

Evaluating Third Party Providers

Faculty-Led Study Abroad Programs

Faculty are responsible for planning and coordinating program activities, accommodations, and other essential components of the study abroad experience. This process can be highly time-consuming and is often undertaken without direct compensation. While managing all aspects independently may offer the most cost-effective option for students, it is not always the most practical or sustainable approach for faculty.

Partnering with a third-party provider can enhance faculty-led study abroad programs by ensuring logistical support, local expertise, and a safe, high-quality student experience. However, choosing the right provider requires a thorough and systematic evaluation. Please consider the following questions and evaluation criteria when assessing providers. Whenever possible, conduct an in-person or virtual site visit to assess accommodations, classrooms, and vendor services.

Company Background

- How long has the provider been in business?
- Does the company specialize in study abroad programs, faculty-led models, or other services?
- Does the provider have specific expertise in the target location or subject area?
- What is the typical program length, group size, and student demographic for past groups?
- Can the provider supply at least three references from universities, faculty directors, or study abroad offices?

Vendor Relationships

- Which vendors (transportation, housing, excursions) does the provider partner with?
- What criteria are used to select and evaluate vendors?
- How frequently are vendor relationships reviewed?

Housing Accommodations

- What housing options are available (residences, hotels, apartments, homestays)?
- How many students are placed per unit? Are accommodations shared with students from other programs?
- What amenities are included (Wi-Fi, utilities, laundry, meals)?
- What are the costs, deposits, and refund policies?

Payment & Billing

- What is the total program cost and what does it include/exclude?
- What are the payment deadlines, and do they align with the university's financial timeline?
- Is there a clear, documented refund policy?
- Can the provider complete required institutional financial forms from [Procurement](#)?

Insurance & Liability

- Does the provider carry both general and professional liability insurance? What are the coverage amounts?
- Can they provide proof of insurance?
- Are students required to purchase additional coverage?

Emergency & Safety

- What is the provider's emergency response plan?
- How do they communicate with students, faculty, home institution staff, and families during crises?
- What local partnerships exist with emergency responders, hospitals, and law enforcement?
- Have they managed past evacuations or emergencies, and what was the outcome?
- What documentation of safety protocols can they provide?

Customer Support

- Is a dedicated representative assigned to the program?
- What is their availability (pre-departure, during the program, post-program)?
- Will the representative be on-site or accessible in-country?
- Will all cost breakdowns, emergency protocols, and contact lists be provided in writing as an agreement or contract?

Accessibility & Inclusion

- How does the provider accommodate students with disabilities (housing, classroom, mobility, medical)?
- What support exists for dietary needs, cultural/religious practices, or LGBTQ+ identities?
- Are accommodations documented in advance?

Ethical Considerations

- Does the provider offer incentives, perks, or rewards to faculty or administrators? For example, do they offer a majority-expenses-paid site visit for faculty? This can be a conflict of interest.
- Do any provider staff have personal or family connections with university employees?
- How does the provider ensure fair labor practices with vendors and homestay families?

Communication

- Does the provider administer and collect evaluations from students and faculty to inform future decisions?
- Does the provider share feedback from student evaluations?
- What kind of program evaluation and assessment does the provider conduct? What is the feedback loop?

If you would like assistance in the review process or a list of previously vetted vendors utilized by CWRU faculty and staff, please contact [Valerie Rambin](#) at the Office of Education Abroad.