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SEPTEMBER 2015



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Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede

Photo: Branson CVB

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Be Your Own Hero

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TERRY VALENTINE
President
 Student & Youth Travel Association

Happy fall. Welcome back to school!

I'm Terry Valentine, the new President for the Student & Youth Travel Association. I'm a product of great educators, like you, who made learning outside the classroom an important component of my education. I was a tuba player in the Cardinal Gibbons High School marching band. We traveled frequently and did a Walt Disney World trip every four years. I was a freshman during the "Disney Year." This life-changing trip, without my knowing it, set the course for my career. I cannot imagine not having gone, as it changed so much for my family and me. I went from student, to teacher, to director of a drum and bugle corps, and finally student tour operator. I've spent my life looking through bus and plane windows, traveling the country and globe, all while standing amidst youth whose lives were changing in front of my eyes—through the mechanism and magic of travel. I'm excited and honored to represent the student travel industry on a national level, over the coming year.

I'll also introduce Eric Marshall, current Chairman of the SYTA Youth Foundation and Vice President of Park Sales, Universal Orlando Resort. You'll hear from us both throughout the year, as we know scholarship options and fundraising are a critical piece of what you do as teachers. SYF offers unique opportunities for student and teachers to fund their travel programs, and is truly at the heart of what we do at SYTA.

By now, I imagine most of you are already settled into your classrooms and moving forward with the school year. Thank you, for all you do as educators! Being in this industry for a long time, I always marvel at the extra time, effort, and dedication teachers put into ensuring students receive a superior, hands-on educational experience outside of the classroom. It's amazing the lengths to which teachers go, to turn on that one light bulb in a student! On behalf of students not yet old enough to understand the value of what you've done for them, our sincere appreciation.

Please use the resources and information in this *Teach & Travel* to plan your best trip yet. We look forward to seeing you on the road with your students!

Terry Valentine
President, Student & Youth Travel Association
Vice President, WorldStrides/MusicAmerica



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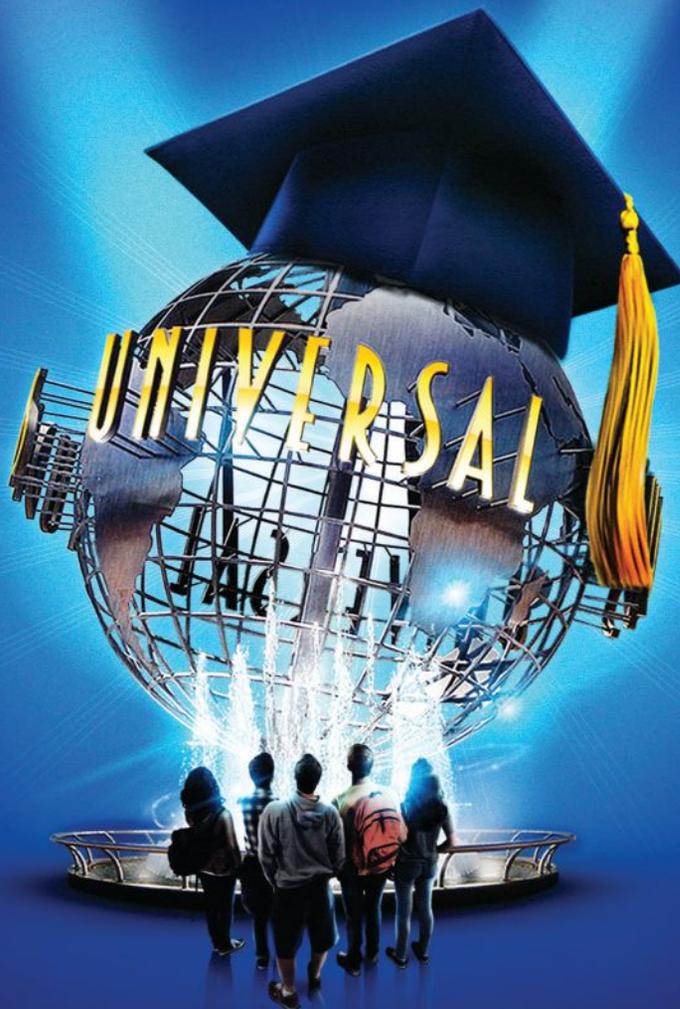
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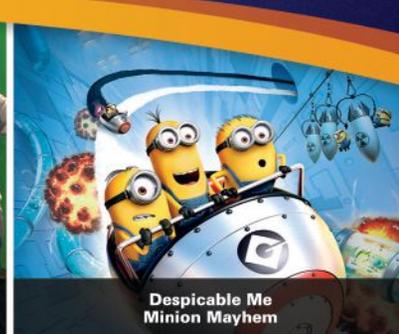
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Chattanooga

Voted “Best Town Ever!” by *Outside* magazine, Chattanooga is one of the South’s top travel destinations and offers up a year-round playground for all ages. The dedicated staff at the Chattanooga Convention & Visitors Bureau is ready to help you plan your next exciting field trip. Students will not only have the opportunity to learn more, they will also have an incredible time with plenty of hands-on activities. What’s New: Tennessee Aquarium’s new *Alligator Bayou* and *River Otter Falls* exhibits, The Jump Park, Southside Social, Chattanooga Choo Choo renovations, and High Point Climbing gym. **See ad on page 11.**



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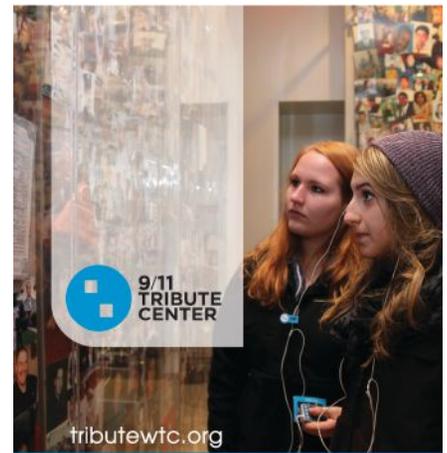
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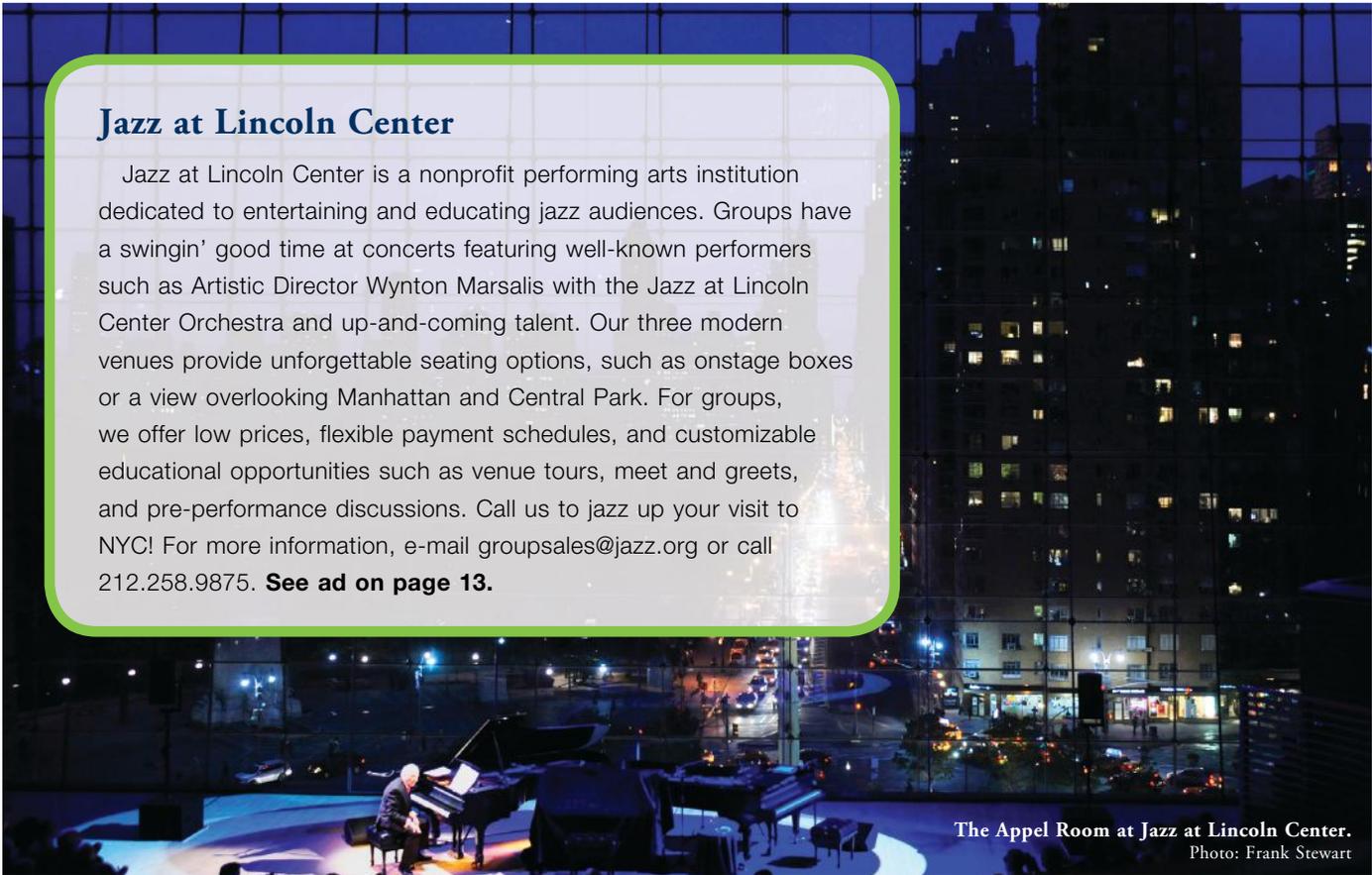
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The Appel Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center.
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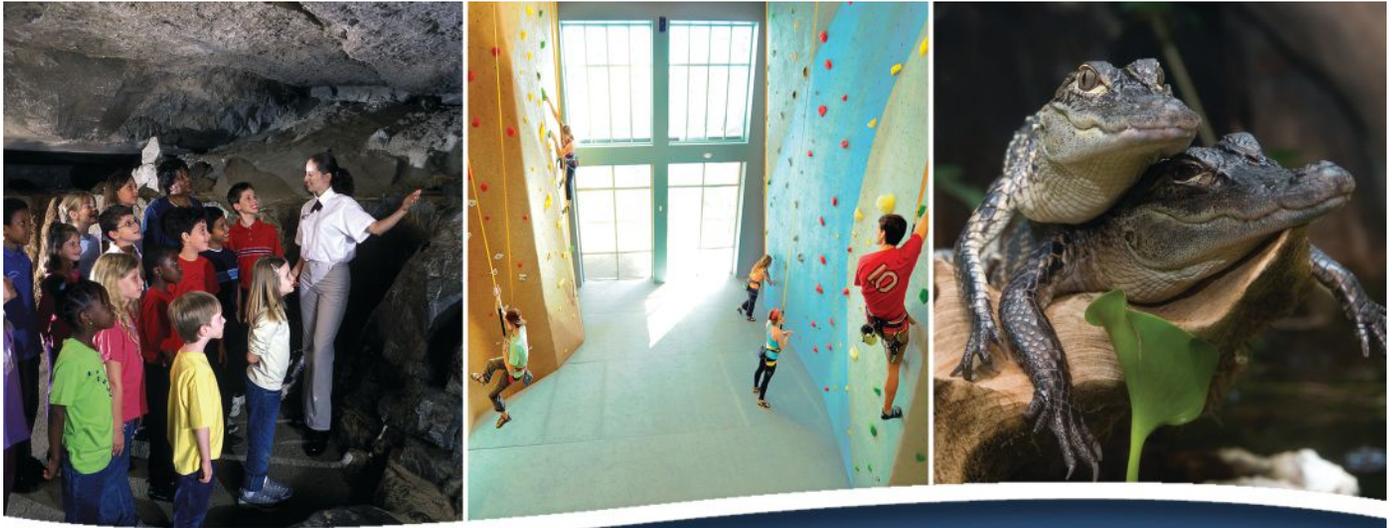
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Myrtle Beach

All students love the beach, especially this beach: the Myrtle Beach area of South Carolina. They think of fun in the sun, entertainment and amusement choices, a multitude of restaurants, and shopping galore. What they don't realize is nature, history, and science abound in attractions throughout the area, giving trip organizers a wide menu of educational opportunities for their groups. The wealth of coastal areas makes for plenty of ways to enjoy a day exploring the great outdoors. There are also theater venues offering backstage programs and performance opportunities. Visit www.MyrtleBeachGroups.com to make plans for your group! **See ad on page 27.**

Adventure Aquarium

Adventure Aquarium, celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2015, is located just minutes from downtown Philadelphia on the Camden Waterfront and features one-of-a-kind exhibits with more than 8,500 aquatic species throughout two million gallons of water. The Aquarium is home to the largest collection of sharks on the East Coast—including the only Great Hammerhead Shark on exhibit in the United States—and is the only aquarium in the world to exhibit hippos. Next year, the Aquarium will be opening a new home for the penguins, where guests will experience them like never before. Visit AdventureAquarium.com. **See ad on page 15.**



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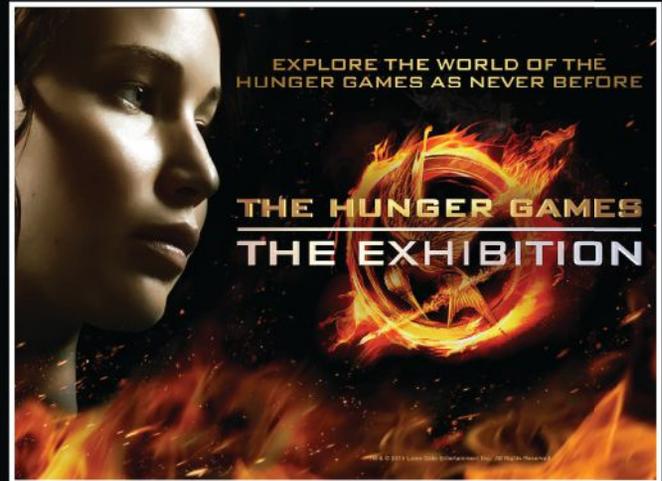
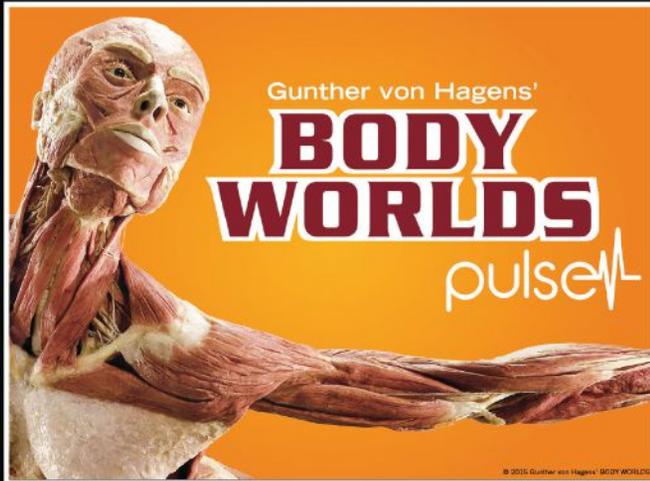
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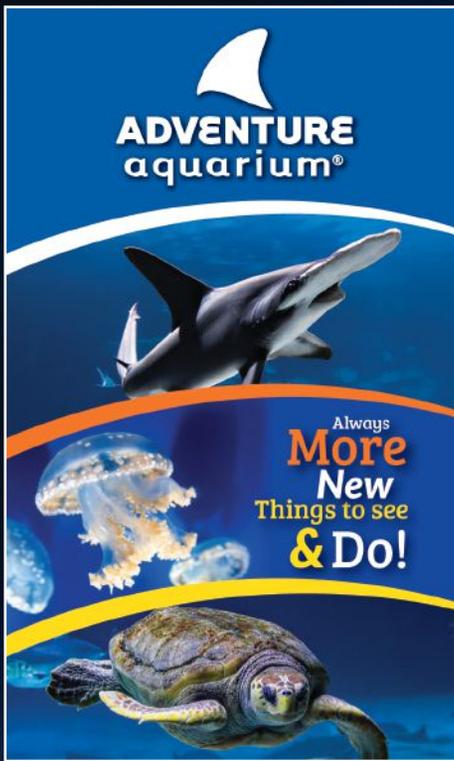
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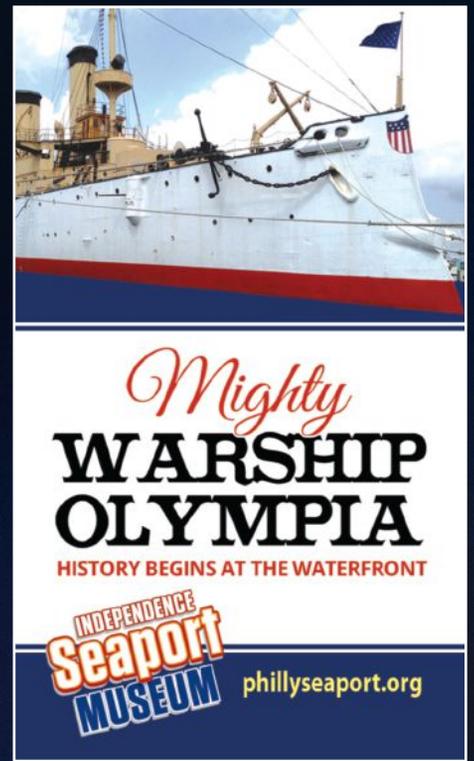
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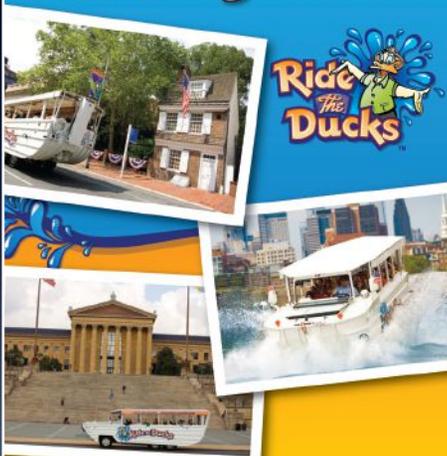
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TRAVEL IMMUNIZATIONS 101

PLAN AHEAD FOR THE SHOTS YOU NEED.

By Mark Yontz

A certain level of planning goes into any travel. Some getaways may be spontaneous and impromptu, yet preparing for a student group excursion is an entirely different matter—especially if international travel is involved.

Experienced group leaders know that traveling abroad with students requires extensive planning and preparation to ensure a successful—and safe—trip. While the primary focus is on lining up transportation, accommodations, and a compelling itinerary, other key things may also need to occur before leaving the country, such as getting the proper immunizations.

There are a number of hazards and risks facing any international traveler, and some of the world's most beautiful and interesting destinations are places where contracting an illness isn't out of the realm of possibility. This depends on your location, planned activities,

vaccination history, and current health status, but the risks are nonetheless real.

If you're part of a group traveling abroad to rural areas or developing countries, there's a higher health risk for contracting measles, polio, typhoid, Hepatitis A and B, yellow fever, and other illnesses—all commonly found outside of the United States in places such as Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. This is why health professionals recommend all U.S. travelers ages six months and older be protected by the appropriate vaccines before traveling abroad.

"Most regions outside the U.S. and Canada have additional vaccine recommendations," said Nola Aigner, a health educator and public information officer for the Polk County Health Department in Des Moines, Iowa. "If you plan on traveling outside of the U.S. and Canada, you should always consult with a physician, travel clinic, or local

health department on what vaccines are needed to travel."

According to Aigner, typhoid, hepatitis A and B, Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis), and malaria prophylaxis vaccines are the most popular ones the Health Department regularly provides travelers. It's important, she adds, to remember that each country has specific vaccine recommendations, and that the cost of vaccines—and where you can get them—also varies by city and state.

"We subscribe to a database that's updated daily that reviews all recommended, or required, vaccines in specific countries," said Aigner, "and it also gives country information regarding other non-vaccine-related diseases." The only vaccine a country can require someone to have is for yellow fever, she said, though anyone going to the Hajj (the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) is required to get the meningitis vaccine.

Knowing what vaccines members of

START YOUR RESEARCH NOW

The Internet is a great place to find information on travel immunizations and which vaccines are recommended for which countries. A few good sources of health-related information for group leaders and travelers planning on going abroad include:

- **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION**, Travelers' Health – wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel
- **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**, Vaccines.gov – www.vaccines.gov/travel
- **WEBMD**, Vaccines Health Center – www.webmd.com/vaccines/travel-immunizations
- The sites of your respective county and/or state health department.

your group should get beforehand is clearly important. But be forewarned: Not all primary health care professionals stock travel vaccines, so visiting travel clinics or the local health department might be necessary to get what's needed. Ensuring vaccines are timed appropriately and completed before departure is also important, as not all vaccines are simple, one-shot affairs.

"You need to contact your local health professional and let them know where you're traveling, so they can figure out what immunizations you need and the appropriate immunization schedule," said Aigner, who recommends travelers also get an annual flu shot. "You need to get most shots at least two weeks in advance of travel, but some vaccines might require a series of vaccines that could take one to six months to complete."

Protecting yourself (and your group) against potential health risks when traveling abroad requires not only planning, but also the assistance of health professionals who can provide counsel regarding the recommended vaccines for the places you will visit. Vaccine costs, vaccine availability, and making sure immunizations are completed and properly documented before departure are also important considerations.

Traveling overseas should be a fun, exciting adventure. Why risk marring the experience by contracting something you might possibly have prevented by planning ahead and getting the appropriate shots? It's an important question to ask yourself, and the answer is simple: Plan ahead and focus on prevention when it comes to possible exposure to illnesses while traveling. You'll thank yourself—and the people who gave you the shots—later!

Mark Yontz is a freelance writer from Urbandale, Iowa.



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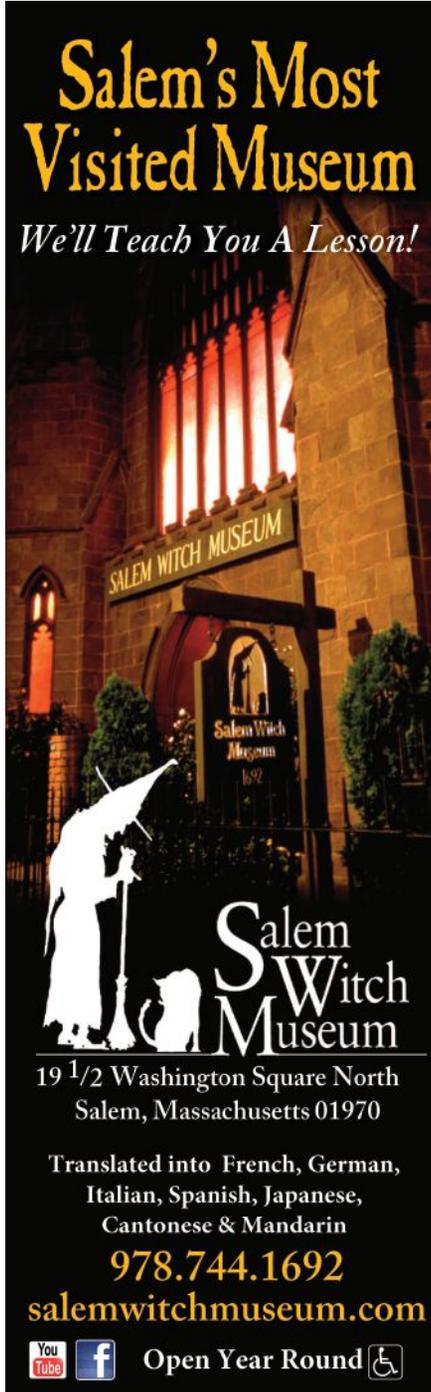
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mary kay pryce

RULE NO. 1

SMILE

ENJOY YOURSELF.

By Amy L Charles

Mary Kay Pryce, a choir director at Northville High School, has taught for 37 years—always in music, always in Northville (Michigan) Public Schools. Pryce began traveling with students in 1992, having decided to teach at the high school level for a decade before taking students on the road. She wanted to establish her program first, with travel being an addition, not the reason.

Toronto was her first choir travel. The plan: Travel every other year. One year, after the choir sang at Old North Church in Boston, Pryce received a letter from a gentleman who'd greatly enjoyed the performance and wondered if the choir could sing in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, his hometown. He extended an invitation and planned every detail. The community's churches all wanted to feed the group. Sunday morning, the choir walked to and sang for five churches, and did an assembly at the local high school. Their host put them up in dorms at University of Kentucky, where he was faculty. The "very homegrown" trip cost the choir about \$200.

The choir loved this trip, but worried it meant they couldn't go to a big city the next year. It wasn't counted as their "big trip" and the choir now travels yearly, visiting New York City every other year.

It's important to Pryce to provide experiences. Travel must involve performance, be affordable, and be reachable by bus. The school's location affords many choices within

a 12-hour drive. There's nothing saying they should travel, notes Pryce—and many things saying they shouldn't—but the reason to travel is to offer students a new experience. "We've had kids who've never been to a city, on a boat, left alone by their parents..." Travel presents opportunity for students to have a unique experience, planned for them.

Pryce loves watching her students, performing in places they otherwise might not visit or playing old-fashioned picnic games in a park. For the students on the trip, that trip is their favorite—their experience. Nashville "was a real gem," she notes. "Nashville was a really nice experience, really different. Country line dancing was something they'd never do. They went on a ropes course and really had fun." She'll keep traveling with students, as long as it's fun. "When it stops being fun, we won't do it." Rule No. 1: Smile. Enjoy yourself.

"If you can't have fun, why spend all that money? We're traveling, for goodness sake! We're not taking the SATs!" Pryce also wants parents to have fun, and any parent who wishes to travel with his or her student is welcome to be part of the experience.

"We're really positive about having people join us. We plan trips that adults like. I always plan a trip I want to be on. When the parents are there, all we ask is that they be eyes and ears." Pryce wants students to like having their parents on the trip. Parents

are chaperones, with a lighter touch. They're asked to not say anything to the students; to be aware, but not make a correction. They monitor hotel exits at night while chatting on their phones, playing cards, being nonchalant. "In case anyone wants to leave, there's an adult there." Parents are participants, included in the fun.

Pryce advises educators considering student travel to be "old enough" to really step back and run things; to be able to anticipate problems; to be established enough to have the confidence to set up the trip. She appreciates the power of having a strong tour coordinator to tend to the fine print and glitches. "It's huge!" she says of Apryl Black, of Green Light Group Tours. "Basically, I'm telling her, 'This is what we like,' and her answer is always 'Yes.'" Pryce lays out the trip. Black handles the logistics. "If we're running late to a restaurant, short one theater ticket, that's her! It's fantastic, because I can really enjoy my time with the kids and be on the trip with them—not worry about who's short a pillow."

Pryce makes travel fun, even with rules. "There's no travel agent with an umbrella, no parent telling them what to do." There's a no-whining clause. There's Rule No. 6: "If someone shows you six fingers, it means, 'don't be annoying.'" It's the final rule, however, that might be Pryce's favorite.

"Rule 12: Don't break any of the above rules. It will ruin your director's trip!"

CHOIR TOUR RULES

1. SMILE. ENJOY YOURSELF. Keep in mind what a wonderful opportunity this is.

2. ENJOY EVERYONE ON THE TRIP. Don't hang out with only a few other people. Contribute to the group. Make a new friendship with someone in the choir.

3. NO WHINING or unnecessary complaining.

4. KEEP TRACK OF YOUR BELONGINGS. Don't lose anything. Bring what you need to make you happy—blankets, books, games, food, music, et cetera.

5. 5% RULE. This is the maximum amount of time that you are allowed to be irritated, grouchy, bored, or otherwise out of sorts.

6. DON'T BE ANNOYING!

7. KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE. We're here to sing, too! Get the rest you need.

8. BE KIND to your travel guide, bus drivers, chaperones, hotel staff, and everyone else. Exhibit fine manners and class at all times. Loud and rude behavior makes us all look bad.

9. USE GOOD LANGUAGE. Vulgar language is for vulgar people.

10. "PLEASE" AND "THANK YOU" are good words. Use them often.

11. RELAX, BE PATIENT. Traffic delays and slow service are inevitable.

12. DON'T BREAK THE ABOVE RULES. It will ruin your choir director's trip and place future tours in jeopardy. (Besides, it's a violation of Rule 6.)

LET'S HAVE A GREAT TIME!

—Courtesy of Mary Kay Pryce, Choir Director, Northville (Michigan) High School



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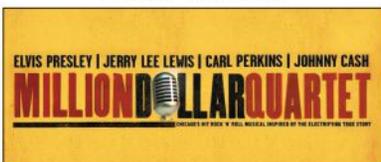
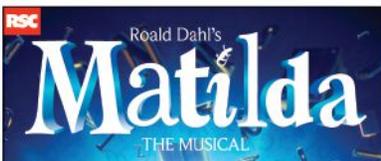
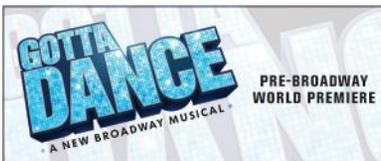
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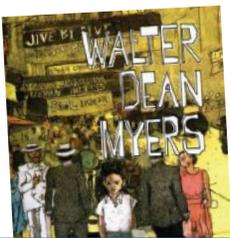
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PLANTING THE SEED: USING BOOKS & MOVIES TO INSPIRE TRAVEL INTEREST

By Jennifer Reynolds

Among the first things we learn from travel is how much we don't know. It's amazing how many ways there are to eat, worship, spend leisure time, build houses, design cars, play music, and more. Inspiring a love of travel is inspiring a love of learning. Consider these books and movies to provide students with background knowledge about a region you'll visit, give them the travel bug, or offer discussion topics on being a good traveler.

BOOKS

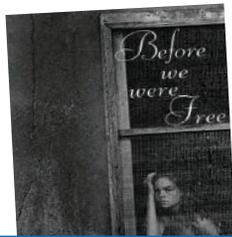


BAD BOY

By Walter Dean Myers

In this memoir of his 1940s and '50s youth in Harlem, the author's treatment of racial and social class sets the stage for learning about the important role Harlem has played in U.S. history, with funny, bittersweet anecdotes and a personal, relatable

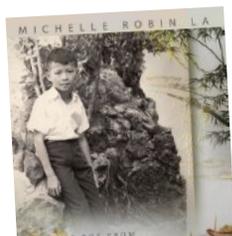
voice. Consider incorporating this text as background for a New York City visit.



BEFORE WE WERE FREE

By Julia Alvarez

This young adult novel portrays life in the Dominican Republic during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, as experienced by a young girl whose family is part of the secret resistance against the Trujillo regime. The story provides an interesting lesson on Cold War politics and life in Central America, portraying a time when strongmen were the region's norm. While this text focuses on the Dominican Republic, repression and resistance are broader themes, as is the bravery of everyday citizens.



CATCHING SHRIMP WITH BARE HANDS: A BOY FROM THE MEKONG DELTA

By Michelle Robin La

This book tells the true story

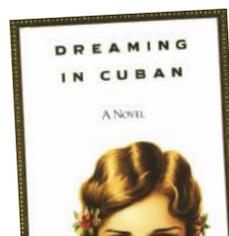
of a young man caught in the Vietnam War crossfire, and the repercussions that followed the war's end for those who had not supported the Viet Cong. Part history lesson, part cultural snapshot, the book provides an understanding of how the Vietnam War personally affected civilians of South East Asia.



DATELINE: TROY

By Paul Fleischman

This story of the Trojan War is relayed through contemporary newspaper headlines, the text constructed similar to a graphic novel, with snippets of narration coupled with newspaper clippings and other images, not only telling the story of the Trojan War, but making connections to modern-day events.

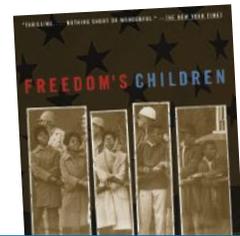


DREAMING IN CUBAN

By Cristina Garcia

Many characters from the same

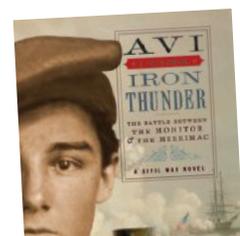
family serve as narrators for this tale of the diaspora caused by the Cuban revolution. Appropriate for older (late high school) students, the story features artful language and nuanced descriptions that provide glimpses of life in many places beyond Cuba and insight into the immigrant experience.



FREEDOM'S CHILDREN

By Ellen S. Levine

Thirty African-Americans who were youth at the time of the Civil Rights movement tell their stories in this true-story collection. From those who attended newly desegregated schools in Little Rock to those who marched in protests and peacefully broke segregation laws, the bravery of many unknown heroes is celebrated. Many locations in the South are represented in this text.

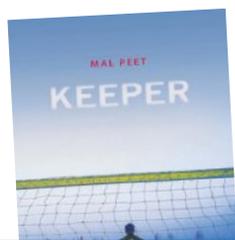


IRON THUNDER

By Avi

The narrator of *Iron Thunder*—a

13-year-old boy whose father has been killed in a Civil War battle—helps to support his family by working to help build the ironclad *Monitor*. This vivid military history would make excellent background reading for a Civil War-themed trip or an East Coast tour.



KEEPER
By Mal Peet

In this fictional story, a South American journalist interviews El Gato, who has risen from an impoverished Brazilian rain forest logging community to become a World Cup-winning goalkeeper. El Gato's story touches on culture and environmentalism themes, but cannot possibly be categorized as a sports, culture, or science story. The interview incorporates adventure and mysticism in an engaging tale.

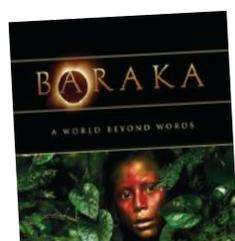


THE BOOK THIEF
By Markus Zusak

Amid a sea of incredibly good Holocaust literature available for young adults, *The Book Thief* stands out for several reasons. Death serves as the omniscient narrator, telling the story in a style reminiscent of a graphic novel.

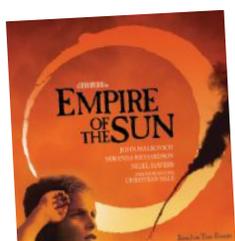
Rather than focus on concentration camp horrors, this text focuses on the lives of civilians profoundly affected by bombings, censorship, and distrust of nearly everyone—and on the joy of finding an escape in reading.

MOVIES



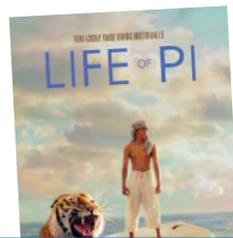
BARAKA

A film like no other, *Baraka* shows without narration the incredible vastness of the global experience. With scenes of natural wonder and environmental destruction, indigenous peoples and city dwellers, industrialization and agrarian life, sacred sites and concentration camps, *Baraka* shows the unfathomable variety on Earth.



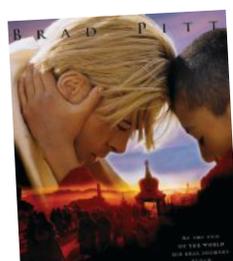
EMPIRE OF THE SUN

Starring Christian Bale well before his Batman days, *Empire of the Sun* is about a young English boy living in Shanghai, who is separated from his parents when the Japanese invade and sent to a confinement camp where he struggles to keep hope. This film is valuable in terms of history and culture for students visiting East Asia.



LIFE OF PI

The cinematically beautiful film *Life of Pi* tells the story of a young man whose family is lost at sea in a disaster that leaves Pi stranded on a lifeboat with sundry zoo animals that were on the same ship. While the story doesn't directly deal with travel, it inspires a desire to explore and understand.



SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET

This is the true story of mountain climber Heinrich Harrer, who traveled to India to climb Nanga Parbat and was stranded when World War II broke out. Harrer, an Austrian national, was imprisoned in a British POW camp in India from which he escaped, hiking into Tibet to seek refuge. After a formidable hiking experience, he and his companion, Peter Aufschnaiter, enter Lhasa, the

home of the Dalai Lama— forbidden to foreigners. The law of hospitality prevails, however, and Harrer spends the duration of the war (until the impending Chinese invasion of Tibet) living in this truly foreign land. The narrator's attitude is one reason this film (and book) is so compelling. In a land untouched by technology, with customs that surely seemed strange, Harrer expresses wonder and curiosity, but never judgment or unfavorable comparison.



THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

"To see the world, things dangerous to come to, to see behind walls, draw closer, to find each other, and to feel. That is the purpose of life." Thus muses Walter Mitty, negative assets manager at *Life* magazine, in this fictional quest based on the short story by James Thurber. In order to keep his job in the wake of reorganization, Walter must track down the elusive photographer Sean O'Connell, a life-changing quest that takes him to Greenland, Iceland, and Afghanistan. 🌍



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STOCKING YOUR CLASSROOM

ON THE CHEAP

By Jennifer Reynolds

Last summer, *Forbes* magazine reported that the average teacher spends more than \$500 of his or her own money each year stocking the classroom. That's \$15,000 over the course of a 30-year career! Consider these resources to make the most of what you're spending, and perhaps even find free items to replace things you currently purchase.

CLASSROOM LIBRARY

A classroom library can be a great way to manage time for students who finish work early, or for schedule disruptions such as having half of your class gone for a field trip or attending a meeting. If classroom library books have a tendency to disappear—maybe because students get hooked on a story while reading and take the book home to finish it—sources of cheap, good books could be helpful. Above and beyond the tried-and-true garage sale method, check out these resources for inexpensive books:

If you teach in a district with a high percentage of low-income students, check out First Book Marketplace (fbmarketplace.org), which provides new books at greatly reduced prices, with a large selection in Spanish. Kids Need to Read (kidsneedtoread.org) coordinates donations of out-of-print and overstock books to low-income schools.

The Reading Resource Project (lefbooks.org/reading_resource_project/) offers bulk purchase options, with varied collections of 100 books for \$78, in support of literacy events such as National Drop Everything and Read Day. The collections are themed, and many are available in Spanish.

Scholastic Books offers warehouse sales (scholastic.com/bookfairs/warehouse) with clearance prices and bulk-rate discounts in various regions throughout the year.

If your students use tablets, investigate Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org/), which houses almost 50,000 titles available for free download.

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While your school might not be able to afford a tablet for every student, you can create your own tech learning devices by collecting old iPhones. Even after a phone has been unsubscribed to its carrier, it can still pick up a Wi-Fi signal and provide a variety of tools for students. Using the "Settings" menu, erase content and settings from each phone, and download free learning apps for your students, such as educational games that are not dependent on Wi-Fi. Use camera and movie-making apps as aids to creating digital learning projects. Prevent students from using any apps you wish to keep off-limits, such as YouTube or Safari: In the "Settings" menu, choose "Enable Restrictions" and turn off any apps standard to the phone that you wish to make unavailable. Send out a request in your back-to-school newsletter, and request parents drop them off at open houses or orientation events in order to get your classroom stocked before the year begins.



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Register at AdoptAClassroom.org, which allows donors to pick from registered classrooms, choosing which teacher's classroom their donations will fund. Teachers follow up with reports to donors on how their donations were used.

At donorschoose.org, teachers can promote their projects for up to four months, and donors choose which projects to fund. After the goal for the project is met, Donors Choose ships the needed materials to the teachers, and donors receive photos of the project in progress.

For teachers in low-income districts, supplyourschools.org could help provide needed supplies. Digitalwish.com provides grant opportunities, fundraising for technology, and a wealth of free lesson plans, as an added bonus. Digital Wish also provides tech equipment at discount prices, contingent upon the percentage of students in the district who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Ask your local community for what you need. If you maintain a classroom website, keep a wish list in a visible place, so that parents who are able can donate items on your list. Post the wish list on your whiteboard during parent-teacher conferences, too. Contact local businesses and organizations that might be able to meet your needs, and utilize www.freecycle.org to let your community know what you're looking for and see what's available. You never know what projects a find of canning jars, flowerpots, or egg cartons might inspire! 🍄

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REASONS TO PLAN STUDENT TRAVEL TO BRANSON

By Matt Poe

Branson, Missouri, has rapidly grown in student group popularity, and Lenni Neimeyer, Director of Leisure Group Sales at the Branson/Lakes Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, has many reasons for groups to visit the area. The Branson CVB offers a wealth of student travel knowledge, experience, and information, and provides a wide range of complimentary services. Here are five of Neimeyer's best reasons for educators to bring students to Branson.

1

FIRST-CLASS PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

With rare opportunities in a variety of venues, Branson is fast becoming a top-flight student performance destination.

Students could perform in a state-of-the-art theater for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Performing groups could be the pre-show entertainment on the same stages as some of Branson's biggest, brightest stars. Theme parks and other attractions also afford exceptional settings. Neimeyer notes Branson offers distinctive opportunities that are able to draw on real-life performance experiences at a highly

professional level.

Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede opens its doors to bands and choral groups, giving them the chance to perform before live audiences. John Richardson, director of sales and marketing, Dixie Stampede, said the venue showcases student groups in the Carriage Room for crowds of up to 1,000—seated on all sides and around the balcony.

"This unique staging offers the students an uncommon experience," said Richardson. "Performances range from small bands and dance troupes, to adjudicated competitions complete

with elaborate trophy presentations by horseback riders."

Branson Landing features a scenic boardwalk along the 1.5-mile Taneycomo Lakefront. At Branson Landing's heart, visitors find a vibrant town square terracing down to a spectacular water attraction. Student groups have opportunities to perform throughout the attraction. "We will work with school groups for music performances, parades, et cetera on our property and add them into our events calendar," said Allison Scowden, marketing assistant, Branson Landing.



GAINING ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE

Student groups could benefit from Branson's enormous variety and accessibility to the entertainment industry through educational workshops, master classes, and behind-the-scenes-programs with theater professionals.

“More live shows than anywhere featuring world-class entertainment personalities, multitalented performing families, specialty acts, impersonators, illusionists, comedians, and spectacular large-cast production shows make Branson the most entertaining place on earth to learn,” Neimeyer said.

Greg Hoffman created Branson On Stage Live! to help students engage in entertainment industry-related learning activities. He finds the On Stage Live! experience the “Ultimate Musical Showcase” for student instrumental, choral, and dance groups, who take center stage as a Branson theater’s opening act. “We are celebrating our 20th year as a dedicated student performance management company designing custom performance tours for college, high school, and middle school bands and choirs from all across America.”

A performance coordinator guides student groups through the theater performance showcase. Students participate in a pre-show clinic, rehearsal, and sound check to prepare for their debut. Branson On Stage Live! personnel set the stage and provide full concert band percussion, stands, chairs or choral risers, and keyboards, professionally addressing the needs of each performing group. Qualifying groups might perform a selected piece with a Branson entertainer during their student presentation.



NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED COMPETITIONS AND FESTIVALS

Interactive musical competition experiences abound in Branson, through nationally recognized festival companies. With so many professional venues available to student groups, and other attractions that allow performances, it’s no wonder Branson hosts many festivals for student performers.

Silver Dollar City Music Summit Choir Festival, taking place April 22 and 29, 2016, at The Riverfront Playhouse, is open to elementary, middle school, junior high, and senior high school men’s, mixed, treble, and women’s non-show choirs. Groups may perform two selections of contrasting style, with the option

of a brief warm-up performance. All school groups receive a participation award immediately following their performance, and are able to see adjudicator comments and scores online at the end of the performance day. After performing, there’s still time for fun and rides at Silver Dollar City theme park.

Continued on page 36 ...

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4

EXPLORING THE RICH HISTORY OF THE OZARKS

Performance may be top of the list for many student groups heading to Branson, yet the area offers much more. Neimeyer explains that the rich history of the Ozarks and Branson is reflected in diversity of businesses, attractions, museums, historical landmarks, craftsmanship, geology, landscapes, wildlife, and military contributions. All serve to move students beyond the four walls of the classroom, expanding their educational horizons.

Silver Dollar City began as a re-creation of the mining town that once stood at the mouth of Marvel Cave. “The park originated as a cave attraction—not just any cave, but Missouri’s deepest cavern,” said Michelle Herzan, who does marketing for the venue. “This is a registered natural landmark with guided tours offered every thirty minutes. We use this to educate on so many levels,

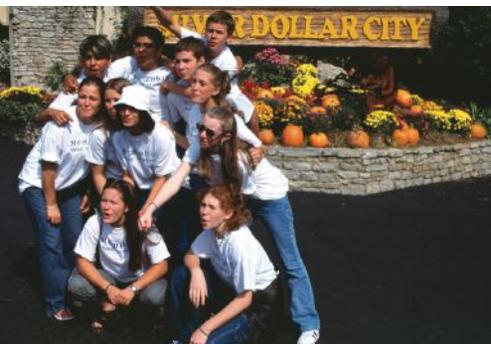
and on so many subjects.” Students visiting in May can take part in School Days, featuring hands-on educational activities focused on science, social studies, history, and fine arts. The schoolmarm welcomes students for a lesson on the American flag, and other studies include the Butterfield Stage Coach Line, the history of Silver Dollar City, folk music history, and sing-alongs with the Homestead Pickers.

Beyond Branson and U.S. history, students could learn about historic events such as the sinking of the *Titanic*. The Titanic Museum Attraction connects educators and students to the passengers and the stories of the *Titanic*, through many subjects. The attraction’s Education Guide provides activity ideas for lesson plans that connect math, science, geography, history, and language arts curriculums to the *Titanic*. The

venue also provides performance opportunities.

“Student marching bands and choirs are encouraged to honor the musicians that were onboard the *Titanic* by performing at the Titanic Museum Attraction,” said Mary Kellogg-Joslyn, Titanic Museum Attraction co-owner. “In our Music Gallery, students can play their instruments and play on our baby grand piano.”

When students need to simply have fun, consider Track Family Fun Parks, which has four locations in Branson. “The Track Family Fun Parks has been providing student friendly entertainment for over thirty years,” said Julie Wilson, sales and marketing director. “You’ll find a story at every turn.” The venues include go-kart tracks, laser tag, bumper boats and cars, mini golf, and arcades, along with plenty of food options.



5

CENTRAL LOCATION IN THE HEART OF AMERICA

Convenience cannot be overstated, said Neimeyer, who cites Branson’s location as a great reason for students to visit. “Branson is less than a

day’s drive from one-third of the nation’s population,” she said. “For those student and youth groups who want to fly to Branson, the Branson

airport is located just ten miles south of downtown, Branson offering convenient and affordable airfare prices.”

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TORONTO



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REVEALED

When looking for places where students can be offered a “global experience,” many savvy travelers have learned that Toronto—the capital of Ontario and Canada’s largest city—offers an appealing mix of things cool enough to capture the attention of all ages.

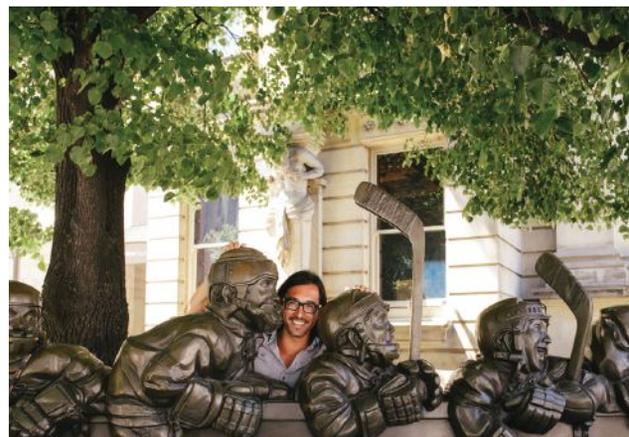
North America’s fifth-largest city and consistently ranked among the world’s “most livable” cities, Toronto offers a surprisingly hip, urban contrast to the stereotype some people have of Canada. But what else would you expect from a city that’s home to more than 70 film festivals, 9,000 restaurants, countless entertainment options, and hundreds of ethnic neighborhoods where more than 180 different languages and dialects are spoken?

Toronto is much more than just a big city on the shores of Lake Ontario: It’s a globally oriented city with a vibrant mixture of history, arts, culture, food, and entertainment that makes it a great place for student groups to visit.

“Toronto provides a global experience in an accommodating setting,” explained Andrew Weir, executive vice president and chief marketing officer for Tourism Toronto (www.seetorontonow.com). “It’s also a very safe and easy city to navigate, and much of it is very walkable.”

Much of Toronto’s uniqueness comes from its rich diversity, a “big selling point” revealed in everything from culture and languages, to neighborhoods and food—and not surprising, considering more than half of the city’s population was born outside of Canada. “The city can be different from block to block, and beyond this neighborhood diversity there’s also the diversity of food—all of which allows for a unique exposure to the world,” said Weir. “It’s all a part of our DNA.”

Beyond the global feel of Toronto’s many different neighborhoods, Weir said, there are plenty of other attractions to keep students engaged. For a look at Canadian culture and history, visit the Hockey Hall of Fame and the Art Gallery of Ontario, aka the AGO.



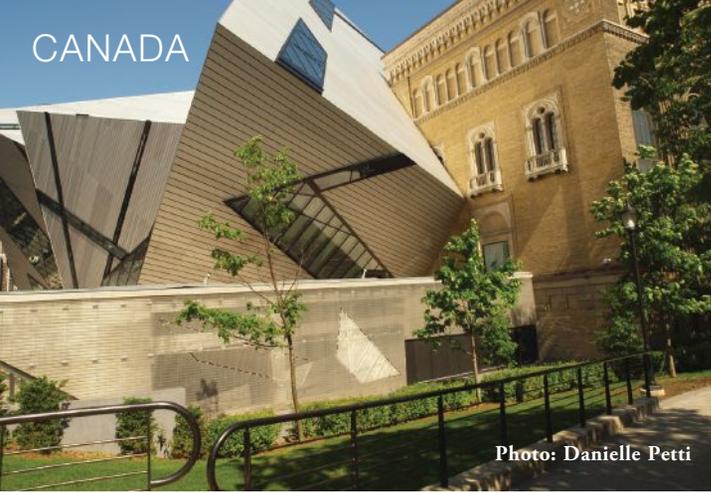


Photo: Danielle Petti



Photo: Danielle Petti



The historic Distillery District (www.thedistillerydistrict.com) and the popular Kensington Market (www.kensington-market.ca) could offer hours of big-city fun and entertainment.

Coordinating a visit to coincide with one of Toronto's many festivals could be a good way for students to experience the city. "Festivals lend themselves to certain groups and can be an interesting way to build something into a curriculum." Weir gives as an example the Toronto International Film Festival, or TIFF, which hosts the TIFF Kids International Film Festival every April and offers tours at the TIFF Bell Lightbox (www.tiff.net), where visitors can see exhibits and learn about filmmaking year-round. He also recommends Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival (www.hotdocs.ca), North America's largest documentary festival, conference, and market, as another annual April option.

On Weir's recommended "can't miss" list for groups are the aforementioned Hockey Hall of Fame and AGO, as well as the CN Tower, the Toronto Islands, the Distillery District, and Kensington Market.

Like any big city, Toronto could feel overwhelming. That's why students might appreciate finding ways to experience it that offer a different perspective and allow them to connect in more meaningful ways.

"We can roll up to a spot and experience it up close, and stitch together a lot of different sites on our tours," said Terrence Eta, the founder of Toronto Bicycle Tours (www.torontobicycletours.com). "There's something about being on a bike that really gives you a chance to absorb the environment."

Eta notes Toronto has a lot of different dimensions—from sports, to art, to culture and history. With its fleet of 50 to 60 bikes, his company can accommodate a wide range of groups. And because Toronto Bicycle Tours is a boutique shop, it does tours year-round, seven days per week, and offers a bit more flexibility in customizing a tour to fit a group's needs.

"The city looks different through the seasons and offers different stories to tell," explained Eta, adding that the typical student bike tour usually travels seven to eight miles over a roughly two-and-a-half-hour period. "We're not riding very far on our tours, but we are getting off the beaten path, seeing lots of stuff, and really interacting with things."

In a city as large and diverse as Toronto, interacting is the key to a successful and meaningful visit. There's too much you might miss by simply viewing everything through the lens of a motorcoach window.

Take advantage of what Toronto has to offer and explore the many layers of the city's history and culture. If you do, you might be pleasantly surprised by the international experience your group has on the shores of Lake Ontario! 🇨🇦

Mark Yontz is a freelance writer from Urbandale, Iowa.

Continued on page 44 ...

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There's no shortage of things to see and do in Toronto, so deciding what to include in your itinerary could be a real challenge. Here's a quick look at some top attractions to consider during your visit.

... continued from page 42.

CN TOWER

Looming high above downtown, CN Tower was once the world's tallest structure and is today one of Toronto's most famous landmarks. CN Tower offers a number of viewing areas, places to eat, and an adventurous EdgeWalk—with the city far below!

www.cntower.ca/en-ca/home

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

This well-regarded museum has more than 80,000 works in its collection, from the present back to the first century. AGO boasts the largest collection of Canadian art and, with 480,000 square feet of exhibit space, is also one of the largest galleries in North America.

www.ago.net

TORONTO ZOO

Located northeast of the city center along the Red River, Canada's largest zoo is home to more than 450 different species from around the world. Unique exhibits showcasing animals from North America, the African Savannah, the Great Barrier Reef, and more make Toronto Zoo an attraction worth visiting.

www.torontozoo.com

TORONTO ISLANDS

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www.torontoisland.com

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www.rom.on.ca/en

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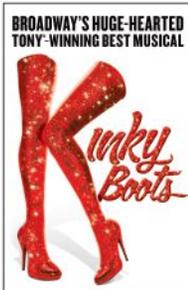
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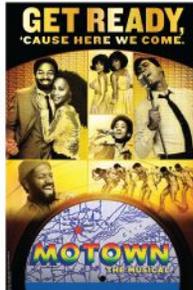
toronto

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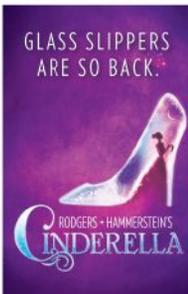
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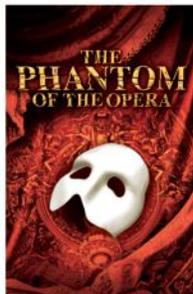
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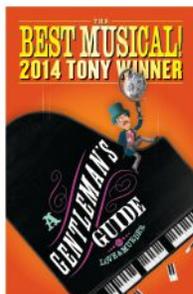
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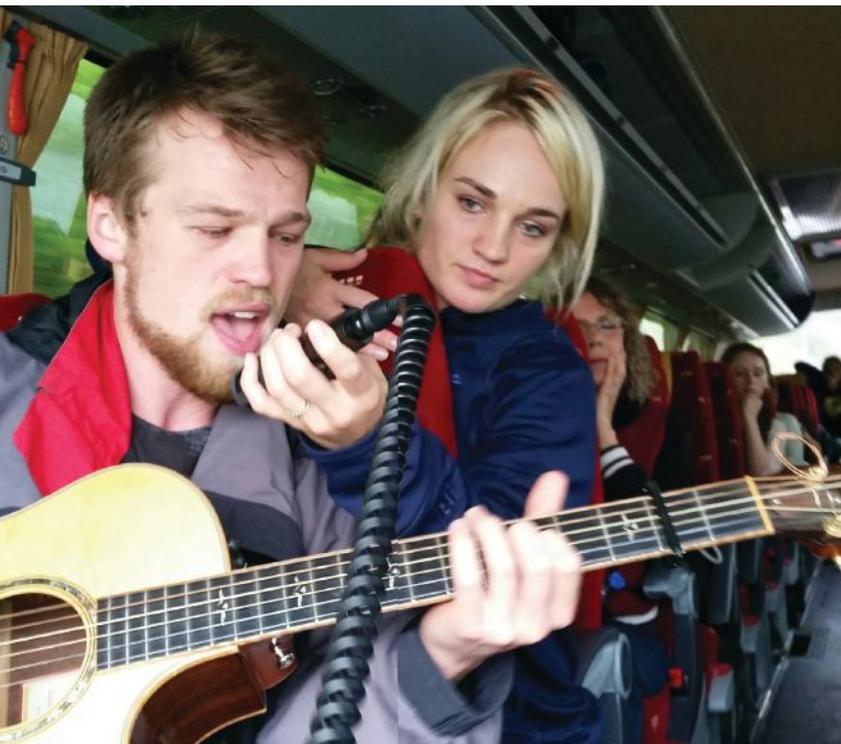
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BEYOND ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADES

IRELAND

for STUDENTS

By David Matthews



A small country with a small population, Ireland packs more culture, history, humor, music, and craic (Irish for “good times”) into every square mile than any other nation.

The reasons to take student groups to Ireland—musical or nonmusical—are summed up by Jim Gray, director of the Irish Fiddle Fetish. The group comprises orchestra students from Dublin Scioto High School in Dublin, Ohio, who enjoy playing Irish music. They’ve toured Ireland several times and have hosted workshops and performed with The Willis Clan, a rising star in Irish, bluegrass, and pop music.

Gray notes that taking a student group to Ireland is among the best trips he’s undertaken in 30 years of teaching and traveling. “Ireland has some of the coolest places on earth.” He finds it striking to watch students realize that ancient and living history

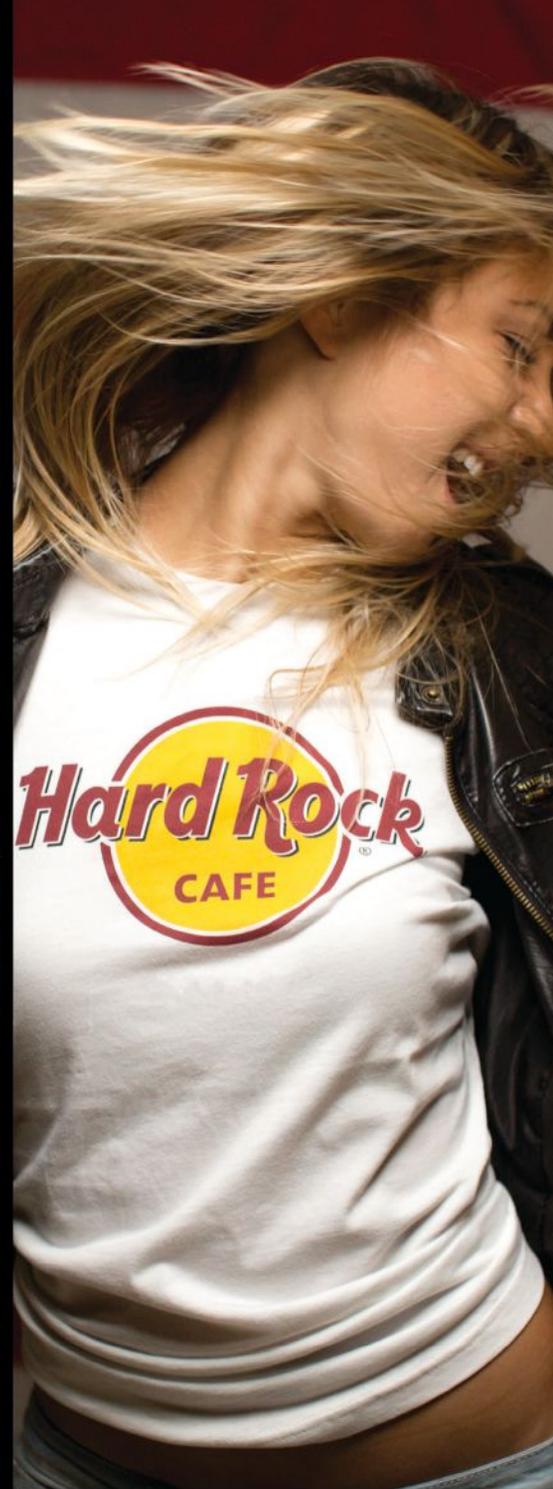
exist side by side. “It’s a great place to experience where much of American history came from, and where some of the most influential music in today’s popular culture got its start.” He advises music teachers to not be afraid to do impromptu concerts wherever they take their students. “The Irish love and appreciate good music and American students who take the time to learn their music and bring it home to them. And don’t be afraid to make some music in the pubs!”

This year Ireland promoted “The Wild Atlantic Way” in the west, and 2016 will celebrate “Ireland’s Ancient East” with its 5,000 years of history. There are magical cities and sites in both the

Continued on page 52 ...



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... continued from page 49.

east and west that student groups will love. Prime Tours has been taking groups to Ireland for 15 years, and staff are still amazed by all of the things to see, do, and experience there—and are always touched deeply by the famous genuine warmth of the people.

The student market is growing. “Ireland is getting a lot more exposure for the student market due to more exposure on Facebook postings and word of mouth advertising,” said Jean McCluskey, Tourism Ireland’s Manager Golf & Group Travel Marketing. “Students will have not a good time, but a great time. And the Irish teenagers are very friendly and happy to help with local games or out-of-the-box experiences.”

TIPS FOR PLANNING AND MAKING THE MOST OF AN IRELAND STUDENT TOUR.

MOVE AROUND THE COUNTRY.

Use several hotels in several cities. Some groups choose to spend a week based at one Dublin hotel, yet while there can be benefits of the hub-and-spoke method, it makes for a lot of back-and-forth driving time—and you can only reach so much of Ireland in a day. You can get from Dublin to Galway in three hours, but that’s a six-hour round trip, not leaving much time for musical Galway or the rugged Connemara Peninsula, the must-see Cliffs of Moher, or the moonscape of the Burren. And anyone going to Killarney must visit the Ring of Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula. A new favorite to many of our groups is Westport in County Mayo. Westport House offers group tours of the ancestral home of Grace O’Malley, the Pirate Queen, a scenic cruise on Clew Bay, and Crough Patrick, the mountain where St. Patrick climbed, then fasted for 40 days.

One highlight south of Westport is Glen Keen Farm, with sheepdog demonstrations, turf cutting in the bog, hiking, lunch, or just tea and scones. The owners can bring in local dancers and musicians. A recent Prime Tours group had 105 people, ages 4 to 83, and everyone loved it.

Dublin has Trinity College and the ancient Book of Kells exhibit, plus shopping on Grafton Street—and all of the national museums are free. The Temple Bar area has dozens of shops and pubs, many of them with music sessions during the day.

Northern Ireland has become more popular. Belfast has the Titanic Experience, plus its educational “murals tours” depicting both sides’ views of The Troubles. Go north to the Antrim Coast, home of the Giants Causeway and the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge and settings from Game of Thrones.

HEAD FOR THE PUB.

Ireland has unique venues suitable for student groups that few countries have: pubs. Many welcome musical groups for impromptu sessions until 9 p.m. Student groups can visit pubs to experience the music, great food, and

culture, which goes beyond drinking Guinness. Although the drinking age in Ireland is 18, McCluskey said, “They will not get into trouble, as the locals will look out for them and the student groups are chaperoned.”

KNOW WHERE YOU’RE STAYING.

Some student groups sign up for a tour and find themselves in hotels well outside of the cities. That may save a few Euros, but the group is removed from the Irish people and the culture, except when they travel to places in their bus.

HAVE YOUR EVENING SCHEDULE SET.

Bus driver hour restrictions are tight, and you may find yourself paying for a relief driver or being told you can’t travel to an evening event—even an early one. This becomes more important if you are staying at a hotel outside of town or in an office park with nothing much around it.

CONFIRM THE PUBLICITY FOR MUSICAL GROUPS’ PERFORMANCES.

It can be disheartening to raise all of that money and travel across an ocean, only to have three people wander into your performance because no one knew about it. Most Irish venues are great about spreading the word and selling tickets, if it’s a ticketed event where your group teams up with a popular local group.

HAVE A TOUR DIRECTOR ON BOARD.

Bus drivers and guides in Ireland do an amazing job with history, culture, and maybe a song or two, but they don’t handle many group issues off of the bus. A tour director can arrange late-night transfers, media relations, photography, social media updates, venue coordination, ticketing, musical gear rental, and other things that can and will pop up. Leaders and chaperones should focus on their students and having a good time, not on logistics.

STAY AT LEAST ONE NIGHT AT A CASTLE HOTEL.

Some are extremely expensive, but a few have affordable group rates and your students get an incredible historic experience.

BUILD IN ADDED TIME FOR ACTIVE AND ENERGETIC STUDENT GROUPS.

Many venues have opportunities for more exploring. Make time to hike, play on the beach, or just hang out in a scenic town where students can absorb the Irish culture, meet some locals, and talk about their experiences. 🐾

David Matthews is president of Prime Tours in Dublin, Ohio.





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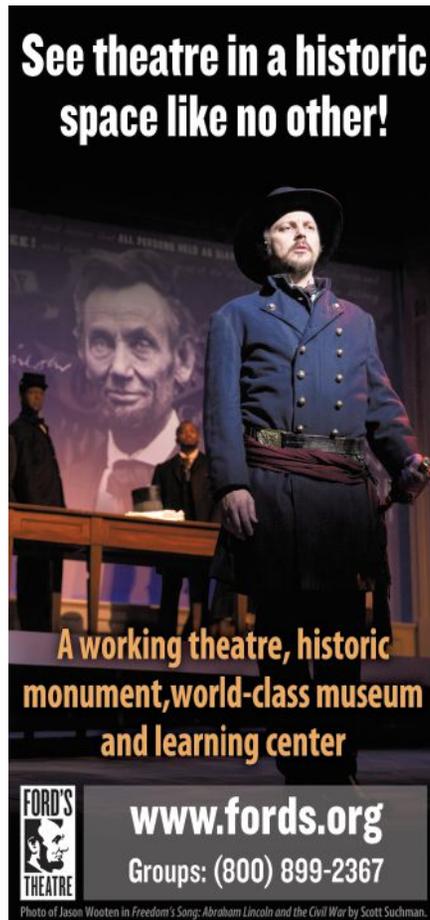
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Sacramento,

By Jennifer Reynolds



EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Sacramento's history is tied to California's beginnings. The gold rush that fueled westward expansion and led to California's statehood is documented at the California History Museum, Sutter's Fort, the Gold Bug Mine, Marshall Gold Discover State Historic Park, and Old Sacramento, a 28-acre National Historic Landmark District and State Historic Park along the Sacramento River. Old Sacramento offers shopping, dining, and entertainment, along with historical attractions and world-renowned museums (including California State Railroad Museum) that commemorate the California Gold Rush and the Transcontinental Railroad. Tours of Sacramento's capitol building provide an opportunity to learn about the state's history and witness government in action.

The Crocker Art Museum offers guided tours with options for students to create their own works, using techniques and materials discussed in their tour. Reflective of its multicultural backdrop, the museum's permanent collection includes European, African and Oceanic, Asian, and California and American exhibits, as well as ceramic and paper collections with international representation. Upcoming exhibits include Chinese porcelains and ceramics from the Amazon region.

ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

America's Farm-to-Fork Capital, Sacramento allows student groups to enjoy hands-on tours of its local farms and food industry, gaining a valuable learning experience showing where their food comes from and the importance of one of California's largest industries. Groups can raft or hike their way through Gold Country, and camp near the banks of the Sacramento River. With several amusement parks nearby, a zoo, the American River bike path (considered one of the West Coast's premier bike paths), golfing, eco-tours, and many theaters (some offering field trip and educational opportunities in addition to performances) and arenas that host performances, there are plentiful activities to keep students entertained and engaged.

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Sacramento offers ample performance opportunities. The state capitol building, Arden Fair Mall, Raley Field ballpark, Sleep Train Arena, and Old Sacramento host student performance groups—some seasonally, some throughout the year. Sacramento events also provide opportunities. Second Saturday Art Walk, Sacramento Youth Jazz Festival, Juneteenth celebration, Gold Rush Days, and California State Fair all host student performance groups. 🎭

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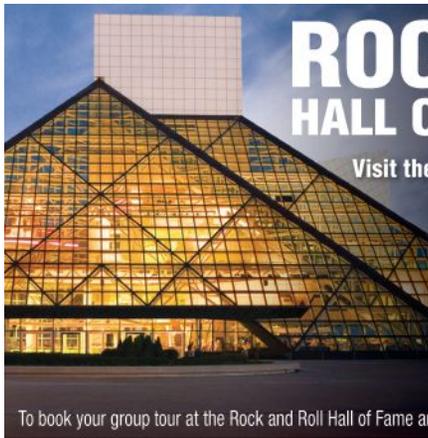


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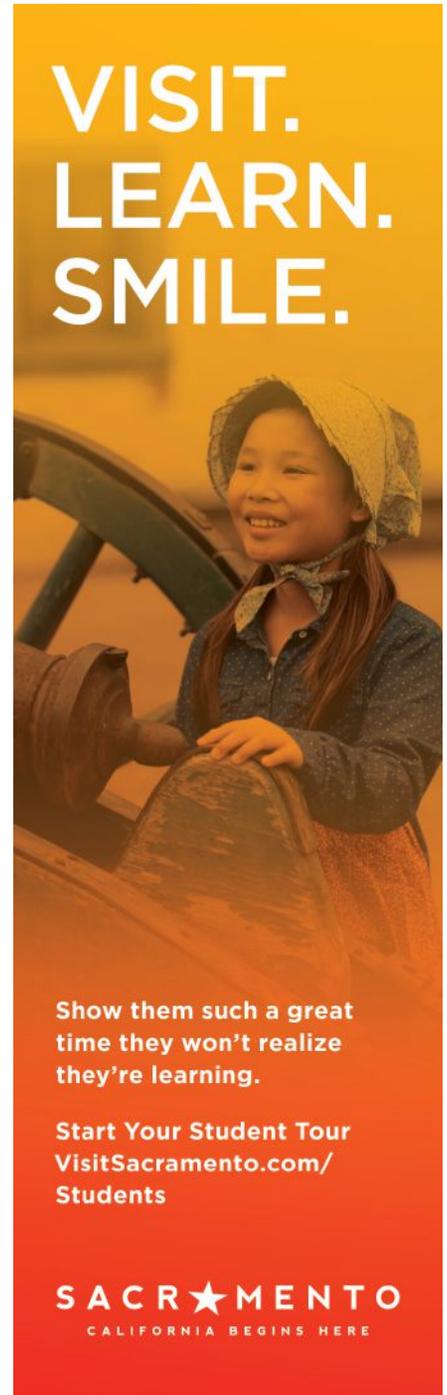
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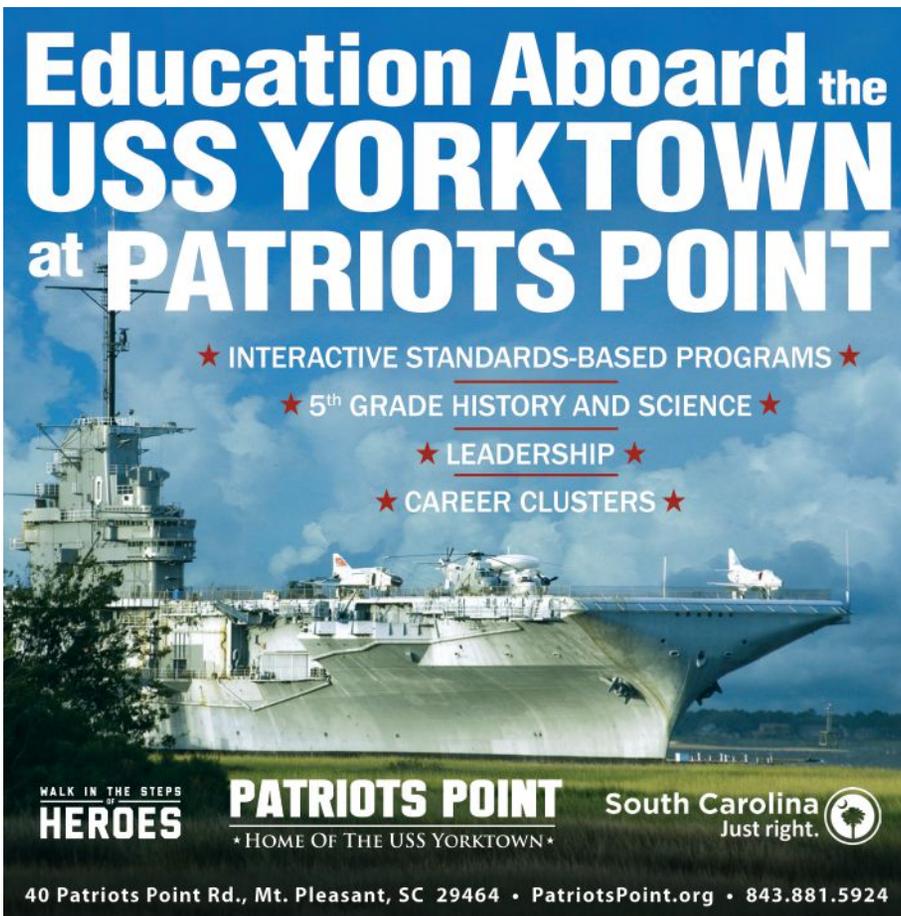
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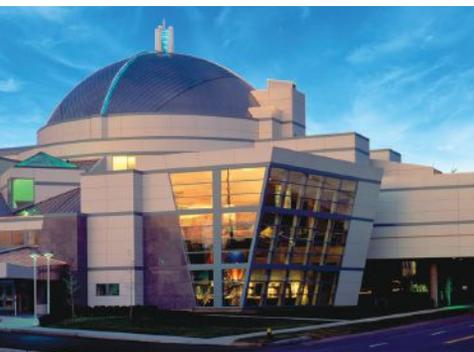
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MISSOURI St. Louis,

By Jennifer Reynolds

EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Saint Louis Art Museum recently opened the Grace Taylor Broughton Sculpture Garden, a remarkable outdoor collection of international, modern and contemporary art. The Laumeier Sculpture Park is another popular destination for art lovers. For a glimpse into St. Louis' past, the Missouri History Museum invites guests to explore its latest exhibit, *A Walk in 1875*. The exhibit presents the most fascinating and comprehensive maps of St. Louis created in 1875, and helps tell the story through artifacts and images, giving a glimpse at such topics as cooking, the brewing industry, the infamous Whiskey Ring scandal, and even St. Louis' first baseball field.

The St. Louis Science Center and museums dedicated to Black history, the Holocaust, photography, the Civil War, transportation, economics, and the Pulitzer Prize provide a multitude of learning opportunities. Visit the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, where the famous Union general and president lived with his wife, her family, and an enslaved African-American workforce from 1854 – 1859. Fifteen minutes east of St. Louis, the Cahokia Mounds are remnants of an ancient city that was larger than London in 1250 A.D. The location, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, offers an interpretive center as well as guided and self-guided tours.

ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

McDonnell Polar Bear Point at the Saint Louis Zoo is now open, featuring an 850-pound male polar bear, who joins black rhinos, Asian elephants, hippos, cheetahs, and a range of other wildlife at this free attraction. Let your students explore subterranean natural wonders of the Cave State's numerous underground caverns. Camping and canoeing are available, too. Go Ape! Treetop Adventure is an exhilarating adventure course where visitors encounter obstacles like rope swings, rope ladders and bridges—40 feet in the air.

The nation's oldest botanical garden, Missouri Botanical Garden spans 79 acres, includes Japanese, Victorian, English Woodland, and Ottoman gardens, and hosts a range of festivals throughout the year. Forest Park, a historic urban park, contains museums and restaurants, forests with hiking paths, a lake and waterfall, sports fields, and numerous other attractions. St. Louis is home to NHL, NFL, and MLB sports teams, theaters, opera houses, and a symphony. Tour the city by riverboat, Segway, or trolley. Water parks and amusement parks round out the activity opportunities!

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Six Flags amusement park offers a Celebrate the Arts program that gives performance opportunities to bands, choirs, dance teams, and performing arts groups. The Gateway Arch, St. Louis Science Center, Gateway Arch Riverboats, Ballpark Village, St. Louis Union Station, and numerous other venues also offer performance opportunities. 🎭

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DEALING WITH

DISRUPTIVE PARENTS

By Julie Beck

Planning a trip can be chaotic. Numerous components must be arranged: determining a destination, selecting a travel company, and confirming lodging, transportation, and tours. This doesn't include recruiting students, collecting or following up on payments, and completing the dreaded paperwork. All aspects can be daunting; however, as the tour leader, you somewhat have control over them. One area that could be challenging when planning a student educational trip is dealing with the parents of your delegation. Actually, exhausting may sometimes be the more appropriate word.

Usually I find it's one parent, not both, who is the domineering type. Such parents are overbearing or, as it's referred to in the college circle, the "helicopter parent." According to a Parent magazine article by Kate Bayless, "The term helicopter parent was first used in Dr. Haim Ginnott's 1969 book, *Parents & Teenagers*, by teens who said their parents hover over them like a helicopter." The term quickly caught on and became a dictionary entry in 2011. Carolyn Daitch, Ph.D., director of the Center for the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders, stated, "Helicoptering parenting refers to a style of parents who are over-focused on their children." The main reasons parents hover over their children are (1) fear of dire consequences, (2) feelings

The main reasons
parents hover over
their children are

**FEAR OF DIRE
CONSEQUENCES**

FEELINGS OF ANXIETY

OVERCOMPENSATION

**PARENTAL
PEER PRESSURE**

of anxiety, (3) overcompensation, and (4) parental peer pressure. When some parents worry about many things and want to protect their children from what might happen and keep them from hurt or disappointment, they become overbearing.

There are consequences for helicopter parenting.

These parents have good intentions. But hovering may have a negative effect on their children, including decreased confidence and self-esteem, undeveloped coping skills, increased anxiety, sense of entitlement, and undeveloped life skills. This can be a big problem for a tour operator leading students. Students may expect to have their way and,

as we know, this isn't possible when leading a large delegation. Students may also expect their tour leaders to complete tasks (pack their luggage, launder clothing, et cetera), as they're used to their parents doing everything for them. Finally, leaders may have to contend with students unable to cope with change as they travel, particularly if overseas where culture, language, currency, and other issues could be at hand. Helicoptering parents can be disruptive to tour leaders, even if the parents aren't traveling with the group.

Preparing for a recent People to People overseas journey, I had monthly meetings with my high school delegation. At our first meeting, one parent was a bit overbearing. She jumped in and did everything her daughter did, from team building, to note taking, to participating in get-acquainted activities. Since this was my first interaction with her, I didn't say anything, but rather observed her actions. At our next meeting, I gently nudged her to the back of the room and encouraged her to interact with the other parents. She was hesitant, but did so, while keeping a close watch over her daughter. As the months wore on, the mother changed from being a helicopter parent to a loving parent. She realized her daughter was capable of coping and this indeed would be a life-changing experience, for her daughter and for her.

A parent who doesn't interact with

I truly believe it could be **AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE** where parents could engage with their students and helping them ...

GAIN LIFE SKILLS,
BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE AND TRUST, and
RECEIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH.

the tour leader can be disruptive, as the leader needs effective communication with the parents. I want parents to feel comfortable with me taking and leading their student. It's important to me that parents understand my travel experiences and background, focus on safety, commitment to educational journeys, and, most important, dedication to their student. By communicating and interacting with the parents throughout the planning process, the leader can begin to better understand the student and how to handle him or her when situations arise on the trip.

On my last journey, I never communicated with one student's parents until the week before we traveled. By then, it was too late. It's not that I didn't try to connect with them: The parents chose to ignore my communications, never attended meetings, ignored my voice messages and e-mails, and made no effort to reach out to me. I felt distant from those parents and from their daughter. When we held our farewell party, just prior to our overseas departure, the parents of my delegation were excited to see me. They hugged me when I arrived and departed the party. They were confident in my ability to ensure their sons and daughters would have an amazing, fun, safe, educational journey, and that I'd be able to handle any crisis

that occurred. The one family, whom I barely knew, merely shook my hand. It was an awkward feeling, one that may have been avoided had the parents had not withdrawn their communication.

The last focus on disruptive parents involves those who travel with student delegations. If parents travel with their children on a group trip, they need to remember that the tour leader is in charge. The tour leader, who has extra training, needs chaperones; however, those chaperones (often parents) are expected to adhere to the same rules as everyone else. Parent chaperones can neither expect nor demand extra privileges for themselves and their student. The tour leader is also in charge of enforcing rules and regulations. A parent may be conferred, but the tour leader has the ultimate say in what transpires regarding discipline and consequences. A parent who goes on a student trip must be willing to accept this lesser role and understand that the tour leader has responsibilities and guidelines he or she must adhere to for the sponsoring organization. If a parent intervenes, it can jeopardize the authority the tour leader has to the remainder of the delegation.

Next summer, I'm leading a student trip to Japan. For the first time, I've agreed to let parents travel with their high school students. I realize I'm

opening up myself to some challenges: I could have supportive, helpful parents on my journey who realize my role and let me do my job, or I could have some disruptive parents who want to wreak havoc on my well-organized overseas trip. I plan to make a policy that parents traveling with us must attend all meetings, as the students are required to do. That way, I can develop a rapport with the parents and with their students, establish a chain of command, and emphasize my expectations that must be followed. I truly believe it could be an amazing experience where parents could engage with their students and their lives while helping them gain life skills, build self-confidence and trust, and receive opportunities for growth.

Julie R. Beck is a world traveler who visited all fifty states by age thirty and all seven continents by age forty-two, and has now visited seventy-four countries. Her goal is to reach one hundred countries. Julie, a leadership and travel consultant, shares her experiences with others in leadership workshops, travel columns, and presentations. She is an avid backpacker and canoer who resides in North Carolina. You may reach her at julierbeck@gmail.com.



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DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN CUBA

Learning about a different way of life

By Jennifer Reynolds

Students from Harvard-Westlake School in Studio City, California, recently visited to Cuba to document everyday life in the island nation. Through interviews, photography, and documentary filmmaking skills they captured the essence of life in a place that, while close in geographic location terms, is far different from the United States.

Cheri Gaulke, head of Harvard-Westlake's visual arts department and director of the school's summer film program, notes that students create documentaries informed by history. "We tell students, 'We expect you to give back, to create a project that tells someone's story.'" Students learn the art of digital storytelling—how to ask good questions; how to take and edit photos and video. "There is a real emphasis on journalistic skills, and we're constantly coaching them. The students' projects make them feel as though they have been a part of something historic. I think they're really proud of that."

Gaulke partnered with Alethea Paris of Friendship Tours World Travel for the Cuba visit. Paris offers trips that focus on transcending ordinary tourism and on helping students become informed citizens of the global community. Before leaving from Miami, students met with anti-Castro Cuban exiles who offered historical context for the trip, providing students with a sense of why some Cubans left when the revolution took place, and a point of reference with which to compare what they experience on their visit. When they arrived, students met

with native Cubans in various settings. Interactions with bands and hip-hop artists, dance and cooking classes, baseball games, and time spent at Havana's Malecón sea wall and other public gathering places allowed opportunities to connect.

"These experiences expose students to a range of opinions, and it becomes possible to 'tease out' critical analysis," Paris said. "We try to strip away the rhetoric about why a country has been demonized." These experiences also helped students develop a complex understanding of Cuban life: The hip-hop artist students met with, for example, had a colleague in jail due to his song lyrics. Students discovered, though, that politics does not dominate citizens' concerns: "You can't eat politics" is a common refrain. Students learned much about their own way of life, too—especially their privilege, of which they might have been previously unaware. "There's this sense of history. You feel like you're in Barcelona. The architecture is incredible, yet, it's crumbling; the government can't afford to maintain it. You see the antique cars, and they look charming from a distance, but they're cobbled together," Gaulke said. "The grocery stories, where you have to bring your ration cards, and the choices and quantity are so limited—it helps them to understand the implications of the embargo, and the kids see the kind of privilege they have as U.S. citizens. It becomes clear on a trip like this."

One of the trip's most meaningful activities involved pairing students with local students, using disposable cameras to document the local students' lives, and sharing photos of the visiting students' lives. The students' digital storytelling projects helped to facilitate exchange, and were displayed at Bergamot Station in Santa Monica, following the trip.

DETROIT ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

The magic of Disney ... and beyond!

By Amy L Charles

The Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences choir experienced the magic of Disney last summer, becoming one of the few students groups ever to grace the Cinderella Castle stage in Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World Resort. The 40 members, ages nine to 13, also experienced other magic along the way.

Angela Kee directs the choir, which spent a year rehearsing and



fundraising, hoping to participate in the Disney Performing Arts program. Kee strives to help students build confidence, poise, self-discipline, understanding of the artistic process, and civic pride. An assignment honoring their city resulted in “Detroit State of Mind,” with a professional music video that received more than 100,000 YouTube views. But it was a video of the choir singing Pharrell Williams’ “Happy” that went viral—and spiraled!—resulting in *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* surprising the choir with a television “visit” by Williams and a check for \$50,000 toward the Disney goal.

“Over the past couple of years, they’ve garnered so much attention—it’s absolutely amazing,” said Maurice Morton, CEO of DAAS. “The talent they possess! Not just performing, but delivering messages through their songs. The ‘Happy’ video, Ellen, Disney—it’s been a miracle for the school.” The students realize that through their music, they’re touching lives worldwide. And the school, focused on the arts and academics, now has a waiting list for third grade.

“The Disney Performing Arts program has meant a great deal to me as a choir director,” said Kee. “It has allowed me the opportunity to feature my students, onstage, at a world-renowned theme park! What started as a reward trip for the students’ hard work and dedication to their rigorous performance schedule ended as a dream-come-true for all involved.” Until then, Kee had only dreamed as far as a skating and pizza party as a year-end reward for the choir. Reading about the Disney Performing Arts Program inspired her to dream big and ask herself, “Why not Disney World?” The program also inspired her students and heightened their enthusiasm.

“Ms. Kee and her students are a great example of how music education opens doors and can transform the lives of young people,” said Tim Hill, Director of Special Programs, Disney Destinations. “As an entertainment company, Disney is passionate about the importance of music education, and Disney Performing Arts gives young people the chance to experience the thrill of performing. They also get a chance to learn about the business of show business. Who knows? We might even

see some of Ms. Kee’s students taking on a music career with Disney someday.”

“The Disney Performing Arts program experience, to me, meant everything! It allowed me the opportunity to experience the state of Florida, see and feel the Disney magic, and, most important, perform for hundreds of people, which I love to do. It gave me hope for my future career as an entertainer,” said choir member DeMauri Ward. “I still attend DAAS, and I am still a part of and perform with the choir, so it affects my aspirations. It inspires me to continue to pursue my dreams and achieve my goals—to also set my goals higher.

“The rush I feel when I perform is a feeling I really can’t explain, but I am happiest when I’m on stage.”

For information on Disney Performing Arts, visit <http://www.disneyyouth.com/our-programs/performing-arts/>. For a “Happy” moment, see the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences choir performing for—and on—*The Ellen DeGeneres Show*: <http://binged.it/1FFRuY3>

DISNEY PERFORMING ARTS unlocks student potential and helps young people make their own dreams come true—whether it’s performing in front of an international audience of thousands at Disney theme parks and resorts or honing their craft in enriching workshops and clinics taught by entertainment professionals. Every year, thousands of vocal, instrumental, and other ensembles travel from around the world to participate in Disney Performing Arts programs at the Disneyland Resort in Southern California and the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. Disney delivers workshops and performance opportunities that enrich, inspire and often lead to life-changing personal achievement.

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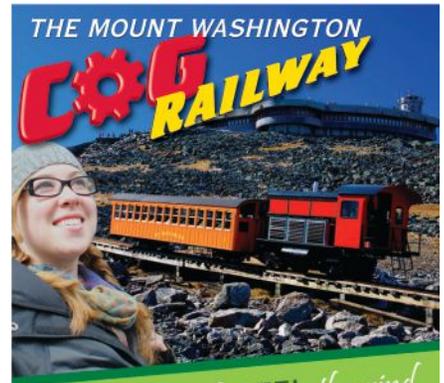
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“¿Cuántos años tienes?” I asked the little boy. “Doce,” he replies. Confused, I ask his age again. “¿Cuántos años tienes?” | “Doce,” Marcos mumbles.

The translations pour in my head. I must have heard wrong, but from his body position, his eyes, and the tone of his voice, I know I am right. I can feel his embarrassment of admitting he is 12 years old, although he looks as if he were four. My back begins to tickle from sweat, not from the 100 percent humidity. When I traveled to the Dominican Republic to support Aprendiendo a Vivir—a foundation that supplies materials and education to children with Type 1 diabetes—I saw the effects of diabetes on children like Marcos.

I always wondered why some people have loads of opportunity, while others struggle to survive. For that reason, my principle interests in volunteering were to alleviate my guilt, work with kids, and gain medical experience. However, my mindset quickly changed during the first training session. While my biggest problem was my ACT score, others are trying

to figure out how they will get today’s dose of insulin. Usually, I am the kind of person who feels sorry for myself whenever I hear a tragic story, but this time I took action.

After my year of training and fundraising, I worked in-country as a counselor for Campo Amigo, a summer camp engineered toward educating children with Type 1 diabetes. During camp, I taught the volunteers of Aprendiendo A Vivir how to create camp activities. This allowed the volunteers to continue my work after I left. The theme of Campo Amigo was “sé tu héroe” (be your own hero). Throughout camp, I reinforced this theme with the children by making superhero masks out of construction paper and capes out of plastic bags. After they looked like superheroes on the outside, I showed them how to be superheroes on the inside. When I first gave José his insulin injections, he would look away. After I told him multiple

times that he is a superhero and can have a new superpower, José gave himself his first injection.

At the end of the month, we returned to the place where I met Marcos. Instead of guilt, the children filled me with potential: for them and for me.

Traveling has given me insight to the necessity in bettering international health care. It has given me a reason to attend college, because the answer lies in more than handing out medication. The problems continue after I leave, so I need to learn how to make a sustainable impact. I look forward to educating people in developing countries about how to prevent and manage their diseases, with the hope that one day, everyone can be his or her own superhero. 🦸



LAUREN CHUNG,
a senior from Santa Monica High School in Santa Monica, California, wrote the winning essay for the 2015 Ripley Hunter World is a Classroom essay contest.



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