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## FAQs: International Travel in Summer 2022

### Purpose:

As troops and councils confirm their travel plans for summer 2022, we want to remind councils that Girl Scouts do not travel to international locations rated “Level 4: Do Not Travel” by the United States Department of State.

- This guidance, which is outlined in the Safety Activity Checkpoints, was revised by Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) in 2018 when the Department of State introduced their four-tier advisory level system.
- GSUSA guidance has not changed.

The Department of State’s definition of a Level 4 travel advisory is as follows:

“This is the highest advisory level due to greater likelihood of life-threatening risks. During an emergency, the U.S. government may have very limited ability to provide assistance. The Department of State advises that U.S. citizens not travel to the country or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so.”

We understand that some international trips may need to be postponed due to this guidance, so GSUSA has developed the following FAQs and tips for council staff who communicate with troops or groups about planned trips. Staff may also wish to use this COVID-19-specific checklist to evaluate plans for both domestic and international trips.

### FAQs:

#### Why does GSUSA guidance say that girls can’t travel to Level 4 countries?

- Girl Scouts’ number one priority is the safety of our members. We rely on the guidance of the U.S. government to understand the risk of traveling to other countries.
- The U.S. Department of State assesses the risk of each country and provides a travel advisory from levels from 1 – 4.
- The Department of State guidance for Level 4 countries is as follows: “This is the highest advisory level due to the greater likelihood of life-threatening risks. During an emergency, the U.S. government may have very limited ability to provide assistance. The Department of State advises that U.S. citizens not travel to the country or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so.”

#### When did GSUSA create the guidance not to travel to Level 4 locations?

- In January 2018, the U.S. Department of State updated their travel advisory system to assign a Level 1 – 4 ranking for every country. The rankings consider many factors,

“including crime, terrorist activity, civil unrest, health, natural disaster/weather, and current events.”

- In spring 2018, GSUSA updated Safety Activity Checkpoints, adding a detailed explanation of these advisories and clear instructions that Girl Scouts not to travel to Level 4 countries. This content is located in Safety Activity Checkpoints in the “Trips/Travel” chapter. This has been included in each iteration of Safety Activity Checkpoints through the most recent update in 2021.

### **Isn't a travel advisory that is Level 4 for COVID-19 different from a travel advisory that is Level 4 for crime or terrorism?**

- No. The Department of State travel advisory for every country provides details about the travel advisory designation level of 1 – 4. For example, a level 4 ranking could be due to COVID-19, crime, or terrorism.
- When a country is designated as Level 4, regardless of the reason, the federal government rates the risk of travel very high with a clear “do not travel” advisory.

### **Isn't the U.S. also ranked Level 4? Why are other countries any different?**

- The Department of State does not provide a travel advisory for the United States. If you are seeing a “Level 4” ranking for the United States, you are looking at data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- While CDC data is very helpful and should be considered when making plans for both domestic and international travel, the CDC rankings for COVID-19 are based primarily on virus incidence rates and trajectories. They do not include other factors, such as risks from crime or terrorism.
- The Department of State’s level evaluations for COVID-19 take into account several additional factors, including “public health indicators, access to medical care, crime, entry and exit requirements, and the ability of the U.S. government to assist in an emergency.” For this reason, Girl Scouts maintains its recommendation to follow Department of State guidance for international travel.

### **Can we travel to Level 4 countries if we do our own research and make plans to mitigate the risk?**

- The Department of State guidance for Level 4 is as follows: “This is the highest advisory level due to the greater likelihood of life-threatening risks. During an emergency, the U.S. government may have very limited ability to provide assistance. The Department of State advises that U.S. citizens not travel to the country or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so.”
- Girl Scouts follows the guidelines of the U.S. federal government for the safety of our members. Anyone considering travel to a Level 4 location should thoroughly consider the safety risks associated with travel. For example: will council insurance cover you

and/or girls if there is a problem? Do parents understand that their girls are traveling to a country identified as high risk by the Department of State? What is your plan if girls can't travel home due to testing positive at an airport and therefore not being allowed to fly? What if it becomes necessary for girls to return home to the U.S. due to a disaster or geopolitical event in the country, or an emergency at home, and they are unable to return home due to a positive COVID-19 case? Investigate the legal liability of traveling with minors to a country that the U.S. government considers unsafe for travel.

#### **Will GSUSA Destinations take place in for countries that have been ranked "Level 4"?**

- No, Girl Scouts will not travel on a Destination if the Travel Advisory level in that country remains "Level 4: Do Not Travel."
- This is the current statement on the Destinations website: "As safety is Girl Scouts' first priority, please note that all Destinations are planned, but tentative due to the ongoing pandemic. Decisions to move forward with each Destination will be made on a case-by-case basis in the spring."
- On 3/10/22, we updated this statement to provide greater clarity: "Girl Scouts do not travel to locations with Level 4 Department of State travel advisories."

#### **Are any of our sister organizations in WAGGGS using the same guidance?**

- Yes. For example, Girl Guides of Canada has decided not to allow **any** international travel for the remainder of 2022.

#### **How can I break this news to my girls, who have worked so hard to earn and save funds for an international trip?**

- Girl Scouts' Raising Awesome Girls article, "[Help Kids Cope with Disappointment in the Face of COVID-19](#)", has some helpful advice. For example:
- First, be honest and clear about the issue. One of the best ways is to ask the girls themselves to read the Department of State's [definition](#) of a Level 4 Travel Advisory, and to read through the [recommendations the Department of State issues](#) for anyone who chooses to travel to a high-risk location. What is their reaction to it? What would they advise a friend or family member about traveling to a place at that level of risk?
- Next, acknowledge their feelings of disappointment or frustration. They worked hard to save money for a trip, they've been looking forward to it, and they have to change their plans because of unforeseen circumstances beyond their control. Make sure they know it's normal to be upset. Perhaps guide the conversation to other disappointments they've experienced and how they handled them. Help them remember that they have faced disappointments or changes in plans before – and they were resilient and creative enough to deal with it.
- Finally, let the girls take the lead in visioning the path forward! Talk to them about the option to pivot their plans to places they can travel – inside the U.S. (See below FAQ

about domestic trips for suggestions). They now have an opportunity to be creative, and to envision a new experience to have this summer, or to postpone, and have another year to money-earn for an even-more-fantastic experience in 2023.

**My troop is not using any Girl Scout funds or resources. Can we just travel to a Level 4 location anyway, as a group of friends?**

- It's not possible to dissociate the trip from Girl Scouts if you use any Girl Scout resources to plan or pay for it.
- If you choose to travel on your own, here are some things to discuss with girls and their parents: You can't use any Girl Scout Product Program rewards for the trip. You can't plan the trip during your Girl Scout troop meetings. You and the girls can't wear any identifying Girl Scout clothing on the trip. Finally — and importantly — you are not eligible to purchase GSUSA-affiliated Mutual of Omaha accident and sickness insurance.
- Girl Scouts' number one priority is the safety of our members. We recommend that adults considering travel take this guidance seriously and seek legal advice to determine the liability and legal risk involved in bringing minors to a location deemed "Do Not Travel" by the United States government.

**Are there domestic trips that we can suggest to our troops/groups who want to travel this summer?**

- Troops who had intended to travel internationally were probably especially interested in learning about cultures that differ from their own. There are many cross-cultural experiences available right here in the U.S., such as:
  - Visit Girl Scouts Birthplace in Savannah and learn about the regional Gulla Geechee culture (Maybe attend the QuestFest event July 14-17, 2022).
  - Explore a truly unique culture in Puerto Rico (no passport required!)
  - Travel to Hawaii to understand the spirit of Aloha
  - Dig into indigenous cultures in Alaska
  - Visit attractions and sites owned and operated by indigenous people across the country
  - Dive deep into Chinese culture in San Francisco (maybe consider your walk across the Golden Gate your bridging to the next level of Girl Scouts!)
  - Explore global cultures in New York City – from food in Queens, to LGBTQ+ heritage; to immigrant stories at Ellis Island and the Tenement Museum (And walk across the Brooklyn Bridge to bridge to your next Girl Scout level)
  - Discover Black history through road trips in the southeast and coastal California, the Harriet Tubman Road Underground Railroad Scenic Byway in Maryland, or the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, with over 100 locations in 15 states.
  - Practice your Spanish in Miami; the city nicknamed the capital of Latin America – or learn about the culture of Haiti and many other nations
  - Explore unique Creole and Cajun cultures in Louisiana

- Discover [AAPI culture in Los Angeles](#), from Koreatown to Filipino heritage and more
- Learn about the Amish way of life in [Pennsylvania](#)
- Take a State Fair road-trip, or just visit the iconic [Iowa State Fair](#)
- Explore [Somali culture](#) in Minneapolis, MN
- Visit [Little Saigon](#) in San Jose, CA
- Explore colonial period history in Boston, Philadelphia, or Williamsburg
- Research many other national parks and state parks that have stories about various cultures

**Some of our members planned international travel but graduated from high school in 2021 or are graduating in spring 2022. Can they get an extension to spend money earned on behalf of Girl Scouts (i.e., product proceeds and other troop funds to 2023?)**

- We know that changing plans can be very challenging for girls who have been planning these trips for years. However, all members who are graduating high school in 2022, or graduated in 2021, should work out a plan to spend down their funds before their girl membership expires on 9/30/22. (This is because all funds earned on behalf of Girl Scouts must be used to support **girls'** experiences within Girl Scouts; it cannot be used to support adult experiences, and members transition out of girl membership the September after they graduate from high school. Limited extensions were previously made for girls who graduated in 2020 and 2021 to extend use of funds, but no further extensions are permissible.)

**How can girls who graduated or are graduating this year spend their funds if they cannot go on the trip they had planned?**

- There are many options! Encourage the girls to find a way to use their funds that will help them celebrate and close-out their time as a girl member of Girl Scouts on a positive note. In many cases, troop members will soon be dispersing to different towns or states, and new, exciting opportunities for young adults (internships, jobs, study abroad) are in their near future.
- This summer's celebratory experience might be a domestic trip (see above FAQ about domestic trips for inspiration), purchasing Lifetime Memberships; funding a Take Action project or scholarship fund in their community; or attending a local or national Girl Scout event (example e: [QuestFest](#) in Savannah).
- If they choose an outdoor adventure, such as hiking and backpacking, they may be able to allocate some funds towards the proper equipment (e.g. backpacks, hiking boots, guidebooks).

- As always, all activities and use of funds must be directly tied to the mission of Girl Scouts. All funds must be used for the purposes of Girl Scouting. Funds cannot be used for private benefit. (For example: paying for Girl Scout events/activities would be allowed because it is mission related. Providing college scholarships to individual girls would be a private benefit for the girl; therefore, it's not allowed.)

**If graduating members want to travel with Girl Scouts in the future, will there be opportunities?**

- Yes. GSUSA is now offering tours for Girl Scout alum through our new partnership with Club Adventures, a AAA-owned company. Stay tuned for future opportunities to travel in 2023 and beyond.