

Considering a European tour for your students?

Decisions, Decisions!

What's best for your students:

A large corporate tour company package tour?

Or a tour custom-designed by best-selling author, award-winning teacher, and long-time European tour leader Douglas Bond?

Thanks for the opportunity to weigh in on your senior trip. In my experience, journeys like these have the potential to be life shaping for young people, for all of us, which I'm sure is your goal in considering a capstone travel experience for your scholars.

For those of you less familiar with my work and background, a few words on that score might help (you can read more at bondbooks.net/profile). I co-led my first Europe tour for high school age young adults in 1996, and, oh, my goodness, did we have loads to learn on that first tour. We did it largely the way most big-box corporate tours work; we hired local guides and did packaged guided tours at the sites we visited. I won't say it was a disaster--it wasn't--but it was far far less than ideal. We subjected our young people to tour guides who had agendas (all of us do) that were often polar opposites from our philosophical and theological world view. These guides had no idea what our students had studied, what they knew, how they could be brought into and made participants in the tour. The net result was that there were a great deal of disjointed talking heads standing in front of spectacular sites, but our people came away with sensory overload and little or no sense of the continuity of what they were seeing and experiencing. The best tour guides were entertainers who told good ghost stories, but these largely failed to awaken deeper appreciation and cohesive understanding of what the young people were looking at.

As a result of our disappointment with this model of doing tours, we began carefully crafting our own tours, doing our own research, and preparing to create one big story with each episode of the tour a chapter in the story, the story of Western Civilization, but most specifically, the story of redemption and God's providential guiding and governing all events, all people, artists, musicians, architects, authors, kings and emperors, scholars, heroes and villains to bring about the redemption of his people the Church and Kingdom of God. The process was exciting and invigorating (and produced more than a few books as you can see at bondbooks.net) and we found over many years of leading young people on European tours that the wonder factor resulting from the cohesion of philosophical and theological unity went up exponentially (I love seeing my students/travelers tear up when we're bringing them into yet another episode and human player in the larger story). Now, well over two decades later, leading an average of three tours a year, I absolutely love taking people to experience the many places and personalities connected to those places that have inspired me and have been settings for many of my historical fiction books and non-fiction biographies.

A couple of things you may want to keep in mind as you consider using a large corporate tour company or an individual like me. Big tour companies hire people, and the nature of the travel industry is that those people come and they go. It's easy to think that because the travel company has been around for many years that the individual tour director and the many tour guides that your students will listen to have been around and have years of experience doing what they do.

Most of them do not, and those that do usually have lots of knowledge of their particular location but without a larger sense of how it fits in the whole. A tour director, the person that is attached to your group, is not your tour guide; they will coordinate with a number of various guides (some in their first week on the new job), and will perform the duties of an activity coordinator, but they are not your guide. It's very important to understand this. In frustration at this disappointing reality, one well-known Christian ministry has approached me three times and asked if I would be their boots-on-the-ground guide for their high-end tours (about \$6K for an 8-night tour). Deeply disappointed with the lack of continuity, worse yet, they found the various guides and their perspectives often diametrically opposed to a Christian view of history and culture. It's unsatisfactory to their travelers who paid a chunk of change to visit Edinburgh Scotland, for example, only to hear disparaging things about what a horrible monster John Knox was.

Another consideration is the sensory overload of trying to cram too much, too many cities, too many sites into an 8-day excursion. I have found repeatedly that our people are so much more satisfied, they come home with much more meaningful and long-lasting experiences, their perspective enlarged and their imaginations inspired, when we scale the tour to do fewer things but do them better and with varied experiences interspersed: like English country walks, punting on the Cherwell, dining in historic places (not at the group feeding places big tours often take you to consume food), sailing on the bateau bus on the Seine, hiking a spectacular stretch of Hadrian's Wall or the Cinque Terre, and interacting with locals who have become friends of mine. I can lead the equivalent big cities tour you may be considering, to be sure, and I can make these more meaningful, but I think you will be much happier in the long run, and as a sustainable tour to repeat with your students from year to year, with a mainly 2-city tour (see PDF on sample tour options for students). If you don't see immediately a tour option that suits your students, download the PDF Bond Tour Itineraries and peruse some of the other tours I have led over the years; there are many site variations that I'm happy to coordinate in consultation with your particular interests and expectations. From my years of experience, I can custom design a suitable and meaningful tour for your students.

If you decide that the big-box corporate tour route is not a good fit for you, I would love to be the one who coordinates, directs, and guides your European tour. Once you decide, I'd be happy to come meet with staff and families to answer questions, present the tour options with ppt and video clips, etc. Once you have decided on the specifics of the tour that's most appropriate for your students, leave the rest to me. I love doing these tours! I'll do all the planning, booking, organizing so you can put your energies into the all-important task of educating the next generation for the glory of God. Please visit bondbooks.net/tours to hear what many of our travelers have said about our tours over many years.

With warm regards,
Douglas Bond

PS Contact me today at bondbooks.net@gmail.com or call me 253-381-1961