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Principal's Blog

TRAVEL EDUCATES THE MIND

"The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page."

St Augustine

When I was 19, I went on an adventure to the United States via an organisation called BUNAC (British Universities North America Club). I travelled alone to the USA and then met up with some other college friends. After 3 days in a youth hostel I found myself somewhere to live and also found three jobs which I worked to fund my later travels around the States. I worked in an office, in Dunkin' Donuts and as a security guard at Harvard University. I experienced daily life in the US, met lots of new friends, had a great social life and at the end of 2 months in Boston I travelled around the states for 3 weeks and visited Washington DC, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles taking in cultural and historic sites. Later after I left university and was about to embark on my teacher training I travelled around Europe for one month back packing and sleeping in youth hostels and one night in a converted circus tent in Munich. I visited the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain. I learned a lot about the cultures, history and societies of these countries and I practised my French, Spanish, Italian and German with the locals. All of these experiences have enriched my adult and working life.

Mark Twain said that *"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness"*; he was absolutely right. Travel allows a person to see life from the perspective of other people and cultures. Indeed, we have all heard people say that travel is the best education you can get. This is why at The Junior & Senior School we offer our students a plethora of opportunities to travel; both within Cyprus and the local area and also overseas. 12 students and 2 teachers just returned last week from a joint Business and History visit to the USA and a 5 day visit to New York City. They had a fantastic time and experienced

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the local culture and food. They visited historic sites such as Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, economically and politically important places such as Wall Street and the United Nations Building and even found time to visit one of the US's famous Ivy Leagues Colleges, Columbia University. The group also watched a musical theatre production on Broadway. Previous overseas visits by Senior School students have been to London, Paris, Prague, Berlin, Athens, Thessaloniki and Barcelona. Next year the Modern Languages Faculty are planning a trip to France and Germany incorporating a visit to Strasbourg and the European parliament. Every year the 'A' Level Drama students go to London to experience theatre workshops and live theatre to help with their studies. The PE department have also organised ski trips to Austria and Italy in recent years.

Younger pupils are offered a large number of travel experiences within Cyprus. We offer many one-day trips, and these are incorporated within the school fees. Children from as young as Early Years go to a local park or a fire station, a castle or historic site or to see a Greek play at the theatre. Residential trips are also organised, for example the Year 8 Religious Education and PE trip which incorporates various places of worship of different faiths and outward bound and team building activities. The Year 6 end of year trip takes the whole year group to Paphos to experience various outdoor activities which build self-confidence and resilience. A key section of our curriculum involves covering the SMSC aspects of learning. Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development is the overarching umbrella that encompasses personal development across the whole curriculum. We endeavour to cover the many diverse features of these topics in PSHE lessons and assemblies. We also offer an extended afternoon programme which can help to expose children to learning experiences other than academic facts and knowledge. However, travel is also a key contributor to covering these important factors.

See the UK Ofsted framework Pages 39-40 Paras 147-50 for a detailed definition of SMSC.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730127/School_inspection_handbook_section_5_270718.pdf

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I love to accompany students on these trips. Since my arrival at the school I have been to Paris and Athens with Senior School students; I have also accompanied Year 1 to the gym, Year 2 to a pizza restaurant and Year 5 to visit the historic sites of old Nicosia. When you spend time with the children on an hourly basis, you get to know them so much better and you form mutual respect that can otherwise take much longer to build in the classroom environment. However, despite these rewards, for teachers the preparation and planning that goes into making these trips a success is substantial. They have to contact hotels and bus companies, travel agents and restaurants; they need to complete detailed risk assessments and plan the finances of the excursion; they have to complete pupil lists, send letters to parents, collect in medical forms and permission slips. During the trip itself, teachers are required to be *in loco parentis* and have the huge responsibility of keeping the children safe and well. This is even more demanding on a residential trip when they are essentially on duty 24 hours a day and also away from their own families. In many state schools in the UK, due to all the above factors many schools have reduced or stopped their school trips altogether. However, I am very proud of the fact that at The Junior & Senior School, year on year our dedicated teachers continue to offer these fantastic experiences to our students and parents.

The benefits of travel for the broadening of the mind and in terms of learning experience are evident and manifold. Travelling allows you to speak different languages, try other cuisines, learn about history at the place where it happened. You can learn about nature such as our Year 6 visit to Troodos as part of their mountains' topic or Geography and Science fieldtrips to Akamas and to study rivers. Students can learn about different faiths, beliefs and cultures. They discover how different societies and infrastructures operate and they learn new skills such as rock climbing, reading a city map, ordering a meal, or even landing a plane (as was the case with a recent Travel & Tourism visit to a flight simulator in Limassol). They can meet local people and talk to them about social, economic and political issues. However, for me the most important skills they learn are independence and resilience.

On a school trip away from their parents, young people learn to be more independent. They have to organise their room, get themselves to meeting points at an arranged time, get along with others in the party, taste new foods, learn patience and overcome home

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sickness. The modern world is a dangerous place and as adults the tendency can be to stifle our children and protect them from all possible risks. When I was in the US all those years ago, I remember calling my mother from a payphone in San Francisco to tell her I was OK and she burst into tears; this reaction was a complete mystery to me at the time. Now as a mother myself I fully understand her anxiety and when my daughter is travelling without me, I am also anxious. However, this is my problem, not hers. If we ensure that all the necessary precautions have been taken and on school trips that we have appropriate and carefully considered risk assessments in place, then we should continue to offer these opportunities to our students and as parents we would allow them to participate. These experiences are invigorating and help young people to discover who they are and what they want to do in life. Travel opens our eyes to people, cultures and experiences that we may never have even considered, and this is very fulfilling and exhilarating.

So, to return to our initial quotation from St Augustine. We do not want our children to only read one page of the book of life; the one they learn in the classroom. We want them to explore all the other chapters that come from exploring the wider world and all it has to offer.

Thank you,

Deborah Duncan

Principal

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