

# Youth Travel

## PLANNER

2023-24

### PAST MEETS PRESENT

MUSEUMS, TOURS, AND HISTORICAL SITES  
ACROSS AMERICA MAKE THE PAST COME TO LIFE

#### ADAPT & INNOVATE

Tour operators  
discover new ways  
to inspire the  
next generation  
of global citizens



#### PLUS

6 student tour itineraries,  
art and science curriculum  
connections, and performance  
showcase opportunities



# Continued Growth

It always seems hard to believe when the beginning of a school year rolls around—at least, perhaps to those on the outside. Although I'm not an educator, I have enough of them in my inner circle to know the time and effort that goes into prepping for those



first few days and months of the school calendar. For them, the new academic year is no surprise, but is planned and calculated to ensure a smooth and successful start. And beyond planning for in-person learning, those educators who design student travel programs are doing so well in advance of the trip itself, months and even years before witnessing the smiles and "aha" moments unfold. Last year alone, these student travel coordinators helped more than 350,000 students embark on domestic trips—a more than 250% increase than the year before—according to the Student & Youth Travel Association's (SYTA) 2022 Student Travel Business Barometer. They also helped 60,000 students experience the wonder of traveling internationally, a nearly 200% increase over the previous year.

SYTA's report sheds light on youth travel's recovery, and inside these pages, you'll learn more about the state of the industry, where experts share challenges and opportunities for the future. Within this magazine, you'll also find six sections

dedicated to the most popular youth travel themes and curriculums. From interactive STEM labs and hands-on history to performing arts destinations that put students center stage and youth sports venues that specialize in the all-star treatment, this annual resource is filled with ideas designed to ignite a lifelong love of learning and travel.

I wish you all the best in this school year and in your student travels ahead!

*Courtney Birchmeier*

COURTNEY BIRCHMEIER

## Youth Travel PLANNER

PUBLISHER TAMMY GALVIN  
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER ARTHUR MORRISSEY

### EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR ALESIA TAYLOR  
GROUP EDITOR KATELYN BLOOMQUIST  
EDITOR COURTNEY BIRCHMEIER  
MANAGING EDITOR KATHERINE LAWLESS

### ART

CREATIVE DIRECTOR TONYA SUTFIN

### PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR DEIDRA ANDERSON  
SENIOR ADVERTISING COORDINATOR MIKAYLA SNYDER  
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR ELLIANNA RADOVICH  
JUNIOR ADVERTISING COORDINATOR SYDNEY KELL

### SALES

#### ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES

JIM HOLTHAUS  
GREG JONES  
ALAN LININGER  
AIMEE SMITH

#### SALES & MARKETING SPECIALIST

TAUSHA MARTINSON-BRIGHT

### BUSINESS

DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS KATHIE GORECKI  
ACCOUNT ASSOCIATE AUSTIN SCHMELZLE

### CIRCULATION

#### DIRECTOR OF AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

GERI WILSON

#### AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER CINDY FISH



GREENSPRING MEDIA  
9401 James Ave. S., Suite 152  
Bloomington, MN 55431  
612-371-5800  
greenspring.com

### HOURLY MEDIA

CEO STEFAN WANCZYK  
PRESIDENT JOHN BALARDO

### SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

For high-quality reprints of 500 or more, call 612-371-5882 or email danderson@greenspring.com.

For address changes, ordering single copies, cancellations, or general questions about your subscription please contact customer service at 866-660-6247.

The pages between the covers of this magazine (except for any inserted material) are made from wood fiber that was procured from forests that are sustainably managed to remain healthy, productive, and biologically diverse.

### POSTMASTER

Send new address changes to Group Tour magazine: 5750 New King Drive, Suite 100, Troy, MI 48098

Group Tour magazine USPS #016-239 is published quarterly by Greenspring Media LLC, 5750 New King Drive, Suite 100, Troy, MI 48098. Periodical postage paid at Troy, MI, and additional mailing offices.

©2023 Greenspring Media. All rights reserved.



@grouptourmagazine



# Adapt & *Innovate*

Amid youth travel's resurgence,  
industry experts recognize new needs  
and opportunities to inspire the  
next generation of global citizens

by **MICHAEL McLAUGHLIN**





Austin Preparatory School  
choir, Basilica of Saint  
Augustine, Rome, Italy

## As I settled into a seat toward the

front of the Basilica of Saint Augustine on the Campo Marzio in Rome, two dozen students walked in front of the altar wearing tuxedos and black dresses. As they began to sing, their voices soared to the frescoed ceiling and filled the church. I turned around and smiled as I observed the pride on families' faces and the joy of the standing-room-only crowd who came to listen to the concert. The students' enthusiasm made for a stellar performance, which was the ultimate reward for their months of preparation. This wasn't just a concert in the theater; it was a capstone experience on the global stage.

Exploration through travel is an enriching opportunity that expands horizons. Over the last 15 years, most recently spent as the head of middle school at Austin Preparatory School in Redding, Massachusetts, I've watched students navigate bustling markets on a linguistic exercise in Peru, explore castles and the crown through role play in the United Kingdom, and conquer their fears while engaging in adrenaline-pumping activities in Australia. These "tales from the trails" remind me of the value of student group travel. These opportunities inspire students' capacity to take risks, foster their global citizenship, and create lasting memories.

As the administrator who coordinates many of the travel offerings for my school, it has been thrilling to travel near and far—a return to normal—this year. After that memorable aforementioned trip to Rome at the beginning of the year, I traveled on the eighth-grade capstone to Washington, D.C., in March—something we hadn't done since 2019. In July, I brought a delegation to the Independent Schools Cultural Alliance in London for three weeks. Meanwhile, our senior capstone trip to Disney in November is fully booked, and the interest in our 2024 central European trip has been tremendous. The year 2023 is turning out to be a great year for travel, and not just at my school, but across the board. Student group travel is recovering and doing so at a rapid pace. According to the Student & Youth Travel Association (SYTA), in-country travel worldwide has increased by 267% over 2021, and out-of-country travel increased by 198%. Although domestic travel outpaced international travel in 2022, both point to a return to pre-pandemic metrics.

The industry is seeing a resurgence, but aspects of student group travel have changed. Stakeholders must embrace innovation to remain competitive. Being aware of today's post-COVID travel trends can help those who plan and operate tours to adapt and think strategically. The student group travel sector is undergoing a period of renewal and growth, while interest in real-world experiences and the rise of STEAM have created new opportunities in the market. By being innovative about offerings and continuing to prioritize the needs of students, industry players can ignite a lifelong love of learning and travel for a new generation of globally minded individuals.

## Pandemic Impacts

While 2023 has already shaped up to be a more normal travel season than 2022, the student group travel industry can expect lingering impacts from the pandemic. Staffing shortages continue to limit the services of essential vendors like bus companies, hotels, and restaurants. Patience, positivity, and a plan can go a long way in keeping the stress of a travel interruption at bay.

Trips continue to be organized primarily by educators working with their travel planner partners to provide educational travel experiences that meet the goals of both schools and parents. Travel planners play a larger role in managing registrations and payments. "There is much more transparency [among] the travel planners, schools, and families for the services they are providing the group," says Carylann Assante, CEO of SYTA. "This way, parents can see the terms and conditions for the trip—especially as more of them are purchasing travel insurance."

The security from trip insurance—from flight interruptions to medical coverage abroad—has provided families with confidence in their investments and peace of mind about their child's safety. "Both travelers and providers became more savvy about insurance post-pandemic," Assante added. "Not only are more travelers asking for and buying insurance, but providers are also working to make the purchase easier by offering plans as an option within the travel package."

### PRO TIP

**High demand for some of the most popular attractions can affect an itinerary.** Pursuing an alternative site can maximize learning objectives and provide students with a unique experience. For example, instead of summiting Brunelleschi's Dome in Florence, Italy, climb Giotto's Tower or take in the cityscape from the Piazzale Michelangelo.





From above: Cooking class and pottery class in Panama, EF Tours

## Immersive Learning

Parents see educational travel as a remedy for pandemic-related learning setbacks and as an opportunity for their children to create memories with peers. “We were really interested to learn that parents are prioritizing immersive learning experiences as equally important to in-classroom learning,” says Adam Bickelman, vice president, public relations at EF Education First in Boston. “Experiential learning—actively encouraging students to learn about themselves, the world, and their place in it—imparts important ‘essential skills’ like global dexterity, critical thinking, and resilience.”

“What has changed is that itineraries are providing groups more time at specific sites to enhance the student experience,” Assante notes. Group leaders are best served by focusing on quality over quantity. “Timed entries at some of the most popular sites has improved crowd control but has changed the environment by breaking larger groups into smaller groups or rotating students in and out of activities,” she says. Groups will need to increase the number of chaperones to provide appropriate supervision. It is vital that chaperones be trained in their role of helping students to be curious, compassionate citizens.

Tour planners and attraction managers can appeal to group leaders by focusing on how a particular activity makes learning hands-on. Interactive workshops in which student groups participate in activities related to the theme can be more impactful than just crossing off the list of “must-see” museums, institutions, and landmarks. For example, in London this summer, my students participated in an acting workshop at Shakespeare’s Globe theater. This deepened their appreciation of attending the musical “Wicked” the next evening.

Opportunities for student groups to engage with the local community through authentic experiences can foster active learning. “With the increase in awareness about sustainability and inclusivity, we are seeing more focus on providing deeper, more interesting

## PRO TIPS

**Find ways to embed reflection.** Provide time for students to capture and share their impressions about their experiences through journals, vlogs, or artwork that captures their stories. Reflection helps cement learning and provides an outlet for students to think critically about their experiences.

**Be inspired by your school’s mission and vision.** How does a particular trip advance your school’s mission? How does it advance aspects of the curriculum? How might a particular trip generate excitement about some aspect of your school’s strategic plan?

**Celebrate your story!** Showcases for musical ensembles can be powerful opportunities for schools to generate interest in a program and enhance the school’s reputation.



cultural experiences for students, focusing on local food, cultural customs, and interacting with local people,” Assante says.

Consider a cooking class, attending a religious service, or partnering with a local organization on a need their community identifies. These kinds of experiences add a practical dimension to travel and allow groups to make connections to diverse perspectives.

Group leaders can also find an ally in a destination’s convention and visitors bureaus. “They usually have insight on what is happening locally—especially access to smaller, more diverse providers of experiences,” Assante says.

### The Rise of STEAM

Thematically, trips connected to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) are on the rise compared to a decade ago when tours connected to biology or chemistry ranked toward the bottom of curricular-based trips. “We are seeing venues offering more STEAM-related resources,” Assante says. “By building a program that includes activities that will appeal to a range of interests or partnering with another school that shares similar curricular goals, group leaders can meet enrollment goals and maximize affordability for families.”

EF Tours developed a portfolio of dynamic itineraries to help groups explore STEAM topics in a hands-on way. The company’s Japan-based tour Robotics, Engineering, and the Future of Cities includes visits to science museums and research labs. A highlight of the trip is time in Odaiba, a collection of

human-made islands that serves as a futuristic residential and business district. Students experience an earthquake simulation and think through surviving different natural disasters as they explore climate change. The Toshiba Science Museum in Kawasaki introduces students to Toshiba’s latest technologies through science-based games.

“Panama boasts a rich blend of experiences that make it a perfect destination for educational travel,” Bickelman adds. The Panama Canal is an engineering wonder, and what better way to see it in action than from the deck of a boat. Students also participate in an interactive workshop focused on the importance of wetlands conservation and immediately see relevancy by taking part in a beach cleanup and a reforestation activity. And, of course, adventure enthusiasts can enjoy the opportunity to surf, zip line, and whitewater raft all in one trip.

### Performance Showcases

Travel opportunities connected to the arts remain consistent—as they should be! Traveling as part of a performance showcase exposes student performers to different environments and challenges them to adapt to new situations, teaching techniques, and approaches. Preparation for such a journey includes more than just logistical considerations; students learn a repertoire of challenging arrangements to be performed at various different venues.

Embedding workshops, master classes, and rehearsals into the tour itinerary can contribute to skill enhancement and technical improvements to one’s craft. Performers can learn new techniques, receive feedback, and refine their craft, ultimately improving their artistic abilities. These opportunities let student groups experience different cultures, traditions, and artistic perspectives. 📍



Japanese Aerospace  
Exploration Agency