

LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

**How to Succeed in the Student
and Youth Travel Marketplace**



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DEFINING STUDENT AND YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Travel changes people's lives. It exposes them to new cultures, different ways of thinking and unique experiences while broadening their knowledge. Travel breaks down barriers of prejudice and ignorance, and facilitates cooperation and communication. Travel is usually the favorite topic at social events. No one wants to talk about their new life insurance policy or investment opportunities in the market, but everyone loves to share their most recent travel experiences and dreams with others.

Many of these experiences started with student travel. Textbooks, teachers and computers are vital to our children's learning, but the first-hand knowledge and experience that is gained by traveling eclipses classroom learning. Consider the social benefits of traveling with classmates and creating shared experiences. Think about the bond that is strengthened between child and teacher or child and parent by traveling together. There really is no substitute for this experience, and the overall majority of kids love to travel.

Student travel comprises a robust and growing segment of the market and a huge opportunity for suppliers and vendors. There are 37,100 public and private high schools in the U.S., the majority having some type of organized group of students that travels.

Student travel can be like an annuity fund. You capture the customer at a very early age, and the fond memories of their experiences in your destination during an educational trip, performance, event or competition are the surest way to guarantee a customer for life. They return as adults, passing those experiences down to their children.

While the opportunities in the student travel category should appeal to the majority of suppliers, the myriad of categories, nuisances and niches can be confusing. This is a very broad and accessible category. However, in order to succeed, it must be broken down to focus on those opportunities that best fit your business.



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EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL

Goals and Objectives

Educational group travel is quite simple in nature. It is a trip that takes a group of kids (typically middle, junior high or high school) to a destination in which they see first-hand exactly what it is the school is trying to teach in a particular subject. These trips range in duration from local, single-day field trips to 10+-day international tours, and everything in between. A common educational trip is three or four days, typically occurring over a weekend.

Some of us can recall an 8th grade Washington, DC trip; this is a classic example of an educational student program. The 8th grade spring trip to our nation's capital has become a rite of passage for many school districts. These programs are standardized, including two or three hotel nights and visits to iconic museums and memorials to educate students on our governmental and political processes.

Some programs may have a specific focus such as politics, tributes to veterans, immigration or community outreach. The combinations and permutations are almost endless, enabling suppliers and

vendors to incorporate their products and services into the program and tailor-make it to fit the needs of the school.

The prospect list of those who lead educational trips generally leans toward:

- History teachers
- Social studies teachers
- Science teachers
- Principals and school administration
- Political science teachers
- Arts/music teachers

Popular Destinations and Attractions

While DC is the standard bearer of educational travel destinations, opportunities are not limited to our nation's capital or to major cities. Regardless of the town and state, there are various educational day and overnight trip options that schools will take. Visits to state capitals are common. Think Springfield, IL; Sacramento, CA; Boston, MA; or Albany, NY. These trips typically occur when students are in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades. This is just a sample list; there are many more destinations that have a strong educational component.

Some typical 3-4 day educational travel destinations:

- Washington, DC
- New York City
- Chicago
- Boston
- Philadelphia
- Los Angeles/San Diego
- San Francisco
- Seattle

Typical 1-2 day destinations:

- Sacramento, CA
- Springfield, IL
- Boston, MA
- Albany, NY
- Harrisburg, PA
- Hartford, CT

Typical international destinations:

- London
- Dublin/Ireland
- Paris
- Rome/Florence/Venice
- Vienna
- Munich
- Madrid/Barcelona
- Mexico

Determining the Curriculum

Educational travel is not limited to capital cities. Many trips center around language, history or immigration. Destinations such as St. Louis (Gateway to the West); Memphis, Selma or Atlanta (civil rights), Chicago (ethnic and industrial history) and New Orleans (humanitarianism) provide countless learning opportunities.

While hotels, motorcoaches and flights are usually the largest dollar share of the trip, there are many other activities and attractions that vendors and businesses need to provide either in-destination or en route. Restaurants and food stops, museums, historical landmarks, theaters, theme parks and other forms of entertainment can all be built into educational travel programs.

Each community school district has a curriculum. Especially in the history and social studies departments, there is some facet of the program that may involve travel. National and local government studies are standard at every school, and depending on the overall composition of the student body, there are other important parts of the curriculum that are relevant to where they may travel.

Determining which schools are traveling requires a little research. Many times, trips are posted online so that parents can sign their kids up. Typically, school-sponsored trips that support the curriculum tend to materialize at a better rate than those that are not. This is not to say that trips done outside of school sponsorship and outside of the curriculum cannot be successful, but with school sponsorship, they generally have a stronger marketing push and support from the parents, which is key. Once the curriculum and destinations are determined, you can quickly determine if your services or products can be a part of the program.



Teachers, Chaperones & Tour Guides

Any program in which children travel requires strict education, supervision and logistical support. Trying to move 100 8th graders over three days is like herding cats...only much harder! It is for this reason that teachers accompany the trip to ensure that the subject material is covered, and that they receive additional support to organize and orchestrate a successful endeavor.

On an educational trip, there is usually one teacher per motorcoach (approx. 40-50 students) and one chaperone for every 10-15 students. The teacher makes sure the program material is followed according to curriculum and understands how that information is best delivered. Touring is complemented by local guides who augment the teacher's expertise in the subject matter. These guides are destination experts and serve to mix up the dialogue with local flavor. Local guides lend interest and credibility to the program, no matter the destination. The key is it needs to be fun, unique and authentic, especially for today's "distracted" kids (with all of the media and devices they have at their disposal).

Chaperones make sure students have adequate adult supervision and support, as even the most disciplined and organized teachers can get overwhelmed by a large and rambunctious group of kids. Chaperones deal with a multitude of issues on tour, from lost items (mostly cell phones) to parent calls, to sick kids, to discipline.

Lastly, there are tour directors. Those who specialize in student groups can make or break the trip. A good tour director builds a relationship with the kids, keeps it light and injects humor, while being relevant to today's styles and multitude of electronic gadgets and social networking. Having a great "TD" is an important part of any student travel program, in any category.

Safety & Security

Safety and security is paramount. It is important that teachers, chaperones and group leaders take security seriously, as should any supplier and vendor. If you would not trust your own child's safety and security with your product or service, then certainly don't pursue the student market. The risks for liability and litigation are enormous, so it is important that suppliers ensure they have the proper safety protocols in place, emergency and disaster training, and insurance coverage that protects all concerned. If you are working with children, it is important that your employees be properly vetted and, in some cases, have background checks.

Many hotels are willing to provide security as they typically will put the kids on the same floor and ensure that curfew restrictions are not ignored and someone is there at all times during their stay.

How to Become Student-Friendly

Student travel group sizes can range anywhere from 30 to 300 kids; therefore, it is important to note that whatever your service is, it must be able to handle volume quickly and efficiently. Because kids are energetic, excited and sometimes impatient, that must be taken into consideration when considering your viability as a student venue.

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If yours is an attraction, it is best if the kids have their own area. It is better for the kids, their teachers and other adults who may not want to join your group. Make sure the entrances and exits can support the flow of traffic, and try to eliminate bottlenecks. Always have a representative on hand to introduce your establishment to take a bit of pressure off of the teachers and chaperones.

If you are selling an item or a particular product, it is always best to have it included in advance and pre-paid. If not, make sure that payment procedures are simple and quick, and there is enough staff on hand to ensure a quick exit. These programs are on tight timelines, and if your souvenir shop has a long line of kids waiting to purchase items, you are losing out on economic opportunity and adding stress to the teacher/group leader by slowing down the flow of the trip. Be properly staffed. Be ready for the groups.

Student Groups Are Price-Sensitive

Rarely are we talking about a group that will say “cost is no object.” While they are all driven by price, they are driven more so by value. Generally, the main decisions on price center around hotel quality and location, included meals and overall trip inclusions. The key is to be fair and competi-

tive, as typically you are not the only game in town, and with the enormous amount of volume the market produces, it tends to force price competitiveness. Overprice your product and you will find that teachers, group leaders and tour operators will quickly pass you by for more value-based offerings. Keep in mind that in most cases the parents are footing the bill for these trips. Often this is in conjunction with a fundraising initiative.

Timing and Seasonality

Educational trips can happen year-round, but spring is the heaviest travel period with business peaking in May. There are spikes around President’s Day weekend and spring break as well. This is followed by fall, then winter (depending on the destination), then summer, as obviously the kids are off, the teachers are off and families are busy with sports, vacations, activities, etc. The key here is to ensure that your business can handle groups at the peak student travel periods because in student educational travel, “it is what it is” and no amount of wheeling and dealing is going to change the seasonality patterns in this particular market.



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Who are Your Customers?

When travel suppliers are entering the education travel market the first question is, “Who do I target to pitch my products? Is it the schools, the teachers, the parents, the tour operators, the tour directors or the group leaders?” The short answer: all of them.

The quickest path is to “start at the top” and target the tour operators. They are already working with the schools and have the packaged programs in place. The challenge here is two-fold. First, does your product compete with someone they are already carrying? If so, you have to illustrate your value and negotiate. These really aren’t deal-killers, but it may take some time for the tour operator to incorporate your product into their programs. Sometimes, depending on the tour, you can make your product or service an optional add-on, which gets you in the door. If the take-up rate is high enough, the tour operator may then make you a standard inclusion.

Targeting schools and the teachers is a “push” tactic. Many schools do their own trips, without a tour operator, so this can be an effective approach. This same tactic can also be used if you know of parents in the local community who function as chaperones or group leaders. The key is finding schools that are already doing trips.

Don’t forget charter and private schools. They are generally traveling more and open to adding in more components to their programs as they are not as price-driven.

A teacher’s most precious commodity is time, so make sure you refine your elevator pitch, and follow up via e-mail and with collateral materials that support your services or products.

Finally, one other key source of pitching your products or services can be local suppliers, guides and tour directors. Remember, they are on the ground, with the groups, and are experts at the logistics and the feedback from the kids on the tours. If a component is not performing, or is in high demand, they will report back to the tour operator or the school and let them know that things need to be added or changed. Of course, their influence will vary by operator or by group, but they are an excellent source for information on whether or not you will be successful in incorporating your product or service into student tours. Having rapport with other suppliers, tour directors and local guides can be a very powerful source of information and guidance.

PERFORMANCE TRAVEL

The main difference between educational travel and performance travel is not necessarily the destination as much as what they are doing in the destination. While there may be elements of learning, the main objective of this sector is to perform. This is done typically in front of an audience, perhaps competing with other schools to bring out the best in the students.

Some of the most recognized performance trips are high school marching bands that travel to Disney World, Disneyland or Universal Studios. The performance is choreographed, practiced and then performed in front of an audience. These trips can be prestigious for the school, since they attract future kids to be part of the program and create memories that last a lifetime.

Like educational travel, performance group types are plentiful. We just referenced a marching band, but it extends to other performing arts - choir groups, youth groups, drama clubs, debate teams, cheer, science and math clubs, and sports. The main goal is to get outside their local communities, perform, then have fun in the destination. The same benefits that apply to educational travel also apply to performance travel. The shared experience of performing on a “larger stage,” as well as the teamwork and camaraderie that is created by traveling together, is life-changing for many young adults.

Types of Performance Group Customers

- Band directors
- Drama teachers
- Choral group instructors
- Dance troops and dance school owners
- Theater schools

Venues and Audiences

Performance groups of all types need a clean, accessible and safe venue to perform. Some ven-

ues are historical landmarks such as New York’s Carnegie Hall or Orchestra Hall in Chicago. Some are theme parks, and some are standard concert halls or university venues. Depending on the group, it is critical that it is not too big, or not too small. It is also important to ensure that there is an audience! What good is performance if there is no one to see it? This is one reason why theme parks are so popular for performance student travel, as groups are guaranteed a sizeable audience every day.

For venue selection, accessibility and having the right amount of practice and staging areas for the group are key. These are typically large groups and there will be students, teachers, audiences, equipment, costumes and many other types of controlled chaos that will need to be accommodated. Venue selection is important to the success of any performance program; it must be able to handle the flow of people, equipment and vehicles.

Especially with performance groups, family and friends come along to see the performance. This helps bolster the audience, but it is also good to “get people off the street” to fill the venue. Some



venues charge a small admission, but most of the time it is free to get the numbers up and ensure the group gets the opportunity to perform in front of as many people as possible. To play in front of large crowds is not always possible if the students come from small towns. These performance trips get them out of their comfort zone and put them on a larger stage, with the ultimate goal of improving their confidence and skill.

Safety & Security

The same rules apply here as they do with educational travel. Whether high school or middle school, the kids need the proper amounts of supervision and security to avoid distraction and perform at their very best.

One key difference here is the security of the equipment. Unlike educational groups, performance groups travel with instruments, uniforms, computers and equipment that are very valuable. This equipment needs to be stored and safeguarded. It can be stressful for performers and

directors to have to worry about their instruments, costumes or equipment, as it is all critical to the execution of the performance. And it can't just be put in the hotel rooms. Remember, students are usually in quad accommodations, and you can only imagine the clutter that four kids in a room can create. Adding in equipment and uniforms on top of that can be impossible.

The equipment and uniforms these groups travel with is critical to the performance and should be treated as such. Especially in the case of instruments, which are tuned and specific to the performer and cannot be simply replaced or substituted. Vendors must be mindful of the importance of instruments, costumes and equipment needed for the performances.

As students arrive and prepare for their performance, there are opportunities for vendors to showcase their products and services. Restaurants, lodging, transportation/tours, attractions and evening events are all part of the program.



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There is more pressure to make the performance the primary focus, but there is still plenty of time and opportunity for the groups to have fun and explore.

Experiences unique to the local area can be built into the programs. In fact, many programs will offer optional packages to stay an extra day or two. If family and friends come along on these performance programs, there is a strong interest in continuing on and experiencing the local destination. It is a great opportunity for suppliers to promote themselves to a “captive” audience.

Speak the Language of the Performance

You don’t have to be an expert on concert performances, dramas or debate teams, but do your homework on these groups before you consider hosting them. It shows respect and uncovers some little things you can do to make them feel special. What you learn in the process becomes a manual for other staff members to understand this market better. Would you talk to a baseball team the same as a drama club? Of course not, so do some research on the space that they are in. Also, talk with tour operators, teachers and suppliers that cater to this market. Ask questions such as “what will you expect from me to make sure your group has what they need?” This will go a long way towards helping you understand and accommodate these groups.

Working with Band Directors and Performance Instructors

When it comes to performance groups, your main customers are the directors and instructors. Their primary motivators are making sure that the performance is the best it possibly can be for the students. Anything that makes that easier, simpler and more enjoyable is their ultimate goal.

Keep in mind that when you are talking to band directors, drama teachers, choral instructors or dance groups, travel is a small part of what they do. They are generally in charge of an entire

department or school. They will want to make sure they have considerable input over at least the performance aspect of the trip, but they don’t have time to do your job for you. Remember, this performance is of primary importance to them. The goal is delight the crowd, win the competition, etc. Its success can mean positive feedback from the kids, parents, family and friends that will lead to increased participation in their program or future success of the school.

Listen carefully to their needs, accommodate them within reason and make sure you go over details precisely before, during and after the performance.



EVENT TRAVEL

Event travel is similar in some aspects to performance student travel. There are educational components that could be built in, but event travel generally contains a performance on a specific day at a specific event that draws a large crowd. The event can be the highlight of the trip such as a drama/theater festival that draws schools from all over the country or a high school marching band competition at a holiday parade or college football bowl game with tens of thousands of fans in attendance. As you can imagine, the exposure for the kids, playing in a venue that large and possibly receiving TV exposure is a huge boost to the group's prestige and recruiting profile. It also can be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the kids. It puts them on a stage that prepares them for life, especially if they choose to continue down a path in performing arts.

While performances can happen almost anywhere and anytime, a trip needs to be attached to a specific event. There are literally thousands of these events nationwide and dozens of tour operators that organize or provide entertainment for them. Some tour operators sell into those events, and some “own” the event and send their school clients to them. The large variety provides significant opportunity for all types of travel suppliers and vendors. Google searches for events in particular cities will yield significant results, and many of those can involve potential performances by groups of kids.

Planning and Preparation

Like performance, everything centers around the event and that particular day. Over-communication and attention to the smallest of details will ensure you maintain a long-term relationship with the event organizer or owner. There are a lot of moving pieces, so timing, logistics and precise communication is key. And it doesn't hurt to have a plan B, just in case. There may



be travel delays, inclement weather, injuries, equipment breakdowns, the list goes on. It is always good to have a backup, just in case, and illustrates to the operator that you are thinking of their needs and reducing their stress level. Like performance-based travel, everything leads up to the event, so the days and weeks preceding it can be stressful. Careful preparation and checklists can alleviate that stress and ensure you deliver on your end.

Safety and Security

For events, safety and security is very much the same as with a performance trip. It can be a much bigger venue or stage (such as a college bowl game), which can mean much larger participant numbers. It is important that there are enough chaperones for kids, hotel and venue security is in place, and adequate security for equipment, instruments, uniforms, costumes, etc.

Activities Before and After the Event

There are significant opportunities for the participants, their families and their friends to see and experience the destination, pre- or post-event. Quite a bit of practice and preparation leads up to the event, so the more leisurely pursuits tend to happen afterwards, when there is a collective sigh of relief following a job well done. Fun dining options and entertainment in the evenings are viable options prior to the event performance. But once the event has happened and awards are presented, a wide variety of tourist activities can be offered.

If the event is in Florida or California, why not go to a theme park or the beach? See the local sights or take an excursion? With events, the programs usually have a “base package” that includes the basics of the event, but then a plethora of options for the kids and their friends and families to pursue. These need to be reasonably priced and relatively short in duration so that they can return home not too long after the event. And, of course, make sure you can handle the numbers and chaos. If you can't, it will most likely be your last opportunity with that particular event. This is a fraternal community, so your performance could affect future results in the space.

Finding Events

Creating and building an event is not an easy thing to do. It takes time and energy for it to become established and develop a reputation. New events need an extraordinary amount of promotion and marketing to ensure maximum participation and ROI. It is best to find the event operator and get into their programs. They have already made the huge investments to create and grow the event, and they have refined the programs for success. Seek them out and develop a dialogue with them if your product or service is a potential fit for the event, either pre, during, or post event.

They will usually have a point person that is the event director. Discussions with the event director will indicate if there is an opportunity for you to incorporate your product or service into the program and they will typically work with their operations team to add you in. The earlier you start with introductions and conversations, the better your chances of getting in. Keep in mind that events have a fairly long sales cycle of one year or more, and as soon as the event is complete, they have already started working on the following year's event. Persistence, combined with attractive pricing, should yield results.



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FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND COLLEGE TRAVEL

Another large category with many global players is foreign language travel. This space is competitive. But the potential is huge for both inbound and outbound travel and the customer base is easy to identify with teachers of languages being the primary targets. High schools have foreign language departments offering Spanish, French, German, Italian and even Asian languages. Naturally, the best way to learn a language is to immerse in the culture first hand, which is best achieved by traveling to the destination. There are schools and tour operators that send American students abroad to learn, and those that bring students from around the world to the U.S. to learn English. The latter represents a significant opportunity for you as a product or service provider to reach these organizations and let them know you can handle their groups.

A developing category for high schools and junior high schools involves college visit tours, also known as TRIO (not an acronym). TRIO programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for

individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. They are administered, funded and implemented by the United States Department of Education.

These trips take groups of kids to tour colleges, hear presentations on the benefits of the college, how they can apply for financial aid, etc. Being federally funded, the participation in the programs is very consistent. Some school guidance counselors run college visit trips on their own, while others use tour operators that specialize in this business or a local bus company. If the school isn't running the trip on its own, they may be sent to tour operators on an RFP basis, so once again the operator is the key, and being part of their proposal ensures you get a piece of the federal pie.

These trips are invaluable for many young adults who otherwise might not have had an interest in going to college or thought it unattainable.



OTHER CATEGORIES – EXTRA -CURRICULAR, CHURCH, CLUB, AND SPORTS GROUPS

While we have covered the main categories of student and youth travel, there is a universe of other youth group travel opportunities that may be worth pursuing. Some of these groups have niche tour operators that serve them, while others book through a local travel agent that specializes in groups. However, because of their specific nature, many of these groups operate the trips themselves.

Think about all of the extracurricular clubs, church youth groups and sports teams that take trips every year. Just to list a few examples:

- All sports teams (think beyond the big three of football, basketball and baseball)
- School clubs – Art, chess, math, science, language, computers, etc.
- Religions youth groups. Many churches have youth outreach programs and these generally travel for a multitude of reasons. It is either for spiritual education and enlightenment, community outreach and charity or group bonding and strengthening.
- Dance schools including contemporary, ballet, Irish, rap/hip-hop

While there are many opportunities, the challenge here is “how do I get in?” Making contact with the leaders of these programs and organizations in your local community can be your way in. Generally, you will discover one or all of the following once you make contact:

1. They are doing educational travel
2. They are doing performance travel
3. They are doing event travel
4. They participate in foreign language or TRIO trips
5. They have a multitude of sports team and club trips
6. They are participating in competition and have travel groups

Regardless of what you find and discover, you can then quickly eliminate them as a possibility or proceed forward depending on if there is a potential fit. Even if they are utilizing an operator, you can then craft your strategy and tact accordingly. One would be hard-pressed to find a school that does not do any form of overnight group travel.

TRADE SHOWS, NETWORKING AND PRESENTING PROFESSIONALLY

With all of these schools, suppliers, operators and partners, naturally there are many trade shows that present outstanding opportunities to make connections. Organizations such as ABA (American Bus Association) or SYTA (Student Youth Travel Association) are very familiar with all of the student market niches and segments. These shows have operators and many of their vendor partners in attendance to discuss product updates, contracts and operational issues. If you have the budget, it would be in your best interest to start at these type of events and find out “who’s who” in the student market.

Depending on your product or service, there are other trade shows that cater to educators, principals, and music directors. Depending on how close they are to you, they may enable you to make valuable contacts. The key is to search for these shows by market, talk with your peers and get out there and start making contacts. Nothing will happen waiting for the phone to ring.

A small number of publications and websites specifically cater to those who organize student travel, either tour operators or student group leaders. Search student group travel publications or student group travel websites on Google for a list of options.

As you prepare to meet buyers, it is important that you and your products are presented professionally. You are carrying a parent’s most valuable possession, so you want to come off as professional, credible and well put together. Make sure you have solid and professional collateral materials, both on and offline that appeal to youth groups. Make sure you can articulate your safety and security protocols and that you have the proper insurance coverage. Many schools have board oversight that require this type of coverage, so be prepared. Make sure you have an up-to-date website that includes testimonials and highlights your experience and value.

Think of your presentation as if you are interviewing for a job. Your success is in getting your foot in the door. After that, it is a numbers game, and the more games you play, the more you will win.



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SUMMARY

Travel changes people's lives. And for young adults, it sets them on a path to greater discovery, knowledge and experience.

For those who participate in student travel programs, it may be their first time out of their home city or state. We recently spoke to a principal of a middle school who had just rebooted its travel program after a brief hiatus. We asked him why he started up again. He responded, "When I was in 8th grade, I had never traveled before and my parents decided to put me on the school trip to Washington, DC. That trip inspired me to study history and as a result of that trip, I decided to become an educator, which led me to where I am today. I want to make sure all of our kids have that same opportunity and inspiration."

No other market has the ability to make a bigger impact on people's lives. Student travel builds the pipeline of a future generation of domestic and world travelers.

As a travel supplier, you have an opportunity to tap this massive market, a market that is completely renewable and sustainable. Every year, a new group of kids comes through, ready to see the world with fresh eyes. And the many segments and niches discussed solidify a place for you if you follow the steps and put the work into it.

As faculty retires, new teachers and administrators see the benefits and value of learning outside the classroom. In fact, more so than the generation before because they themselves experienced travel at a young age. Just ask any teacher, director, administrator or coach about their experience traveling as a youth. Chances are they have a great story to tell.

This market needs dedicated suppliers and vendors that can deliver consistent product, provide a safe and secure environment, and help change the lives of future generations.

Are you up for the challenge?



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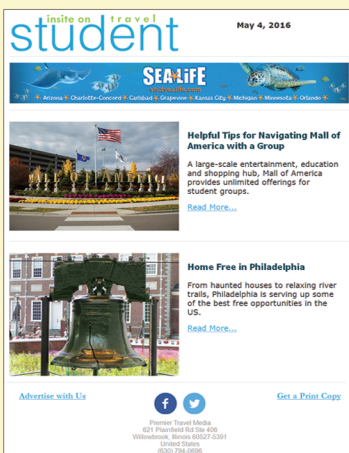
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