



School and Community Youth Groups FAQ's

What are the directions to the Thompson Island Ferry?

The M.V. Outward Bound leaves from the EDIC dock off of Drydock Avenue in South Boston, two hundred yards from the Black Falcon Cruise Terminal and Boston's Design Center, behind the North Coast Seafood Building. A parking garage is located on Drydock Avenue across from the Design Center.

[Click here for directions](#)

Who are the instructors and what are their qualifications?

Thompson Island instructors range in age from 21 – 45 years old and must meet rigorous national standards for the skills and competencies required for the courses they instruct. Instructors are trained first and foremost to ensure the physical and emotional safety of program participants. All lead instructors are certified in Wilderness First Aid and CPR. Many instructors are also certified Wilderness First Responders, which provides even more in-depth medical training. When youth groups are on island, there is always senior field staff on island who are trained Wilderness First Responders.

What is the role of the National Park Rangers?

National Park Service Educational Rangers assist in the delivery of the environmental science and natural history components of environmental programs. Educational Rangers are extremely professional, possess a deep understanding of environmental program subject matter and have vast experience developing and delivering environmental science and natural history curriculum for elementary, middle and high-school age children.

Do instructors/Park Rangers have background checks?

All instructors and National Park Service personnel have background checks. Thompson Island Outward Bound's instructors have criminal background checks using the GIS system, which includes a 7-year nationwide background check. It is more extensive than the CORI check, which only covers Massachusetts. All National Park Staff have Federal background checks.

What is your student to instructor ratio and what is the supervision like?

Our learning is group-based, and groups are typically of 10-12 students paired with two instructors. When students participate in climbing activities, there are additional personnel present including a trained high ropes "site manager." For environmental programs, there are also national park rangers present at environmental activity sites. Younger students (up to the age of 16) remain within 100% site and sound of our instructors at all times.

What is the staff's experience with homesickness and what are the procedures for extreme homesickness

It is not unreasonable to expect that some students have not spent more than a night away from home. The scenario for homesickness is pretty standard and instructors have strategies to divert students from focusing on feeling homesick; ranging from keeping an eye out, talking with them, keeping them engaged in the activities, etc. Generally students are comforted but encouraged to stay on course unless they are so homesick that they aren't getting anything out of the program. If the problem persists, the teachers, staff or other adults may become involved in a conversation with the child. If it is still a problem, parents may be called, and in extreme cases students go home. It is rare that we send students home, but it has

happened. Usually they work through it. Some of the best comments we have had from past programs were about how proud the students were that they stayed with it.

What are the sleeping arrangements and how many children are assigned to each room?

The students will either sleep in dormitories or camp on the island. The students will be separated by gender, typically on separate floors or in different buildings. Adults will stay in the dorms with the students—either our staff, or the adults who accompany the students to the island--depending on arrangements made prior to the group's arrival. Our dorms range in size from 2-5 beds per room. The rooms feature nice, clean wooden single beds. Bathrooms are shared, dorm style, with multiple sinks and toilets. There is a bathroom on each floor. Camping is usually in raised platform tents or in shelters. Thompson Island provides linens (sheets and towels) in the dorms or sleeping bags and camping equipment if camping, unless other arrangements have been made

What should I bring?

For each program, Thompson Island will provide an appropriate clothing list to the person organizing the trip. On all courses, close-toed shoes are required. And electronics (cellphones and Ipods) are not allowed on course. Water bottles and sunblock are requested. Jewelry and valuables highly discouraged.

What about medicines?

All medicine and over the counter drugs should be in their original containers and packed separately in a zip locked plastic bag, with the child's name clearly written on the bag, as well as the prescription directions and doctor's instructions for taking the over the counter medicine affixed to the medication's container.

What is the policy regarding serious food allergies and dietary restrictions?

Generally, we offer a variety of foods at each meal, such that most people can find something appropriate to eat. If the student's allergy/restriction is such that they cannot eat most food generally available, we ask that you contact us well in advance of the course, so that we can make specific arrangements. We also ask that participants be very specific and clear about this restriction on their medical form.

What about safety?

Safety is built into all our procedures and is our number one priority. Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center (TIOBEC) meets or exceeds safety guidelines established by Outward Bound USA, the recognized pioneer in developing industry safety standards. TIOBEC conducts yearly safety inspections of all ropes courses and related climbing equipment. Each year emergency response plans and safety manuals are updated and distributed to instructors and other staff as part of a rigorous safety-training program. Staff training also includes multiple days of student management skills training, which addresses emotional, as well as physical, safety of all students. To further oversee safety, there is a full-time Safety Director for the entire island and both a full-time Programs Safety Coordinator and a full-time Operations Safety Coordinator. Additionally, periodic safety reviews and safety audits are conducted by independent experts, which focus on operational assessments of course elements, emergency procedures of specific programs, and all aspects of Thompson Island operations as they relate to safety.

How can our child contact us or how can we contact our child if necessary?

There is a staff person at Thompson Island on call 24 hours for emergencies. With each course, a Course Director is on call 24 hours for emergencies. The on-call phone number is 617-438-5621. You can also activate the emergency system AFTER BUSINESS HOURS by calling (617) 329-3900 and following the emergency prompt. These numbers are for **EMERGENCIES ONLY**.

Will there be other groups on Thompson Island at the same time our children will be there?

During the course there may be other programs on the island. All programs are run separately and do not concurrently share resources.

What if it rains? What are the provisions for inclement weather which either prevents the children from going to or returning from Thompson Island?

Thompson Island runs programs "rain or shine," and students should plan/dress accordingly. Thompson Island will stop running the ferry, however, if the winds become too high during a storm. The weather is monitored by the Waterfront Director, the Safety Coordinator, and the Chief Operations Officer. Decisions to evacuate students are made before the winds get too high. Typically the school or organization is notified and a plan is created for notifying families so that students can be picked up at the dock or at their school/organization. If a storm threatened to affect the start of the course, then the school/organization would be contacted with a plan to delay the start of the program.

What if a student is afraid of heights or some other activity that is planned?

Students work through all the initiatives as a small group. The program is "challenge by choice" which means that students must make their own decisions as to how they participate. No one is forced to do an initiative--but they must contribute to the group in some way.

Do we have to fill out the medical forms?

All participants must have a completed and approved medical form and all questions on the form answered to participate in Thompson Island Outward Bound program. Thompson Island Outward Bound's medical screener must carefully review each form and call parents/doctors with any questions. The medical forms are the appropriate place to state allergies so our staff can make accommodations for them.

Do we have to sign the liability release form?

In order for your child to participate in Thompson Island Outward Bound's activities, you and your child will need to sign our assumption of risk and liability release form. This form lists some of the activities in which your child may participate and the risks of those activities. Outward Bound expends considerable energy assessing and addressing risks associated with its programs and invests significant effort to care for your child's safety. The release form helps to explain the risks that you are assuming and asks that you release certain liability.

Outward Bound has a culture of self-responsibility but in today's society where lawsuits are prevalent, we must have some insulation from litigation because litigation takes the precious resources of both time and money from the core mission of our non-profit organization. In addition, our insurance is provided with the understanding that all participants on courses like yours will sign the release form. However, if you ever have a question, please let us know. We will work with you to resolve your concerns. We care deeply about our students and want you to have a positive experience with Outward Bound.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Carol Merz at Thompson Island Outward Bound. Email: cmerz@thompsonisland.org or phone: 617.830.5116.