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### Spring is Coming! Ensuring Student Travel is Impactful and Rewarding

Washington, DC prepares for its largest number of tourists during the warmer months of March through June. A main component of these travelers are student groups from around the world. Tour Operators and teachers battle for entrance into popular sites such as The Holocaust Museum, National Archives, and the U.S. Capitol. Those that succeed feel they have done the due diligence of placing the check mark next to the itinerary to-do list. However, in my conversations with tour operators, tour guides, and city partners, it is apparent that itineraries as they currently are formalized may not be the most impactful experiences for the students. In a city such as Washington, DC, where history can be seen at every corner, taking the time to ensure a learning opportunity is highly important and lacking in much student travel around the world.

The webinar conducted by the Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA) on “Student Travel as a Transformative Experience” rekindled a passion for this topic. During my short tenure at Destination DC, it has been my mission to uncover and highlight educational opportunities beyond the basic tour. The opportunities at the many attractions allow for life-long impacts from classes on free speech to a personal conversation with a Holocaust survivor to re-enacting a Shakespeare play. However, too many operators indicate that the itinerary does not allow the time. I would argue that fewer stops and more in-depth analysis would be a greater value than a whirlwind visit.

Another idea regarding student travel that truly hit home this week was the active involvement of the city partners. From hotels to restaurants to attractions, staff can make every moment a learning opportunity. A large complaint brought up regarding student groups are that they misbehave and are a menace. The partners point fingers at chaperones and tour directors, but I believe they could have a profound impact if they got involved personally. A powerful video entitled “Every Opportunity” provides an outstanding basis for this idea. Talking to the students, respecting them and having a conversation can go miles in their growth. As the child in the video states, “Give us courage, give us compassion, help us find our own voices so we can become who we are meant to be.” A simple welcome from a hotel manager in a suit welcoming the students to his/her home with a discussion on the rules would have a huge effect. This would also garner respect of others property and be a base line for respectful travel later in life.

The stated ideas in the sentences above all wrap in to a need that I believe American students are greatly lacking. The world is a global community, yet students within the United States, who have access to so much, are let down by the knowledge they are given of that world. Outbound group travel should be a greater focus of the education system. It is by encountering different cultures that a person truly reflects on themselves and their beliefs. Inserting a habit of international travel at a young age would create more open-minded and respectful future leaders. From my research, helping this population achieve these travels is very limited. I believe that those working in the student travel market can be a movement to help establish these exchanges as the norm.

Travel opportunities are one of the most valuable experiences that can be given to a student. The community that touches their lives every day should slow down, listen to the needs, and make every moment impactful. Many strive to make this a reality. I am proud to add my name to that list.