

nea *Member Benefits*

Educational Travel Guide

An Alternative Way to See the World



Educational Travel Guide

If you're the type of person that likes to travel to places to tick off another cultural site or treasure from your list and say, "Been there, done that," then educational travel is probably not for you. But if you like to research your destination before you go, read books to better understand what you will be seeing, and ponder the wider cultural and historical context of the sights, then you may very well want to consider an educational travel tour.

The term "educational travel" may conjure images of college students hiking through Tibet or backpacking through Spain. But there's more to educational travel than college study-abroad programs. High school students, retirees and especially educators are taking advantage of this type of travel program for school credit, professional development or just for fun. This guide will help you learn more about the world of educational travel and explore some of the available programs.

What is "Educational Travel"?

"Educational travel" refers to structured travel programs that integrate in-depth study about a particular region of the world or a particular subject with a standard travel itinerary. This can include lectures, guided tours by certified local guides and regional experts, special events, hands-on projects (including cooking and art classes), exclusive viewings of landmarks and art galleries, and informal conversations with regional celebrities, award-winning academics and indigenous peoples.

Opportunities for educational travel range from private jet tours to one-day seminars. Because most programs provide on-tour accompaniment with one or more specialists in the field, educational travel can come with a higher price tag than regular tours. However, there are programs suitable for almost every budget.

Program Descriptions

Smithsonian Journeys

From family travel programs to private jet tours, Smithsonian Journeys offers a wide variety of itineraries through their two travel lines, Signature Tours and Travel Adventures. A pioneer in the field, Smithsonian Journeys was founded 39 years ago as an educational outreach program of the Smithsonian Institution. Smithsonian Journeys is self-supporting, receives no government funding, and all profits go towards supporting the Institution.

All Signature Tours are accompanied by expert curators, scientists, independent scholars or academics who deliver a schedule of relevant lectures and are available throughout the tour to answer questions and engage in informal discussion with the tour members. The itineraries are designed with the curious traveler in mind, avoiding "tourist traps" and offering only limited shopping opportunities. Many of the tours provide behind-the-scenes visits or special access to popular sites, so that you can enjoy the full benefit of what your guide is saying without competing with large crowds. Signature Tours also offer visits to film, theater and music festivals; sporting events; the Metropolitan Opera; military history sites; and subject-themed symposia. From pre-trip reading lists to traveling companions with similar passions, Signature Tours provide an in-depth education in your destination. Tours can cost anywhere from around \$2,000 to nearly \$12,000, with private jet tours costing as much as \$65,000 or more.

If these prices are out of reach, Smithsonian Travel Adventures may be a better bet. Travel Adventures are markedly less expensive since a study leader does not travel with the group. Instead the trip is led by a tour manager, with local experts providing the educational content. The plan also features larger tour groups and more affordable accommodations and meals. Travel Adventures is operated in affiliation with Collette Vacations,

Educational Travel Guide

which provides NEA members with special discounts. According to Smithsonian Journeys Director Amy Kotkin, educators “can get very good prices,” and should take a look at the Travel Adventures line for more affordable educational tour options. “In some cases,” says Kotkin, “they are half as expensive.” So for people who do not wish to spend a lot, these trips are a much better offer.

If these prices are still too high, Kotkin recommends checking back to the Smithsonian Journeys website often to take advantage of regularly featured special offers. There are early booking discounts and bring-a-friend discounts that are all tour specific.

If you are interested in organizing a class trip, Kotkin recommends working with Smithsonian Student Travel, which is operated through EF Educational Tours.

Elderhostel

Elderhostel claims to be the first, and largest, educational tour organization for adults over the age of 55. Offering a wide variety of domestic and international programs, the tours range from one day courses, called “Day of Discover,” to an 111-night, around-the-world cruise. There are also women-only programs; individual skill development programs, like pottery-making or yoga; liberal arts study tours where you can concentrate on one topic, whether it be Shakespeare or Islam or lighthouses; and ‘voluntourism’ opportunities, among others. The Elderhostel website makes it easy to filter through the 8,000 available itineraries to find one that’s right for you. You can browse by activity level, location, tour type, price, and popularity.

Elderhostel also runs Road Scholar, which is designed for Baby Boomers, and offers longer, more rugged itineraries with greater emphasis on the experiential aspect of travel. Featuring multiple hands-on activities and behind-the-scenes visits, the tours also provide more time for autonomous excursions. Resident experts are on hand to provide educational content and to facilitate the traveler’s pursuit of individual interests. The tours are structured to take you beyond sightseeing to a more intimate understanding of the destination. With a smaller catalog of itineraries, the average trip is between one and two weeks, group sizes are fairly small, and prices are typically around the \$4,000 range, rarely top \$7,000, and can be as low as \$1,500.

GEEO.org (Global Exploration for Educators Organization)

GEEO.org is a non-profit organization that develops summer tours exclusively for educators (and their travel companions) to select overseas locations with itineraries customized for teachers. The organization negotiates deep discounts with well-established tour companies, and provides the tours on a first-come, first-serve basis.

In exchange for the discount, educators who travel with GEEO agree to share their travel experience with their class according to GEEO’s “Educational Plan.” This includes a 10-minute PowerPoint slide presentation, a 10-minute Google Earth presentation, a classroom wall display, and a lesson plan that incorporates details from the trip. Participating educators must also work with GEEO to organize guest speakers (Peace Corps alumni from the region or teachers from overseas) to provide a guest lecture to the class.

When it comes to affordability, GEEO presents a nice alternative for the budget-conscious. “I try not to break the \$2,000 dollar threshold,” says GEEO Director Jesse Weisz. “We try to have our least expensive trips be below \$2,000, and the most expensive trips I try to keep them in the \$2,000 to \$3,500 range.” Weisz, who receives no salary for his work with GEEO, conducted extensive research to determine a price-point that would be affordable for most teachers.

GEEO.org offers three trips for summer 2009: Tunisia, Peru and India. Their website features detailed itineraries, outlining the day-by-day activities for each tour and other pertinent information, like tipping costs and health requirements. Each trip is 2-3 weeks long and the group size is limited to 10-18 people. No

Educational Travel Guide

application is necessary, but the trips are only open to current K-12 teachers, school administrators and individuals pursuing a teaching certificate.

Last year, GEEO attracted teachers from 19 different states thanks to a nationwide marketing effort. “The teachers still talk to each other,” says Weisz, “and these teachers travel with one another again.” GEEO is a registered 501(c)3 and a majority of the teachers who traveled with GEEO last year became fundraisers for the organization. “I think this is something important,” says Weisz, who believes Americans need to become more aware of the world they live in. “We need to bring this into the classroom. So that’s why I started the organization.”

Education First (EF) Tours

EF Educational Tours helps the teacher to bring his or her students the world, literally. Designed specifically to facilitate classroom groups, EF has one of the most attractive offers around: the free-travel deal, which is available to educators who successfully organize a group tour through EF Educational Tours. The organization provides guidelines to assist with planning, recruiting and fundraising for a class trip, including a toolkit for working with the administration and school board.

Costs generally include round-trip airfare, two meals a day, transportation, hotel accommodations, tour director, sightseeing guide and interactive activities that immerse students in the culture. Trip prices are around \$2,500 on average and custom tours are available for educators who wish to set their own agenda.

EF also operates Smithsonian Student Travel which offers class trips within North America, including Canada, Washington, D.C., New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta and other locations across the United States. As with EF Educational Tours, Smithsonian Student Travel provides free travel for teachers who plan their group trip through the agency.

Go Ahead Tours, yet another offering from EF, is an option for individuals and private groups looking for luxurious or adventurous locales. EF also offers EF College Break for students aged 18-26.

Affinity Groups

Some people are hesitant to sign up with a tour group because they worry that their fellow travelers may not share their interests or be suitable traveling companions. For that reason, many institutions, like alumni groups, museums and non-profit organizations, offer educational tours for groups of like-minded travelers.

Graduates of the same higher learning institution will naturally have much in common with other fellow alumni, and colleges or universities frequently send members of their faculty along to provide the lectures and other educational content. Check with your alma mater to see if they offer travel programs.

Many museums, like the American Museum of Natural History or The Field Museum, run educational travel programs. Usually curators or researchers join the tour as study leaders. Travelers know that the others in their tour group support the mission of the museum, and are likely to share the same cultural interests.

Additionally, a wide array of non-profit organizations, especially those dedicated to environmental or cultural preservation, offer tours. If you are a member of such an organization, inquire with them to see what they offer. Usually, the tours feature experts from the organization’s field of interest and activities that are related to the organization’s mission. For example, the Audubon Society offers trips rich in bird-watching opportunities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation visits areas that abound in culturally significant landmarks, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition leads tours into Yellowstone National Park to study wildlife and ecology.

Educational Travel Guide

Travelers can be assured that everyone in the group shares the same interest, and that the itinerary is planned to address those interests.

Program	Professional Development Opportunities/ Credits	Available Tour Types (Group, Individual, Customized)	Cost & Discounts	Available Destinations	Contact
Smithsonian Journeys	None	Group	\$999-\$65,000+	U.S. and worldwide tours	1-877-338-8687 Reservations@ SmithsonianJourneys.org
Elderhostel	None	Group / Day Programs	\$46-\$33,500	US and worldwide	1-800-454-5768
GEEQ.org	Classroom material and guest lecture assistance for participating educators	Group Only	\$1,500-\$3,500	Locations change every year, depending on discount availability.	1-877-600-0105 jesse@geeq.org
EF Tours	Professional, developmental and college credits are available	Customized Group / Packaged Group / Individual Tours available through "Go Ahead" program	\$2500 On Average	Over 40 countries	1-800-637-8222

Educational travel provides a wealth of opportunities for educators interested in learning more about a particular subject or geographical area, getting ideas for the classroom, and advancing their careers during the summer months. It provides opportunities for you, your family or friends and, in some cases, your students, to see and learn about the world with knowledgeable experts at your side.

While all of these programs are well established, make sure you do your homework. Many travel programs include insurance in the cost of the travel package, but some do not. As travel insurance policies vary, check with the tour operator to ascertain the level of coverage provided.

Review the itinerary carefully to see that it actually addresses the advertised theme in a comprehensive and educational manner. Pay close attention to the study leader or subject expert—are they qualified to lecture on the particular educational theme and do they have experience with the destination? Investigate group size, whether the price is all-inclusive or heavy on extra charges, how many meals are provided, the types of accommodations, and other relevant details. If luxury lodgings are critical to your traveling enjoyment, make sure they are provided. If optimal, use of time is important, avoid a tour that literally covers a lot of ground. Price tag and destination alone should not be the sole factors in choosing a tour.

Educational travelers like to say that the world is a great big classroom. Every new experience, from the morning's breakfast to a chance encounter with a local, is fraught with opportunities to learn. There are many organizations catering to the intellectually hungry tourist out there. The first step in your journey is finding the one that's right for you.