



Gretna's Revolution by Laura Cejka



A TRAVELING ENSEMBLE'S CHECKLIST

By R. Adam Clark

After selecting music, planning choreography, auditioning parts, fitting costumes, constructing a set, and rehearsing your ensemble, you have decided to take the show on the road. Have you prepared for this? Do you have everything? What needs to be done in order to move this musical juggernaut?



Let's all face it, we would travel a lot more with our ensembles if it were as easy as, "Okay, get on the bus and let's go!" But, it's not – not even close. There are two major logistical areas to consider when it comes to off-site performances: Administration and Travel. The first area is always your responsibility, but the latter is only yours if you are a glutton for punishment!

You will need to handle the administrative responsibilities associated with the trip, and while you are busy trying to ready your ensemble for the performances, you will need to be sure that you have covered your bases. The logistics for moving a group to a performance may be handled by a travel professional and will significantly lighten your workload.

The following checklist is designed to help guide you in preparation for travel.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Administrative Permission – These tasks are probably the most logical first steps in all travel. It's good to have your principal/headmaster on board with your travel plans, and also have them put it on the calendar. This helps build support for your efforts, and also credibility for student absences in other academic areas.

Forms & Paperwork – Some of the initial paperwork for your central office may include Travel Approval, field trip request forms, out of state travel forms, and means of transportation forms. You will also need the emergency contact forms, insurance forms, and indemnity forms from all travelers.

Financial Account – Depending on your system, it is generally a good idea to separate your travel funds from general operating funds. If you are not using a travel company, you will become an accountant. Using your school bookkeeper or booster club treasurer, I recommend setting up a separate account.

Fundraisers – If you are going to raise funds, you will likely need permission for that. Select a profitable fundraiser with a proven track record for success, then complete the necessary forms with your administration.

Chaperones - With any travel, wrangling students in foreign places is better not done alone. No general goes into battle without a few good commanding officers. A good ratio is one adult per six students, but check for school policy. Have student/chaperone groups assigned in advance.

Housing List – This list is often needed by hotels in advance. It is never a good idea to put adults in rooms with students who are not their own children. Never.

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Contest Registration – If your ensemble is preparing to compete, be sure and complete the application - which may include submitting your program, a picture of your ensemble, and possibly a recording.

Traveler list – One week prior to departure, a final list of all travelers should be provided to school administration, faculty, and staff. Also, it is a good idea to communicate with a school nurse to help make you aware of any medical concerns.

Meetings – While everyone is busy, sometimes meetings are necessary. An initial meeting should be held to present the trip to the families and students. A price and payment plan including specific deadlines for money collection and a cut-off date for sign-ups should be presented at this meeting.

Another meeting should be held about one week prior to departure in order to go over what to pack, chaperone identification, form collection, review of the itinerary, and a clear presentation of rules. If you are using a travel agency, they will most likely attend and present at both of these meetings.



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Traveling continued

TRAVEL

Transportation – If you are traveling by air, you will want to find a carrier with nonstop service if possible, or a large enough layover to reorganize your group between flights. Don't be surprised for larger groups if you travel on two separate flights. All groups will need bus service.

While some groups meet at the airport to cut out one element of cost, once you arrive at the destination you will want a reliable bus company ready to pick up your group and transport them to the hotel, or contest venue. You may also need their services as you sightsee, tour, shop, and eat. The complete itinerary will be due to the bus company prior to departure.

Performance – If you are competing or performing, you will want to know the logistics of where to meet any performance representative, the timeframe, the flow of the contest, and the departure procedures.

Entertainment & Dining – While on any trip you will want to experience all a great location has to offer. Tickets to sight-seeing attractions, exhibits, and amusement parks should be sorted out prior to arrival to maximize time at the venue. Finding a place large enough to accommodate your group can be a challenge when selecting dining options, and making sure they can meet the dietary needs of your group must also be considered.

Food courts, buffets, and continental breakfasts are always a great idea, otherwise you will need to evaluate their menu options. Make sure to budget adequate time between locations for traffic, and sufficient time at the various locations to experience the venue. A tour guide is always a good idea – they know the area and can make a trip into an experience.

Lodging – Quite possibly the most important decision when housing a group, lodging can make or break a trip. The location of the housing site is almost as important as the quality of the facility. Placing your group too far from the venue can cost you valuable time in the commute, but a hotel in the wrong part of town can be a constant security risk. Finding a place to stay that will be comfortable, accommodating, and clean yet affordable is the most important decision for the trip outside of your destination choice.

I hope that this checklist provides you with an easy overview and helpful guide to putting together your group travel. When it comes to travel, there is so much to consider before you even set foot on the bus! I always recommend the use of a travel professional to lighten the workload of the director. It is not impossible for a director to manage the travel logistics, but with the work of rehearsing the ensemble to make them performance-ready, and the administrative work to prepare for departure, it is often the best way to off-load labor to an experienced professional.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: R. Adam Clark is both a band director and a travel specialist with Main Street Travel Co. Owner Jana Smith and R. Adam Clark have helped several groups travel, perform, and experience world-class performances since the company's founding. For more information on hiring a travel specialist visit www.mainstreettravelco.com or call 800-593-1262.

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