

Guide to Selecting Student Group Travel Partners

US Motorcoach Partners

A resource for student travel organizations evaluating US-based motorcoach and ground transportation providers

How to Use This Guide

This guide supports the selection of US-based motorcoach companies for student and youth group travel. US operators are subject to federal oversight through the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), which maintains public records on operating authority, safety ratings, and inspection history. This publicly available data reduces the need for in-person vehicle inspection and direct maintenance record review in most cases. The use of this guide is to support tour operators/travel organizations in choosing a motorcoach carrier if the tour operator/travel organization does not have its own practice for contracting with motorcoach carriers..

✓ **Industry Association Tip:** We strongly encourage our members to select motorcoach companies that belong to the American Bus Association (ABA), United Motorcoach Association (UMA), or International Motorcoach Group (IMG). Membership in these associations reflects a commitment to industry standards, professional development, and peer accountability — an important baseline when transporting students.

Vendor Profile

Tour Operator Information

Company Name	
Address	
Contact Name & Title	
Phone	
Email	
Date of Review	
Review Method	☐ Phone / Email ☐ In-Person ☐ Remote / Video ☐ Combined

Motorcoach Company Information

Company Name	
FMCSA DOT Number	
FMCSA Safety Rating	☐ Satisfactory ☐ Conditional ☐ Unsatisfactory ☐ Not Rated

Registered Business Address	
Primary Contact & Title	
Email	
Phone	
24-Hour Emergency Contact	
Website	
Number of Vehicles in Fleet	
Number of Drivers	
ABA / UMA / IMG Membership	☐ ABA ☐ UMA ☐ IMG ☐ None ☐ Other: _____
Use of Subcontractors	☐ Yes ☐ No — If yes, describe below <i>Note: If yes, we require notification prior to using a subcontractor unless in an emergency situation. Please provide additional information in subcontracting section below.</i>

Section 1: Federal Authority & FMCSA Standing

US motorcoach companies operating in interstate commerce are regulated by the FMCSA. Before engaging any carrier, verify their FMCSA standing at safer.fmcsa.dot.gov — this takes less than a minute and provides safety ratings, inspection history, and out-of-service records.

✓ **Industry Association Tip:** ABA, UMA, and IMG member companies are regularly reminded of their FMCSA compliance obligations. Membership is not a guarantee of safety, but it is a meaningful indicator of engagement with industry standards.

#	Question to Ask	What to consider	Response
1	Does the company hold all required federal, state, and local operating authority for the routes and services being provided?	<i>If answer is yes — active FMCSA authority confirmed; DOT number verified at safer.fmcsa.dot.gov</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q1) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
2	What is the company's current FMCSA safety rating? (Verify at safer.fmcsa.dot.gov)	Satisfactory is preferred; No Rating acceptable with clean inspection history; Conditional or Unsatisfactory requires explanation	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

Comments (Q2) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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3	Does the FMCSA record show any out-of-service orders, violations, or enforcement actions in the past 24 months?	Clean record preferred; any violations explained with documented corrective action	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q3) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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4	Is the company registered and authorized for both interstate and intrastate operations as required by your itinerary?	Yes — authority covers all states and routes on the itinerary	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q4) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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Section 2: Insurance & Financial Protection

US motorcoach operators are required to maintain minimum insurance levels under federal law. Confirm coverage is current and meets your organization's contractual minimums.

★ **Student-Friendly Criteria:** Request a Certificate of Insurance naming your organization and client as additional insureds. This is standard practice and protects your organization in the event of a claim.

#	Question to Ask	What to Consider	Response
5	Does the company carry current passenger liability insurance meeting or exceeding federal minimum requirements? Can a Certificate of Insurance be provided?	Yes means current COI provided with coverage limits and expiration dates	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q5) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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6	Do the insurance limits meet your organization's minimum contractual requirements for this trip?	Yes means limits confirmed in writing; adequate for group size and trip type	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q6) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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7	Will the company add the tour operator and client as additional insureds on the policy if requested?	<i>Yes means it's a standard practice; included in service agreement</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q7) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
8	Is the company bonded or does it carry any additional financial protection?	<i>Look for a clear explanation if not required for the service type</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q8) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			

Insurance Notes- please provide any additional comments if applicable

Section 3: Vehicle Standards

US operators are subject to FMCSA vehicle inspection and maintenance requirements. For domestic operators, direct maintenance record review and in-person vehicle inspection are generally not required as a condition of engagement — the FMCSA public record provides meaningful baseline verification. However, you may ask about vehicle age, amenities, and seatbelt availability for student comfort and safety.

★ **Student-Friendly Criteria:** Seatbelts, Wi-Fi, climate control, accessibility, and restroom availability are frequently important to student groups and chaperones. Ask about these amenities before booking.

#	Question to Ask	What to Consider	Response
9	Does the company have a preventive maintenance program in compliance with FMCSA requirements?	<i>Yes means federal compliance confirmed; no maintenance-related violations in FMCSA record</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q9) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
10	Are pre-trip inspections performed and documented for each vehicle as required by federal regulation?	<i>Yes means standard federal compliance practice</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

Comments (Q10) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:

11	Are emergency exits, safety equipment (fire extinguisher, first aid kit, emergency hammer), and emergency lighting present and functional in all vehicles?	Yes means federally required; and company confirms compliance	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
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Comments (Q11) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:

12	What is the average age of the fleet? Are all vehicles in active commercial service?	Age disclosed; all vehicles in active, maintained service	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
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Comments (Q12) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:

13	Are seatbelts available in all passenger seats?	Yes means seatbelts present and functional in all seats	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
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Comments (Q13) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:

14	Do the motorcoaches have Wi-Fi, climate control, a restroom, and USB/power outlets?	Yes means amenities confirmed for the specific vehicles assigned to your trip	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
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Comments (Q14) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:

15	Can the company confirm or share photos of the specific vehicle(s) that will be assigned to your trip?	Yes means vehicle assignment confirmed in advance; photos available on request	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
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Comments (Q15) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:

Vehicle Standards Notes- please provide any additional comments if applicable

Section 4: Driver Qualifications & Fitness for Duty

US drivers operating commercial passenger vehicles must hold a valid Commercial Driver's License (CDL) with a Passenger (P) endorsement and meet FMCSA medical fitness requirements. Federal regulations also govern hours of service and drug and alcohol testing.

★ **Student-Friendly Criteria:** Ask specifically whether drivers receive any orientation or guidance on working with student groups, and whether the company has a student group conduct policy. This is not federally required but is an important best practice.

#	Question to Ask	What to Consider	Response
16	Do all drivers hold a valid Commercial Driver's License (CDL) with a Passenger (P) endorsement?	Yes means standard federal requirement; company confirms compliance	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q16) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
17	Do all drivers hold current DOT medical certification as required by federal regulations?	Yes means DOT medical cards current for all drivers assigned to your trip (Note: medical certification applies to the drivers own personal health)	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q17) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
18	Does the company have a documented hours-of-service compliance program consistent with FMCSA regulations?	Yes means federal compliance; HOS tracking system in use	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q18) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
19	Does the company have a documented drug and alcohol testing program compliant with FMCSA requirements?	Yes means pre-employment, random, and post-incident testing program in place	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q19) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
20	Are drivers trained in emergency response, vehicle evacuation, and passenger emergencies?	Yes means training is documented and current	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q20) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			

21	Does the company provide drivers with any guidance on conduct and interaction expectations when transporting student groups?	Yes means student group conduct orientation or briefing standard practice	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q21) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
22	Does the company have a policy on appropriate interaction with minors?	Yes means written policy or equivalent guidance in place	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q22) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			

Driver Qualifications Notes – please provide additional comments if applicable

Section 5: Operations & Student Group Service

#	Question to Ask	What to Consider	Response
23	Does the company have experience providing motorcoach service to student or youth travel groups?	Yes means references from comparable student travel programs available on request	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q23) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
24	Is there a dedicated dispatch or operations contact available during the trip for the tour operator?	Yes means named dispatch contact with direct phone number provided and listed in comments below	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q24) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
25	Does the company have a process for communicating delays, vehicle substitutions, or itinerary disruptions to the tour operator?	Yes means communication protocol in place; contact information exchanged before	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

		departure and process described in comments below	
Comments (Q25) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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26	Does the driver support safe and orderly boarding and disembarkation appropriate for student age groups?	Yes means drivers briefed on student group boarding procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q26) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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27	Does the driver provide a passenger safety briefing at the start of each trip?	Yes means safety briefing at departure standard practice	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q27) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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28	Does the company have a documented incident and emergency response process? Will incident reports be shared with the tour operator?	Yes means incident procedures in place; reports shared promptly	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q28) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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29	Does the company have a process for handling complaints and corrective follow-up?	Yes means complaints handled through a documented process	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q29) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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Operations & Student Group Service Notes- please provide additional comments if applicable

Section 6: Subcontractors

If the company will use subcontracted carriers for any portion of your trip, confirm that equivalent FMCSA standing and insurance requirements apply to those carriers as well.

#	Question to Ask	What to Consider	Response
30	Does the company verify that subcontracted carriers hold active FMCSA authority and current insurance?	<i>Yes means subcontractor vetting process documented</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q30) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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31	Are subcontracted carriers members of ABA, UMA, or IMG?	<i>Preferred — membership encouraged for subcontractors as well</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q31) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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Subcontractor Notes – please provide additional comments if applicable

Section 7: Contract & Policies

Confirm all pricing, terms, and group-specific policies in writing before confirming a booking.

#	Question to Ask	What to Consider	Response
32	What is the pricing for the services? Are all fuel surcharges, tolls, taxes, and driver gratuity included or itemized?	<i>All-inclusive pricing or fully itemized quote with no hidden charges</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q32) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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33	What is the cancellation policy?	<i>Clear cancellation timeline with refund schedule in writing</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q33) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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34	What are the payment terms and deposit amount?	<i>Deposit schedule and final payment deadline clearly documented</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q34) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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35	Is the contract specific about which vehicle(s) and driver(s) are assigned? What is the process for approved substitutions?	<i>Vehicle and driver assignment in writing; substitution requires advance notice and approval. Please provide process in comments section below.</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q35) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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36	Does the contract include indemnification language protecting the tour operator?	<i>Yes means indemnification reviewed by counsel before signing</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q36) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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37	Does the contract specify reporting obligations for incidents and major disruptions?	<i>Yes means reporting obligations defined in service agreement</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q37) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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38	What are the policies on driver break schedules and maximum driving hours per day?	<i>HOS-compliant schedule provided; itinerary reviewed against driving time rules. Please provide policy below.</i>	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Comments (Q38) — if Yes/No/N/A does not fully apply, explain here:			
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Contract & Policy Notes - please provide additional comments if applicable

General Observations & Summary Notes

Use this space to record overall impressions, any follow-up items, and a recommendation on whether this company is appropriate for student group travel.

Overall Impressions

Follow-Up Items / Outstanding Questions

Overall Recommendation

☐ Approved for Student Groups ☐ Conditional (see notes) ☐ Not Recommended