

SOLVING COMMON ISSUES FOR TOURING YOUTH ENSEMBLES



FOREWORD

We constantly hear from ensemble directors who face the same issues time and time again. Whether they're fighting for approval from school administrators, trying to recruit and boost their numbers, or attempting to organize a trip on their own. If you've never led a performance tour before, it might seem like too much for one person, but don't worry. Our step-by-step guide walks you through these common problems and offers practical solutions. You can do this; we can help.



AUTHOR BIO

David Solar is the Marketing Manager at Encore Tours. His passion for travel began with high school trips to Dominica and Italy, where he fell in love with the food, art, and culture. David received his B.A. in Communications at Boston College before receiving his MBA from Penn State University. He currently lives in Waltham with his wife and twin daughters. Special thanks to Tori Cook and Kate Huffman!

What Should I Do Before Asking For Administrative Approval?

1. Discuss the benefits of travel:

- Develop cultural awareness
- Expand your horizons
- Learn a new language
- Help build your resume

2. Discuss benefits of performing:

- Play for diverse crowds
- Experience exotic new venues
- Support hands-on learning



FIRST HURDLE

Gaining Administrative Approval

For music directors with interest in leading a group of musicians on a performance tour, one of the first major issues can be getting the administration or board of your school or organization to approve your upcoming trip. For teachers leading a group of students, this is particularly true. In fact, teachers may need to convince their principal or even the superintendent, in addition to the school board. This can be a daunting task, so it is a good idea to set up a meeting with the administration to go over tour details, answer any questions, and assuage any critical concerns.

Based on our experience, these are the three best-kept secrets to getting your administration's approval for your tour!

1. Provide a Detailed Proposal for the Tour

The proposal should include a comprehensive itinerary that contains a sample list of which hotels will be booked, suggested venues for all performances, any meals provided (preferably including plans to deal with dietary restrictions), and a throughout list of which activities will be included.

If you are taking students on a tour, be sure to focus on the educational value of your daily activities and how it will positively impact the young travelers. If you are traveling with adults or musicians outside of a school setting, focus on the value the experience will bring to your musicians both individually and for your program as a whole. Performance tours can help with recruitment and retention, boost your ensembles reputation, and improve the quality of your ensemble's performances. Your tour company can provide you with all the information needed to give your administration a clear and detailed view of the performance tour goals and expectations.

2. Discuss the Tour Company's Safety and Security Policy

Your tour company should have a variety of security measures in place to ensure that your travelers have proper coverage in the event of any emergency. Having a dedicated staff in the United States is important but having on-the-ground support in your destination city is essential. Ideally, the tour company will have a 24/7 emergency response team on-call, along with a vast network of overseas staff to provide additional support if it is required at any point during the tour.

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A professionally trained Tour Manager is a must for any overseas tour! Companies like Encore Tours will automatically enroll travelers in a basic health insurance plan to cover all your passengers overseas, while also providing peace of mind through general liability insurance and indemnity bonds. Once you go over these security measures with administrators, they will feel much more comfortable sending their members or students overseas.

Administrators can also rest easy knowing that all travelers are covered by a refund policy that takes effect in the event that the US State Department issues an official Travel Warning. Any first-rate tour company will prioritize these safety and security measures.

3. Have a Funding Plan in Place

Finding the funds for a tour can be a difficult and arduous task. Make sure you have a strategy in place to ensure that ensemble members are able to raise the necessary funds to go on tour. Have you considered hosting a fundraising concert? Is your organization providing any passengers with scholarships? Those are important questions to ask, but your tour company can help too! At Encore Tours, we give every international traveling group a free 5-day trip to either Paris or London! This trip, which includes round-trip airfare, breakfast daily, and hotel accommodations in central city locations, can be auctioned off as a valuable fundraising tool. Throughout the year, Encore also provides several opportunities for passengers to enter contests to win prize money or scholarships.

Additionally, Encore provides each passenger with their own personalized fundraising page, where individuals can send emails to friends and family and post on social media to help crowd-fund their trip.

Once you have this plan in place, it will be difficult for your administration to say no! You can even have your tour company's representative fly out to attend the meeting and help discuss any questions or concerns.

If all else fails, see if your performance tour company can offer you a site inspection for you and an administrator (or board member) to check out the hotels, restaurants, performance venues, and destinations in advance!



TIPS:

- Utilize our referral program! If your colleague travels internationally with us, you can earn a \$1000 cash or a scholarship equivalent for one of your travelers.
- Need help with your fundraising efforts? Make sure to check out our comprehensive fundraising guide for detailed suggestions and strategies.
- Enjoy traveling? Consider extending your trip! Unlike other companies, Encore does not charge administrative fees for group leaders who choose to return separately from their ensemble.

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SECOND HURDLE

Dealing with Low Numbers

One of the biggest challenges in planning a performance tour is recruiting your passengers. If you travel frequently, this situation may seem eerily familiar: you locked in the lowest price, for an amazing destination, where you will perform at top-notch venues—but people still aren't signing up. You want to travel, but you wonder whether it might be wise to postpone the trip and try again next year.

So what do you do when you are faced with this decision? Do you push back the trip? Do you cancel the trip entirely? This is the story of a group facing this tricky decision and the surprising, wonderful experience that came from it.

When the Sacramento Youth Symphony chose the United Kingdom as their performance tour destination, the orchestra members were immediately gleaming with excitement. But, as tour planning progressed, the economy began to sputter and people across the country began to feel the crunch. It became clear that many of these young musicians would need to skip the trip, and the tour would fail to meet its expected numbers. Not only would the Symphony be coming in with far fewer passengers, but ultimately their ensemble did not have the necessary parts to play the prepared repertoire—a common issue that can occur when planning a musical travel trip.

Artistic Director, Michael Neumann, was passionate about the value of travel and refused to admit defeat. Rather than postpone the trip, he headed back to the drawing board and brought forth with a unique solution. Michael made the bold decision to prepare an entirely new program centered around smaller chamber pieces to better suit the needs of his traveling musicians. While touring in the UK, they performed two of their four concerts in this format.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Nearly 80% of Encore's Group Leaders book another trip with us.
- The average group size of repeat groups is nearly 25% greater than new groups -- largely due to the high praise from returning travelers.
- 99% of Group Leaders rate their experience with Encore Tours as either "Good" or "Excellent."



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But what about the original repertoire which had already been fully prepared? The ensemble was not ready to give up on their hard work and, after collaborating with Encore Tours, they decided to transform the other two performances of their tour into joint performances with the Cardiff Philharmonic and the Ealing Youth Orchestra — two local orchestras from the United Kingdom.

Alongside their international peers, the Sacramento players were able to perform their full orchestral program, and the creative interaction between the ensembles created a life-changing experience with memories that will last a lifetime.

Music bonds us together, and performance tours allow diverse cultures to come together and share in the universal language of music. That's true regardless of the size of your ensemble.

Still skeptical about taking a trip due to low numbers? We have plenty of additional suggestions to help with your recruitment efforts.

1. Consider hosting an informational meeting immediately after a concert/performance. The students and parents are already there (at your school or performance venue), so it doesn't require another weeknight commitment.
2. If you're dealing with students, make sure to involve their parents early in the process. Parents want to know that their children are safe, and that their money is being well-spent. Make sure the parents know we have safeguards in place to prevent pickpockets, deal with any lost passports, and adapt to events impacted by inclement weather.
3. Talk about quality and value. At Encore Tours, there are no hidden charges. We book centrally located 3- and 4-star hotels, so you're wasting precious time commuting or spending additional money for cab fare. We also make sure that all of the top sightseeing destinations are included in your fully customizable package. That means you can spend your time doing exactly what you want.
4. We organize performance tours all over the globe, but consider targeting popular destinations like London, Paris, or Rome for your first trip. These are fan favorites and should encourage greater participation.

Planning an international performance tour can feel overwhelming, but Encore Tours' Program Consultants help every step of the way. Whether you're dealing with a dozen musicians, or an ensemble of 200, the team at Encore can help plan unique itineraries based on every unique situation.

If you ever find yourself in a situation where your recruitment numbers are low, take a little advice from the Sacramento Youth Symphony: with dedication and creativity, a low number of players can go a long way!



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THIRD HURDLE

Addressing Logistical Concerns

Bringing your ensemble on a performance tour is a life-changing experience. but the expenses can add up quickly when you're dealing with a large group. For that reason, some ensemble leaders will attempt to self-organize their trip, only to deal with constant roadblocks and subpar venues.

If you're constantly worried about logistics, you can't focus on the music. At Encore Tours, we have developed many international partnerships and an impressive global network., so that you can concentrate on what is most important. That means rehearsal space is booked, instruments have been rented, performers have reliable transportation, and all equipment has been carefully handled.

Most people begin planning a tour on their own by researching and booking a preliminary tour of their performance destination. That means researching flights, reserving cars or public transportation, booking hotel rooms, finding accommodating restaurants (which can be very challenging for large groups), contacting managers of performance venues with letters with their requests for acceptance, paying initial vendor deposits, contacting local organizations to help with promotion, and much more. And that's just the start!

From there, group managers need to continually work with vendors as their projected passenger count changes, obtain stage information from each venue, locate reliable instrument rental companies, coordinate changing rooms, book Tour Manager and driver accommodations, determine rooming assignments for all passengers and create performance programs.

That's a lot for one ensemble director to handle without having to worry about fundraising, chasing payments, answering passenger and chaperone questions, and ensuring that all dietary restrictions are being properly handled. Using a travel company means that you can gauge interest through a survey, easily get a quote, select a touring repertoire, and set a payment plan for passengers. It's that easy!



TIPS FOR BOOKING:

- It's typically ideal to start booking your trip 12=18 months out.
- Make sure to gather promotional materials including group photos, brief biographies, and past recordings. This is incredibly helpful in creating a quality press kit.
- Be receptive to new ideas! Some of the best trips have involved impromptu shows and experiences.

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Of course, one of the most common concerns involves the venue and audience. Nobody wants to travel halfway around the world only to perform at a subpar venue, or in front of a small and indifferent crowd. Your ensemble deserves to be heard, whether you're performing in a prestigious, well-known venue or one of our many hidden gems.

Worried about a small turnout? Properly promoted performances are crucial to guaranteeing a packed house at every concert. That means not only having quality promotional material, but also having local contacts on the ground providing their assistance. These contacts can also provide valuable suggestions, including potential additions to your ensemble's repertoire that are sure to excite and entertain the local crowd.



Encore guarantees audiences at every formal performance. Included in your trip are the necessary promotions to obtain an audience, including advertisements, press releases, flyers, and more.

We buy currency ahead of time, so you don't have to worry about your tour price changing. Upon request, we can also include instrument transportation, instrument insurance, piano/organ tuning, equipment rental, programs for concerts, and even security guards if you're traveling with students.

Encore means more, and we are committed to providing first-class service to all of our travelers.



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Still on the fence?

Encore Tours believes in rewarding and empowering their Group Leaders with unbelievable rewards and valuable professional resources, including:

- Group leaders travel free
- Discounted rates if a group leader's family member joins the tour
- Generous stipends
- Referral rewards that include cash and scholarship opportunities
- Free networking events, like Prelude, in amazing destinations around the world.

Recertification for Teachers

Encore Tours offers the opportunity to earn up to three graduate-level professional development credits provided by Courses4Teachers and University of the Pacific.

These credits are accepted by school districts throughout the United States and can be earned simply by traveling on an Encore performance tour or by attending Prelude.

Explore All of Encore's Rewards

Learn About Prelude

Qualified Group Leaders are eligible to attend Prelude -- our FREE annual professional development and networking event held in places like Prague, Vienna, and Milan! It's just one of the many ways Encore is there to support directors and help your program grow!



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