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Tour Handbook

Past Tours

Chorus Abilene (as The Classical Chorus of Abilene) took its first international tour in 1998 to York and London, England. Thirty-two singers participated in a festival directed by Dr. Henry Leck, rehearsing for several hours each day, along with several other choirs from the U.S. It was a big dream and started a series of wonderful experiences! See Page 14 of the Handbook for a complete history of Chorus Abilene tours.

Because of our many and varied experiences, we have developed procedures that support our philosophy of choral touring. Each tour is unique and specific requirements vary somewhat; however this Handbook will help you see, as an overview, what can be gained from tour and what we expect from those who travel on a tour.

Why Tour?

We believe tour offers unique opportunities and experiences. It offers singers the chance to perform as a choir in venues not possible any other way. Because we have experience, it allows parents to send singers knowing they will be looked after. And for travelers less adventurous or experienced, it allows you to go without making all your own travel, hotel, or sightseeing arrangements.

Tour Goals/Philosophy

First, and of utmost importance, TOUR IS FOR SINGERS!

Each decision that is made for a tour begins with this premise. Traveling with a group of children from different backgrounds and of different ages is not the same as family travel. While we welcome family members, we need to be clear this is not a family vacation. Choices of schedules, activities, and rules are made to create an educational and safe trip for both singers whose parents are there and for singers whose parents are not. This is a time when singers can build strong relationships with each other. Therefore we encourage chaperoned time spent together with their fellow singers, as opposed to time spent with only a family member.

Sightseeing will typically include variety - some singers will like different activities better than others because of different interests. While we hope adults enjoy the activities also, choices are not made with them in mind first. And even after much planning, we have found that favorite memories are often "accidental moments" which we simply happen upon unforeseen.

Second, tour is about music.

Obviously we are a choir. Tour is about a longer than usual list of repertoire ready to sing (see more in **Music**). It is about the opportunity to sing in a wide variety of spaces that are often historical or ancient or specifically built for making choirs resonate. Tour is also about taking as many opportunities to sing as we can, in both the planned concerts and in spur-of-the-moment occasions that arise. Tour stretches a singer beyond what we are able to accomplish in our regular season and teaches them to blend and develop interdependence as a "choir".

Third, tour is educational.

Travel to other countries with different customs broadens a singer's perspective on life. They see that there are different ways to accomplish the same thing that are not necessarily better or worse - just different. We know we cannot see everything in a short trip, so we must make selections (and leave something for a return trip). We work to include activities that give singers a personal experience

with subjects they study. Standing in front of the Mona Lisa or Michaelangelo's David is far better than seeing a picture in a book. Visiting Windsor Palace or Hampton Court is totally different than studying British monarchy in history. Eating traditional cultural food in its home setting is worlds removed from reading a recipe. And who knew there are so many ways to flush a toilet or turn on the lights?

We know from experience that the educational activities will be processed at different levels by different ages. A 6th grader will come home with a different experience than a 12th grader. In addition, some activities are appreciated immediately and some are appreciated many years later. We try to balance all these variables as we plan.

What Do Singers Gain

Singers grow musically on tour.

Tour is intense. Typically, by the time we set off, they will have prepared (and memorized) about 20 pieces of music, ready to pull out and perform in new settings, in different orders, or in sections as needed. This requires extra rehearsal and work at home. Once the tour singers arrive at each concert destination, they learn to adapt to settings that vary in size, in the way they hear themselves and each other, and even in the way they can see the director. They will adapt to singing in one row or two or three rows, depending upon space; to watch the director for cuts of songs sections (or additions) for program length; to sing outdoors or in places with significant reverberation. Each added musical experience makes them a more well-rounded and confident singer.

Singers grow socially.

Tour is intense. We travel with a wide variety of ages: 5th graders through adults. Older singers learn to interact with and help younger singers; younger singers learn to interact with older singers. It's not always easy. Singers learn how to recognize when someone needs some attention or when they need to be alone. They learn when to tone down volume and when it's ok to get a little loud. They learn to work through the occasional conflict in ways that benefit both parties. They learn to shift "groups" according to the circumstances and common interests and to respect each person on the trip. They build relationships.

Singers grow in responsibility.

This one is easy. Singers always have adult back-up, but they are expected to stay up with their music folder daily, with keeping their water bottle filled, with packing up to move from hotel to hotel, and getting their own suitcase and backpack to and from each new location. Although never without an adult, they are expected to listen and stay up with times for the next activity and where they should be. Responsibility is an area into which they seem to flow naturally. Although younger singers may lose some of that "adult" behavior when they arrive home, it doesn't REALLY go away - that ability is ready when they need it next.

Lastly singers grow emotionally.

Have we said yet that tour is intense? Singers are on the same airplane, bus, and in activities with the same group for 8-10 days - many of whom they really don't know as we begin the trip. They are with new people in strange places, with no familiar hamburgers and fries, when it's hot or rainy or cold, and when they are going non-stop without enough sleep. However, they come home having experienced some amazing "highs", having conquered some difficulties, and having learned they possess a wealth of internal resources to call upon.

Music

Tour music may largely consist of concert music from previous seasons for the participating ensembles. While every singer may have heard a specific piece of music in a concert, they themselves may not have performed it. Tour rehearsals are the primary way the "tour choir" comes together and establishes a common sound. Therefore, the tour rehearsals are mandatory - not optional.

Many of the venues we perform in were built for the performance of classical music, much of which is based in religious texts or thought. Often our venues are churches or cathedrals, so we take a complement of "sacred" music appropriate to both the settings and the venue requirements.

We will typically include some American or Texas folk songs in addition to folk music native to the areas of the tour. These songs help us create moments of true cultural exchange on tour and help us live out our desire to be Abilene's Singing Ambassadors. These songs are also vital components to impromptu singing opportunities.

Repertoire for tour is typically 18 - 20 songs. Because the tour choir is a combination of the Youth Chorus and Chorale, sometimes singers will be asked to sing a part they do not sing during the regular season. We hope they will look at this as an opportunity for musical growth, rather than something potentially "scary". They will never be asked to sing something they are not vocally able to do.

Concerts

Each tour generally provides three-four official performance opportunities. These may be formally advertised concerts in a cathedral or church; a mass; or a cultural exchange concert with a local choir; but are usually a combination.

As a choir we are also often able to sing informally in other interesting spaces, as we sightsee. These opportunities can be as varied as singing for fellow tourists while waiting for a tour, in a music room while sightseeing in a palace, from the stands of a birds of prey show, in a shop at the airport, or standing on the street waiting for the bus.

Clothes

Each day on tour, singers and chaperones will wear the designated Chorus Abilene shirt with jeans or khakis. We pack one color of shirt for each day. The itinerary will list the clothing of the day, based on activities for that day. The primary reason is so that we can quickly ascertain where all our singers are in any location. In addition, it makes packing easy!

Travelers should plan to wear tennis shoes each day. We typically walk an average of 5 - 7 miles a day and comfortable footwear is a high priority (always a good idea to break your shoes in ahead of time). In addition, singers should pack their concert shoes and other travelers should pack an additional pair of shoes. Please do not bring flip flops. Because of uneven walking surfaces, open-toed shoes are discouraged for adults and not allowed for singers.

Do not pack shorts or swimsuits. Rarely do we stay somewhere with a pool and often we visit cathedrals where shorts are not appropriate. Tour leadership and chaperones are not interested in spending time monitoring for inappropriate clothing.

We add a "nicer" outfit to our packing list for no particular reason. Occasionally the group will decide to "dress" for dinner; but this depends upon circumstances and group decision, rather than necessity. Dresses for girls, if worn, should be knee-length. No spaghetti straps or strapless clothing, please. See Appendices for sample packing list.

Preparation

In order to get the most from the trip, singers should prepare for tour musically, mentally, and physically.

Singers, of course, need to prepare the music. This requires excellent attendance during the regular season, attending all tour rehearsals, rehearsing at home, and memorizing the songs.

Mental preparation includes having some idea of what's ahead during the trip. To help with that, we generally hold two required tour workshops, where we talk about safety, attitudes toward a new culture and new foods, packing, and money. We also ask tour singers to write two reports on some aspect of what we may see. This might be about the history or geography of the country, or a composer or artist, or a particular site we will visit. In addition, we have found some short videos about the country or culture to be informative. Assignments vary by tour, but singers are expected to complete any assignment given by the due date.

Physical preparation for **everyone** on tour is crucial. Extensive walking is required, often in the heat and often on uneven surfaces, uphill and downhill, so already being in good shape is essential. Make sure you can walk several miles at a time. Begin drinking lots of fluids so that you are hydrated when you get on the plane (and keep drinking). Try to be rested when the trip starts, because without doubt we will be short on sleep while gone!

It is very important to observe **deadlines**. We ask that both adults and singers stay up with and meet the assigned deadlines. From our end, we will do our best to be consistent and considerate with our schedules. We will give you payment deadlines, report deadlines, and fundraising deadlines. It is not a good use of time for anyone to have to go back and double-check who has not turned in forms or who has not done an assignment or who still hasn't returned fundraising money.

Safety

- ♪ We take safety seriously. Each person on tour, not just singers, is expected to follow our safety precautions.
- ♪ Singers are never to go anywhere without an adult. No exceptions. Not to the bathroom in the airport, not down the hall at the hotel, not "just into the next shop". Although this is not an absolute for adult shadow tour members, they should never leave the group alone without checking with tour leaders.
- ♪ Singers stay with their own chaperone group at all times unless alternate arrangements are made to join another chaperone group.
- ♪ Meeting places and meeting times must be respected by every single person on tour – singers and adults alike.
- ♪ Airports are not a good place for jokes about bombs or terrorists. (We say this with a smile but it's true nevertheless. **Addendum**: we no longer say this with a smile – it is now an absolute.)
- ♪ We have a system for navigating airport check in, security, for counting on and off the bus, in and out of restaurants, etc. Everyone is expected to respect this (see **Travel**).

Both Structured and Fluid

Tour is an interesting combination of the need for a strict itinerary and the necessity of making changes on site as we go. We begin with as complete a plan as possible. However unexpected occurrences, like a traffic jam or visiting dignitaries (this does seem to happen a lot) or flooding, may force us to be flexible with our schedule. You will always be apprised of any changes if they occur and will be expected to work cheerfully with us.

Tour leadership will make exceptions or changes to plans on site if/as necessary.

Who Is in Charge - or Tour is not a Democracy

Tour leadership consists of the tour manager and the conductor. Tour leadership will designate chaperones for singers and singers should be ready to follow directions from these adults. We will introduce leadership and chaperones to singers to make this clear for them.

Singers are expected to follow all rules at all times. We make these rules clear at the workshops. Rules are in place for the benefit and safety of all singers. What might not seem like an absolutely necessary rule for a 12th grader IS absolutely necessary for a 5th grader. To allow the older singer freedom from rules encourages the younger singer to break them as well - or it encourages bad feelings because of perceived unfairness. Either result can bring unfortunate consequences.

Great words for singers to come equipped with are "yes, sir" and "yes, ma'am." There are always occasions when we need quick action and don't have time to explain "why" until later.

We occasionally have shadow tour members who apply "common sense" to our rules and thus wrongly allow singers to break them. Once again, things that are fine for a family vacation may not be fine when on a Chorus Abilene tour. It doesn't make them wrong - just not appropriate for our setting. Ultimately, if there is an accident or a problem, Chorus Abilene will be considered the responsible party – even if a parent or grandparent is present.

Often we have a tour guide who is with us. This guide will work with the tour manager and conductor and is available for questions about the country and sites we are seeing - he/she may be our point of contact for hotels, sightseeing entrances, restaurants, and basic cultural information. However he/she should not be approached about approval for changes to our activities or schedule. This makes his/her job more difficult.

Respect

Singers and adults alike are expected to respect fellow singers, fellow adults on the trip, tour leadership, local guides, and themselves. Lack of respect will necessitate a change of rooming arrangements or, for worse infractions, a trip home immediately at parental expense. (We have yet to encounter the need for either of these!)

We encourage singers to verbally respect every other singer on the trip. There may be vocal differences or personality differences – but this is part of the learning that takes place on the trip.

Adults, this is a more difficult topic to address. Because Chorus Abilene works with children and because Abilene is generally a conservative community and we gear our trip for children of all ages and backgrounds, here are a few rules we hope you will respect:

1. Please help us make sure that singers are never alone, even in “safe” hotel hallways.

2. Please do not speak critically of other adults, children, or leadership in the remote hearing of singers. Please, as you would in most settings, be careful of language.
3. Please do not smoke in front of singers.
4. Please do not drink alcoholic beverages in front of singers. This includes beer and wine at meals. What you do when on your own or after singers are in their rooms or when you are in your own room is your business.
5. Please do not wear clothing that is not approved for singers as well, unless you have discussed it with tour leadership (exceptions might include items such as footwear).

You can see that all these rules are applicable to singers, as well. If any of these requests are too difficult for these 10 days, we ask that you consider traveling on your own instead of with us.

Travel

Each person should plan to take one suitcase and one backpack. The suitcase will be checked and the backpack will be your “carry-on” and with you each day of the trip.

Suitcase: each singer should pack in a 20-22 inch suitcase. Adults may use a 25 inch suitcase, if necessary. Sometimes space is limited on the bus and airline restrictions are also getting more difficult. This is plenty of room for the way we pack and travel. Each person must take care of his/her own luggage and smaller makes it easier. Please speak to tour leadership if you need an exception.

Backpack: This is the easiest carry-on and most kids have one. It must be big enough to fit their music folder and a water bottle. While shoulder bags are permissible if large enough, all carry-ons should zip securely. Some days we can leave these locked on the bus and some days we cannot.

Chaperone groups: singers are assigned a group, under a particular chaperone, to make safety more manageable. Groups are usually 4-5 singers in size and divided by age or compatibility. We want everyone to have the best time they can, while making the trip as organized and safe as possible. Please let tour leadership know if your singer wants to request a particular group or chaperone and we will do our best. See the Chaperone section for more information on what the chaperone manages for their singers.

Try new things: We encourage singers (and adults) to try new things! This most often comes in the form of food. They will not necessarily like everything they are served but we usually say “try a bite” – if you don’t try it, how do you know whether or not you like it? Singers on their second trip are quick to take that first bite – for picky eaters, that might be all they taste, but they have a much more open mind about new experiences in the future! Don’t make faces or comments about something “yucky” or “dumb”. We have to remember we are guests in someone else’s home.

The same could be said about new ways to turn the electricity on, flush the toilet, take a shower, cross the street, and pay for services or purchases (or the bathroom). We want singers to know that there is usually more than one way to do almost anything – and the Texas way is not necessarily better, just different! Good phrases to bring are “That was interesting,” or “Wow! I like seeing new things!” or “Thanks for letting me try that.”

Tour is very physical, as we have mentioned before. Proper preparation will help everyone get the most from the experience. If your singer is not an athlete, make sure they begin some sort of exercise

– walking is a great way to get ready. We walk long distances and often in hot weather. Lots of water is also important, both before we go and while we are gone. We constantly remind singers to “refill your water bottle”. This is good both for general health and specifically vocal health.

Airport Procedures: See Chaperone Duties below for a detailed look at this. Being prepared and organized makes getting through the various airport procedures much simpler! Occasionally a singer will be stopped for more thorough security scanning or checking. Their Chaperone will never leave – but singers should be polite and pleasant at all times. Again, “thank you” is a great phrase in any language and one we always learn in the language of the country we are visiting.

Shadow Tour

A shadow tour member is anyone who is not a singer, chaperone, or tour leader. Shadow tour members travel with group for all activities, but have no specific responsibilities. They are expected to be timely, follow safety rules, and not to be a distraction for singers. They may occasionally want to do something instead of (or in addition to) a scheduled group activity. While certainly fine, they should check in and out with leadership ahead of time and not ask to remove singers from the group. Depending upon the number of singers who sign up and the number of chaperones required, shadow tour spots may be on a first come first serve basis.

Shadow Tour members should also be careful about giving instructions to singers regarding plan changes. If something needs to be changed immediately, Tour Leadership will first let chaperones know – which means shadow tour members may or may not have the most immediate update. However extra eyes are ALWAYS welcome when it comes to safety!

We ask that shadow tour members keep in mind that we encourage singers to focus on music, performance, educational opportunities, and building community. If your singer sees you not interested in our sightseeing or more focused on activities like shopping, they may take their lead from you.

Chaperones

A Chaperone carries more specific responsibilities. See Page 22 for Chaperone Application Form.

Chaperones have responsibility for their group of three to five singers (usually depending on age of singers) and are expected to set a good example. Here is an overview of chaperone responsibilities.

- ♪ You hold the money and passports of the children at all times.
- ♪ You distribute their money on a daily basis as needed (keeping money in individual plastic bags is handy way to keep daily amounts for each child separate), along with a record of when you handed out how much. Return any left at the end of the trip.
- ♪ You may work with an assigned shadow person, as needed, to be the "engine" or "caboose" of your group when going through airports, walking from place to place, or touring museums.
- ♪ You show the children to their rooms at the hotels, ensure that they know where your room is located, and demonstrate emergency hotel evacuation routes, exits, and meeting places. Make sure they know your room number and how to call, if they need you.
- ♪ Each group will be color-coded. This includes suitcases, backpacks, and formal concert wear. You should hand out colored ribbons at our last meeting. Suitcases and backpacks should be checked by you for color-coding as your singers arrive at the meeting place for departure.

- ♪ Collect and distribute the formal concert wear after we arrive. We have special suitcases for the formal wear. When we arrive at each hotel, the suitcases will be unloaded into tour leadership room and each chaperone will distribute the clothes to their group. The night before hotel departure all clothes will be returned, on the color-coded hanger, to the chaperones who will get them back to the suitcases for the return trip. Each singer packs and keeps their own shoes.
- ♪ Ensure your group is with you at all times, even breakfast. Count them as they load the bus and as they unload the bus.
- ♪ Check singer rooms before hotel departure for forgotten items.
- ♪ Escort your group during "unstructured" time, ie. lunch.
- ♪ You may combine with other groups during the free times (if any) but, unless mutually agreeable, do not split up your group.
- ♪ Occasionally a singer requests to join another chaperone group for a short time. Before allowing this, make sure you have personally checked with the other chaperone to confirm they are ok with this and to make absolutely certain the other chaperone knows they now have responsibility for your singer.

Each day, make sure that kids are up in time to get to breakfast. Speak with the parents of your singers before departure, to ascertain how reliable singers are in waking themselves, speed in getting themselves dressed/showered, and eating speed. Slow or fast doesn't matter, as long as everyone is ready for the bus at the assigned time. Breakfast is usually a come and go affair, but singers should not be on their own. Your interaction with your kids will determine this but YOU set the routine for your group.

Morning comes early, so singers must be in their rooms at the assigned times. Check to make sure they are heading to bed. There is no wandering in the halls to visit another room after curfew time.

Keep an eye out for homesick children – they will show that in different ways. Do all you can to make sure they have a fun and memorable experience!

Medical Conditions

We want tour to be possible for as many people as we can. We can work around allergies, gluten intolerance, etc. Manageable asthma might be an example of a condition that allows you to travel but that might flare up and require you to miss a portion of the trip to rest & recover – we are ok with that if you are. We, of course, know that emergencies arise. However if you or your singer has a serious or regularly recurring condition, we would ask you to consider carefully before joining the trip. Physical mobility is a requirement for the trip.

Finances

The largest expense for tour is the amount each person will owe to the company who arranges the tour. This amount varies by where we go, how long we stay, how many people travel, and how many activities we include. Typically covered is everything except daily lunches and spending money. We ask that each tour participant make monthly payments. Usually all payments to the tour company must be completed by March before our June trip. We try to plan for 18-20 months of payments.

Another category of costs are Chorus Abilene direct costs. These include bus rental Abilene-DFW and back, tour shirt costs as applicable, and May tuition for May tour rehearsals.

Cancellation policies vary from company to company. We will let you know what they are when we receive them. Your responsibility is to read and make sure you understand them. If your singer must drop after making payments that cannot be refunded and you have not purchased trip insurance, occasionally the tour company will allow a substitution, even if no refund is possible. **THIS SUBSTITUTION DECISION REMAINS WITH CHORUS ABILENE LEADERSHIP.** Normally tour leadership will look for another singer to benefit from this unfortunate situation. However if you as an adult must drop, sometimes it is possible to substitute another family member. Remember: all substitutions **MUST** be suggested in consultation with tour leadership.

We always provide trip insurance information and suggest you take advantage of that, especially if you have any pre-existing health condition that might flare up or potential work condition that might arise at the last minute to prevent you from going at the last minute.

In some years, parent payments are made to Chorus Abilene and we send that money on to the tour company on yours/your singer's behalf. Some years' payments can be made directly to the tour company.

Fundraising

Tour is ultimately the financial responsibility of each singer's family.

Once a tour has been chosen and a cost determined, possible fund-raisers will be agreed upon. Some events will be classified as an individual fundraiser and some as a group fundraiser. The proceeds of group fund-raisers will be split among all participants and then added to each singer's tour account, while the proceeds of individual fundraisers will be added directly into the individual singer's account.

Potential Fundraisers for Tour 2021 are:

ShopwithScrip, an online shopping card purchase that returns a percentage of the face value of the cards. This is an ongoing fundraiser – we place an order each month but with proper enrollment, you can also use it online at any time.

Popcorn sales: this has been successful at raising smaller amounts; however there is a large potential for recurring sales since it's inexpensive and tasty. ☺ Cost to the customer is \$2 and net to singers is about \$1.10 per package. We will ask you to pay the initial cost and then you may turn in the profit.

Spotlight: a portion of sponsorships from this gala is available to tour singers, after the amount budgeted for our regular programs. Income depends upon sponsorships solicited and received.

Raffle: We will usually organize one raffle for each tour. Success depends upon the quality of donated items. We have had very successful raffles with large items such as a shotgun, TV, hand-crafted quilts and also lesser auctions of dessert items or services. For 2021, we will raffle a 4 day trip for 2 to Paris or London in the fall of 2019.

We have tried numerous other fundraisers in the past, such as Texas Value Cards, candle sales, car washes, Krispy Kreme sales, brochure sales, restaurant dining, and several others. Some have been successful one year and not successful the next. Parental interest seems to be the key factor. The potential for fundraisers is completely open but depends upon parental involvement. The office cannot manage fundraisers – just the money which is raised through them. If you have ideas and are willing to head up a fundraiser, by all means speak with Tour Leadership!

Money from fundraising is held in reserve until the year just before the tour (closer to when final payments are due or until such time as you have sufficient fundraising money to pay the balance of what you owe. This is done to safeguard fundraising money in the event that your singer drops from the tour for any reason.

Cancellation fees must come from parent payment amounts, not from fundraising through Chorus Abilene official fundraising events. You assume that risk with your own money. Any fundraising money organized through Chorus Abilene ultimately belongs to Chorus Abilene. Although it is reserved for your singer, if for some reason your singer changes their mind, we apply that fundraising money as a scholarship for another singer. Any money raised through fundraisers is not refunded to you if your singer drops or cancels. Tour fundraising money is for TOUR. It is not earmarked for a family to use as they wish (i.e., tuition for the following year).

Although fund-raisers are supported by the Board of Directors, financial responsibility for all tour expenses ultimately remains with each singer and their family.

Airport/Departure Procedures

On the day of departure, everyone from each group will assemble together with their luggage and backpacks before the bus is loaded. Chaperones should find their singers as they arrive. When everyone is assembled and in groups, the baggage will be loaded onto the bus (the backpacks go inside the bus) by chaperone group. Following the loading of suitcases, everyone will gather for a group photo and then board the bus.

At the airport the bus will be unloaded. Everyone will get their bag by chaperone group & enter the airport by chaperone group. All luggage will be checked in at the desk. You will assemble at the airline check-in and check in by assigned Group number. Normally Tour Leadership will be in the first group and the last group.

Chaperones should have their group all together (including shadow person) & have singers' passports out ready to distribute. The chaperone checks in first, then singers in the group. The shadow person follows to make sure all singers are taken care of. As each singer checks in, they should hand their passport BACK to the chaperone. Be flexible, as occasionally airline personnel intervene, and make sure you see your group at all times.

Proceed through security in chaperone groups. Again, chaperone goes through first, with shadow person last. As each child clears security, they should hand the passport and boarding pass back to the chaperone and wait till the whole group clears security. Chaperones then take back the passports and proceed to the gate. Once at the gate area, remain there until boarding. *This should be when everyone takes a bathroom break. Singers are NOT allowed to go anywhere by themselves without an adult, even in pairs!*

After deplaning at our destination, all groups assemble in Group Order before proceeding to immigration and then baggage claim. At immigration, each child needs to have control of their passport (and the form filled in on the plane, if applicable) before speaking to the agent. Once again, please have the chaperone go through first and collect the passports as the children are processed. Shadow person goes through last. If we change flights along the way, we simply repeat this process.

Once at our destination, we will meet the tour representative after we are through immigration and baggage claim.

Practical Information

Currency Exchange: Our goal is to make sure that each person has money ready to use when the airplane lands. Our trips are busy and it is not always on-the-way to find a bank at which to exchange or withdraw money. Who wants to waste time on something we could have done before leaving?

Therefore, we will ask you ahead of time for an amount of money that will be used for lunches and spending money on the trip – typically \$250-\$300 (this varies by country and by person). We then make one large currency exchange and distribute before departure, so that everyone has money for the trip when we arrive. Singer money is given directly to their chaperone.

Adults are welcome to exchange as much as they wish.

Credit/Debit Cards: We don't recommend credit or debit cards for singers, although there are occasionally exceptions for older singers with jobs. This is just one additional item that can be problematic if lost. For adults, here are some basics.

- ♪ Typically you don't need more than one of each.
- ♪ You will need a 4 digit pin number for both your credit card and debit card.
- ♪ Call your bank/company (or do this online) and let them know dates and places of travel. Otherwise you may find they block your transactions as being fraudulent.
- ♪ Most credit cards charge a foreign transaction fee. Check your card carefully ahead of time. At this date, one that does NOT is Capital One.
- ♪ Debit/ATM cards often charge a percentage fee based on much you withdraw. Ask about this ahead of time.
- ♪ Be sure you bring separately the numbers of where to call in case you lose your card. And yes, that has happened.
- ♪ Guard them carefully!

Passports: All passports must be valid for 6 months beyond our return date. For example, if we return on June 17, 2021, your passport must be valid through December 18, 2021. While you might squeak by if it expires in November, you probably don't want to risk being turned back at the check in counter while everyone else boards the plane. If you already have a passport, please check it now for expiration date. If it will be valid, send copies now and check that off your list!

The office needs a copy of the inside page (showing photo and information) as soon as possible. This copy accompanies us with the Tour Manager, in case an original is lost. This is also needed well before the trip to confirm your airline seat – so make sure you get this done in a timely manner. You will need a completed application and 2 passport photos (available from many places), taken to the Post Office *by appointment*.

If your singer is under the age of 16, both parents must be present to apply for a passport. If not possible, the Parental Consent Form (notarized *Form DS-3053: Statement of Consent* – Note: there are provisions when this cannot be obtained, but it takes time) must be brought. Currently fees for minors are: \$80 + \$30. Adult fees are \$110 + \$35 for a first-time passport and \$110 for a renewal. You do NOT need a passport card – just the book - so save your money.

We cannot stress enough the importance of beginning the passport application NO LATER THAN the summer before the trip. So for 2021, please plan to accomplish the passport application process the summer of 2020. If both parents are not currently married and living in the same household, we suggest beginning the passport process as early as possible.

Electricity: Plug Adaptors and Converters:

Europe's electrical system is different from ours in two ways: the voltage of the current and the shape of the plug.

American appliances run on 110 volts, while European appliances are **220 volts**. Newer travel accessories and electronic gadgets are "dual voltage," which means they work on both American and European current. If you see a range of voltages printed on the item or its plug (such as "110–220"), you're OK in Europe. Some older appliances have a voltage switch marked 110 (US) and 220 (Europe) — switch it to 220 as you pack. If your appliance is designed to run only on 110-120 volts, you are likely to see smoke, if not fire, from this potent mis-match. You will need a step-down power converter or transformer to safely step the voltage down from 220 to 110. In these cases, you'll need to buy a separate, bulky converter (about \$30). Try to avoid this!

Once you've dealt with the voltage, you'll have to consider the plug.

Plug adapters are the interfaces between the American flat-pronged plug European sockets (see pictures below). You can use the adaptor same for England & Ireland, but not most of Europe. These allow you to plug your electrical device into the wall socket, but they do not convert the electricity to the American 110 volts. You can get along with just a plug adaptor for most of today's small electrical devices designed to run on dual voltages, such as cell phones.

You may want to secure your adapter to your device's plug with electrical or duct tape; otherwise it can easily get left behind in the outlet. Some sockets in Europe are recessed into the wall; your adapter should be small enough so that the prongs seat properly in the socket. If, for some reason, your adapter doesn't work in your hotel, just ask at the desk for assistance; hotels with unusual sockets will probably have the right adapter to loan you.

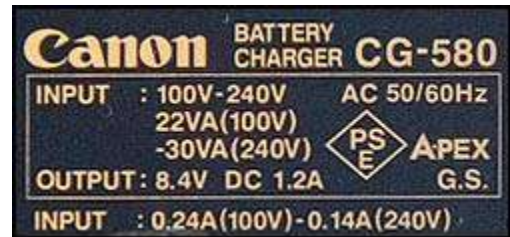
Some hotel rooms have only one electrical outlet, occupied by the lamp – and none in the bathroom. Adults may want to bring an extension cord with a multiple outlet – one adaptor plugs it in and all your devices can charge while plugged in.

Devices able to use simply a plug adaptor include most laptops, *most* recently produced battery chargers, cell phone chargers, and many small, electrical gadgets, especially those designed for world travel. You can check the back of the device or the "power brick" for the electrical input specifications. (see photo below)

As you're packing, try to go light with your electronic gear. While phones now are often also our computer, camera, & alarm, remember that we limit use for texting, Facebook, & phone calls to “in-the-room” hotel use in the evenings or mornings. We also advocate leaving at home most larger items such as hair dryers and curling irons. Not only does this eliminate the need for a converter, but you will find that time to use them is very limited.

Here's a photo of the information on a device that you can just use with a plug adapter:

This device only needs a plug adapter to work in Ireland or England, since it can use any voltage between 100 and 240, as long as it's AC voltage alternating at 50 or 60 hertz. Sometimes called a "universal power supply," this battery charger can be used throughout Europe with the right plug adapter.



Works for many European countries



Specific to UK (including Ireland)

Note: The United Kingdom and the rest of Europe require different adaptors.

Chorus Abilene Tour History

1998 – York/London	10 days	Best Tours Festival under Henry Leck
2000 – Canada	7 days	Niagara Festival under Barbara Tagg
2002 – London/ Paris	10 days	Individual Tour with Casterbridge Tours
2003 – Arlington	4 days	Individual tour for TMTA Conference
2004 – Italy	10 days	Individual Tour with Gateway Tours
2005 – Caribbean Cruise	7 days	Individual Tour through Carnival Cruiseline
2007 – Austria	10 days	Individual Tour with USIT
2010 – Spain	8 days	Individual Tour with Encore Tours
2012 – Italy	10 days	Individual Tour with KI Concerts
2014 – Austria	10 days	KI Concerts Festival under Henry Leck
2016 – Paris/London	10 days	Individual Tour with Encore Tours
2019 – Ireland	10 days	Individual Tour organized on our own
2021 – Italy	10 days	Not Your Mother’s Travel & Tours

Sample Packing List and Packing Tips

This is just an example from a past tour – it WILL change. Pack as much as possible the week before departure. That gives you time to think and make sure that you have everything you need. The following is one method of packing which works well for singers. Adults may pack as they wish. PLEASE BE SURE YOU HAVE THE ALL THE SHIRTS!

Pack T-shirt, underwear, and socks for each day in a different gallon ziplock bag. Label each day with the day of the week on both sides of the bag. Squeeze as much air out of your bag as possible. Load the ziplock bags into your suitcase in reverse order, so that Day 10 is on the bottom of your suitcase and Day 4 is on the top. When you are finished with a particular day, fold your dirty clothes back into your ziplock bag and place in the bottom of your suitcase. This keeps your other clothes clean and keeps your suitcase neat. If you choose not to use ziplock bags, rolling your T-shirts (with socks & underwear for that day) takes up less space than folded and is easy to pack.

Again: This schedule WILL change as the schedule is finalized. This is just an example.

Days 1 & 2: Travel Days ROYAL BLUE t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes

Day 3: GREEN t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes – *Shirt, underwear, socks packed into your backpack*

Day 4: TOUR 2021 t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes

Day 5: RED POLO shirt, Khaki pants, tennis shoes

Day 6: GREY t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes

Day 7: PURPLE POLO shirt, Khaki pants, tennis shoes

Day 8: CALIFORNIA BLUE t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes

Day 9: PURPLE t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes

Day 10: Return Trip TAN t-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes

In Summary: In your suitcase, you have packed 7 shirts, 2 pairs of pants (1 jeans & 1 khaki), underwear and socks for 7 days; something nice for evening special occasion;
In the bottom of your Backpack: Day 3 Green t-shirt, & socks & underwear for 1 day (in case your suitcase gets lost); jacket; music; and will wear royal blue t-shirt and a 2nd pair of jeans.

Other Clothing in suitcase:

Pajamas

Concert shoes and other clothing needed for concert wear

Take 2 pair of shoes total – tennis shoes for walking (on your feet) and concert shoes for performance. If another pair fits in your suitcase, that's fine, but remember - no flip flops or sandals.

Boys – 1 nice shirt to be worn at our evening out with khakis or your black uniform pants.

Girls – a nice shirt & pair of pants or a dress/skirt, knee-length. Shoulders should be covered.

Boys – belt, black socks

Girls – hose or knee highs (for your uniform)

Toiletries (in suitcase): For some toiletries, we suggest buying trial or small sizes of items.

Contact Solution

Toothpaste & toothbrush, other
necessary dental items

Hair Products – Brush, Comb,

Shampoo, hair bands

Make up

Deodorant

Razor

Feminine Hygiene Products

Hand lotion - please bring only unscented as you will be in close quarters most of the time
Chapstick
Nail kits, nail clippers or files - pack in your suitcase.
Lightweight jacket
Watch

Small rain poncho and very small fold-up umbrella
Small flashlight
Travel Alarm
Vitamin C drops or cough drops – please use original package
Batteries/charger

Other Items as needed (in your suitcase):

Address labels if you want to send postcards
Sunscreen or hat
Prescription Medicines for the trip – in most cases, your chaperone will keep these for you.

Electrical items require an adaptor
Email addresses if you need them.
Earplugs for plane ride

In Your Backpack:

Water bottle – Very important. However when you go through security at any airport, it MUST BE EMPTY. You can refill later throughout the trip.

Ziplock bag of Day 3 clothing
Music folder

Jacket or light sweater – it is often chilly on the airplane.

Camera – if you use a phone for your camera, it comes out during security

1-2 small snacks (like cereal bar, crackers, raisins, nuts) optional

Journal – jot down what you did each day, what you spent, what you saw, how you felt

Small cheap rain poncho

Pencils or pens

Ear plugs – up to you

Tissues

Gum

Packing Tips

Print your itinerary and put a copy in your suitcase so you know what to wear the following day. When you reach your evening destination, take out the clothes that you plan to wear the next day. You may be sleepy in the morning and want to spend that extra 5 minutes in bed.

Pack your suitcase in the order of when you will use the clothing. Don't pack your Day 10 shirt on top nor pack your pajamas on the bottom. Put what you need for Day 10 on the bottom and Day 4 on the top. Heavier items (like shoes) should be placed at the bottom of the suitcase (when it is in an upright pulling position).

Pack toiletries in many different small ziplock bags. If something spills, it stays inside your small bag and is easier to clean up.

Pack your suitcase at least two days ahead and let it settle. You will have more space to pack those last minute things. However don't overpack or you won't have room for souvenirs on the way home.

Pack small things inside your shoes. It takes up less space in your suitcase and helps keep the shape of your shoes. Consider packing your concert shoes in a Walmart bag or small trash bag to keep the rest of your suitcase cleaner.

Remember that you can always wash underwear in the hotel. Chaperones are not there to do it for you but they ARE there if you need help.

Take only what you need – don't pack the entire 12 oz. of toothpaste or the complete shampoo bottle unless you are going to share with your roommate. Use small containers or trial sizes. Families can pack one set of toiletries to save space. Shampoo and soap are usually provided.

Do NOT Pack

Jewelry other than a watch and a small pair of earrings – small being the key word

Hairdryer – usually in the hotels

Sandals or Flip Flops

Perfume

Swimsuit

Knives

Shorts

Nail Polish or remover

Taking any expensive item is a BAD idea.

Ideas:

Polish your dress shoes.

It might be a good idea to get your uniform cleaned/washed. Girls – check your hems.

All pants & jeans must be neat. Do not have excess zippers, buttons. Do not travel with metal hairclips. It's no fun to be patted down through security! Be prepared to remove belts, shoes, watches, coins from pockets, etc. as we go through security at the airport. The fewer of these items you have, the easier security is!

Parents:

If you are NOT going on the tour, please bring:

- ♪ Passport and any extra spending money to the chaperone in a ziplock bag with the singer's name on it to the last tour meeting.
- ♪ You may also do this ahead of time, if your chaperone is agreeable.
- ♪ \$10 for food on the way home from or at the DFW airport.
- ♪ Chaperones will keep the balance of singer money on the trip for them.

Other documents needed from you:

- ♪ Copy of Health Insurance Card.
- ♪ Emergency contact info sheet.
- ♪ Copy of proof of trip insurance, if purchased.
- ♪ Feel free to send notes to your singer for the chaperone to give them during the trip, if you want.

Chaperone Suggestions

- Get a folder or notebook and keep your handouts in a central location. Print relevant emails and keep them there.
- Buy a simple neck wallet or fanny pack for under your clothes (available at Walmart or Academy or online). This will hold necessary documents and cash and will tuck under your clothes – either around your neck or around your waist tucked into your skirt or pants.
- Make sure you have a pin number for your debit card and credit card.
- A debit card allows you to withdraw money from your bank account. A credit card is handy but sometimes includes more fees. Do not use your credit card to get cash.
- Notify your bank and credit card company that you will be out of the country.
- Take the emergency contact number for your credit/debit cards in case they are stolen.
- Take kids to the bathroom at all possible times. Bathrooms are not always easily accessible, especially in groups.
- A plastic ziplock for each child makes an easy way to keep each child's passport and money separated yet accessible. Adding their name to the front of the ziplock makes it easy to see whose is whose quickly. Another idea is a small zipper pouch with room for passports and money separated into different accessible compartments.
- Talk to the parents of any child you are responsible for. You might want to take handwritten notes to give out along the way.
- It is rarely easy or quick to mail items but ask if parents need postcards sent to family – parents can provide mailing labels to make that easy.
- Remember we all need about \$5-\$10 in case we stop for food on the way back to Abilene from DFW. We do not stop on the way to DFW.



System from a 3-tour chaperone: I also use plastic storage snack bags to hold the money inside along

with passports. I also color code each student's passport, storage bag, and section inside folder with garage sales tags for easy transactions during airport times and shopping. You can easily add a small pen and pad for quick notes.

Sample money belt/
fanny pack for waist.



Sample neck pouch with
multiple pockets.

Emergency Contact Form

Name of Traveler: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Telephone Number: _____

Prescription Medication Names & Dosage: _____
Adults only

Allergies: _____

Emergency Contact Name: _____

Address: _____ Tel. No.: _____

Email Address: _____

You may give us more than one contact

NOTE: This is now done online. The link will be sent out during the 2020-21 season.

Singer Tour Agreement

_____ I have read the tour handbook and agree to abide by all the guidelines.

_____ I agree to participate in and arrive timely for all regular concerts, unless agreed upon in advance with the conductor.

_____ I agree to arrive appropriately dressed for all concerts as outlined in the handbook.

_____ I agree to attend all regular rehearsals, with the exception of illness or school conflicts where I have no choice.

_____ I agree to notify Tour Leadership IN ADVANCE of any workshop date conflicts as dates are being selected.

_____ I agree to attend all tour rehearsals and the Tour Workshops.

_____ I agree to be responsible in my communication regarding potential conflicts and not depend upon my parent to do this for me (although they may certainly help).

_____ I agree to submit my written tour reports by the assigned deadlines.

_____ I agree to watch the assigned videos and learn the assigned words in Italian.

_____ I agree to abide by all the rules that govern safety, behavior, and dress while on tour.

_____ I agree to be cheerful and helpful while on tour, respectful of tour leadership requests.

_____ I agree to memorize all music to be sung on tour.

_____ I agree to return fundraiser money and information by due dates.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Adult Travelers

_____ I have read the tour handbook and agree to abide by all the guidelines.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chaperone Application

I would like to be considered as a chaperone for Chorus Abilene international tours.

I have read the information in the handbook about chaperone duties and I am willing to fulfill these.

I understand that Chorus Abilene will try to defray the cost of my trip somewhat, but that no guarantees can be made at this time. I will plan to pay the entire amount at this time.

I understand that there are a limited number of chaperones needed and this application is an indication that I am serious about these duties.

I will make regular monthly payments for my trip and my child's trip.

My Qualifications for being a chaperone:

Date

Signed

Individual Tour Payment Contract

Please initial each item below.

I understand that:

_____ Payment for all tours, both international and within the U.S., are ultimately the responsibility of my family.

_____ Chorus Abilene may provide fundraisers to help my child with tour costs. Although it is possible to add extra fundraisers, Chorus Abilene is not responsible for providing any extra fundraisers beyond those in place at the beginning of any singing season.

_____ Any money raised by my singer through a Chorus Abilene sponsored fundraiser must remain with Chorus Abilene to be applied to other tour costs, if my singer decides not go on tour before a tour deposit is sent.

_____ Any money raised by my singer through a Chorus Abilene fundraiser must be returned to Chorus Abilene if my singer signs up for tour and then cancels for any reason after tour registration is completed (and money is refunded directly to you by the tour company).

_____ Any cancellations fees charged by the tour company (if a singer cancels after tour registration is completed) must come from family payments, NOT from Chorus Abilene fundraiser or scholarship money.

_____ Occasionally the tour company will offer Chorus Abilene the opportunity to substitute a new singer in place of a cancelling singer, without a "name change" fee. This means that although the cancelling singer loses the designated cancellation fee, a new singer is allowed to substitute in that place and benefit from said cancellation fee amount. If no singer is substituted, the cancelling singer simply loses the cancellation fee. Chorus Abilene maintains all control for deciding who can be substituted at any point in time.

_____ All family payments, less the cancellation fee charged by the tour company, are returned to me if my singer cancels. All money raised through Chorus Abilene fundraisers must be returned to Chorus Abilene in order to help another singer, if my singer cancels.

_____ Fundraising is in place only for tour costs. Just because my singer has raised the money, I have no control of use of the money if my singer cancels. However I pay or my singer fundraises in excess of actual tour costs, available money will be refunded to me.

_____ The tour company decides on dates and cancellation policies. I have read the information from the tour company and understand these limitations.

Signed

Date

Checklist

As applicable

- _____ 2 copies of passport inside page (All)
- _____ Tour agreement (All)
- _____ Financial agreement (All)
- _____ Medical release or medical information (All)
- _____ Copy of health insurance (All)
- _____ Emergency Contact Form (All)
- _____ Tour Reports (Singers only)
- _____ Homework pertaining to workshops (Singers only)
- _____ All Tour payments (All)
- _____ Money for currency exchange (All)
- _____ Money for bus or shirts (All)
- _____ 20-22 in. suitcase for singer (25 in. for adults)
- _____ Passport given to chaperone (just prior to trip)