further strengthen your crisis management skills, complete these tasks:

- **Analyze National Legislation:** Research the national legislation for disaster and emergency management in your country (usually available on your government's website). Prepare a list of main actions, including designated evacuation points, key emergency stakeholders, and essential services (e.g., hospitals, armed forces) in your region.
- **Research Organizational Procedures:** Research your organization's specific emergency procedures. Create a step-by-step protocol for yourself to follow in case of a crisis.
- **Compare Guidelines:** Compare your organization's emergency procedures with the national emergency guidelines of your country. Identify any gaps in emergency provision or areas where coordination might be challenging.

You have successfully completed this important learning unit on crisis management in visitor guiding. I look forward to seeing you again in the next learning unit.