

The Benefits of Leading a Student Tour

*Plus How To Choose an Educational Travel Company

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As a teacher, you have an enormous task. Instructing kids, teens, and young adults about the world around them is extremely important and always challenging. But by using the right tools, you can bring their foreign language lessons to life and effectively connect with your students. Travel is one of the most engaging, powerful tools available. In fact, educational tours, which have grown in popularity in recent years, consistently leave a profound impact on students and teachers alike. They're exceptionally successful at linking classroom learning to real-world knowledge!

Of course, for your students, traveling to new places makes their school subjects more appealing and relevant. Traveling is fun! And when your students are having fun, they will care about the experience, pay close attention to it, and remember it. So by taking the language out of the classroom and into their lives, students are more likely to use it and learn it. Plus, travel not only increases exposure to foreign language, but also promotes cultural insight, which provides a valuable backdrop for language learning, as well as life skills ranging from the social to the economic.

For you, touring with a student group offers you an opportunity to revitalize your lesson plans. Instead of showing slides or assigning textbook readings, you can bring your students on-site to interact with native speakers and improve their listening and comprehension skills. Providing personal

connections to the history, art, and culture of a region increases the effectiveness of your teaching and deepens your students' understanding.

An educational tour will also help you refresh your knowledge and increase your mastery of the subject matter. In fact, with some companies you can even earn continuing education credits for completing coursework in conjunction with your tour. And teaching on location will help you develop future classroom content. But perhaps most importantly, a tour will give you the ability to have a real impact on your students' lives.

No matter what language you teach, you can find itineraries that complement your class—from German to Chinese. In fact, you can find fabulous tours to hundreds of destinations around the world. Choose European highlights like Paris, Nice, Barcelona, and Rome or ancient wonders like Machu Picchu and the Mayan temples. The options for adventure are endless!

There are a few things to keep in mind before you start packing your bags. Choosing a destination, itinerary, and excursions always takes careful planning. And recruiting students and organizing logistics can get complicated, too. To keep things simple, find a professional program consultant to walk you through the process. The key here is to pick a company that will assign a single person to your trip to make sure you get personalized service. You don't want to be shuffled about from person to person, particularly if your students have a unique curriculum, special interests, or dietary restrictions. And if you want to customize your itinerary, you'll need a program consultant who is experienced and reliable throughout your entire tour-planning process.

Value is another important consideration. Some companies let teachers travel for free, but that doesn't mean teachers should overlook price. Make sure that when you're comparing tour fees, you're looking at the tour inclusions and quality—not just the cost. Satisfying meals, efficient transportation, and safe, well-located hotels should be priorities. And extras, like themed dinners, theater tickets, and river cruises, can add value. So make sure you look at all the details before you make your choice.

Just remember that the role of the tour company is to make your job as group leader easy—from helping you plan your trip to having a travel-savvy tour director actually accompany your group on tour. Also, look for a well-organized and informative Web site that offers group leader resources for teachers and an easy online sign-up for students. Your chosen company should have comprehensive traveler support and an overall good reputation for customer service. Try to get a sense for other teachers' experiences, from photos of their trips or personal conversations. After all, your group tour can be an experience of a lifetime. Make sure your travel partner shares your passion for education, travel, safety, and value.