

Foreign Exchange Programs

There is an overwhelming amount of information (596,280 web sites to be exact) out on the internet when you search for “high school study abroad” programs; however I urge you to still take a look at the search results and browse around. The following information pertains to students who want to leave the US and travel abroad (outbound) but many of these companies offer “in-bound” programs as well and welcome the opportunity to have you host a student from another country. If this is your interest, please be sure to coordinate with the counselor at DHS who handles this (presently Kris Robison) to be sure the company has been approved by the principal and that space is available for the upcoming school year. We limit foreign exchange students to 6 per year and they are on a first- come first-served basis.

When browsing on the internet, remember that any address that ends in “.com” is a commercial site and “.org” is reserved for non-profit organizations. Therefore, the .com sites have something to sell to you or their subscribers and the .org site is usually more neutral.

That said if you go to www.csiet.org you will find they have an Advisory List they sell for \$23.49 that lists all the travel abroad programs they have approved of. They position themselves as the “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” for all the major travel programs. Having their approval rating is not a bad idea when you are trusting someone to have your child’s best welfare at heart while they are away in a foreign country with limited language skills and other difficulties that arise. The CSIET Directory lists over 50 of the bigger, and respected travel companies with a brief description of their offerings and prices.

Before you explore, you will first need to decide:

- 1) What country do you want to go to (or region of the world). Some travel programs are geared only to a travel abroad experience and they’ll quickly visit many countries.
- 2) Do you want a semester, year-long, or summer experience? Is this primarily academically-based, i.e. will you attend a high school, or just travel?
- 3) What are your goals? Do you want a language immersion experience? Do you want to explore the culture, or the arts, or the people?
- 4) What amenities do you expect? In other words, can you handle the limited frills of a third-world country?
- 5) What is your budget?

Once you have these answered (and more questions will come up) check the various websites of the travel companies and look for the CSIET seal of approval. Sites to look at that offer a good search engine based upon the answers to the above questions are”

<http://highschool.studyabroad.com> or www.highschoolprogramsabroad.com

At these web sites you will put in your preferences and the program sorts through the various travel agencies and will identify those companies that meet your criteria.

Costs will range from \$2,500-\$15,00 for a semester-long program or up to \$20,000 for a year-long (academic school year) program. Personal costs are extra. There are some programs that are volunteer-based and operate on a “Peace Corps” philosophy and they will be the least expensive – many just requiring you pay all expenses associated with your stay.

Essentially the more you pay, the more you get. The more expensive programs include all transportation, airport transfers, home-stay accommodations, placement in a local high school, accident and illness insurance, 24-hour emergency assistance, pre-departure and in-country orientations, supervision, guidance and support through all phases of the process and incidentals. None of these programs will cover passport/visa fees, personal expenses, school expenses and other costs not related to the program.

SCHOLARSHIPS

There are some scholarships available that will pay for most expenses. Check with each company about the requirements.

The **Rotary International** organization selects a student from our area each year to attend a foreign country and there are minimal costs to the family. This is an ‘exchange program’ where we accept students from another country’s Rotary program and they accept our US students. This is announced in September of each year and they make their selection in the fall for the next school year. If interested, please call John Hammer at 782-3500 or e-mail Hamer@MindenNV.com. You may also visit the Rotary International website: www.rotary.org/programs/youth_ex.

Another ‘full-ride’ scholarship is the “**Congress-Bundestag**” program that pays for all expenses and has the student travel via AYUSA / ASSE (probably the largest and biggest of the companies, see www.asse.com or www.ayusa.com has more info).

This scholarship provides 250 full scholarships for American high school students to study and travel in Germany for one academic year. For more information on this scholarship and application deadlines (currently December 16th) go to www.USAGermanyScholarship.org

For more information, search for ‘high school travel abroad scholarships’ and sort through the 86,000 hits that come up. Hopefully one of these will defray the costs of what will be a memorable experience.

On a personal note, I have had 4 children study abroad and they thoroughly loved and benefited from the experience. Contact me at 782-5136 ext #1719 for more information.
Kris Robison