



CHILD PROTECTION CODES OF CONDUCT

OUR COMMITMENTS



Through this Child Safe Policy, EXO Travel wishes to state its strong commitment to protecting children in Asia and to position itself as a proactive, pioneering tour company that has, since 2016 become the first ChildSafe certified company worldwide.

EXO endorses the UN's International Convention of Children's RIGHTS. This convention sets out the rights that must be realised for children to develop their full potential; free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and have their own rights. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development.

At EXO Travel, we are committed, through our own activities, to contribute to a more sustainable development of the destinations where we operate and, ensuring as much as we can act upon, that children are growing up in a safe and fulfilling environment which is a prerequisite to future well being of any society.

It is even more crucial in the countries where we operate where social rights are nascent, poverty rates are still high and a large population of disadvantaged children are at risk (child refugees, urban migrant's children, children with disabilities, children of minority or indigenous groups) and, are still too often considered as money makers and cheap labour, while being denied their basic rights such as a free primary education.

Because they are still developing, children are especially vulnerable to poor living conditions such as poverty, inadequate health care, nutrition, safe water, housing and environmental pollution. The effects of disease, malnutrition and poverty threaten the future of children and therefore the future of the societies in which they live.

DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS A CHILD? A child is a person who is under 18 years of age except if the national law of the concerned country states otherwise. Children and young people are persons aged between 12 and 17 years of age and are clearly covered by our guidelines. When we are talking about children, they are our own children, the children of our employees and suppliers, the children who are travelling through our services, and the children in the communities where we work and visit.

WHAT IS CHILD WELFARE? Child welfare refers to ensuring the protection, safety and well-being of children. We want to ensure children are safe from abuse, but also contribute to building environments where children can develop emotionally, physically, cognitively, and socially. On the other hand, child safety is making sure that children are safe from abuse and harm.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE? According to the World Health Organization definition, it is related to 'all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power'.



Physical abuse occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child. This may take the form of but is not limited to slapping, punching, shaking, burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns, fractures etc.

Emotional abuse is a chronic attack on a child's or a young person's self esteem. It can take the form of but is not limited to name calling, threatening, ridiculing, intimidating or isolating the child or young person.

Sexual abuse is any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child or a young person regardless of whether physical injuries are sustained. Child sexual abuse is a physical violation of a child's body through any sort of sexual contact or psychological violation of a child's space through verbal or visual sexual behavior.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's or a young person's basic needs: Physical needs, such as adequate nutrition, medical care, personal hygiene, shelter and appropriate supervision.

CHILD SAFE CERTIFIED

EXO is committed to contributing to the protection of children and supporting their sound development, and we actively spread and promote children's rights among our suppliers and clients. As a leading tour company...

Our guiding principles are as follows:

- All children are human beings, who are the subject and receivers of human rights that EXO Travel will respect at all times.
- All children have equal rights to protection from all forms of abuse and exploitation regardless of their gender, race, health situation, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, social background or culture. Child abuse is never acceptable.
- All children should be encouraged to fulfill their potential and inequalities should be challenged.
- All staff, board members, guides, partners, beneficiary organizations, and our suppliers have a responsibility to support the care and protection of children.

- ✗ WILL NOT promote or sell activities that could potentially harm children such as orphanage/shelter, slums, school visits, unsupervised activities with children, child labor and sexual exploitation
- ✗ WILL NOT employ children under the age of 18 years old or 15 with specific conditions
- ✗ WILL NOT produce advertisements / communication that is abusive to children
- ✗ WILL NOT directly or indirectly complicit in any Children rights abuse.

EXO Travel is a ChildSafe Certified Travel Business. ChildSafe is an international movement to protect children from abuse and exploitation. ChildSafe involves everyone in the protection of children, particularly the travel industry which directly interacts with vulnerable people. Travel businesses and travel professionals can make a significant impact on the well-being of children and communities.

[Find out more information here.](#)



- ✓ WILL raise awareness to its partners on the minimum standards of protection for the children to include in their programs and activities.
- ✓ WILL follow ChildSafe's 7 Standards and embed best practices in its operations.
- ✓ WILL ensure tours are free from activities harmful to children and families.
- ✓ WILL train all staff, tour guides and therefore travelers to better support and protect local communities and children.
- ✓ WILL report any risks to children, incidences or suspicious of child abuse and exploitation.

WE CARE FOR CHILDREN

At EXO Travel, we ensure that all our employees are aware of the problems of child abuse and the risks to children.

Our company should **respect national laws** within each of our destinations relating to fair wages, maternity, and paternity leave and offer flexible working hours to accommodate for pregnancy and child care needs. This may include breastfeeding, attending pre-natal care appointments or being at home with their children after school or at night.

When hiring new employees we carry out **reference checks** and where applicable we seek police background checks, especially for anyone expected to work at a community level or in any settings where they may interact with children. We ensure they will meet national laws requirements for working with children.

We **do not accept child labour** below the minimum working age and provide decent working conditions for all personnel to be able to look after their own children. These requirements are included in our employment contract conditions, as well as in our suppliers contracts sustainability addendum.

We provide **internships and training** programs to local youth, potentially leading to career opportunities. Through training programs, we ensure our company representatives gain and maintain a basic understanding and practical knowledge on child protection.

We **provide Child Safe training** to our staff and to our freelance guides. We require them to follow an online training, we've developed with Friends International. At least on a yearly basis, we deliver in-person training in each destination with partner organizations.

Our **Employee's Manual**, which is provided to all employees has a specific section on child safety issues. As such, new employees are made aware as soon as they start working with EXO.

In every destination, we communicate on **reporting guidelines** to contact the appropriate local authorities to react quickly and appropriately in any suspected case of child abuse.



WE DRIVE POSITIVE CHANGE

A tour is a complex combination of services and activities which are usually all purchased from external suppliers. As such, our commitment to child protection ensures there is no mistreatment of children directly or indirectly along our supply chain.

We ask all our suppliers to sign a **sustainability addendum** to our contracts where they commit not to use any child labour, to respect international and national labor laws, including respect of maternity leave and working conditions for pregnant women, and to fight against any kind of exploitation of children.

Within the **services we purchase** from our suppliers, we ensure they do not hire organizations (orphanages, dance schools) that are using under aged children (below 14 years old) to perform dance shows, or else, on a regular basis or, at night me in hotels or tourism sites.

When creating a new product we check with specialists organizations on the ground that it will not lead to school dropout, family relocation, or situations where children have to spend time outside their regular care (family or other).



We collaborate with child welfare organizations to deliver training/ information to key community stakeholders and to ensure children and their communities can voice complaints or grievances against tourists.

Our main partners especially in rural communities are informed of EXO Travel **behavioral guidelines** for travellers and how to report inappropriate behavior.

We promote existing tools and mechanism for travellers and communities to report any child welfare incidents and/or concerns, such : **reporting@thinkchilsafe.org**

Last but not least, we ensure children are included as key stakeholders and **their interests are considered** when developing our emergency or disaster contingency plans (eg: any required emergency devices or equipment (life jackets, for example) are suitable for children and are maintained properly.

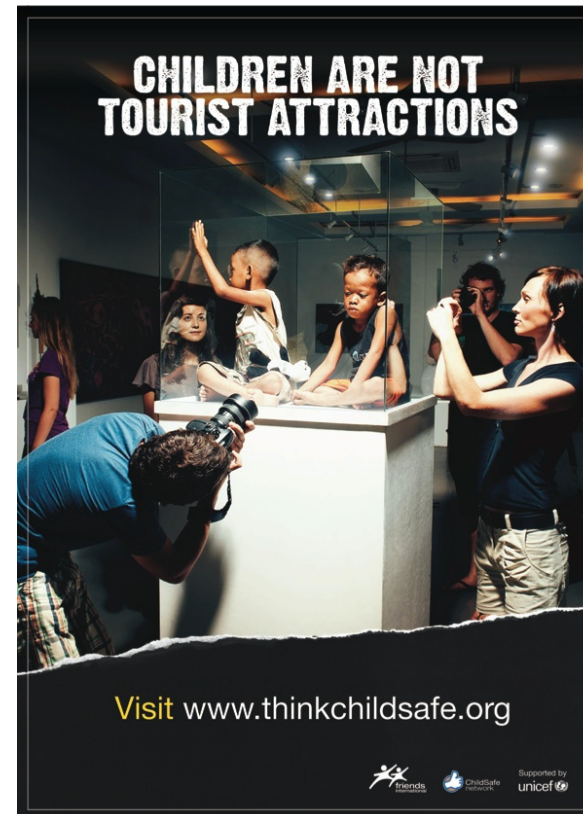
CHILD SAFE TRAVELS

Over the years, we've witnessed a rising demand from travelers to interact with children, through schools visits, volunteering in children centers or teaching English for few hours and it became for us a growing concern with regards to child protection in our destinations.

Such visits which tend to be repetitive, short term and even sometimes organized without control of any sort, in particular school visits which occur spontaneously, are denounced by child protection organizations. They have revealed to be detrimental to the emotional and proper educational development of children. Unfortunately what may seem at first sight as a good deed is turning into an established part of 'tours' and ends up diverting these centers from their original goal which is to educate and provide care to children, **turning the children themselves into tourist attractions.**

Visiting these centers can also seed **unhealthy child behaviours**, for example, children may become accustomed to strangers taking their photograph, or to receiving money or gifts from travelers. These visits are also likely to incite and/or facilitate future sexual offense; as children are then more vulnerable to potential predators who use grooming techniques and are more difficult to discern from a well intentioned person.

As such, since 2013, EXO Travel has **banned visits to schools and orphanages** from its tours and offers meaningful alternative activities supporting parents and children in a more efficient and harmless manner. What seems obvious in many countries around the world has become a challenge in Asia. Many western tourists themselves, who would never allow this to occur in their own schools, view it as a good action in a poorer country.



As well, EXO Travel **does not include volunteering to teach or facilitate learning activities** as part of a tour. Teaching or facilitating development is a job for experts who know the local language, not for travellers seeking "culturally immersive activities." Engaging in such activities, even after school hours, disrupt development or put children at risk of abuse, as stated above.

At EXO Travel, we partner with numerous **vocational training program** that use tourism to create educational and employment pathways for adolescents and young adults, often from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of them organize traveler visits or offer services such as meals catering, selling souvenirs etc, enabling them to gain income and develop their programs sustainably.

Travelers visits to such centers is part of the trainees curriculum, it reinforces the skill development of adolescents and young adults and supports youth employment in the local communities. We highlight these tours to our clients in our products as Responsible experiences and ensure the following:

- Visits do not disrupt the teaching of students (all above 14 years old) and are organized by the training center professionals.
- Travelers are informed of respectful behaviors to adopt in front of trainees (eg: dressing, speaking etc.)
- The training program or vocational school has a Child protection policy in place.

Furthermore, we do not promote voluntourism because we believe volunteers should be skilled and involved over a long period of time.

However, we encourage our clients to **donate to selected not-for-profit organizations** supporting children and families.



While tourism offers many benefits, if not done correctly it can have negative impacts on the local community. It is important to be aware of these negative impacts and to help make a positive difference and educate travelers.

Often harmful behavior comes from travelers that want to help, but may not know the best way to do it. Therefore, we must inform travelers about the correct ways of interacting with children.

Examples of **harmful travel behaviors**:

- Giving money to begging children or buying from a child selling souvenirs
- Children dropping out of school to work as an unofficial tour guide.
- Tourists visiting and donating to schools and school children directly.
- Tourists volunteering with children without the right skills.

It is clearly explained in our "Tips for responsible travelers" shared in a booklet, through our tour guides and electronically to as many travelers as possible.

WE INSPIRE OUR CUSTOMERS

EXO Travel recognizes that it has a responsibility to the children that might be portrayed through its philanthropic or commercial communications. Every child has a **right to be accurately represented** through both words and imagery.

We believe the portrayal of a child must not be manipulated or sensationalized in any way, but provide a balanced depiction of their life and circumstances. Children must be presented as with their **own identity and dignity preserved**.

Individual children readily identifiable, must be seen in a safe situation with their parent/ guardian, where the photo is depicting typical residents of a destination that travellers may encounter in a **positive manner and with informed consent**.

Imagery should not depict children in vulnerable or abusive situations, situations that insinuate sadness, poverty, hunger, or any situations with sexualized references. Language and images that could possibly **degrade or victimize or shame children are avoided** in our communications.

We communicate publicly our Child protection policy and certifications, in our communications materials.

We regularly **publish articles** on how to support child welfare organizations and travel responsibly while helping children.

Our Travel consultants advise our clients based on our **child safe travels requirements** and are trained to offer alternatives which are elaborated and customized for each client in an ad hoc manner. However, templates of argumentation explaining our position to clients are available.

They are also trained on Child Safe related issues online and in person along with our tour guides, enabling them to **recognize and act** whenever they see a situation where children can be at risk, as well as to advise travelers on most appropriate behavior.



USEFUL GUIDELINES

- When starting a new communication project, always ask yourself: 'Could this communication or marketing project have potential negative consequences for any children?' If there is any doubt, review the project and make changes as appropriate.
- Focus on group images or stories rather than on individual ones that would single out a child and thus increase his/her vulnerability. Inform children and their parents/caregivers/guardians about the purpose of filming, photography, or interviewing, and ask adults for their written consent. Consent is not needed for individuals in the background of a photo or video who are not readily identifiable, but as a general rule it is always recommended to ask people if they agree to a photograph being taken.
- Children involved in photographs must always feel in control. Filming, photographing or interviewing must conclude immediately if the child wishes or appears uncomfortable or distressed. A child must be aware they can stop at any time. Children are not to be interviewed alone; they must be accompanied by a trusted adult of their choosing. Discuss your questions with the child's parents/caregivers/ guardians before asking them in local language or of their choosing.
- Language used verbally or in written form must not degrade, victimize, exploit or shame a child and should not allow viewers to identify that child by name, location, etc. In all forms of media, children should always be dressed appropriately and should never be depicted in any poses that could be interpreted as sexually provocative. Photos or footage of naked children should never be taken; if done so inadvertently, all copies must be immediately deleted.
- File text, photo, and video materials with care to ensure the identities of children interviewed are protected. External journalists, photographers or film crews must be given our Child Protection policy and sign their commitment to it. External materials should state: "Names of the children and their parents/ caregivers/guardians have been changed, and photographs are not those of the children mentioned in the story. All children have given permission for (company name) to use and share their images and stories." Whenever possible, send an example of the published materials to the local company representative so they can share it with the children and adults who have been portrayed.

Source: extracts from "CHILD WELFARE AND THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY: GLOBAL GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES"