



ISO 21101 Conformity Increasingly Required for Adventure Tourism Programs Globally

What is ISO? What is ISO 21101?

ISO is the **International Organization for Standardization**. It's a Switzerland-based NGO with a membership of over 160 national standards bodies. ISO (iso.org) publishes voluntary consensus standards developed by subject matter specialists. Founded in 1947, it has published over 20,000 standards regarding almost all industries.

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is the ISO member from the USA.

ISO 21101 is a voluntary standard describing Safety Management Systems for adventure tourism providers. The most current version is from 2014. The full title of the standard is "**ISO 21101:2014 Adventure tourism — Safety management systems — Requirements.**"

The standard is designed to provide an outline that can be used to design a Safety Management System (SMS). This document is sometimes called a risk management plan or risk assessment and management system, although those terms can also have somewhat different meanings.

ISO 21101 has two companion documents. **ISO 21102:2020 Adventure tourism — Leaders — Personnel competence describes competencies** of adventure tourism activity leaders. **ISO 21103:2014 Adventure tourism — Information for participants** describes information to be provided to adventure tourism participants.

A sample of other standards published by ISO which may influence wilderness risk management includes:

ISO 31000 Risk management — Guidelines

ISO 13289:2011 Recreational diving services
— Requirements for the conduct of snorkelling excursions

ISO 24803:2017 Recreational diving services
— Requirements for recreational diving providers

ISO 31030:2021 Travel risk management
— Guidance for organizations

ISO/WD 31031 Managing risk for youth and school trips
(under development)

What's happening with ISO 21101?

ISO 21101 is becoming adopted as a compulsory standard in parts of the world.



Switzerland requires the use of ISO 21101, 21102 and 21103 for certain high-risk outdoor adventure activities, through the Arrangement on Mountain Guides and Organizers of Other Risky Activities (Risk Activities Ordinance).



Kerala State in India introduced adventure tourism safety regulations in 2021. The regulations integrate ISO 21101 into the requirements.



Maharashtra State in India also issued a Government Resolution in 2021, prescribing adventure tourism safety regulations. The Resolution references detailed safety guidelines, including a Safety Management System annexure based off of ISO 21101. (Details: bit.ly/maha-21101)



New Zealand is considering adopting ISO 21101 as an alternative to its current safety audit standard for adventure activities. This arose in a 2020 adventure regulation review following a deadly 2019 volcanic explosion.



ISO certification is expanding. Wilderness and outdoor program providers are being certified as meeting ISO 21101 by various certifying companies. This occurs even where conformity to ISO 21101 is not required.

Why is this important to me?

If you provide certain outdoor adventures in some locations, you may have to conform to ISO 21101 standards.

If ISO 21101 conformance becomes compulsory where you currently operate, you must meet them or face penalties.

What are benefits and criticisms of ISO 21101?



Benefits

ISO provides consensus standards developed through a deliberative, inclusive process

ISO standards are trusted worldwide by those seeking reliable guidance



Criticisms

ISO 21101 relies on a linear incident causation theory which critics call outdated

ISO 21101 is a generic framework (essentially: assess and treat risks) applicable to any industry. But it provides no detailed outdoor adventure guidance that providers may seek.

Where can I learn more?

Learn more about ISO 21101 and related topics through these resources:

Risk Management for Outdoor Programs 40-hour online training:
courses.viristar.com

Outdoor safety textbook: viristar.com/book

Custom consulting on outdoor safety:
viristar.com/wildernessoutdoor-risk-management



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Viristar works with government entities, industry associations and program providers to improve outdoor safety practices.



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