

How Field Trips Boost Students' Lifelong Success

Educational trips contribute to better student outcomes in school and beyond. Maximize the impact of field trips with 9 ideas to get a jump-start on next year.

Tighter budgets, standardized tests and heavier workloads have resulted in fewer field trips in recent years. But cutting educational travel from the budget is a mistake—take it from the U.S. Travel Association, who recently conducted a study with 400 adults (balanced for gender, age, race and income), half of which had taken a learning trip in their youth, the other half had not.



The study found that, regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, youth who take educational trips have better grades (59 percent), higher graduation rates from high school (95 percent) and college (63 percent), and greater income (12 percent higher annually). In fact, 89 percent said educational trips had a positive, lasting impact on their education and career because the trips made them more engaged, intellectually curious and interested in and out of school.

“When I was growing up, my parents said the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) were important,” says Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “But for my kids, I made roaming the fourth R. We live in a global society, and if you don’t see outside the neighborhood you grow up in, the world will pass you by. Traveling has opened my kids’ eyes; it’s made them more confident and inspired them to reach outside their normal environment to learn and obtain skills to bring them to the next level.”

Margy Natalie, acting onsite learning manager at the [Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum](#), agrees: "Field trips give students the opportunity to learn in a natural environment and experience things first-hand and from primary resources, rather than texts; real objects rather than photos." Carylann Assante, executive director for [Student & Youth Travel Association](#) (SYTA) and [SYTA Youth Foundation](#), seconds that notion. "Today's students are visual learners and a field trip lets them touch, feel, and listen to what they're learning about, [which helps them] build on classroom instruction, gain a better understanding of topics, build cultural understanding and tolerance, and expose them to worlds outside their own."

Assante says field trips are particularly important for disadvantaged students, as they provide students with unique opportunities that level the playing field. "Field trips give diverse and financially-in-need students equal opportunity to experience things outside classroom that their families may not be able to afford." A field trip can also be the first trip a student takes without their parents, so it builds independence, as well. "There's a reason people say I need to get away and recharge my batteries—there's truth to it," adds Dow. "If I was a school system looking at these stats, I couldn't afford not to make this a part of our curriculum."

So just how can teachers ensure a successful field trip? Keep these tips in mind:

- 1. Look around your region for nearby trips.** suggests Dow. "You can take a quick drive and see the history of places around you—there's tons of inexpensive things teachers can do that will have a phenomenal impact."
- 2. Do your homework.** "Plan carefully, do your research, visit the site before you plan, ask questions and take recommendations of staff," suggests Natalie.
- 3. Follow protocol.** "Teachers need to review their school's policies on field trips in advance and prepare the forms with specific learning objectives and how the field trip will accomplish those objectives tied to their school's core curriculum," says Assante. Most museums, attractions and locations have education materials you can use to show how their attraction supports educational curriculums.
- 4. Involve the students.** "Discuss the goals of the field trip in advance, talk about what they will see and what they should learn," advises Natalie. Consider letting the class pick the field trip destination so they have ownership, adds Assante.
- 5. Make trips relevant.** "Base your field trips on your content area—if you're studying ancient Egypt, don't take them to Jamestown," warns Natalie. "Focus on how the trip fits into your content or another educational goal. A field trip should be a day out, not a day off."
- 6. Incorporate technology.** "Many students use their mobile devices to engage with the field trip in the classroom with apps and blogs," says Assante.
- 7. Select a field trip where students are not sitting down** like in the classroom, but are able to touch, explore and share their experiences, suggests Assante.
- 8. Fundraise.** "Engage the parents, PTA or other teachers to support school wide field trips and help raise the funds so everyone can afford to attend the trip," says Assante, who also notes that companies, like Target, now offer field trip grants.
- 9. Follow up.** "Students are much more likely to write about an experience they recently had, like the field trip, than a random prompt," says Natalie, who recommends following up with graded assignments. "Have them write about their favorite artifact or activity on the field trip, or why this field trip is important to keep, or conversely, how a different field trip might be better."

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